

**Happy
New
Year!**



Inside this issue:

Lori Wolf Pg. 2
December
Speaker

Dave Burr Pg. 2
Webmaster

Review and Pg. 3
Refresh

Opportunity Pg. 3
Knocks

Bill Belew Pg. 4
Blog Info

Website Pg. 5
Information

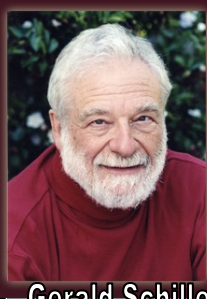
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**" Do not
blame God for
making the
tiger, but thank
him for not
having given
him wings."**

Indian Proverb

WEST VALLEY BRANCH

Schiller Will Share a Few Tricks



Gerald Schiller

Our January speaker Gerald Schiller is the author of eight books and more than a hundred articles, short stories, reviews and poems. He has taught classes in English, cinema and creative writing. Many writers who have a smidgeon of talent and reside here in Movieland become involved in film making. Schiller is no exception. He wrote and directed educational and promotional

films and documentaries. Schiller will speak on his books, his career, and his marketing and promotion strategies. His latest book, *It Happened in Hollywood* was just published by Globe Pequot Press and is a series of short articles about unusual events that happened in Hollywood, including the death of Marilyn Monroe, The Twilight Zone accident, the murder of Ramon Navarro, the birth of the "talkies," and many other stories.

Incidentally, Gerald Schiller is a magician and an active

member of the International Brotherhood of Magicians. He is also a performing member of the Magic Castle in Hollywood, CA. Schiller will bring invitation cards to The Magic Castle (where he frequently performs) for those who might want one.

Perhaps our January speaker will show us some magic tricks for writers. Like...how to get published in a competitive ever changing market.

More information on Gerald Schiller available at:

geraldaschiller.com



New Technology Brings New Tools for Writers

Today's writers are becoming familiar with blogs, websites, eBooks, kindles and the new ways to publish and share their work. Hence, my editorial goals in 2010 are to present innovations and opportunities for publication. *In Focus* will host guest writers and present interesting websites for your perusal in the coming months. And now, 2010 goals from a few of our fellow members of the CWC/WV:

My resolution is to market my writing more — to devote one day each week to sending out queries, submissions, and follow-ups. I make this resolution every year. Hasn't happened yet. Writing's more fun. - Ray Malus

I plan (1) to submit at least 3 romance stories to Women's World; (2) to submit another 2 mysteries to Women's World; (3) to finish my work in progress suspense novel and start submitting it; and (4) finally try to break into the Glimmer Train market. - Dorrie Lloyd

Published members might offer assistance to those who are trying to get it together. A member generously helped me organize about 150 memoirs, poetry and other non fiction articles. (Thank you Lillian.) SO MY RESOLUTION FOR 2010 IS: GET MY BOOK DONE AND PUBLISHED!!!

- Leslie Kaplan



THE PITCH

THE WRITER

Looking For:

- ♦ **An agent**
- ♦ **Guidance**
- ♦ **Publication**

manuscript

THE HOOK

THE AGENT

Looking for:

- ♦ **Professional format**
- ♦ **Clarity of language**
- ♦ **Credentials**
- ♦ **One page pitch**



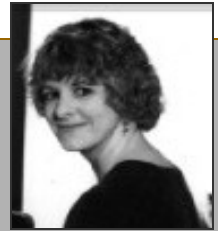
There's a right way and a wrong way to query an agent. Our December speaker Lori Wolf made clear the difference between a **professional query** and a sloppy plea destined for the trash can. Her handouts were especially informative.

The Do's: One page with your name, address, email, telephone number - **contact information**. After Dear Mr/Ms Agent, a "**hook**." The first sentence and the first paragraph will be quickly scanned for interest and writing expertise. Good beginnings might be: *Did you know... What would you do if... As I ran from the flames... The tornado left us...* After the attention grabber the letter should briefly present the story, the main idea of the manuscript. *The stranger said, "Hello Josh. I'm your twin." I stood transfixed.* **Dangle the lure.**

The Don'ts: Long explanations or intros, fancy fonts and letter heads that confuse the eye, an autobiography, a play for sympathy, offensively casual language, self glorification of one's skills and the "suck up" maneuver to gain favor. *I hear you're a Dodger fan. Well, I'm a Dodger fan too. I think of baseball stories all the time. Let me tell you a really good one. Try again.*

**Be brief,
Get to the
point.
Establish
yourself as
a writer."**

Lori Wolf



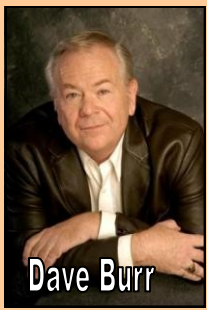
After the **pitch** is made, the query letter should **sell** the story in the **body** of the letter. The body will make up the agent's mind: accept or reject. Now is the appropriate time for explanations and to quickly list subtopics.

At the end of the query, most agents expect **credentials**. What has this person written and published already? Is she experienced as to word number, deadlines and her target market? Is she organized?

Finally, check to determine if the agent will want **clips** of sample work to judge the writing style. Include a **SASE** with adequate postage.

Follow-up? Wolf recommends waiting four to six weeks before an inquiry on the status of your professional quality query. **Do it right for best results.** **K.H.**

CWC/WV Webmaster



Dave Burr is a lifelong scholar of the sciences and the arts. In college young Dave took courses in physics, earned

a degree in psychology and then launched a career in computer technical support. His writing was confined to technical articles and documents for his work circles.

In 1994 he enrolled in an acting class and has pursued that creative outlet ever since, mostly in stage productions.

Two years ago a life coach suggested that Dave experiment with another creative outlet: writing. He wrote a few things for her perusal. Kismet! The instructor proclaimed Dave a writer and suggested he develop that talent.

Last year Dave joined our writers club in an effort to build up his writing skills. Since joining CWC, he has presented some skillfully written material at Open Mike and submitted a short story for a writing competition in Writer's Digest.

Dave confides, "*The discipline needed to be a self-acknowledged writer still eludes me. Nevertheless, participating in the West Valley Branch has brought me into contact with a whole new group of friends who are in various stages of the same journey. There*

is comfort and reassurance in hearing of other people's struggles, progress and successes."

When asked why he became our webmaster for both the CWC/WV and the Central Board, (most of us would rather not) Dave states that he's pleased to use some of his "day job" skills in support of the CWC membership.

"That support, in itself, I find very gratifying and it helps keep me involved in the creative writing process on a regular basis."

Write on, brother Dave! And then read on Open Mike. We all learn from good example.

- KH

review and refresh

Music in Poetry

Rhythm

In English, the words of everyday speech have different "beats," soft and loud, heavy and light. For example, the word "unique" has two beats: **u** and **ni-que**, with the stress on the -nique. The word "reference" has three beats: **ref**-er-ence, with the stress on the **ref**.

In rhythmic poetry the beats take on definite, predictable patterns: He **would** not **see** me **stopping here** / to **watch** his **woods** fill **up** with **snow**.

Meter

The following combinations of stressed and unstressed syllables are referred to as feet.

The *iamb* (de-**lay**) - unaccented syllable, accented syllable

The *trochee* (**on**-ly) - accented, unaccented

The *anapaest* (in my **heart**) - two unaccented-one accented

The *dactyl* (**hap**-pi-ly) - one accented, two unaccented

Two feet in a line is called...*dimeter*

Three feet ... *trimeter*

Four feet ... *tetrameter*

Five feet... *pentameter*

Six feet ... *hexameter*

And so on.

Thus, ...and the **sheen** on their **spears** was like **stars** on the **sea** is *anapaestic tetrameter* and ...**beside** the **lake** **beneath** the **trees** is *iambic tetrameter*.

The master poets were experts in combining words with rhythm and music. If you enter these waters and choose to follow a basic rhythm pattern, you must be consistent throughout. If you drop the pattern even slightly (without a good reason) the reader will spot it and the poem will be ruined in the same way a pin prick deflates a balloon.

Many poets won't attempt rhythm and write free verse. If you attempt a rhythm pattern and you carry it off, however, the words of your poem can provide a beautiful musical background as it speaks, as Shakespeare did in his sonnets.

Sonnet 73

*That time of year thou may'st in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadest in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the deathbed whereon it must expire,
Consumed by that which it was nourished by.
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.*

Wm. Shakespeare



OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS



Writers affiliate with groups like the California Writers Club to network with other writers, to receive new ideas and to share information. This column shares web sites that might prove advantageous in 2010. Hundreds of sites relate to writing: blogs, market listings, agents, publishing resources - plus all kinds of networking for writers. Listed below are a few useful ones which in turn link with other sites for an almost endless source of help and inspiration for every type of writer. Keep this list handy for reference in the New Year.

www.writingfix.com- This site is filled with useful writing tips and writing prompts.

www.askoxford.com- As you would imagine, this site deals with words.

www.copyright.gov- Everything you wanted to know about copyrights and were afraid to ask.

www.grammarbook.com-This site offers a breakdown of grammar and punctuation rules.

www.sfw.org/beware- Anyone can benefit from this site developed to help writers avoid being scammed.

www.mediabistro.com/galleycat- an online resource for trends and insider information in the literary world.

www.omnivoracious.com- blog written by book editors at Amazon.com with news, reviews interviews, etc.

www.poetrymachine.com-a collection of poetry markets including Canadian and international markets.

www.logicalcreativity.com/jon/quotes.html-a resource of quotable quotes on writers and writing.

www.rwanational.org- excellent place for anyone seriously interested in writing and publishing romantic fiction.

www.nasw.org- This site was established to protect the professional interests of Scientific Writers of America while presenting accurate information.

www.about.com- a broad spectrum of information from history to zoology, friendly, not always deep; maintained by 750 hired experts.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

- Lenora Smalley



"It's got a good beat and I can rhyme to it," said the poet.



So You Want to Blog, Eh?

Bill Belew

So, you want to blog. Or maybe you are already one of the 16% (according to Technorati) of Californians who already have a blog and you just want to get read more, have more visitors, and have folk turn more pages once they get to your site. Perhaps you want to use your blog as a platform to get the word out on your book that you have written or are writing. In any event, first you have to have a blog.

Starting a blog is not that hard. It's the keeping it going that takes commitment. Getting the blog read is even harder. I am of the opinion that it is relatively easy to write. Put pen to paper and you're on your way. Getting read is the challenge. This article deals with how to start a blog from scratch. Other aspects of blogging, getting read for example, will be covered in future articles.

Here are five ways to get started.

Go to blogger.com and click the **Create a Blog** button. Then follow the directions. My two cents: a blog created at blogger.com is obvious to the visitor and doesn't really get a lot of respect. I may be wrong. (mashable.com/2007/08/06/free-blog-hosts/) lists more than forty free blog hosts. It's a bit old but will give you other options.

Go to Godaddy.com or some other similar service that offers domains and hosting and fiddle with choices for domain names till you come up with the domain name you'd like for your blog. How do you choose a name for your domain? I own billbelew.com, panasianbiz.com, filmyfair.com, and a bunch of other sites—so how about your name? How about the name of your book? How about something related to what your book is about? Keep it simple, easy to remember, relevant. I use Surpass Hosting for my large sites and Godaddy for my smaller ones. Laughing Squid is good, I hear, as is Total Choice Hosting.

Once you get your domain and a hosting service such as Godaddy.com, call their service department (believe it or not, the Godaddy folks do answer the phone) and tell them you want to install WordPress (it's free) on your site. They will send you the directions by email. It may sound intimidating, but it is not. The Godaddy folks (I am feeling like a salesman) are easy to work with and will often stay on the phone and walk you through the process. There are other blogging software choices (Moveable Type for example), but I'd go with WordPress. One reason is that the creator of WordPress lives in San Francisco (near me). They have WordCamps where WordPress users get together and solve all the problems of the WordPress universe. Seriously, WordPress is the most blogger-friendly platform there is, and when I went to WordCamp last year I got some really hard questions answered.

Try to get yourself accepted into a blog network. If you're accepted, the network will do all the work for you in setting up your blog, pay you a little, and take a lot if your site becomes successful. But the site they create will belong to them. A

good place to start for this option is Problogger (jobs.probloggger.net); another place that is hiring is examiner.com (examiner.com/about_examiner). If you try Examiner, let me know because if you are good, I can refer you with my secret Examiner number. What that means is that if they hire you, I'll get \$50.00 (we can go out to eat to celebrate if you like). More importantly, I have a bit of mojo with the company because of traffic I have brought in and my recommendation might help you get to the top of the applicant pile. It has helped others before. Or you can also do a search for blogging jobs and wade through the options.

Come to the **Blogging for Publishing and Promoting Your Writing Workshop** and I will try to walk you and others through it. Details for the workshop at <http://www.southbaywriters.com/meetings/workshops/blog-workshop.html>. If that doesn't work for you, ask the workshop bosses at your writing club to give me a call and make arrangements for me to come to you.

Contact me at <http://www.billbelew.com/contact-info/> and I will help. I can do a little bit for nothing, but I can't do a lot. And if a lot of folks contact me and each asks me to do a little, then a little becomes a lot. If your idea for your blog is good, we will consider including it in our network. Being in a network is a good thing. One big reason, but definitely not the only one, is that being in a network means other sites will be linked to your site and your site to theirs from the get-go. The search engines see links to a site as a credibility factor for your site, and in the end that makes your site more findable. If your blog were to become part of my network, I would *not* own the content or the domain name. Those belong to you. That's very different from #3.

Once you find your platform, be it a freebie like blogger.com or wordpress.com (you can't put ads on Wordpress freebies, I think) or set it up yourself, or become part of a network, or pay someone else to do it for you, you will end up with a login name and password that get you to your blogging software. This is where you write your blog. The software looks much like a glorified email program except that once you have written what you like and want people to read, instead of clicking send, you click publish. Then you go to your website and you see your work on the web. Cool, eh? And if you don't like what you see, you can go back and edit it.

At this point all you have is a blog name, a host, and software for publishing your work and maybe a group of friends (network) that you belong to. The blog may not look like much, meaning the appearance will be quite basic (unless you joined a network), but those things can be changed and improved to taste. That, however, is beyond the scope of this article.

Now that you have a blog, what is it you want the world to know?

Bill Belew, a member of CWC South Bay, is owner of the CosmoFair Blog Network. He has written more than 12,000 posts and his blogs have received more than 16,000,000 page views. Belew's Blog Workshop info follows on page 5.

Making New Connections on the Net

Stories of Cloth

Stories of Cloth is a culturally diverse arts and heritage project, initiated and led by visual artist Lesley Sutton, to reflect on the personal memories associated with the ritual events of birth, marriage and death, through the sensory medium of cloth. Stories of Cloth has created a rare opportunity for exchange between cultures and generations, increasing understanding of one another's lost and changing heritage.

Working with photographer Paula Keenan, Lesley has observed and documented the precious memories of life; Individual and collective stories told by small groups of women from Asian, Chinese, English, Jewish, Kosovan, and Somalian descent, living in South Manchester.

Despite their varied cultural backgrounds, all the women held something in common: the celebration of life from birth to grave, and the use of textiles during these festivities.



The resulting exhibition, featured here, offers a diverse fusion of artifacts, documentary photography, and artwork, created collaboratively between the two artists. We now hope to develop the project further by collecting stories of cloth from all over the world and touring this exhibition to other museums and galleries. Alternatively subscribe to our blog and keep up to date with all our postings on <http://storiesofcloth.blogspot.com/>

lesley@storiesofcloth.com

<http://www.storiesofcloth.com/submit.php>

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Special Workshop: Jan 23, 2010

Blogging for Publishing and Promoting Your Writing

Professional blogger Bill Belew will tell us how to promote our writing through blogging. **Early bird rates end Jan 3**, so register soon! Lookout Restaurant, 605 Macara Avenue, Sunnyvale, CA (at the Sunnyvale Golf Course)



More information at:

http://www.southbaywriters.com/meetings/workshops/blog_workshop.html or <http://tiny.cc/L0g1p>

Information on Blog Workshop

FAVORITE REFERENCES FOR WRITERS:

Writer's Market 2010 and Writer's Digest 2010 are now available on line and in the bookstores.

Speaking of Blogs ...

<http://sixquestionsfor.blogspot.com/>

In response to a post on my personal blog, a reader suggested I publish a series of interviews in which editors "list, in excruciating details, all that each editor desires in his/her stories." Wow. What a great idea. Not only does this provide authors with specific information about what editors are looking for in the submissions they receive, it offers editors a venue for advertising their publications and getting the word out about what, in their opinion, constitutes "good writing."

If you:

1. have a question or comment,
2. would like to suggest a publication, agent, or publisher for me to contact, or
3. are an editor, publisher, or agent and would like to participate in this project, please contact me at sixquestionsfor@gmail.com.



Jim Harrington
[Writer/Editor](#)
Huntsville, NC

TIGERS AND THEIR PREY



The Birds in the Ivy

Through the sun-glistened panes of the patio door,
The cat watched the clouds, glad the storm was no more.
She stretched then and polished her fur, her pride,
And the birds in the ivy sang outside.



This gray striped devil had lain under the bed,
And remained through the thunder, so great was her dread,
Determined to stay there, needs be, 'til she died,
Or the birds in the ivy again sang outside.

But be kind to old Tabby. How often have we,
In our own soul's darkness, felt shackled, unfree,
Afraid of some forces about to collide,
And the birds in the ivy stopped singing outside?

But our clouds split and scattered, made way for the sun,
And our dark time spent under the bed was quite done.
We started again, stretched, and polished our pride,
And the birds in the ivy sang outside.

- Dave Wetterberg



ESCAPE CLAWS

You sleek, soft, velvety feline,
nuzzling my ankle, snuggling in my lap,
I'm entranced by your prancing, pouncing play,
your flowing motion through almost-closed doors,
the quiver of your whiskers,
the flickering twitch of your ear,
your playing possum in my favorite chair,
your marmalade markings blending with the carpet.
Oh, to think that I almost gave you away
to save those nylon loops
from the curvature of your claws!

- Erica Stux

Pet-antic



My dour cat springs on my bed without an invitation.
She stalks across my knees with not a hint of hesitation.
She tromps upon my stomach without any consultation,
And sets her haunches on my chest with smug determination.

Her eyes are fixed on distant things with dreamy expectation.
She squints and peers into the void in solemn contemplation.
Imagining utopia — or humankind's damnation?
Or maybe seeing phantom mice for feral depravation.

She calls out once — a plaintive cry — a mewl of desolation,
And snags her claws into the sheet, in pet-ish consternation.
“Dear Puss, is this internal pain a mystic divination?
Or just a hair ball in your craw? Or kitty constipation?”

She shades her eyes with tasseled lids in cattish concentration,
And from her throat, there comes a thrumming uvular vibration.
She pads her paws upon my breast in pumping palpitation,
Ignoring me — in blissful waves of self-preoccupation.

Oh Cat, what is the chimera that causes such elation?
Is this a case of furtive catnip-caused intoxication,
Or psychedelic pussy dream-inspired exultation?
Is it some feline fantasy or merely...meow-sturbation?

- Ray Malus

The Tiger

TIGER, tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symme-
try?



In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder and what art
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand and what dread feet?
What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? What dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And water'd heaven with their tears,
Did He smile His work to see?
Did He who made the lamb make thee?



Tiger, tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

- William Blake
1757 - 1827

Sunday in the Mountains

It had been a beautiful day. Traces of snow still littered under the pine trees, and the air was sharp and fresh.

I was glad my friend Dave Nudelman invited me to join his cub scout outing on Mount Wilson.

Now the twelve of us were on our way home, rolling down the winding mountain road aboard the old stake truck that Dave's dad loaned to the scoutmaster, Elliot. We all stood holding on to the wood stake railing admiring the high tree-covered peaks and the deep canyons below. David's eighteen-year old brother Mark stood near the cab ready to offer any advice to our scoutmaster, the driver, should he need it.

We seemed to be picking up speed as we passed one car after another. The wind had increased as we lurched around each turn, with the steep mountain embankment at our left and the deep canyon on our right. We were getting a kick out of bouncing, swaying ride. Someone yelled with pleasure, "Wow, this is more fun than coming up the mountain." Mark was not laughing.

Suddenly I heard and felt a bump and looked back. An automobile parked on the edge of the road was spinning around. That stopped the laughter. We were now very aware of the speed the landscape was passing by. Another side lurch as our truck swerved around a slower moving vehicle on this two-lane mountain road. I watched Mark climb the railing and lower himself to the running board at the driver's side of the cab. He held on to the side-view mirror and door handle and yelling at the driver.

"Elliot!" Mark shouted. "Slow down, for Pete sakes!"

"I'm trying to but the brakes don't work."

"Use the emergency brake!"

"I tried that, too, but they don't hold. I'm trying to shift down now."

Mark yelled up to me, "Max, tell everyone to get

down and protect themselves." The boys heard him and sat down on the bed of the truck with their backs against the stake fence. I pressed my back against the cab's rear wall and waited for something to happen.

I did not have to wait long. The truck suddenly turned left off the narrow pavement onto a wide shoulder of plowed earth, bouncing violently. Then dreamlike, I watched the boys flying over my head and I, too, became weightless and joined them in the air. There was a long roar of metal and glass shattering and boys screaming. Then all was silent and black.

I opened my eyes slowly and turned my head. I was dumped on soft packing quilts that were stored at the back of the cab. I carefully stood up and beheld an unforgettable scene. The boys, some moaning and some bleeding, were strewn all over the ground. The truck had rolled about forty yards down the slope, and miraculously, now stood on all four wheels.

One by one, the boys got up and felt themselves. The only one seriously hurt was Mark, who was thrown from the running board at the first rollover. We learned later that he broke his arm. I walked down to the truck and saw the cab's window shattered and inside alongside the driver was Mrs. Nudelman holding her three-year-old daughter Ida, who had only a bruised forehead.

Elliot was shocked but unhurt and helped Mrs. Nudelman and her child out of the cab. Then he walked back to inspect his cub scouts, mumbling, "This is a miracle. This is a miracle. Thank God!"

Passing cars stopped and people came out to give us first aid until a police car and ambulance arrived and took Mark away. Much later, a tow truck came and hooked up the front of the truck while we watched shivering in the cold.

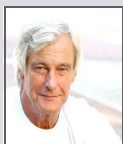
"OK boys," yelled the tow truck driver. "Everyone back on the truck and I'll be taking you home."

That was one Sunday in the mountains that the members of our cub scout group would never forget.

- Max Schwartz



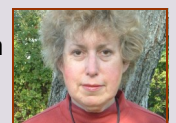
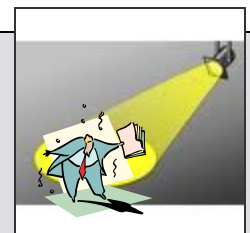
RECOGNITION

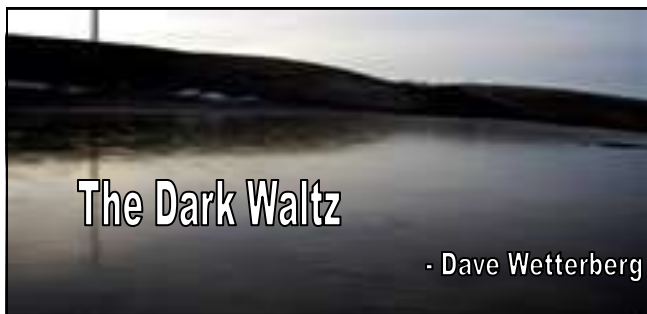


Dean Stewart received **The Jack Oakie Memorial Award for Excellence in Comedy Script Writing or Screenwriting**, a \$1000 award, at College of the Canyons.

Kathy Highcove has had a story published on Shadowcast Audio Anthology this past December. The story—a flash fiction piece from the October 2009 *In Focus* — will go into the site's archives in January;. Here's the url if you want to hear it read aloud:

<http://shadowpress.wordpress.com/2009/12/11/shadowcast-flash-3-double-issue/>





At the desk clerk's wake-up call, he jumped out of bed. By daylight, he stood beside his car, fishing for his keys, ready for the next four hundred miles. The silver door-handle stuck to his hand. Let go fast, or your skin is mine, it said. The driver's side squeaked when he sat down, telling him he weighed more than when he lived here, considerably more. The heater came on with the starter and the air charged up his trouser leg. At first it was as frigid as the outside air. Then it mellowed and smoothed out warm.

He drove uphill on the road to the highway so fast he hardly noticed the sign that said *Steadman, Land of Maple Sugar*. Each house of his old home town, plugged into its frozen brown lawn, had a long front porch supported by Greek columns. At the boys' academy, the road curved north, and the buildings, empty of students and silent for the Christmas holidays, looked at him with brick faces, gloomy under the winter clouds. Two miles more and the houses disappeared.

He slowed down, unusual for him, enjoying the early morning peace of the country road, thinking he could pick up the lost speed once he reached the highway. He leaned over the steering wheel to get a better look into the woods. The pines, matriarchal and stubborn, held their green in spite of winter, but the maples were skeletons, drawing straight lines into the sky. The birches and the younger trees, brutalized by the snowstorms, leaned over from the extra weight. He braked and idled in neutral and squinted out the side window. The defroster hadn't completely cleared it yet, and when he rolled it down for an unclouded look, the icy air spilled into his car like quicksilver.

Along here there used to be ... there they were, marking the entrance to the pond, two posts without a gate, as if to say, this is mine, but come on in. Drawn to it, he crossed the blacktop and drove between the gateless posts onto the dirt road and into the woods slowly, the snow under the tires cracking and growling. Somewhere in here, he knew, was the pond he skated on when he was a boy. Then it was there, to the left of the steering wheel. He couldn't see the surface, but the clearing in the trees made room for a pond.

He stepped out of the car and slammed the door, the sound ricocheting off the trees and zigzagging through the woods. His breath a visible cloud, he walked up a rise and the pond opened up to him. The ice was white, not transparent, white from the circling and the scratching of skates, the way it used to be. The marshes at the far end of the pond stood up like spikes, upside down icicles. He tried to remember what it looked like in the spring, but he could not visualize it in color, only as it was now, in shades of black and gray. The sight of the pond, familiar but strange, moved him, and he trembled. He breathed deep and removed a glove and blew into his fist, as if this would stop it. He took a few steps onto the ice, gingerly at first, because the snow had packed itself into a layer under his soles. Then, gaining some balance, he stepped out and half-slid, half-walked to the ponds center, recalling when he was a young man here, surrounded by other skaters.

Then he realized that the pond was dark. He looked up. The overhanging clouds had melted together, losing their outlines. The frozen marshes along the shore were shadows.

He heard the easy rhythm of a skater circling the pond's edge, first one

skate, then the other, each answered by a hollow echo under the ice, a momentary stillness in between. Strange, he thought. No one was on the ice when he arrived. Whoever it was must have been lacing up. He could see nothing now, only hear the rising sound of the skates approaching him.

"Hey, good morning!" he yelled, but the dark skater whizzed past silently.

It became darker, and the man, upset and a little frightened, shuffled his legs toward the shore. He heard the skater glide to the far end of the pond and turn and begin his second run toward him, louder and louder, until he swept by, nearly touching him. The man yelled again, "Hey! Wait! Stop for a minute!" his voice echoing after the skater, but the hollow sound faded again to the far shore. He slipped then, and went down on all fours, blinded by the dark, trying to feel his way. He felt warm. His hands and knees were wet. The ice was melting.

The skater returned on his third run, and the man sensed danger. He struggled to his feet and nearly fell over backwards. The sound charged into him. "Stop! Stop!" he screamed.

At the collision, he glimpsed the skater's face, and it was his own face, as if he were looking into a mirror. And it was not a collision, nor even an impact, but a blending, and the man found himself skating with the same rhythm he had only heard before, floating, leaning ahead with each thrust of his leg, gliding into the darkness. He skated on, unquestioning, sensing the shoreline like a blind man senses an obstacle in his path, confident, at one with the dark and the cold and the ice and the water and the silky muck that lay underneath it, waiting.

As he sailed her surface, he heard the pond, softly at first, as she rose under him and floated with him and eased him down again. "Caress me, my darling," she sang. "Caress me, my love." The man twisted lightly and jumped, making a complete revolution in the air before returning to the ice on one skate. Then he turned and skated backward. "That's it, my darling," crooned the pond. "Love me. Love me." The man streamed on, lulled by her song. Along the shore the shadows followed him with their anxious eyes, whispering to him, urging him on to his rendezvous. They knew the pond, how she would crack under him and suck him to the velvety sludge below.

"Come, my love," the pond sang. "Embrace me."

She would bury him and he would be hers forever then, no matter how he protested, no matter how he screamed in the last seconds, trying to hold his breath forever as he slipped under the surface into more darkness, floating again, but sinking this time, senseless, motionless, into the bed of his deceitful lover.

"Come to me, come," sang the pond. "Be mine, darling, be mine."

Panting, the man kept up his pace. The surface was overlaid with water, the edges disconnected from the shore, an island floating.

"You're doing well, my lover," the pond cooed. "Come --- once more around, once more."

Drenched, exhausted, the man strained for more speed across the watered surface. His skates hit the immobile dirt of the shore and he vaulted blindly forward, hitting the frozen ground shoulder-first, rolling until he lay spread-eagled on his back.

"Come back, my darling," called the pond. "Don't leave me!" But the man said no.

"Then tomorrow or the next day or the next," the pond lusted. "Come when the winter is turning to spring. One assignation before the snow is gone. Be mine to answer to my whims." The man said no again.

Painfully, he leaned forward to unlace his skates, but there were no skates. He looked up at the sky and the clouds were in their old pattern. He took a last look at the ice. It was frozen solid, not melting. His breath rushed out in steam again. A winter breeze pierced the trees and entered his clothes and iced the perspiration on his body.

Tarzan and Me



Tarzan, Jane and Cheetah were jungle stories and movies that I couldn't get enough of as I was growing up.



I never dreamed that a time would come when I was about fourteen, that Tarzan would come to my rescue.

The city... Philadelphia. The neighborhood ... Strawberry Mansion. Huddled in approximately a ten square block radius was a happy little Jewish ghetto like community where first born generation Americans were the children of Russian immigrants. I was one of them.

Surrounding this community was Fairmount Park, the Schuylkill River, Robin Hood Dell (our version of the Hollywood Bowl), Pat's - the original Philly Steaks, a Jewish Temple and lots of little stores on York street for food shopping. There were two movie theaters: the York and the Park. One bus line and two trolley lines. It was to me a small wonderful world.

One summer afternoon I found myself locked out of the second floor apartment where I lived with my mom, grandma Buba, aunt Celie and my brother Herman. No one was home. I had an urgent need to get into my apartment.

This three story structure was the second building from the corner and across from the park. On the corner was a snack shop where teens congregated. It was well known in our neighborhood and referred to as *Cherry's Corner*, or just *The Corner*.

How was I going to get into my house? I surveyed the alley on the side of the building. There were indentations in the bricks of about three inches deep and about six inches apart going upward. It appeared easy to climb this wall to the second floor porch, even though I had absolutely no experience at climbing. Yet without any hesitation I placed my fingers and toes into the first set of brick indentations. The fit was perfect. I began my climb. About three quarters of the way up, I froze. It was hard to figure out how to let go—remove my fingers to reach for the porch railing. And then how to release my toes to climb over onto the porch without falling to my death!

Like a spider in a state of suspension, I just hung on, not knowing how to make the next move. Then I heard a male voice call up to me,

"Hi, sweetheart. Gotta problem?"

It was Tarzan! That was the only name he was known by kids on the *Corner*. He was handsome, muscular, about nineteen, and looked like Johnny Weismueller, the actor who played Tarzan in the movies. So I replied, "I can't climb over and I can't get down!"

Tarzan called, "Hang on, sweetheart. I'm coming up!"

In the alley there happened to be a barrel of black tar that a worker left behind. Before Tarzan began to climb, he accidentally kicked over the barrel of tar on to his white pants which became black and white pants. First he looked at his pants. Then he looked up at me. He tried to brush off the tar with his hands. It was a useless exercise. The major emergency was me, little Essie, hanging on for dear life. He began his effortless ascent. After all he was Tarzan.

When he was just able to reach my rear end he said, "Okay now sweetheart, I'm going to hold on to your bottom so you can grab the railing. Then I'll shove you over onto the porch. Don't be afraid. I won't let you fall. I'm going to count to three before pushing you. Okay? Are you ready?"

Scared to death, I finally said, "Okay." while my mind kept repeating...*Tarzan saves Jane...Tarzan saves Jane*. And he did save me. I was so relieved when my feet were firmly planted on the porch floor that for a moment I forgot about Tarzan still hanging on the brick wall like an ape until I heard him call out,

"Do you mind if I climb over on your porch too?"

"Of course not," I said. "Come on up," and even lent him my hand. We both had black tar blotches. Me with black hand prints on the seat of my white shorts and he with his ruined new white pants. I could only hug him and say, "Thank you, thank you! You saved my life."

I never told my family about this adventure, but I didn't know how to explain the black hand prints on my shorts. I wondered what Tarzan would do. Thinking about it, I decided to bury my shorts in the jungle. The jungle in my imagination was Fairmount Park just across the street. Maybe Tarzan could bury his black and white pants there too...right next to mine.

That night, in a twilight state, I dreamt we were in the jungle sitting under a tree. We buried the secret evidence: my shorts and his pants next to each other. Then he put his arm around me and said, "Me Tarzan...You Jane."

Thank you, Edgar Rice Burroughs, for making it possible for me to fantasize about visiting exotic jungles, and for helping me believe I could climb like Cheetah, and for introducing

me to my hero...TARZAN.

• Leslie Kaplan



Often, the misadventures in life provide us with the most memorable moments. Those that bring a smile to the lips years after. Moments from which we learn the deepest lessons.

Because vacations are always sought in environs other than those in which we live I always want to find the trees. Our home is in the San Fernando Valley. Escaping some years ago into the wilds of northern California, which for me means San Francisco and north, my wife and I wandered through the wine country one summer. Spicing vacations with adventure, we make few reservations and often find ourselves in odd resting places.

Such was the day we paused at a winery to freshen up, each of us racing past the long tasting-bar toward the restrooms at the end of the building. The brick wall facing the bar of the tasting room was hung with paintings that we scanned as we passed.

As I reentered the room Susan seized my hand and cried, "I have to show you something!" Laughing, I nodded and repeated the same words with similar exuberance. Whereupon she led me to the selfsame painting I had noted in my initial passage, and we bought it!

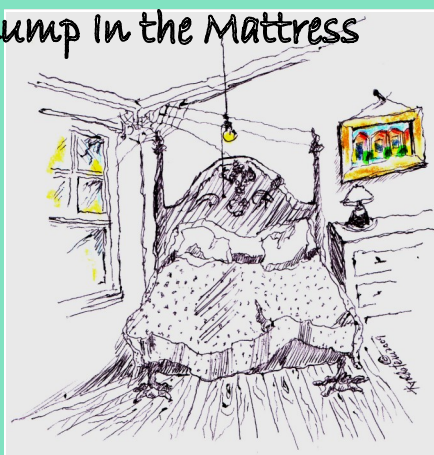
There is a lesson in that. When you travel, there are always things you encounter for the first time, which you may never experience again. At such moments, some inner caution may warn you to wait and see if it may be bought for less, if it is not unique, or many another deterrent "if." There was no such pause that day. Such was our delight we later reflected upon the curiosity that we fled with our prize and never even thought to sample the wines.

Later in the day, seeking lodging along the Russian River, we found no vacancies. Desperate, we were forced to accept a humble caretaker's cabin. The only remaining room in the vicinity. In the golden light of afternoon the cottage did not seem quite as rundown as it later proved to be. Amidst much laughter we hung our prized painting upon a nail protruding from a wall, and pronounced ourselves at home. Consolation prize was a dinner at the finest restaurant in the area before we returned to the cabin.

Sleep was elusive, and somewhere into the night my wife asked if I were awake. I proclaimed the mattress the worst I had ever experienced. I described it as a lump. She laughed and declared her sunken half a spring, and suggested changing places. The linoleum floor was cold to my bare feet, and as the spring was no more comforting than the lump, we were both soon in one of those wonderful laughing jags that originate in childhood and recur at times of ease and tiredness. Moments often remembered for a lifetime.

Creativity is like that. It is the lump in the mattress, which, pressed down in one place, resurfaces in another. Ours is the choice to be depressed by the lump or the spring, or to seize the moment for laughter and invention. The individual who dreams of being a surgeon but is unable to afford the years and dollars required may elect a life of dissatisfaction or heal himself and others in whatever role he chooses. Each of us is born with

A Lump In the Mattress



@Howard Goldstein

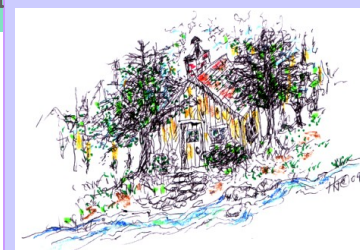
gifts to be turned to fit the varied and unique opportunities of where and when we live.

There are in any day, voices raised saying there is nothing left to be discovered. Just yesterday I read an article announcing the inability of anyone to project tomorrow because we are living in the future. It said there is no one about to describe the connections that will take place in the future, and that all of the connections have been made.

Smiling sadly at that shortsightedness, I picture myself standing inside my mind. In every direction I see no walls, no end. Infinite environments, infinite dreams, endless vistas and combinations are therein. With each step I bounce. I sink. Laughing, I spring over the lump in the mattress.

In the human mind the realization of possible connections and variations are made. The physical world is only the implementation of that creativity. Ours are the miracles of connectivity. We are unique. Tomorrow and creativity are alive and well. **In you !**

- Howard Goldstein



Images From India

The story "Maestro" on page 11 was submitted by a writer in India, Mira Desai. Mira is another member of the Internet Writers Workshop, my virtual writers club. This year I am inviting IWW members to send us stories for our newsletter. I think this creative sharing has been an enriching experience for both CWC/WV and IWW. We receive well-written stories, and IWW members tune in to www.cwcWestrValley.org and take a look around our website. And vice versa.

Mira Desai writes, works and lives in Bombay/ Mumbai. Her translations of stories from Gujarati have featured in Indian Literature, Pratilipi, Muse India and Calque. She has contributed to Six Sentences Vol 2, sixsentences.blogspot.com, Birmingham Arts Journal and Celebrate Bandra.

She works in the Indian pharma sector, and blogs at

austereseeker.blogspot.com



Mira Desai

Past the floodlights on the grand stage against the backdrop of the Gateway, Ustad Fakir Khan played an intricate piece on the tabla. In the distance, the sky changed to a lighter shade of blue, past the black of the sea. He glanced at the sitar player, Pandit Shahid Kumar. Shahid was engrossed in the notes he was playing. No, he hadn't noticed the shift in the palette of the sky, not yet. Perhaps there was time this once to upstage him.

The last night of 2009. A special concert to usher in a new dawn. Their music so far had been inspiring, uplifting... melodious strains of the sitar and the tabla beats had echoed all night. A perfect harmony, a give and take of percussion and string-- no one could guess at the undercurrents.

When the concert began, fireworks had lit up the night skies past Cuffe Parade, a dancing shower of light as people celebrated the year end. Light that had kept pace with their music as they began their first rendition. Shahid, as he had expected, was doing all he could to keep him in the background, a mere accompanist. Which is when he'd quietly raged--and decided. To settle all scores by the first light of the day.

This was a city of connoisseurs. Some in the elite audience had been present throughout the night-long performance, they'd kept beat with the rhythm and an eagle eye on the notes. The women were dressed in rich silks, the men in sherwanis or suits; a gathering of critics, music lovers, other musicians, business people and celebrities. A discerning audience, generous with appreciation. Today, he'd played pitch perfect, all the decades of practice had paid off.

Guruji would have been proud of him.

Both of them had joined the music institute, the gurukool, as children, but Shahid was from a privileged background—a fact that he'd never allowed Fakir to forget. "You gan-waar, you rustic villager" he'd tease. He, Fakir, had moved from his village to the sprawling mansion where Guruji resided, earning his keep doing odd chores, whereas servants would escort a privileged Shahid from his father's home every morning and fawn in attendance.

Fakir had mixed memories of those years. All those years of learning the scales, practicing the notes. Fakir hid a smile at the memory of flying missiles, Guruji's temper displays at his fumbling initial efforts. But this excitement was balanced with Shahid's prods and nastiness. Shahid, always the charmer, would show off or trip him up, particularly in front of Guruji or other students.

When it was time to allocate professions, at the end of the third year—he, Fakir, had been relegated to percussionist, always the bystander, while Shahid had been groomed for the spotlight as solo player.

Reviews in the local press, national press went overboard with praise for Shahid's dexterity, his fine sense of balance. But nothing for him. At most, a line saying so-and-so accompanied on the tabla.

Fakir stole a quick look at the sky, there was a hint of peach on the far horizon. He moved to a complex beat with flourishes and nuances. Shahid struggled to keep pace, fumbled. Ah, he'd taken almost a year to master this tricky sequence. Fakir stepped up the complexity of the beat, leading Shahid along, as if it were child's play. Shahid blundered, again missing a note or two. The audience noticed, grew restless.

Now he was the solo performer. Shahid had finally given up.

The stage resounded with the complexity of his beats—now the sound of quiet rain, now a thundering army. The sky turned from peach to orange. The audience watched, spellbound, the sound fresh and perfect.

Fakir received a standing ovation as he came to a close. In the distance, temple bells welcomed the new year.

By Mira Desai





"Listen to this version, Marcy," said Alan. He stood in front of the picture window for better reading light. Behind him the bristly green arms of the cactus garden saluted the brilliant Arizona sun.

"Special offer for collectors of space memorabilia: genuine NASA space-suit, once used by Apollo astronaut. Helmet and gloves included. Vintage space food and Tang juice containers. Make offer."

"I don't want to hear any more versions, Alan. Stop torturing me with all these drafts of your eBay ad. You know the family wants you to keep all your memorabilia from the space walks. Think of your grandchildren, for God's sake," said Marcy.

Alan sat down heavily in his recliner and stared at his draft.

"I AM thinking of our grandchildren. I wanted to save this stuff for the kids, but I don't want the kids to go bankrupt paying my hospice care...someday. I'm getting older. Can't stay on the treadmill for even twenty minutes anymore. Damn. Hate getting old...and we need the cash."

February Issue



An editor needs to think one month—at least—ahead. The February issue is taking shape in my mind as December comes to a close, and the January In Focus is completed and distributed by email.

The first thing I decide in terms of a new issue is the theme, the main idea that we members might all emote around. Some of our writers don't like themes, they have confided to me. Well, sorry. I want to try themes in this year's issues. I'll look for articles and submissions that

Marcy put down her crossword puzzle and turned down the Jim Lehrer News Hour. "I just watched your flight blast off again on the evening news. And watched your space walk. I got goosebumps all over again. So hard to believe you were once out there in dark space, weightless as an angel."

"I know. Forty years ago. But...for me. Seems like it just happened a few years ago." Alan sighed. "But...I'm a relic of another time, old priorities. And no one wants my stuff. Smithsonian said 'Nope, got enough.' NASA said, 'Keep it yourself.' I really feel like old news, Marcy. I'm an old fallen angel!"

The phone rang in the next room. Marcy left to answer it. Alan continued to muse on the wording of his ad until he became aware that Marcy sounded excited on her end of the phone conversation. Did he heard something about orange drink, new market for seniors, and living example of fitness?!

Marcy returned with a brisk step, her hand over the receiver.

"It's the Tang Company, sweetheart. They want you."

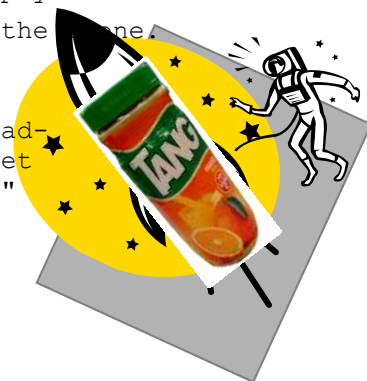
"They want old Alan? Why?"

"They want you to promote a new energy drink for the baby boomer market. Here, talk to their rep yourself."

She handed over the phone. As Alan grasped it, he whispered:

"Fire up the treadmill, honey. Got to get my new wings in shape."

- Kathy Highcove



"match" the theme in some way. But I'm flexible, as you all know by now. I like to read different takes or facets of the theme: prose or poetry; fiction or nonfiction stories; memoirs or fantasy.

Next month's theme is, Who or what is your bliss? (Joseph Campbell would be proud of me.) In honor of St. Valentine, get romantic or tell us your very favorite way to spend your free time. This newsletter, this year, is my happy hobby.

What's yours?

Kathy Highcove





Saved From Herself

Travel in Modern Times

It wasn't that long ago and when I think about it, my emotions pour over me like an uncomfortable blush and I realize I should have known better. My reactions to the whole scenario could have gotten me into troubleespecially when the nervous laughter bubbled up.

At the time I feared for my future as visions of being interrogated under a bright light or, worse, denied chocolate forever as a punishment for my crime crowded my consciousness.

Another LAX story....embarrassing, excruciating and really very funny.

I was leaving for Maryland that afternoon.... my ticket computer issued, my luggage x-rayed and checked, the long walk to check-in traversed.... and finally ready to go through security. I was completely and confidently prepared: no nail files, clippers, scissors, metal boxes or electronic devices. Besides I had no hooks or snaps on my clothes or shoes or metal clips in my hair.

Going through security would be a breeze. I only had my virginal purse and a book bag which held a notebook of family stories I intended to work on during my visit to my son. Relaxed, I walked through the arch ready to retrieve my belongings when I was suddenly startled by a shrill alarm and a red light flashing brightly above the conveyor belt. Fear gripped me and my breath caught in my throat. Did the person behind me have a gun or a bomb?

Then I heard a loudspeaker blare forth:
"Attention security team. Double-edge razor blade, station six!"

Suddenly my heart skipped a beat and I really couldn't breathe. Oh my God! I had one of my father's wrapped razor blades taped to the story about his ill-fated adventure in manufac-

turing razor blades after WW2. I had forgotten all about it !

Before I had time to contemplate my error I was whisked off to a corner by two hefty female security guards who showed me no deference by virtue of my white hair and dangerously pale complexion. It was then that the nervous laughter welled up within me as I thought about my own stupidity and how a harmless hobby could get me into so much trouble. This was bizarre and any excuse seemed ludicrous.

However no one in authority thought anything was funny even after my detailed and apologetic explanation. Age and forgetfulness were not accepted as an excuse. My shoes were taken off and x-rayed again. I was wanded, patted and repeatedly questioned. My stories were dumped on a table, then swept up like garbage and thrown back into the book bag. By then I had to pee and was NOT given permission to go !

With humorless warnings from Security the fifty year old blade, still in its wrapper, was confiscated and I was thoroughly searched again and eyed with suspicion before boarding the plane as the very last passenger. By then all the laughter had left me and I was close to tears, humiliated and angry at myself. The five hour trip to Maryland was miserable and I imagined every passenger eying me with suspicion and making up his own mind as to my character. And all this over a wrapped piece of steel that could do no more harm than cut through butter!

-Lillian Rodich

First published last year in
the Janaury 2009 *In Focus*.
One more time for 2010:



NEW YEAR'S CHALLENGE

Santa's returned to his frozen land.

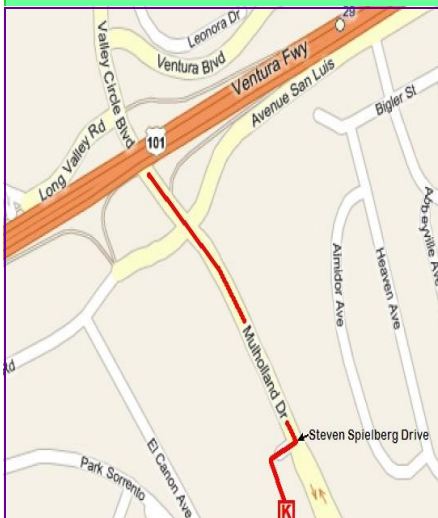
The diapered baby now takes his stand.

Promises to keep or to be broken

Some are secret, others spoken.

Twelve months from now we'll understand.

- Ken Wilkins



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

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, Jan 2nd, 2009 at 1:30 p.m.

MAILING ADDRESS

c/o Dave Wetterberg, 23809 Friar Street

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Submission 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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