February Featured Speaker: Burt Prelutsky

Who is Burt Prelutsky, and why does his name seem familiar to you? Perhaps his credits on television for several movies and the best serial programs offered: Dragnet, McMillan & Wife, MASH, Dr. Quinn, Diagnosis Murder – the list goes on and on. Or maybe you’ve seen his name in print? He was the first movie critic for Los Angeles magazine, wrote freelance for the NY Times, Sports Illustrated, Modern Maturity and more. He wrote his humor/interview column in The LA Times and the blogs on his site, www.burtprelutsky.com are sharp, humorous and thought-provoking. When he visited our branch in 2005 he introduced us to his book, Conservatives Are From Mars, Liberals Are From San Francisco. He was a wonderful speaker, and I believe he sold more books than any speaker since.

Some writers shake in horror when they discover writing a book may take two, three, even ten years – well, Burt took forty years interviewing people such as Groucho Marx, Gerald Ford, Judith Krantz, Ginger Rogers, George Carlin, Oscar Levant, Father John Caroir…a fascinating list that resulted in 78 fascinating interviews packed into The Secret of Their Success: Interviews with Legends & Luminaries. Burt will share with us his most memorable experiences, and how unpredictable subjects can be. He summed it up for me: “Forty years of asking dumb questions, hoping for smart answers.” Based on how much I enjoyed his first book, I’ve already asked Burt to reserve my copy.

NOTE: Stomach flu prevented Burt from speaking at our October meeting, but he’s joining us in February. He’s not only a talented writer and a fascinating speaker – he’s funny! — Cara Alson

Member Showcase: Tom Barnes — Actor, Writer and Hurricane Hunter

From my Writers Notebook I’m going to give you a writing tip from Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway and Stephen King guaranteed to improve your confidence and your writing.

Then I’ll talk about how I got hooked on history and its role in my research and writing.

Also how a rejection letter inspired a nineteen-part blog series on the production of Gone With the Wind, and how an off Broadway role gave me confidence and talking points while making acting rounds in search of TV commercials, prime-time series parts, soap operas and summer stock.

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(Click on title to jump to story)
January Meeting-in-Review:  
Dan Poynter, Self-Publishing Guru  
By Douglas William Douglas

“Herrre’s Johnny!”  
What, you may ask, do Johnny Carson and self-publishing have in common? Dan Poynter revealed that Mr. Carson, like most writers, was actually an introvert!

Today’s publishing environment is especially suited to we recluses because it’s converting from analog to digital with the demise of Brick and Mortar stores (BMs) and the burgeoning of the e-book market. Why, you can even read War and Peace on a two-inch iPhone screen while in bed with your Significant Other (by the way, Dan doesn’t wear eyeglasses).

Using parachuting as a jumping-off point (sic) for his career, Dan Poynter is now the author of over 120 books and is considered an icon in the field of self-publishing (just do a Google or Amazon search — you’ll see).

With a veritable cornucopia of aphorisms, Mr. Poynter outlined his five key business decisions: 1) Go digital (“Losers wait for the wind to change, winners trim their sails.”); 2) Dump the USPS; 3) Promote on-line only (“It’s not who you know, it’s who knows you.”); 4) Tolerate BMs, but don’t pursue them (sic — really sic); and 5) Shop on-line. Dan also showed us how to promote our books at Barnes and Noble by clever shelving rearrangement (the sneaky devil!).

He then gave three key poynters (yawn) for authors: 1) Dump New York publishing houses; 2) Give the old heave-ho to vanity presses; and 3) Embrace traditional self-publishing using simultaneous formats such as audio, large print, digital, POD, etc.

The excellent handout contained helpful particulars, especially on e-marketing (e.g. “Go global!”), and Dan encouraged us to visit his websites, Parapub.com and Parapublishing.com, which have “over 800 pieces of information”.

It was an immense privilege and valuable experience to have had such a prominent expert as Mr. Poynter speak to our beloved chapter. We were all enlightened.

Musings from the President  
Ethel Ann Pemberton

Let’s get fresh—with writing.  
Elizabeth Taylor once said, “There is no deodorant like success.” I remembered that quote because it made me smile, and I smiled wider after discovering who came up with such a delightful image. Another image I particularly like: “He wrote with a surgical indifference”—William Nolte.

How can we come up with such clever devices to amuse our audience? By using simile, that’s how. Unfortunately, memorable analogies rarely appear unsought. No, we must challenge our imagination to discover the pearls. As writers, we should etch the word like in our minds and think in terms of such-and-such is like...

In simile, a comparison between two distinct opposites is indicated by the word like or as. A simple example is “O my love’s like a red, red rose,” or “His personality is like a table leg.” After repeating this like process in our minds, it won’t be long before fascinating analogies appear on their own. That’s the time to transfer those analogies to sentences. You’ll be amazed at the inculcation of the freshness of your words, thoughts, and actions.

Another way to add newness to your writing is to use a metaphor—a figure of speech in which a term is transferred from the object it ordinarily designates to an object it may designate only by implicit comparison or analogy, as in evening of life. Another example of a metaphor: “O my heart is a red, red rose.” Did you notice like is missing?

Metaphors often appear by accident. While biking I’m reminded of a freedom of abandonment. I can feel everything around me in motion—tree branches, leaves, wind, passing cars; and those things have an energizing effect on me. I am also humbled to realize that my existence is part of this mystical movement.

Metaphors are often used in coming of age stories by images of springtime, flowers in bloom, a blossoming girl. Dark clouds and thunderous rain woven throughout a story can depict despair in a crumbling marriage or some other tragic event.

The substantive imagery contained in simile and metaphor is the heart and soul of descriptive fiction. Without them, you’re merely scratching words on paper. Used well, simile and metaphor can bring prose to life. If overdone, however, the salience can become tedious.

Emily Dickinson, a shy, reclusive poet, was well-known for her use of metaphors. While she lived, she had only

(See Musings pg. 4)
**OPINION**

Whither CWC-SFV?

by Glenn Wood

It is now a new year and time to start thinking about what we want CWC-SFV to be in 2010. We have achieved a lot in our first six months and there is still much we would like to do.

We will be facilitating a talk-fest so you can become part of this process. We will consider all possibilities. Do we want more workshops? What kind? Should we be supporting more critique groups? How about promoting new avenues for publishing? What about the quality or quantity of speakers? Shall we focus every meeting on a speaker, or are there other activities we should devote that hour to? Maybe it should be just a social club; after all, writing is a solitary exercise, maybe a social club is exactly what we as its members need. If we instead decide what we want is a place to learn how to become master welders then let’s do that.

Those in attendance will decide. These are just some suggestions to get your juices flowing. Bring your ideas and share them with others, and we may come up with a synergy that defines our vision for CWC-SFV.

At Yahoo! we sometimes use a management technique called “scrum.” The team meets in a room, tasks to be completed are written on sticky notes and stuck to the wall, then team-members literally volunteer for the task(s) they want to do. It’s easy to see why this works so well in the software world. When you are paid copious amounts of money, and bonuses and raises depend on the magnitude and quality of your work, you will tend to pick tasks that you are good at and enjoy doing. It’s harder to see how this would work in an unpaid, non-profit situation, but keep an open mind for a moment.

Number one, we will be determining “tasks to be completed” in our meeting. We will impose no boundaries to suggestions, but will decide among ourselves its feasibility. Number two, we will pick from all suggestions a constellation of things we think will make a whole club for 2010. Then we’ll talk about ways to make that happen!

I want to persuade you of two things. One, that we can make CWC-SFV into a club that we can all value and be proud of, from which each of us can take fun and profit. Two, that doing this need not be as much work as it has too often been in the past.

Your executives have some ideas of, and some skill in, the kinds of things a CWC branch ought to do, but our job is not to choose what those things are. Our job is to facilitate the membership’s decisions. We’re here only to help put focus on the activities that the membership wants; the members do the rest. If there is an idea with enough force and benefit to get us all excited, then it will not be too hard to make it happen. If we do this right we will have something that everyone will want to work for.

I believe that there is something about CWC-SFV that is of value to each of us as members. Let’s get together and discover exactly what that is and how to make it so!

Please contact me at vice-president@cwc-sfv.org, or call 650-279-9436, so we can co-ordinate a meeting, which will be sometime between February 20 and March 13, for an afternoon or evening of honest discussion about the future of CWC-SFV.

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**KUDOS KOLUMN**

by Erica Stux

(If any member has good news to share, such as getting an agent, selling a book, script, essay, or even getting a personalized rejection letter, contact me at: ericastux@aol.com. We are interested in everyone’s successes.)

KAREN FAYE GORBACK won an honorable mention for her short story, “Hot Wings,” in the annual Ventura County Writers’ Contest recently. Kudos to you, Karen, and may you win 1st place next year.

RAY MALUS’ experimental script for Interactive Television, will be given a public reading by The Yale Cabaret, Hollywood. The reading will take place at the Perry Mansion, Heritage Square, Pasadena, on Sunday, February 24, at 4:00 pm. It is open to the public, but space is limited. Admission is $10.00. For more information, go to http://www.yalecabarethollywood.com/.
eight poems published. Four years after her death, her work became available to the general public for the first time. The early critical responses were mixed. Some critics found the poetry “balderdash,” suffering from a lack of rhyme, faulty grammar, and incomprehensible metaphors… Other readers found them remarkably pointed and evocative. As the years passed and as more of her poems were published, Dickinson had come to be regarded, with Whitman and Poe, as one of America’s greatest lyric poets.*

An untitled poem by Emily Dickinson

There’s a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons—
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes—
Heavenly Hurt, it gives us—
We can find no scar,
But internal difference,
Where the Meanings, are—
None may teach it—Any—
‘Tis the Seal Despair—
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air—
When it comes, the Landscape listens—
Shadows—hold their breath—
When it goes, ‘tis like the Distance
On the look of Death—


The Pen Is A Mighty Sword is a contest open to un-produced plays written specifically for the stage. Deadline: June 30. Charges: $10. Guidelines for SASE or online. Looking for plays that are bold, compelling, and compassionate. Prizes: 1st Place: $2,000 and staged reading. 2nd Place: $1,000 and a staged reading. 3rd Place: $500 and a reading. In addition, up to 7 honorable mentions receive $100 each. Contact: Whit Andrews, 1901 Rosalia Rd., Los Angeles, CA 90027. Phone:(877)787-8036. Fax:(323)660-5097. E-mail pen_sword2008@yahoo.com. Website: www.virtualtheatreproject.org.

Jack Dyer Fiction Prize is looking for fiction & short stories. Open to U.S. citizens only. Offered annually for unpublished short fiction. Crab Orchard Review acquires first North American serial rights to all submitted work. Open March 1 - April 30. Fee: $10/entry(can enter up to 3 stories, each story submitted requires a separate fee and can be up to 6,000 words), which includes one copy of Crab Orchard Review featuring the winners. Prize: $1,500 and publication. Address: Dept of English, Southern Illinois Univ. Carbondale, Carbondale, Ill. 62901-4503. Contact: Jon C. Tribble, man. ed. E-mail: jtribble@siu.edu. Website: craborchardreview.siuc.edu.

Glimmer Train’s May Short-Story Award For New Writers Open: May 1-31. Charges: $15 fee/story. Open to any writer whose fiction hasn’t appeared in a nationally distributed publication w/a circulation over 5,000. Word count: 1,200-12,000 words. Winners will be called and results will be announced in their August bulletin, on their website, and in a number of additional

(See TO MARKET pg. 5)
print and online publications. Follow submission procedure on Web site. Address: Glimmer Train Press, Inc., 1211 NW Glisan St., Suite 207, Portland, OR 97209. Phone:(503)221-0836. Fax:(503)221-0837. Contact: Linda Swanson-Davies  E-mail: eds@glimmertrain.org. Website: www.glimmertrain.com. Prize: 1st. $1,200, publication in Glimmer Train Stories and 20 copies of that issue; 2nd. $500; 3rd. $300

Manus & Associates Literary Agency, Inc. Query with SASE sent to the California office. Submit an outline of 2-3 sample chapters, if requested. Accepts simultaneous submissions. Responds in 3 months to queries, and mss. Obtains most new clients through recommendations from others, solicitations, conferences. Agent receives 15% commission on domestic sales, 20-25% on foreign sales. Represents nonfiction books, novels. Will consider fiction areas: literary, mainstream, multicultural, mystery, thriller, women, quirky/edgy fiction. They are actively seeking high-concept thrillers, commercial literary fiction, women’s fiction, celebrity biographies, memoirs, multicultural fiction, popular health, women’s empowerment and mysteries. Contact: Jillian Manus, Jandy Nelson, Penny Nelson. Thirty percent of clients are new/unpublished writers. Address: 425 Sherman Avenue., Suite 200, Palo Alto, CA 94306. Phone:(650)470-5151. Fax:(650)470-5159. E-mail: manuslit@manuslit.com. Website: www.manuslit.com. Check their website and email to their individual email addresses, depending on your material.

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Orion is 90% freelance. It is a magazine about the issues of our time: how we live, what we value, what sustains us. It explores an emerging alternative world view through essays, literary journalism, short stories, interviews, and reviews, as well as photo essays and portfolios of art. It is a bimonthly covering nature and culture. Guidelines available online. Accepts multiple submissions. Byline given. Pays on publication. No kill fee. They buy first North American serial rights. Queries accepted by mail, e-mail. Sample copy available online. Responds in 1-2 months to queries, 4-6 months to mss. Publishes ms. an average of 3-12 months after acceptance. Buys 40-50 mss./year. Send complete ms. Length: 2,000-4,500 words. Pays $300-$2,000. Pays expenses of writers on assignment. Needs nonfiction: essays, expose, historical, humor, personal experiences, photo feature, reported feature. SEE WEBSITE FOR MORE INFO. Address: The Orion Society, 187 Main Street, Great Barrington, MA 01230. E-mail: orion@orionsociety.org. Website: www.oriononline.org.

Something To Ponder: “You can’t try to do things; you simply must do them.” - Ray Bradbury

Check Out Our New Look!
We have a stunning new face on the World Wide Web!
Want to feel extra proud to be a member of The San Fernando Valley Branch?
Take a gander at our new Web Site!

CWC-SFY.ORG
has been completely revamped, and it’s sensational!

It’s high-tech, elegant, and packed with information.
... and we have a new look that would make a Beverly Hills Cosmetic Surgeon preen.
Our new site gives an exciting new face to the most dynamic Branch in CWC.
We expect the site to grow and expand, and be a model for other branches.
Huge thanks to our Webmaster, Glenn Wood.
The Wright Word – by Ray

Punch A Hole In The Sky

We’re all going to punch a hole in the sky. By sheer force of our talent, experience, perceptions, we will smash the barriers of established publishing. We will muscle our way into the world of letters, and forever change it! Yeah. How’s that goin’ for ya?

Uh-huh. Me neither.

Well, here’s a bulletin. We don’t have to. There are thousands of “holes” out there already — just waiting to be filled. Every day, week, month, year, billions of words get printed and read. Editors, producers, publishers, are desperate for your manuscripts!

So why aren’t you getting contracts?

Okay. Before we go any further, let’s define some terms. For the sake of this article we’ll say “publishing” is the distribution of any work. If your friends have read your memoir, you’ve “published.” However “Publishing” (capital ‘P”) means you have distribution through a generally-recognized channel: book, magazine, film, television show, newspaper, etc. In addition, “Publishing” often means “MONEY.”

Got your attention? (Why yesss. Go ooonnn…)

One more thing: Whenever money is involved, the term used is “selling.” It’s not a dirty word. That’s just what it’s called. “Selling.”

Most of us aspire to be the next Faulkner, Hemmingway, Miller (either), Kerouac, Ginsberg, London. “Finishing that novel (screenplay, whatever),” has become a cliché. But clichés are clichés only because they fit. It’s a noble aspiration. Keep at it!

But while you’re doing it, the bills are piling up. Other writers are paying them; why can’t you?

You need to sell!

Anyone who puts words down in any indelible medium is a “writer.” Most of them are unknown. You don’t see them on Letterman. Their names are not banded around at cocktail parties. You don’t read about them in The Times Book Reviews. But they do have the luxury of earning a living by sitting at home and putting words together. They write essays, stories, user manuals, “log lines” — even those incomprehensible instructions that come with electronic gadgets. They are writers; and they get paid! They sell. (Don’t believe it? I have a friend who earns her living working at home for Disney by writing the “blurbs” that appear on DVD covers.)

So how can we do it? Easy. Find a market. Now, we’ve all been told this before. But let me say it a little differently.

We’ve all heard the advice, “Submit to Publishers that handle material like yours.” We tend to interpret that as, “They know how to judge your stuff.” What it really means is, “They’re dying to publish your stuff.”

Any publisher, producer, editor, needs material. His publication, production company, etc. has a position to maintain — a ranking. He’s feeding an insatiable machine. If he runs out of material, he stops publishing and slowly disappears. His circulation drops. His audience vanishes. He’s out of business. Every month (week, day, quarter, year), he has lots of “holes” to fill. He’s desperate to fill them.

But these “holes” are of a certain “size” and “shape.” The publisher of a Romance magazine isn’t interested in Science Fiction. He wants love stories. If your submission fits, he’s ecstatic to use it. But it’s got to be a good fit. You have to customize your submission to what he already knows he needs.

How do you do this?

Well, a really good start is to carefully read Ken Watts’ excellent “TO MARKET” column, in this newsletter. (You can get back-issues on our web site: CWC-SFV.org). When Ken says “Such&such is seeking…” or “So&so needs…” take those verbs literally! They’re not passive; they’re active!

Of course, there is a plethora of Writer’s Market, and similar, books. They’re a bit pricey, but are packed with information. Their drawback is that markets tend to be fluid, so their information may not be absolutely current.

Most important is for you to read — a lot. Read books that are similar to what you want to write. Make a note of the publisher. Take a morning and browse newsstands. Pick up copies of magazines that resonate with you. Read them. Look for “holes” to fill. If there’s a 1000-word article on “My Favorite Uncle,” in one issue, chances are there will be a hole for that in a succeeding issue. Once you find a publication that seems promising, read several issues. Look for patterns. I assure you, they’re there.

In short, find your market, and then tailor your submission to it. Sure, keep working on that pet project. But meanwhile, find a way to sell!

At this point, you may be saying to yourself, “I do this. But I still haven’t sold anything.”

Next month, we’ll try to give you an answer and strategies. We’ll try to look into the mind of the editor. See you then. ❖
The real index of civilization is when people are kinder than they need to be.” —Louis de Berniere, novelist (b. 1954)
It Could Be
More Verse

Oh Woman!
Ray Malus

Oh Woman! Why, for even just one hour,
Would you pursue the vanities of man?
Forsaking, in that foolish quest, your power,
Forgetting you were formed a fertile flower,
The bud of loveliness, since time began.

For men can only conquer and dismember,
Erect tall towers empty, dark, and chilled.
And write small verses no one will remember,
Unable to enkindle any ember
of life, with which our living might be filled.

But you, and you alone can birth and nourish.
And you, and you alone can heal and hear.
Without your gifts, the world would quickly perish,
For I alone can barely even cherish
the silken strength that makes your nature dear.

Demolish my conceits with awe-ful beauty,
And ravish my regard with ageless grace!
Come, plunder my devotion as your booty,
Command your adoration as my duty,
And show me my salvation in your face.

Japanese Gardens in the Rain
Lillian Rodich

egrets pose
upon green thrones
at the fragile tops
of Spring’s green branches
mirrored pools below
reflect the whiteness
and feathery outline
of spreading wings

mist collects
into fine droplets
and….later
rhythmic needles
pricking still waters
yet not disturbing
their tranquility

forms reposed
in ancient history
resting now
in breathing silence
mutely describing
what once was
in nature’s music
and fragile blossoms

while stone lanterns
and bridges remain
etched as a picture
against a gray sky
I'VE BEEN DEFLOWERED!!
by Peter H. Brothers

Well at nearly 57 years-of-age I suppose it was to happen eventually.

Allow me to explain; I do not mean that in the sense you might think I meant it, I was referring to the fact
that, after some seven years, I find myself a published author and – as Coleridge would have it – “a sadder
and a wiser man,” although I am not so certain about the latter.

Some seven years ago I decided to proceed on a book about my favorite movie director, Ishiro Honda.
Honda was the guy who directed what are now generally considered to be such classic Japanese monster
movies as: Rodan, The Mysterians, Attack of the Mushroom People, Mothra and the original Godzilla.

You might think seven years a long time. Actually it was back in 1973 (yes, Operator, 1973) when I
thought how “fun” it would be to write a book on Honda.

Fun. Yes, “fun” was the word. Had I only known that all these years later only the first two letters would
still be accurate! I was working at my first job: an assistant janitor (oh, excuse me, an “Assistant Janitor”) at
the Beth Kodesh Synagogue in Canoga Park (don’t bother looking it up, it has a different name now. How
does a Synagogue acquire a new name?) I was dusting the floors when I first imagined writing a Honda book
and being interviewed about it at the Griffith Observatory (Why the Griffith Observatory? Son if I knew that
I wouldn’t have half the complexes I carry along with me). Life then intruded as it tends to do and before I
knew it 30 years had passed.

It really all begin “officially” in 2003 when I was having lunch at a restaurant in Hollywood with the
delightful name of the “Pig ‘N Whistle.” It was there during a Japanese science-fiction convention at the
Roosevelt Hotel, I found myself dining with two new friends, Brant and Brett (I’m not making this up. I also
know a Brent. That’s correct, I know a Brant, Brett and a Brent!) who both thought the concept worthwhile
and thus gave me the encouragement to proceed.

This reminds me of a totally-unrelated story: I used to do community theatre acting and after one opening
night I was chatting with three other actors: Ron Rezac, Ron Ford and Ron Rosen. Three guys named Ron,
and two of them with the same first and last name initial! Had Ron Ford been Ron Rord I’m sure the earth
would have opened up right then!

Where was I? Oh yes. In any event, it was then and there (or is it “there and then?”) I began the process,
which would entail hundreds of hours writing, dozens of inquiries to publishers, a dozen-or-so proposals and
five rejections. The manuscript saw its way whittled-down from over 500 pages to around 125, ending up at
just over 100,000 words as opposed to the 225,000 it was at one time. Along the way I encountered double-
dealings, back-stabbings, seeing my reputation besmirched and being chewed-out over the Internet and over
the phone. I lost friends and associates and even argued with family members over the book. On more than
one occasion I wished I had started something else.

A fellow Godzilla writer told me not to write the book as there would be no money in it. He was wrong,
there was money involved, but MY money, and quite a bit of it in fact! And the version that eventually hit
the streets wasn’t exactly what I had originally envisioned, but all-in-all I am reasonably satisfied with it.
The funny thing is I ended-up self-publishing the darn thing when at one time it was the absolutely last thing
I wanted to do. But, circumstances being what they were…

Looking back, would I do anything differently? Absolutely! I would have gone about it very differently
and had a clearer concept of what I wanted. I have a tendency to be impulsive and it was reflected in the
preparation of the book. I also would have been more organized. In the end, I am glad it is out (and causing
quite a stir among Japanese monster fans, a vitriolic sect if there ever is one) and hope the people who buy it
read it and enjoy it. The main thing is to get the word out on this wonderful director and get people to take a
much-maligned movie genre more seriously. Just watch his monster films in their original versions, you will
be pleasantly surprised (I hope you will have the same reaction reading my book!)

In the end I am proud of the book and proud of the effort it took to write it. It’s interesting: in every

(See “DEFLOWERED”, pg. 12)
SHAKING IN MY BOOTS
by LILLIAN RODICH

“Francisco, please… let’s try again. How many little white blocks can you fit on top of the red rod?” I feel frustration tightening my throat.

I look at my young pupil’s wrinkled nose and wonder why I’m making such a big deal over this. Ten white blocks fit on the red. Therefore, the red rod can represent a group of “ten.” Easy! The trouble is that the game is not a novelty to my class. It’s old stuff. Still that’s the point. Repeated practice should insure perfection. They’ve done this exercise over and over again. There’s no excitement in the discovery any more. And now they couldn’t care less. Maybe I should make a whole new plan…..something really motivating. All I know is that it had better be an A plus lesson.

Tomorrow my classroom will be visited by PTA board members, the principal, and the district supervisor. And they’re probably going to see Francisco build a tower with his rods and blocks and knock them over, and send the whole class into hysterics. This all having nothing to do with the concept of recognition of units of ten, a concept my first graders actually have down pat.

“Let’s come back to our circle and sing some songs,” I say brightly.

It’s almost two o’clock. The blocks sit forlornly on the math table. My charges are more eager to sing than play math games. I sigh, glad my day is almost over.

Maria, unbidden, gets the rhythm instruments and we sing, “Down at the station early in the morning…..” Early in the morning! My heart sinks. I’ve had all afternoon to rehearse this demonstration lesson and it looks like it’s going to be a disaster.

“See the little engineer pull the little handle…” Rrrrrring!! There goes the bell. My children get their coats and sweaters and line up so quietly and cheerfully that I am heartened. Perhaps tomorrow will work out well after all.

After dismissal I come back to the classroom and start sponging tables. The pencils need sharpening and something has to be done about those overflowing desks. I look at the bulletin boards. They’re perfect! I begin to feel better until I glance at the math table.

O.K. There’s no way to get around this. I take a deep breath and get one of my lesson plans. I’ve worked on every aspect of the lesson in detail. Actually I have fifteen copies. I always like to be prepared for these visiting dignitaries.

I arrange a box of blocks and rods at each of six places for my “star” pupils. Ha! Who am I trying to impress? Francisco’s ghost haunts me. I am determined to be prepared for anything. Still my heart flutters as I look at the “follow-up” materials stacked neatly on a side table and wonder if the lesson will even reach that point.

I check the time. It’s 4:00 p.m. Oh, one more thing. I erase the chalkboard and wipe down the surface with a chamois. Then I write tomorrow’s date with yellow chalk on the upper right hand corner.

My husband Sy and I buy McDonald’s for the kids. The two of us decide to eat our own dinner later and alone. I have a glass of wine. I’m feeling very down.

“Why am I so intimidated?” I think, “I’ve been teaching for eight years and I know what I’m doing. But these darling students of mine are so unpredictable! What’ll I do if they get out of control?” I take another sip of wine.

I can’t sleep. Everyone is out cold. Sy is resting comfortably on his back. The kids have disappeared into their cocoons — no arguing tonight. It’s been a strange evening. The air is heavy and still, like a cloak of silence. Perhaps the wine is affecting me.

I lay out my gray skirt and pink sweater and rearrange my purse. And I review every word of THE LESSON PLAN.

(See “SHAKING”, pg. 12)
James Dean Is Gone
by Duke Howard
(Excerpt from Howard’s novella, “One Eye Dawg” — unpublished.)

Sonny Shanks, a young country western singer remembers the night when Jimmy Dean died and shares it with two former desert rats, the Fitchett brothers at May’s Diner on the Texas border. “I remember that evening,” Sonny said as images of the past quickly flashed into mind: images of the movie, The Creature From The Black Lagoon, Peaches’ Drug Store, the kids from Peaches and Ellie May Hughes. They all came flooding in along with the smell of sugar, strawberries and whip cream.

“I was sitting in a booth at Peaches over at Bisbee sharing one of his giant, three scoop strawberry sodas with whip cream and a cherry on top with the cutest and prettiest girl in all of Arizona, Ellie May Hughes when Jimmy ‘V,’ one of the gang yelled out: ‘Look at that kid out there.’ We all turned to look out the window. There was this skinny little kid with an oversized leather jacket and jeans barreling down the street on his bike towards Peaches. When he got closer, Hog Cannon shouted: ‘Why that’s Little Arty!’ Little Arty was moving and weaving in an out of the traffic — cars were honking and people were shouting, but Arty didn’t care. He had some place to go and some place to be and it ended up being Peaches. Arty paddled his bike into the drug store, jumped off, out of breath and barely uttered: ‘Jimmy Dean.’

‘What about Jimmy Dean?’ Pudd asked.

‘He’s dead,’ Arty said, catching his breath and looking about the room at the inquisitive faces.

‘Dead?’ Cheryl said in disbelief.

‘Yeah, dead, don’t you understand English, like dead in the grave,’ Arty blurted out loudly for all to hear.

“Everything and everyone came to a complete stop, even the waitresses. Gathering himself together, Little Arty announced with a tremor in his voice and a tear in his eye: ‘James Dean was killed on the road to Salinas in California in a car accident.’

“There was an unearthly stillness in that room as kids were frozen in disbelief. You could jes about feel the air being sucked out. It became like a tomb. I looked over at Ellie May an’ I could see the tears buildin’ in her eyes. Then one, two, three and four began to rush down those soft little cheeks and washed away that sweet little smile. Jimmy Dean was dead and Ellie May was crying for him. There was no reason to be happy that night or the day after or the night after that. No reason — no reason at all. James Dean was dead, died on the road to Salinas at 5:45 PM on Friday, September 30, 1955.” 

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library and book store there should be two books: one would be the book and the other a book on what the author went through when he or she was writing it. In many cases I dare say the “behind-the-scenes” story might be more interesting than the printed manuscript! I hope the story of Honda’s life and his career is much more fascinating than what I went through to bring it to the printed page; as Honda himself knew, the ultimate satisfaction not always comes with the end result, the effort is all that matters.

(Peter H. Brothers is the author of the newly-released *Mushroom Clouds and Mushroom Men – The Fantastic Cinema of Ishiro Honda*, published by AuthorHouse and available on-line).

“Stop worrying!” I command my poor sick ego. 
“Dear God,” I whisper, “why don’t you give me a high fever in the morning. Anything to get me out of that darn lesson!”

I fall asleep picturing Room 7, the tables washed, chairs pushed neatly against organized desks, boxes of materials stacked ready for use, lesson plans waiting for visiting “big-wigs.” And the chalkboard erased and wiped clear except for the date, **FEBRUARY 9, 1971.**

Never tempt fate! A huge crack of thunder, a flash reminiscent of an Atom bomb, and the shaking started. Our file cabinet fell over, two lamps clattered to the floor and dishes slammed down on the kitchen counters. The phones were out, the lights were out and the gray dawn gripped us with fear.

I forgot about everything except our personal safety. Sy was gone and I realized he had left for work early. Shudder after shudder followed the initial shock. For some inexplicable reason the kids and I huddled under our wobbly kitchen table.

Just then Sy walked in laughing at our safety net. I was so glad to see him! He explained that his car seemed out of control and he finally realized the reason and headed right back home.

Helen Brendel, my teaching partner, rang the doorbell. The motor was running in her VW. I dressed quickly and was out the door in no time, my heart beating wildly.

As we drove towards San Fernando the radio announced that all valley schools would be closed until further notice. We became increasingly agitated and just exchanged confused glances. Signals were out. People were roaming the streets in silent clumps. Water trucks and first aid stations were already set up. The whole city looked like a movie set. Familiar streets had changed character altogether.

Results of Nature’s violence were visible everywhere: cracked curbs, debris strewn yards, block walls ripped and dangling and an eerie stillness in the cool misty morning.

Finally we drove down Brand Boulevard and turned onto Fifth Street and parked. We were in a state of shock. The annex building stood askew, mutely looking up at a leaden sky.

We ventured into Morningside’s main building. Hunks of plaster from the ceiling peppered the stairwells. Helen and I held hands like two frightened children and crept down the hall in the ghostly silence.

The classroom doors were all forced open by the force of the quake. I walked into Room 7. Every cupboard was empty, its contents catapulted into the room. Light fixtures were dangling and chairs and tables were pushed around or knocked over. Everything was covered with crayons, pencils, books, blocks, toys, papers and bits of plaster. Two window panes were broken and an open paint can had spilled to smear bright red in a gash across the rug.

The building shook again and I cringed. What if this earthquake had happened when my students were in class? Then I looked up at the chalkboard and there it was — the date, **February 9, 1971.**
When My Mother Died
by Glenn Wood

For some time before my mother’s death, I was living in her house. After she made her final return to the hospital, I took to sleeping in the main bedroom. It was warmer in there; nights in November could be very cold in the Sierra Nevada.

I remember one night that I wasn’t able to sleep all night. There was a dog next door who barked constantly, literally, all night! “Woof-woof-woof... woof-woof-woof...” Three barks, then a pause as he took a breath, and three more barks, repeated, all night long. That dog had a lot of resilience. It was a bitterly cold night, I remember. I couldn’t get warm enough to sleep, and that damn dog made sure I didn’t even doze. I hated that dog. I cursed that dog. I considered taking a bucket of water out to douse on him. That would shut him up!

The last several months of my mother’s life were spent in pain. Her nerves were dying in her arms and legs. The pain was constant and enduring, and could not be eased with pills. Pain relievers work by deadening the nerves, but her pain was already caused by the actual dying of nerves. Doctors suggested that they could solve some of this by cutting off her extremities. She made it clear to the family that if it came to that, she did not want pieces of herself chopped off just to prolong her suffering. We, as a family, accepted that.

After a few weeks in the hospital, my mother slipped into a coma. The day before her death my sister and I stood beside our mother’s bed in the ICU, with a doctor. She had been in a coma for several days. We were very sad, of course, and could do little more than stand there silently, not knowing what to do or say. The doctor suggested that one thing they could do was to amputate her leg. When he said that, I noticed that Mom moved her big toe.

Here was a woman in a coma, supposedly unconscious of everything going on around her, unable to move anything except to breathe. And she had moved her toe in response to the doctor’s suggestion! And this is my regret: I didn’t say, “No, we won’t do that; we will respect her wishes.” I didn’t say anything at all.

I did not comfort my mother by letting her know, on her death bed, that we heard her, and cared for her feelings.

I have always relied on others to say the right thing, the comforting thing, in difficult moments. It requires getting out of your own shell of pain to offer strength you don’t feel to others in as much pain as you. It is hard.

The dog who barked in the night? I learned later that the neighbors were a particularly paranoid pair. They had tied him up outside, never to go inside. They put a bright light on a pole, and kept it turned on all the time, night and day. It was very bright, illuminating a full acre to near daylight intensity. The dog was tied to a stake at the base of this light, never getting the comfort of darkness, or a den to lie down to sleep in. This was his life for weeks by the time of that bitterly cold night when he barked. He was undoubtedly psychotic from lack of sleep, deprivation of his freedom, and his separation from his “pack.” All he wanted was for someone to come out and be with him in his pain.

Some time later, a woman ran up to my door. She was extremely distraught. She had just hit a dog with her car. It was lying in the road and she didn’t know what to do. I rushed out and brought the dog back to the yard. He was severely injured, but conscious. I squatted on the ground, petted him, spoke his name, told him he was a good dog, and watched him as he died.
FREE BEER!!

Setting up for meetings is a large task. If you can help, please come at 11:30.

You’ll get to hob-nob with friends, help the Club and, earn our eternal gratitude.

(OK. We lied about the beer.)

— The Staff of The Valley Scribe
NorCal Writers’ Retreat

What: California Writers Club – 2010 NorCal Writers Retreat
(A collaboration of the Northern California Branches of CWC)

When: Monday, April 5 to Wednesday, April 7, 2010
(An extended stay to Friday, April 9 is at a base rate fee per day.)

Where: Pema Osel Ling Retreat Center
2013 Eureka Canyon
Watsonville, CA 95076

Fee: $206 (includes meals and lodging) prior to March 1st
$256 after March 1st

Speakers: Alice Wilson Fried, Berkeley member
Luisah Teish, SF/P member

Send registration form and a check made out to *Wild Mind Writer* to:
Dale King, 32 Bloom Lane, Half Moon Bay, CA 94019.

For further questions, please contact retreat coordinator, Dale King at deking8@msn.com.

For further information about POL: www.polmountainretreat.com
MEETINGS ARE HELD AT 12:30 P.M.
ON THE 3rd SATURDAY OF EVERY MONTH
AT ST. MARTIN-IN-THE-FIELDS EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Hannibal Hall
7136 Winnetka Avenue, Winnetka – South of Sherman Way
(Directions & Map on last page)
UPCOMING MEETINGS
February 20, 2010 — Burt Prelutsky (No, this time, for real!)
March 20, 2010 — Jennifer Haymore
April 17, 2010 - TBA- but it’s Poetry Month- count on a Poet!
May 15, 2010 — Gene Parrett!

SUBMISSIONS
Members are encouraged to submit writing contributions to The Valley Scribe. This is your newsletter, and you should be part of it.
Submit your prose and poetry to humorist@verizon.net
It will then be proofed and sent to the Editor.
Type “Submissions” in the subject line.
If submitting a hard copy, please bring it to the meeting and hand it to the Editor, Ray Malus, or to the President.
Articles/Essays - 400 words or less
Short Stories - 800 words or less
Poetry - Limited to 30 lines
Submit your writings within ten days after the monthly Open Meetings.
The Editor (or President) has license to accept or reject any work submitted based on available space or editing problems.
All submissions must include an email address or a phone number.
Writings will not be returned and may be included in future issues.

GUEST DONATIONS
Non-members attending meetings, are asked to pay a $5 (tax deductible) donation.
New membership is immediate upon application at door.
For more information, contact Lenora Smalley, membership Chair, at the meeting entrance or email membership@cwc-sfv.org.

UPCOMING MEMBER SHOWCASES
February 20, 2010 – Tom Barnes
April 17, 2010 — Ray Malus

NEWSLETTER MAILINGS:
NEWSLETTERS ARE EMAILED TO MEMBERS. Members not having email will receive B&W copies by USPS.
Cara Alson (818) 764-0807 is the contact for sending USPS copies.
Courtesy copies will be mailed for three months to non-members and/or guests who request same.
Copies can be downloaded from the Website: http://www.cwc-sfv.org

Get Member Benefits 1/2 Price!
(See announcement, page 4.)
ST. MARTIN-IN-THE-FIELDS
7136 WINNETKA AVE
CANOGA PARK, CA 91306

From San Fernando Valley
Take 101 Fwy to Valley. Exit Winnetka. Go North (From Hollywood, turn Right. From Ventura, turn left) past Vanowen (almost to Sherman Way). Church is on East side (Right side) 1 Bl. before Sherman Way.

From Simi
Take 118 Fwy to Valley. Exit DeSoto. Go South to Sherman Way. Turn East to Winnetka. Turn South 1 block. Church is on East side (left side) 1 Bl. after Sherman Way.
Walk into the campus. Hannibal Hall is at North end.