Write A Travel Article

- Dave Wetterberg

Going somewhere this summer? Then why not write an entertaining article about your trip? You’re a writer, aren’t you? Submit it to In Focus and if our members give it rave reviews, you might submit it to another publisher and make some money. Here are some pointers:

Prepare
Before the trip, buy a notebook. Make sure it’s portable enough to carry in a purse or in a pocket. Do a little online research and browse through some travel magazines, first, to familiarize yourself with the travel-writing genre, and second, to see if something’s been written already about your points-of-interest. In your notebook write all the things you want to be sure to see. Then, on the trip, write as much as you can as often as you can. Write each morning and each night and write during those idle hours between airport flights and bus connections. Don’t rely on your memory. Write it down before it’s forgotten.

(Continued on page 3)
Submission Guidelines

1. Try to submit a work two weeks in advance of publication.
2. Poems should be of moderate length. I edit to keep stanzas in the original form submitted.
3. Prose up to 400 words fills about a half page. Longer pieces need most or all of a page. It’s helpful to the editors if your prose submission is edited down to below 1000 words. Use Spell-check before submission. Check for tense uniformity.
4. The editor reserves the right to accept or reject any work submitted. Space might be limited and the omission based on editing difficulties.
5. Be advised that the editor may need to make minor changes in text to reduce a document’s size or correct grammatical or spelling errors.
6. Works not used may be stored and used in a future issue of InFocus.

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I just finished reviewing our September to May In Foci. I felt proud to see all those intelligent articles and memoirs and stories and poems. Such talent, and so beautifully presented, thanks to our editor, Kathy Highcove.

Our CWC bylaws state that our mission is “to provide a forum for educating both members and the public in the craft of writing and in the marketing of their works.” Program VP Yolanda Fintor made sure that this objective was well-met. A review of our 2009-10 speakers:

- September – Casey Wilson – Interviewing
- October – Kelly Lange – Mystery Writing
- November – Louise Cabral – Life Writing
- December – Lori Wolf – Query Letters
- January – Gerald Schiller – Marketing
- February – Geri Speiler – Research
- March – Corinne Copnick – Publishing
- April – Chris Beauvais – Poetry
- May – Virginia Lawrence – The Internet
- June – Chris Erskine – Journalism

Critique groups continued as part of the life blood of our West Valley branch. Four groups met twice a month. Coordinator Lillian Rodich reports that members are enthusiastic and loyal, meeting bimonthly at each other’s homes.

After hours of hard work by Leslie Kaplan, Bill Hitchins, and Lillian Rodich, we published Collage, our first anthology.

As branch president, I did my usual job as supervisor, coordinator and troubleshooter. I also served as one of eighteen state representatives to the Central Board. The CB recently cut quarterly meetings to twice a year to defray costs of skyrocketing travel reimbursements. Another major change: establishment of a Northern section and a Southern section to meet independently. I attended the first Southern section meeting in Anaheim, May 1. We exchanged ideas and planned to help each other out in the future.

Our Board of Directors will continue the same excellent programs and activities. They are a sharp, modern group, and they hope to begin a WV blog on our CWC/WV website this year. See you in September. Don’t forget to pay your dues.
The word "tweets" once meant traffic cop whistles and bird speak. Not anymore. Tweets, twitters, blogs, webs and face books are keywords of today’s social media marketing, or SMM. What’s SMM? If you hope to sell a book or share your poems, essay and memoirs with the reading public, then you need to understand and utilize social media marketing.

Modern techie terms are often unfamiliar to many CWC/WV writers. Consequently, VP Program Chair Yolanda Fintor searched for a media expert to interpret new marketing terms. May speaker Virginia Lawrence has an impressive SMM resume. (See May In Focus)

Lawrence knows the ins and outs, the texts and the textures of the modern communication scene. She emphasized that the Internet is a huge market or resource opportunity that can help a new author network successfully.

Lawrence came prepared for a room of newbies. She passed out diagrams of SMM interconnections. Her handouts succinctly listed and defined twitters, Facebook, web site, blog and—better yet—told us how these social media features interacted to spread the word of a new publication. Marketing in today's world requires familiarity with Kindles, iPads, iPhones, Sony Readers and other devices that exchange data.

Lawrence asked us to imagine the procedures used by savvy authors. First, a writer makes a PDF of their new creation—an Ebook—and a website to display the PDF. The website owner adds a blog site to list comments about the book on the website. Next: timely installations of a tweet page, PayPal, directions to the PDF, web content for a target group with tag lines or special words designed to attract the search engines of the target group—buyers on the Internet.

Once all that info is in place, a writer must respond regularly to tweets, and use Facebook, LinkedIn to find target group connections. To keep all sites current, Lawrence advised: "Set aside one and a half hours a week. It takes longer to set up than to maintain."

Virginia Lawrence inspired several in her WV audience to make social media marketing a must-do summer project.

- KH

(Continued from page 1)

Organize

After your trip and back home again, leaf through your notebook with its large collection of descriptions and impressions, and circle the highlights of the trip. Then organize the items for your article using the method that works for you.

For example, chronological order doesn't have to be the only way to organize your article. You could highlight the most unforgettable sights, the most memorable moments, or perhaps the most surprising lessons you learned from the trip.

Regarding outlines: some writers swear by them. But a writer can simply sort the circled highlights into a beginning, a middle, and an end, and then transform them into a rough draft.

The Opener

Use the first person point-of-view at the beginning and throughout your article. The traditional “hook,” of course, is always impressive as an opener, something that makes the reader want to continue on to the next sentence and the next. (“In Rockport, Maine, I almost lost a finger to a lobster.”)

After the hook, a generality or two sets the direction for the rest of the article. (Every part of the landscape and the townspeople seemed connected in some way to the ocean and the fishing industry.)

The Middle

The body of the article should follow the opening theme. Use a friendly tone, but don’t lapse into sloppy and substandard English. (The restaurant was awesome. I noticed one of the waiters had on this cool pirate outfit.) But don’t be snobby either. Think California Casual for an appropriate in-between tone.

Avoid trite expressions like: saw to our every need, breathtaking sights, and absolutely delicious. Use imaginative language that sounds natural, unstrained. Remember my Show and Tell lessons? Your article should be mostly Show, with a little Tell connecting the shows. Your readers want to see the local color, hear the sounds, taste the food, feel the water, and smell the air. Spare them your itinerary.

Be intentionally heavy on description in this section: the buildings, landscapes, local people, customs, accents, etc. Describe your feelings about your discoveries: I was reminded of ... I was saddened when I saw... The train trip made me recall...

The Closing

If you have some afterthoughts or tips for the reader based on something you overlooked or some mistakes you might have avoided, this would be the place for them. Closings don’t have to be long. An enthusiastic echo of the opening paragraph might be sufficient. (Losing a finger to that lobster in Rockport might have been worth it, but I don’t think so.)
DEAN DOES THE BOOKS

Dean Stewart is a rare bird, figuratively speaking: a native born Californian. Our branch treasurer has a yen for the stage - not so rare a quality in a Californian. We all know many residents of this Golden State who either strive to be an actor or obsessively endeavor to sell a script. Some never get beyond the wanna-be-a-star stage. In contrast, Dean has been both a professional actor and a professional playwright.

Drawn to drama as a young man, Dean graduated from the UCLA Sequential Program in Writing for Film and Television, and earned an AA degree with honors in Theatre Arts from Santa Monica College. At an early age, he studied to be an actor at Lee Strasberg Theater Institute and eventually Actors Studio where he was honored to lifetime membership in 1976. He was seen on such shows as “Dynasty” and “Hotel” and “Logan’s Run.” Being a practical sort, he got a day job and worked primarily as a residuals accountant in the entertainment industry and is now semi-retired.

Retirement from accounting apparently meant more time for his work in the theater world. Dean has written several award winning plays. Among his writing awards are two Gold Awards and one Silver Award at the Houston Film Festival, a Silver Award at the Charleston Film Festival, and Best Screenplay at the Santa Clarita International Film Festival.

His first stage play “Bookish” was selected and produced in The New Works Festival at College of the Canyons in 2008; “Rain Check” was produced at the same festival in 2009, and two more of his plays; “Reunion” and “Crepe Paper Blues,” were selected and produced at this year’s festival. “Rain Check” won 8th place in the Stage Play Competition of the 78th Annual Writer’s Digest Writing Competition last year. More glory: Three of his short stories and one poem have been published in The Iconoclast, Lynx Eye and Nota Bene 2006. While writing and staging his recent productions, he double-majors in Music Composition and English at College of the Canyons.

Dean has made time for the California Writers Club for several years. He served as Program Chair for the SFV Branch for two years, was CWC State Treasurer for seven years, and is currently interim treasurer for the West Valley Branch after serving as its very first treasurer for two years. His next job for our branch might be finding someone who will fill his shoes and keep our books. Now… that's a rare bird to find! - KH

Time to Turn the Page

Each CWC branch has its own newsletter and editorial staff. Many editors email our publications to the other presidents and editors. I often take a break from my own on line activities to peruse another newsletter. I recently looked over the Writers of Kern newsletter. Their long-time editor and member Beth Davisson retires from editorship this summer. She mused about her reasons: “I love writing and arranging blocks of writing on the printed page. There’s something satisfying about seeing that the words people have slaved over are properly displayed so they look good as well as sound good and make sense. But it may be true what people say about retirement: I’m so busy now I don’t know how I ever found time to go to work. Of course, we all DO know the answer to that riddle. It’s called lack of sleep. For about the first eighteen months after I retired I spent a lot of time just sleeping or lying around. But I feel rested now and other projects are calling my name.”

Then Beth gave her feelings true expression with the following poem:

Afternoon Hymn

Give thanks for the unrelieved beauty
Of boring days,
When flies buzz in the distance
And ladybirds creep through tall grass.
Relish every day without a ripple,
When fog hangs low
Or sun shines harsh.
You cross your eyes for exercise
And yawn for entertainment.
No attorney, doctor, or accountant
Lingers near to champion your cause.
Boredom presses down
And peace reigns supreme.

(Continued on page 5)
Once a year (4th of July weekend) our family gets together to celebrate my wife’s birthday. By “our family” I mean our children, their children and for the past 2 years our grandchild’s child. Along with my mother-in-law, that accounts for 5 generations ranging in age from 94 to 2-1/2 while our grandchildren range in age from 3 to 28. They come from all parts of Southern California and Arizona, with best wishes being sent from as far away as New York, the “old country”. Each year we have between 20 and 25 of our clan helping to blow out the candles.

My wife Ronnie and I have traveled a good part of our world, some locations several times, but when you are with a group that you have known all their lives and are able to absorb the results of your trials and tribulations over those years, nothing could be more satisfying. To spend time with all of them in one place together, without the stress and strain of every day life and just the desire to live one minute at a time, can undo a year of tensions. The ability to talk one on one with any of them and to watch the results of their becoming who they now are is beyond words wonderful.

Over the past years, we have chosen locations ranging from Coronado to Newport Beach. This year we have again chosen Newport Beach, The Island Hotel, because it has been so hospitable to our group in the past and offers accommodations that have pleased us all. The layout of this property allows for us to spend time together, or the ability to go our individual way and yet we know that dinner must be together to discuss and brag about our daily accomplishments.

Dinner time (with reservations made long in advance for our group) has us meeting in the lobby, with fresh tans and ready to eat. First on the agenda our family photo which usually has the teens checking out how they photographed before final approval is given. Then it’s off to the restaurant of choice to discuss how everyone has grown, what everyone is up to and just enjoy being a family.

When it’s time to go there’s endless hugs and kisses and promises to get together more often. Ronnie and I always leave on a high - feeling truly blessed.

Mel Greenberg ©2010
The current news on the volcanoes of Iceland reminded me of my visits to the volcanoes in Costa Rica while working on the Pan American Highway in 1942. - Max Schwartz

The visit to Vulcan Poas was difficult, but worthwhile. Two friends from the office, Mendie and Mel, and I left San Jose at 11:30 p.m. Saturday night and rode a bus for three hours to a village at the foot of the volcano. Then we began our hike up the mountain. It was like a National Geographic excursion. We hiked two more hours by moonlight. The moon was full with unreal brilliance, which provided enough light to find the path. We climbed through jungles most of the time and finally reached the rim of the volcano, very tired but glad for every step it took to get there.

Standing at the rim of the world’s largest crater, it was impossible to describe the grandeur and greatness of this natural phenomenon. When the crater was first seen under moonlight, it looked so unreal and fantastic that I was anxiously waiting for daylight to come to actually see what was before me.

Then sunrise came and there was no way for describing its beauty. The light of the sun brought forth the many brilliant colors of the volcano. In the center of the crater was a huge lake of boiling sulfuric water. It was steaming and bubbling. This hot green lake was about a mile across. The walls of the crater were beautifully colored and rose perpendicularly for thousands of feet. The diameter of the crater rim was about two miles and probably three-quarters of a mile straight down. The stones in the walls were bright red, orange and yellow and so many other colors that it all seemed like a dream.

We three stood there for hours gazing and taking panoramic pictures. We saw that we were above the cloud line and the sky was brilliant blue as the elevation of the crater was over ten thousand feet. We finally decided to begin their descent from the Vulcan Poas. We'd had a long hard hike down the mountain and were getting hungry and thirsty.

Another time, I joined a small group from the office to visit Vulcan Irazu, an active volcano. This was easier than the climb to Vulcan Poas, as we took a bus all the way up to the crater. The height of the rim of this crater was 11,000 feet above sea level. This was 1000 feet higher than Mount Baldy outside of Los Angeles. The area surrounding the crater contained grotesque shaped trees distorted by the sulfuric gases from the crater. Deep crevices and dried lava surrounded us. Around the mountain were oceans of clouds. I realized I was higher than on my flight coming to Costa Rica. The group walked to the very edge of the main crater, which was only 700 feet across while the crater of Vulcan Poas was a mile across. There were two smaller craters nearby. The main crater held hot boiling fluid, which was bubbling with noxious gas. The color was brilliant green as if there were lights under the surface. There was a great deal of smoke and steam coming from the crater.

Although the volcano looked quite alive, I laid down over the edge of the crater and took some pictures while a friend held my feet. Some of the men threw rocks and boulders into the mouth of the volcano. When the rocks struck the bubbling surface there was an explosion as if from a cannon. I could now understand why the Indians became so religious when they saw the internals of the volcano. It is said that in this country the Indians would sacrifice a maiden to the volcano in offer of good health or whatever they wanted the gods to do for them. The whole scene was breathtaking and awe-inspiring.

There remained one more volcano to climb to – the mysterious Vulcan Barba. I could not find anybody who had hiked to that volcano so I was not sure what I would find. Another American, Pete, and I de-
I Met An Astronaut

It was July 1969 when the American astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin first stepped upon the moon. I remember so vividly the excitement of the moment. Since then I have considered this event in history to be one of the highlights of important happenings of the 20th Century.

Last Sunday, April 25th (2010) the public was invited to attend the Festival of the Books on the UCLA campus in West Los Angeles. What a perfect day it was to enjoy the wonders of the written word. The weather was a balmy spring temperature, the campus was buzzing with thousands of people eager to stop at the many booths including the California Writers Club booth. There were people lining up to attend lectures and conversations being offered by or listen to guest speakers, such as the appearance of the author Herman Wouk chatting with Los Angeles Times writer Tim Rutten about his new book: “The Language God Talks”. I attended this interview along with about five hundred other listeners who were captivated listening to the 95 year old author.

When the time came to leave the campus I proceeded to use the campus pathway to the main road in order to wait for the bus shuttle service to return to my parking place. It is a walk I am familiar with since I used it in the past visits to the festival. Once I reached the road I noticed the shuttle stop marking gone, but as I turned my head to the opposite side looking for another bus marker, a golf cart with three women and a man was approaching where I stood. I raised my hand to the driver, signaling to stop, which she did.

A quick glance at the passengers revealed to me that the man sitting in the cart was none other than the former astronaut Buzz Aldrin. I recognized him immediately but being polite I proceeded to inquire for directions to the shuttle stop. Although the driver was the one who answered me, I noticed that Aldrin was listening to our conversation. (I realized that he too was a guest speaker at the Festival and was being shuttled to his car).

It took me a moment to get over the feeling that I had these few moments. My thoughts were: What were my chances ever of meeting in real life a man who was on the moon? A respected famous person. And further having him listen to me talk? As I was sitting in the shuttle being taken to the parking lot I felt as if I was floating on clouds, perhaps to the moon…

- Marganit Lish

[Volcano cont’d from page 6]

cided to try to reach that mountaintop by starting to hike early Sunday morning. We climbed through jungles until noon and finally decided we were lost when we came upon a small hut. The campesino came out and I asked him for directions to the crater. He said he would guide us for a fee, which was agreed upon.

The guide plunged ahead like a deer, jumping from one rock to another. I was exhausted from six hours of hiking and kept asking how far yet. The guide kept saying “poco mas” or “a little more.” But he continued for hours until I had to rest and told his friend Pete to go ahead and take pictures of the crater.

Several hours later, the two returned. I asked, “How was it? Did I miss much?”

“Nah,” answered Pete. “The crater was dead. The jungle had grown right up to the crater and the crater was full of water.” We paid the guide and slowly hiked back to the village we started from.

- Max Schwartz

Curiosity endows the people who have it with a generosity in argument and a serenity in their own mode of life which springs from their cheerful willingness to let life take the form it will.

- Alistair Cooke
I’ve been looking forward to going to the islands, getting away, exhaling in Paradise—tranquility, serenity, nothingness. We’ve been to all of the islands many times. My husband, Sachi, loves to visit Hawaii. He grew up on Harry Owens and the Royal Hawaiians and Hawaii Calls. He loves hula girls and Don Ho, hula girls and fish and poi, Tiny Bubbles, Little Brown Girls, as long as they’re hula girls, everything about Hawaii. No matter what the weather when we leave L.A., he travels in his Aloha shirt, surfer shorts and flip flops, carrying his ukulele and snorkel gear, smiling and saying 'Aloha!' to everyone. As soon as the flight attendants start jimmying the drink cart down the aisle, he orders his first Mai Tai, make that a double, with extra pineapple and don’t forget the little paper umbrella!

This trip we’ve rented a gracious plantation cottage. It nestles into a quite neighborhood of little Kailua Town on the windward side of Oahu—half an hour and a million miles from Waikiki and a two-minute stroll to the beach. We won’t need the rental car much. Miles of white sand and jade-green water lie almost at our door. Mynah birds cackle and groan at each other under the plumeria trees and I’ll lie in a hammock strung between two coconut palms and watch the mangoes ripening in the afternoon heat. It will be Heaven.

Except for that ukulele!

Sachi suddenly has nothing to do. No office to go to. No lawn to mow. No projects in the garage. Nobody but me to talk to. So, if we were not touring the island sights, heading for the beach, or ferreting out Hawaiian Music shows, he’ll be playing his ukulele—twang plink-a plink-a, twang, thunk. Strummed gently, the ukulele has a soft, enticing, breeze-easy sound. But he likes to really whack it.

All I want is peace. Quiet! I know I am being uncharitable, but for me Hawaii means the sound of the waves, the rattle of the palms, and the random quirking and twerking of the birds.

At first it's cute. Here we are in Hawaii with Sachi on the lanai strumming and humming 'Little Brown Girl in a Little Grass Skirt' and other Hawaiian hits of the 1930s and 40s, but he's obsessive. For three days he’s been stuck on 'The Hasegawa General Store,' a shaggy-dog song about a store on Maui that has everything you could want - from 'sunburn creams to ladies' magazines.' The lyrics are hypnotic, the kind that get into your head and won't shake out. But he can't get past the first few bars, he plays them over and over, and can't get the lyrics straight. I don't know why. I have them, and the tune, branded on my brain.

I have escaped for a while this afternoon. I’m writing this story on the beach in the dense shade of a row of silent, gnarled ironwood trees. They don't even hum in the brisk afternoon breeze.

As I walked away from the house an hour ago, the twang of the uke floated above even the clatter of the palms and the noisy respiration of the sea, but I had my snorkel gear and planned on a quiet afternoon with the fish. You know, you can't hear a thing underwater.
DANCE OF THE FLOWERS

I hear a song
A song as the summer breeze
Flows gently through the towering trees
And down to earth
Where sunflowers and poppies
Dance to the music of nature.

My eyes turn
And before me
My granddaughter Flora
Is dancing
A ballet
Dress twirling,
She moves
Gracefully around flower after flower
To the music of the breeze
Propelling her
Faster and faster
Dipping, twirling to the music of nature

The breeze subsides
Flora gives a bow
Throws a kiss
And folds herself into
A flower
And says goodnight

- Helen Katzman

Redondo Beach

sea meets land
washing over shell strewn shores
ripple upon ripple
wave pushing wave
white tipped
suddenly crashing
spent ... receding
foam fingers in damp sand
tide pools remaining
swirls of debris and crabs
far off roar

- Lillian Rodich

Kona Wind

Trade winds dead, stalled
Fans move heavy air, birdsong drops an octave,
even fish gasp,

Palms give up their dance, sitting this one out,
flowers don’t have the strength
to wilt.

- Alice Folkart

Never Mind Mangoes

Papayas
pendulate
on a slender stem,
shelter beneath fingered leaves.
Papayas hang
like young breasts, heavy, full, ripe.

Never mind mangos.

- Alice Folkart

Vacation Cottage on the Big Island

Hard to sleep last night, the baby volcano under my bed whistled and sneezed.

I know it means me no harm, but it doesn’t know its own strength.

No wonder this cottage was so cheap.

- Alice Folkart
The year was 2002. The month was May. “Mathilda,” our 12 year-old motor home, had always performed reasonably well during our many trips through California and other states. However, that year, when we headed for Utah and Wyoming, Mathilda became very temperamental. The days went like this:

Day 1 - As we approached Las Vegas on the first leg of our trip, the cab air-conditioner stopped working. Air temperature was 110 degrees.

Day 2 - The refrigerator, loaded with food, stopped refrigerating. We quickly found a quick-mart gas station that sold foam ice chests.

Day 3 - The ice chest started leaking as we drove through isolated desert to reach Utah.

Day 4 - It rained. That’s when we discovered our roof vent cover had a crack.

Day 5 - Food in the ice chest started spoiling.

Day 6 - The cruise control went out of commission.

Day 7 - Husband almost went out of commission after paying $50.00 to learn the refrigerator was not repairable. He considered returning home.

Day 8 - We decided to hang in there and invested in a durable ice chest.

Days 9-12 - The challenge was to make sure we parked where we had access to ice.

Days 12-16 - We traveled through Utah without incident, but in Wyoming, departure from Yellowstone National Park was delayed when the coach wouldn’t start. We looked as woeful as the bison that strolled throughout the campground. A nearby camper saved the day. He showed husband how to start a Dodge engine in high altitude.

Days 17-21 - Without any misfortunes for five days, we thought things were looking up. But it was not to be. That last day just eight miles out of Las Vegas, Mathilda’s transmission gave out. There was a two-hour wait for a truck to tow us to an RV repair shop in Henderson. It was Friday. We arrived at closing time and were told we could park on their lot until Monday when they opened. We had two dogs with us and rather than spend two days and three nights with nothing to do and no ice, my husband rented a car, drove us home and returned to Henderson Monday to wait for repairs.

In the ensuing years we did embark on more trips, but never again with Mathilda.

Daddy died when I was about five, but he didn’t leave me for a very long time. He came to see me... in my dreams... every single night, bring- ing me toys, hugs and all the love a child could wish for.

I still remember, though many years have passed, our exact conversations. He would say, “Now remember, you’re my best little girl and this is our secret meeting place for just you and me. So don’t tell anybody... okay?”

Our secret meeting place was a small stand in front of a store where he worked selling clothing and toys, similar to the swap meets of today. And I would reply, “Don’t worry Daddy, I won’t tell anybody, and I’ll see you here tomorrow night.”

Tomorrow night was a given, as this dream repeated itself over and over for two years or more. When the dreams finally ended... was when I began to miss my fa- ther, and... I have never stopped.

- Leslie Kaplan
Wordlessly, he got out of the passenger door, and walked around to the driver's side. I slid over; he got in. He put the car in gear, pulled forward a few feet, and greased into the parking spot.

I heaved a sigh of relief as he switched off the engine. I opened the passenger door to get out. He didn't move.

Still looking forward, he said, "Y'know, I never thought I'd see that."

"What?" I asked.

"As long as I've known you, I've never seen you give up. I never thought you would."

Maybe it was just a simple statement of fact. In my memory, it carries a death knell. Whatever it was, I said to him, "Dad, could you pull out again?"

Wordlessly, he started the car. I shut my door, and he pulled out into the traffic lane. I got out and we switched seats. I put the car in gear, took a deep breath, and carefully backed into the parking spot.

We got out of the car, and I handed him the keys. As we walked to our building, he put his arm around my shoulders and squeezed, just a bit.

As I write this, I suddenly realize that it's been half a century since that day. I won't pretend that, in the fifty long years since, I've been successful at everything I've attempted. But I can't count the times that, when things have been going badly, I've heard his voice in my ear, "Y'know, I never thought I'd see that," and tried just once more.

**REFLECTING MY SOUL**

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**Norm Molesko**

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"The El" runs from Yankee Stadium ten miles North to Woodlawn. A rail- way on stilts, it stands on 25-foot-tall, rivet-studded metal girders that trisect the entire length of Jerome Avenue. From the air, it might look like some enormous, grime-encrusted, cast-iron millipede, preying on the spine of the Borough.

At least, that's the way I remember it on this particular day. And I was only being tormented by one of its million legs.

I was ready to take my driving test. Even in New York, where a car was a mixed blessing, getting a driver's license was a huge rite of passage for a boy — a secular Bar Mitzvah if you will. In preparation, my father had taken me on a last practice run. All had gone well — until the final moment.

Jerome Avenue is a wide six-lane concourse. The two rows of the el's legs straddle the middle traffic lanes, leaving two additional lanes on either side — one for traffic and one next to the curb for parallel parking.

Finding a parking spot in The Bronx took an extraordinary amount of luck. Actually getting into one took the skill of a neurosurgeon. Parkers used every available inch, and it was not uncommon for a car to be trapped in a parking spot, locked between the bumpers of those in front and behind. Squeezing into a vacant space was the most dreaded part of the driving test.

Returning from our jaunt, my father and I had discovered a parking spot directly in front of our building. Jubilantly, I pulled next to the car in front, and started to back into the spot. That's when my war with the el started. As the rear of the car slid into the space, the nose of the car swung to the left — where one of the pillars blocked it. I stopped, and pulled forward to try again. Again, I edged the car backward into the space. Again, the pillar was in the way. I tried pulling further up. Now the rear of the car wouldn't clear the parked car on my right. I tried pulling further back, but now couldn't cut the rear far enough into the gap.

My father watched patiently, as sweat started to run down my cheeks from my sideburns. The geometry just wouldn't work! Finally, I turned to him and said, "I can't do it."

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**Reflecting my soul**

Smiles, smiles, smiles.
I have so many smiles.
This reflects how my soul feels.
It is with a sense of glee.
This fellow of eighty, humbly has to say, the warmth and love I received from
friends and family,
and the Saturday Critique Group, fill me with such joy.
A few brief weeks ago,
from two unexpected heart attacks, I could have easily
floated away.
Fine medical care allows me to stay.
Now I stand before you alive and tall. I appreciate you
and I are here today.

- Norm Molesko
The Fly

- Christina Steiner

The barn hibernated in the sweltering heat of mid-day. The fly just finished off one prolific morning. Hundreds of little darling eggs were laid in the manure. Carefully she placed them in the juiciest crevices, where nourishment was plenty and moisture was around to quench any thirst her brood might experience after their awakening.

Trips back to the horses were frequent. So much egg-laying sure made her hungry. Their legs were a favorite spot to land and bite. Oh, how succulent the crimson fluid tasted. A real energy boost. The horse’s eyes provided her with the clear water of a glacier spring. With irritation, the horses snapped at her. She delighted in their anger and frustration. How the tail battered the horses flank! If she stayed just out of reach, the air movement created a refreshing breeze. She did have to be careful to keep her kaleidoscope eyes on those whip-like hairs. In the few days of her life, she saw many of her kind being whipped unconscious. They landed on the floor, legs straight up in the air, temporarily out of commission, or worse just totally incapacitated.

Sure enough, one of those beastly chickens came along and just swallowed the poor wretched compatriot. The chickens worried her to no end. She saw them congregate around the freshly dumped horse manure. With gusto they scratched and burrowed through the pile and devoured many of the hatched little darlings. The fly was clever though. She laid her brood close to the barn wall, where access was denied to the feathered flock.

The second day wasn’t without peril, but she was in excellent physical shape, in the prime of her life so to speak, ready to unload thousands of eggs and felt strong like a polar bear. (Where did that thought come from? Polar bears live in cold climates, not in fly friendly-territory.) Strong like a bull, that’s a better expression. Bulls would be fun to irritate. Oh well, that’s for one of her darlings to do. She had been happy to have the horses at her mercy.

The fly was ready for a change of scenery. She hitched a ride on the back pocket of the woman’s pants. The woman moved slowly; she was beat by the heat and entered the house with a big sigh of relief. To the woman the cool air in the house felt terrific. The fly felt chilly; her awareness dropped. Letting go of the jeans-pocket, she sluggish flew to the counter-top. Tiny bits of food particles attracted her like a magnet even in her diminished state of mind. She felt old and weak. Her navigational ability was impaired. She buzzed from the counter to the window and promptly hit her head. Temporary unconsciousness made her fall on the sill. A second later she came to and made a successful attempt to right herself. Flying was becoming more stressful. She cruised through the air with a navigation system out of control. Her eyes picked up movement. Out of the corner bounced a big woolly thing, catapulted itself up in the air, and all she saw was a multifaceted tongue and white teeth. The last awareness was this awful crunch. Another life ended down the throat of a ferocious, fly-eating dog.
Monica noticed her neighbor standing alone in the cereal aisle of the grocery store. He stood out in his dark business suit and tie. And he looked confused as his eyes searched the shelves of brightly colored boxes.

She rolled her cart closer and gave a little wave to catch his attention.

"Remember me, Mr. Chang? Heinrik Chang, isn’t it? Monica Silverstein. Remember? We met at our sons’ Boy Scout jamboree. How are you?"

Heinrik turned, stared at Monica for a moment, and then nodded in sudden recognition. His bald pate gleamed in the florescent lights.

"I am not well," he told her as other carts squeezed by them in the narrow aisle. "My wife left me. She said that she finds me disgusting. She is now a lesbian. And she loves her Yoga teacher, Rikki. They live together. Edward and I are alone. I have to shop for our groceries. I’m looking for Edward’s favorite cereal. It’s called Trix, he told me."

"Oh....I’m...so sorry. Edward didn’t tell us that his mom was...gone. My son didn’t know ...I guess. "

"Edward is ashamed. He does not want to talk to me. My daughters went back to college, and don’t call me unless they need money. I cannot pay the mortgage by myself. I cannot even find Edward’s favorite cereal." Mr. Chang shrugged and turned back to search the rows of children’s cereals. Cartoon bears and rabbits reflected in his glasses, grinning and waving as if to mock his frustrations.

"I want to magically disappear, thought Monica. How do I get away from this guy? Don’t want to hear all this stuff. No one told me the Chang’s split up. Think."

"Have to get on with my shopping. I’m sorry you have so many problems right now, Mr. Chang. Heinrik. Jonathon will call Edward soon so they can go to a movie." She inched her cart a little further down the aisle toward freedom.

"Fine, fine. Nice to see you again."

He watched her fast retreat and then called out, “Please ask your son to call Edward very soon." Monica nodded, and sped away.

Heinrik watched his neighbor wheel off down the aisle and take a sharp left at the meat counter. Am I going crazy? he thought. Why did I talk to that woman? She’ll go home and tell all the neighbors what happened at the Chang house. Now we must move for sure. I am dishonored with my family, and soon I’ll be the cuckold of the neighborhood. We can never return to Boy Scout meetings.

He continued to search the stacks for Edward’s cereal. Too many boxes. Silly cartoons. I hate my life here in the US and the trouble this country has brought me. Lily told me she’s an independent American woman now. Tells me to stop bothering her. Maybe I should hurt myself so everyone will blame Lilly and say she’s an irresponsible wife and mother....she’d be sorry then, and feel shame! Like I do.

Okay, here’s the right cereal box. Trix. Now I look for the milk.

- Kathy Highcove

The Storm

I watch my father battle the storm, feel encroaching cold in the drafty cab, hear gears' grinding urgency, windshield wipers' struggling rhythm, see, through briefly cleared arcs, the plow's smothered hood.

In the wind-tunnel void a barrage, an infinity of white-- Coming! Coming! Coming! Buries guard rails, muffles headlights.

I see him alone. Overcome. angled blade tearing at the shroud.

- Mary Shaffer
The California Writers Club meets the first Saturday of the month at the Motion Picture and Television Fund complex. Meeting location:

Villa Katzenberg,
23388 Mulholland
Woodland Hills, CA 91364-2733

NEXT MEETING
Saturday, June 5th, 2010, at 1:30 p.m.
cwcwestvalley.org

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The time is approaching! The dues are coming due! Membership Vice President Sheila Moss will accept dues for next year at the June 5th meeting. Annual dues are currently $45. Make checks payable to

CWC West Valley
Mail checks to:
Sheila Moss
12040 Stewarton Drive,
Northridge CA 91326.

Dave Wetterberg
23809 Friar Street
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