

## MEETING ALERT!

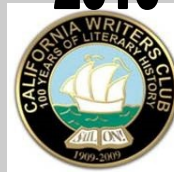
There will be a change in program scheduling, just for this month. Our speaker, Doraine Poretz, will be featured first at 1:30 while open mike will follow our refreshment/break. Please make an effort to get to the meeting early so we can all be seated by 1:30. Don't forget to fill out a raffle ticket (name only) when you sign in. This will give you a chance to win a book offered by our speaker. The drawing will take place before the break.

Yolanda Fintor

## IN FOCUS

Newsletter of California Writers Club/West Valley

OCTOBER  
2010



Doraine Poretz

Our October speaker, poet and playwright Doraine Poretz, is an active artist in the Southland communities. She serves as a poet-in-residence in several

schools in the Los Angeles/South Pasadena area, and teaches a poetry series for adults entitled *Writing Down the Music of Your Life* and conducts seminars on poetry.

Ms. Poretz has published six poetry books. *This Alchemy* published by Olandar Press is the most recent.

Her short stories have been published in both Doubleday and Dutton editions and her poems have appeared in such magazines as *Onthebus*, *Harbinger*, and *CQ*.

As a playwright, she has participated in the Actors Studio Playwrights Unit in both New York and Los Angeles; her work has been presented in theatres on both coasts.

When asked to elaborate on the title of Saturday's speech, *Story Making Through Dramatic Persona*, Ms. Poretz replied, "In poetry there is something called the Dramatic Monologue. A famous example is Robert Browning's *My Last Duchess*. When the character - the persona - speaks, he/she creates through this monologue a dramatic situation.

"*Story Making Through Dramatic Persona* might refer, as well, to a poet creating 'narrative poetry', whereby the poet tells a story in verse—a more condensed and pithier way than in prose."

Join us on October 2<sup>nd</sup> for a presentation by the talented poetess Doraine Poretz.

- Yolanda Fintor

## west valley whimsicals

DRAWN BY MAX SCHARITZ

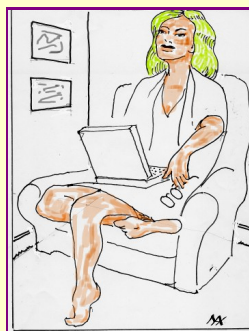
text by Kathy Highcove

Dave's  
pep  
talk



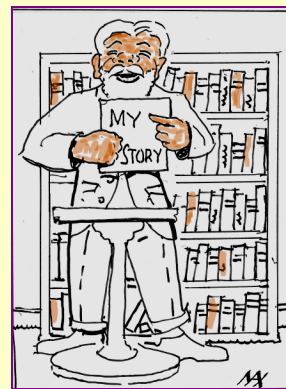
Hey writers, have you let your files gather dust? And tried to forget that book you never finished writing?

Think about it...If you keep your dream in your head and in your drawer, who's going to care? You, that's who.



So, get organized, make an outline, do your research and type away! What have you got to lose? Get busy!

And maybe someday, this'll be you showing off your published book! We can hardly wait!



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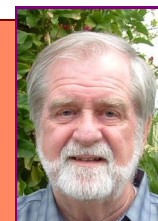
### **Executive Board**

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## **President's Message**



**Dave**

**Wetterberg**

Last month Kathy Highcove, our *In Focus* editor, asked us to write a few lines on the topic *Why I Write*. Other great minds have been challenged by this philosophical question. In the reference book *Quotationary*, edited by Leonard Roy Frank, is a passage by George Orwell on this topic. He begins with "Setting aside the need to make a living," then goes on to cite "egoism," "aesthetic enthusiasm," "historical impulse," and "political purpose." Which one are you?

I think of our newsletter somewhat as the circulatory system in our club body, the bloodstream that pumps nourishment to the other members. The Board of Directors, the brain, thinks, plans, and evaluates. Our critique groups, the digestive system, sample portions of each member's writing, sometimes enjoying the taste, ("I loved it!"), sometimes suggesting a spice or two to improve the flavor ("Why don't you try this?"), and sometimes when the serving is a little disappointing, being kind, ("I think maybe I'll pass on this one."). Last but not least are our monthly meetings, a system which provides the enzymes that invigorate us.

By the way, at present our digestive system has four critique groups and we're trying to get another one off the ground. Not bad for a membership of 40.

### **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*.

# She Got Down To Business

**A**uthor and lecturer Patricia Fry might be described as the writer's version of a one woman band. She writes books – the 32<sup>nd</sup> is in revision – teaches classes, runs her own publishing company, gives speeches, and in her spare time communicates in the growing webs of social networking.

She came to our meeting prepared to shine a light on the newest ways to promote one's book.

First, the groundwork for the topic in mind:

1. Study publishing industry options.
2. Write an effective book proposal – a nonfiction proposal is more complex than fiction
3. Study the topics preferred by today's publishers.
4. Finally, before you research and write, take the time to look dispassionately at your project: Is your topic a valid project? Are you writing the right book?

When the book is finished - to market, to market goes the hopeful author. Fry has ten tips for this stage of the game:

1. Start promotion before publication by building promotion into the book. How? If you've done your homework and know your audience, simply inject the appropriate search engine words that will attract your prospective audience.
2. Organize your resources and make an index if writing a non-fiction book.
3. To make a professional connection with an audience, print and use a business card.
4. Get involved in social media.
5. Build a personal or topic website – or do both! One website limits used access.
6. When the book is out, schedule book signings in specialty stores that are related to your book's topic.
7. Speak to different types of public gatherings on a topic that might tie in to your book.

8. Arrange book reviews to get additional exposure, especially if self-published and research websites that would connect to your book's topic or theme.

9. Hook up with other authors, do a mutual admiration or piggy back on each other's site and social network.

10. Spy on other authors, sleuth through the websites to see who looked at your book.

Other helpful ideas: Use Kindle for promotion by offering a free look a key chapter. Look for opportunities to give speeches and push your book.

"Marketing is a huge task," Patricia Fry emphasized more than once. "Don't hold back, underplay your book or depend on 'experts' to market it. Get in there, work the system and help your book become a best-seller."

Amen to those sentiments, Patricia.

## BRIGHT LIGHT CONTEST

Bright Light Multimedia is calling for the submission of short stories – 100 words to 3,000 words – on the theme of uplifting, positive, romantic love between 2 people, for possible inclusion on our writer-showcase website, The Bright Light Café, and, more urgently, for possible publication in their anthology of Bright Light Café stories and poems, currently in development and scheduled for release later this year.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Bright Light Multimedia – Submission Opportunities

Calling for the submission of short stories (100 to 3,000 words) on the theme of romantic love between 2 people. Submissions to be considered for inclusion on our writer-showcase website, The Bright Light Café, and also for publication in an anthology of Bright Light Café work, scheduled for release later this year. If chosen for inclusion in the anthology, a license fee of \$50 (Australian) will be paid upon publication. Stories must be ultimately uplifting and positive and can be humorous. **Submissions for the anthology project are required by September 30, 2010.** Submissions for the website are welcome at any time.

Guidelines and online submission form are available at <http://www.brightlightmultimedia.com/SubGuide.htm>

Let me count the 'whys' - - [pun intended]

I slow down and smell the roses

Age, time, worries, fade into the background

Things I didn 't know I knew pour out like a bag of spilled marbles

That "Look, Ma! No hands!" thrill of childhood returns

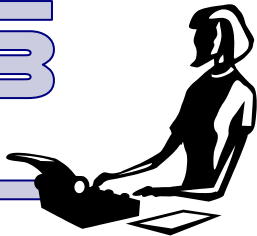
I discover someone I didn 't know I could be

I find out what I really think

I explore new fields sowing new seeds

A reader 's "I liked that!" thrills and invigorates me

- Rita Keeley Brown



Writing puts me in a zone where the world disappears and time is on hold. When I sit at the computer, or more likely, with a **yellow legal pad** to create a first draft, I'm in a sphere of creativity that I equate with joy.

- Yolanda Fintor

1. I want to write things that can bring people to tears or laughter, or lead them to new ways of thinking.

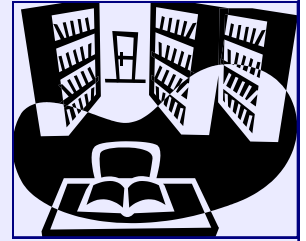
2. I want to be just like Jessica Fletcher in *Murder She Wrote*, writing bestselling novels in a quaint little town somewhere, and maybe even solving mysteries on the side.

3. The more I live the more I have to say, and I say it best in writing!

-Anne Arnold Olivier

## Library Corner

- Anne Arnold Olivier



Shhh! The library has a secret.

Well, okay, it's really not a secret. In fact it's a shame more people don't know about it. I'm talking about the great online resources of the Los Angeles Public Library that are available free with your library card. If you don't have a library card, shame on you. Go get one, and come back and read this when you're done.

Ready?

At the September CWC-WV meeting many people expressed an interest in finding a Newsweek article that recently appeared. You can access the full text of Newsweek and hundreds of other periodicals, such as Writer Magazine, through our Research Library database by ProQuest. Here's how to do it:

1. Go to [www.lapl.org](http://www.lapl.org)
2. Click on "Access the Databases." It's the second item on the menu.
3. Now scroll down to Research Library (ProQuest) and click.
4. Now you're prompted to enter your barcode and PIN. Your barcode is the long number on the back of your library card that begins with 27244. Your PIN is the last four digits of your telephone number. Be sure to use the same phone number you gave when applying for your library card.
5. Now you're all set. At the ProQuest screen you can type in key search terms to look for articles on a topic. You can

Happy researching, and remember that if you get tangled up you can always call the reference desk of your local LAPL library!



## Little things mean a lot, like...



...making the verb agree with the subject, not with the noun closest to it. Not ...

*One of the children were missing.* One is the subject. So it's: *One of the children was missing.*

... pronouncing the word "mischievous" right. It's pronounced miss-cha-vuss, not miss-cheeve-ee-uss.

...not misusing the reflexive pronoun *myself*. Don't say *That Toyota barely missed Sally and myself in* instead of saying *That Toyota barely missed Sally and me.* Don't say *Mildred, Sammy, and myself saw that movie.* Say *Mildred, Sammy, and I saw that movie.* *Myself* is not somehow always magically correct in every grammatical situation.

... remembering that combinations connected by *or*, or *either...or*, or *neither... nor* are considered singular.

*Either Mr. Gordon or his wife Norma opens the store each morning.* Not ...open the store.

*Neither Martin nor Bruno knows what happened Saturday night.* Not ...know what happened.

... not putting the word *however* at the beginning of a sentence. (Okay! If you insist, go ahead. However, I think there's always a better place for it within the sentence.) *Later in life, however, he thought differently about this...* has a better ring to it than *However, he thought differently about this later in life.*

... using the word *fewer* with items that can be counted, like *fewer pencils, fewer students, fewer bricks*. Use the word *less* with items that can't (or wouldn't normally) be counted, like *less sand, less milk, less booze*. And in spite of the beer commercials, *less calories* is wrong, as is the *ten items or less* you see at the checkout stand in the supermarket.

... using *him, her, us, or them* after prepositions and not using their counterparts *he, she, we, they*. The expressions *between you and I ... for he and Sheila ... with he and his wife ...* are all wrong. They should be *between you and me ... for Sheila and him ... and with him and his wife.*



- Dave Wetterberg

## CWC-SBW Presents "Truth or Lie: Writing on the Cusp of Memoir and Fiction"

**November 6, 9:30-3:30**

The Lookout Restaurant, 605 Macara Ave., Sunnyvale, CA 94085

Registration at 9:30; workshop begins promptly at 10; continental breakfast and lunch included.

Early Bird (before October 25, 2010): CWC members \$35; Non-members \$45.

From October 25 and at the door: CWC members \$45; Non-members \$55.

Students with ID, anytime \$25.

Register and pay by credit card (Paypal) at [www.southbaywriters.com](http://www.southbaywriters.com)

Most writers draw from personal experience whether they cast the story as memoir or fiction. During "Truth or Lie: Writing on the Cusp of Memoir and Fiction," Linda Joy Myers, Ph.D., MFT, will focus on how to find your stories and memories and teach you about fictional tools, such as plot, scenes, dialogue, and the narrative arc. In this hands-on workshop you will find the timeline and turning points, themes and characters, and fictional tools that help you to begin and develop the ideas for your memoir or your fiction.

Linda is the president and founder of the National Association of Memoir Writers, an instructor at Writers Digest, and the author of *The Power of Memoir—How to Write Your Healing Story*, and the award winning memoir *Don't Call Me Mother*. [www.namw.org](http://www.namw.org)

For more information, contact: Nina Amir, SBW Workshop Coordinator, at 408-353-1943

# hooks

by Jason Warden

**F**rozen to my pillow, unable to sit up and scream for my mother, I instead lay still and call out for her silently with my mind. I'm answered by silence; in it I shake and pull the Spiderman blanket up higher. I imagine that under them I'm safer, smaller, a less satisfying meal and therefore less likely to be torn apart. Images of the dream, the teeth like shining steel traps, the bony rotten finger, the thing behind the curtain, slowly, silently, they begin to lose context. I call for Dad, but he sleeps hard. Mom says it's because he works too much.

Finally, when the dream is nothing more than pictures seen through bulletproof glass, I ease my feet from under the covers onto the floor. It's cold, smooth like glass, and I feel it attempt to freeze my feet in place. The fear threatens, but I banish it by looking around the room. It works, well, almost. The moon is bigger. It fills the window, and its light is brighter than I've ever seen. It shows me the way out, but its brightness comes with a price. The shadows behind the light are darker, more malicious. I can feel and hear my heart beating too fast in my chest. Even though the nightmare that woke me has fallen apart, it's of little comfort, because now it seems whatever it was has followed me home.

I fix my eyes on the door of my room. It sits there, only a few steps away. I feel, rather than see the shadows move. I turn in a circle and watch as they become a pack of wolves. They huddle and begin to flank me. I step toward the door and they disintegrate, and once more be-

come only spots of darkness. I force my feet to move, reach the door and look back to see the shadows have become a vampire with its cape thrown wide. He has no face, only darkness, but with his arms spread I can almost hear his words as he begs for an embrace. My paralysis breaks and I run from the room not wanting to see what he might become if I stay.

The hall leading from my room is dark - only the window on the outside door cast any light. It is small and the glass is smoked so that barely any light gets in. I'm in the hallway already embracing the safety of my parent's bed, and thanking god for the lack of light when I see him. Beyond the door, as if created by the light of the small window, there is a man. His hat is askew on his head and it covers his face. If he has one, my traitorous mind says. I can't move. Behind me, the shadows are silent, but I can feel the darkness crawling toward me. I risk a look back, and find my room has gone dark. Only a fraction of the light that had been there still is. It should have made me feel better, that lack of light, but I can see the black moving, slowly, as if it wants to camouflage its menace.

I turn back, already moving, and find the man squatting where he can block the path to my parent's door. I try to scream, but my mouth is too dry. Only a squeaky cracked imitation of the terror I feel escapes.

I feel the cold of the shadow and can see it looming over me from behind as it passes out of my room. As it wraps its long arms around me on either side, swallowing me in the black, I feel its icy breath on my neck. It's too much, I don't think, I run. I skirt around the hunkering man, think I'm safe, and then something reaches out. It slams into my ankle bringing a bright flash of pain. The fall is short, like me, and I sprawl out on my stomach. I roll over, the panic spurs my movement, and I have only a second to see it before he falls on me. I feel another of those flashes of pain,

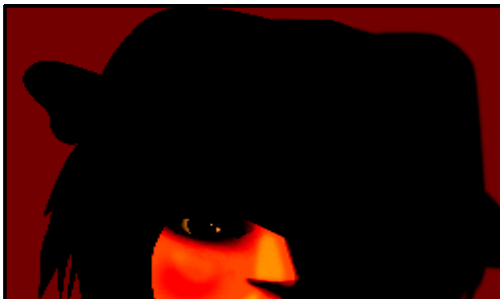
*(Continued on page 7)*

this one both sharp and dull. I can feel the blood as it pools in my eye below where it hit me. Then I'm fighting him, kicking and flailing and find my voice has returned. I scream things I don't understand, words I've heard older boys use. Words I know my mother doesn't approve of. I'm amazed when I feel him weaken. The blows are working, so I scream louder, using those words kids whisper when teachers' backs are turned, and he draws back further. Then, all at once, he is off me, and I feel hands pulling me up. I try to fight and continue to scream, but quickly my arms are restrained and a light flashes on. It assaults my eyes, forcing them closed. I feel powerless, but then I hear my mother's voice, close, in my ear. I squint through the light and see her face next to Dad's. They are holding me. They both look as scared as I feel. I grab her tight, the panic and fear returning, replacing my rage.

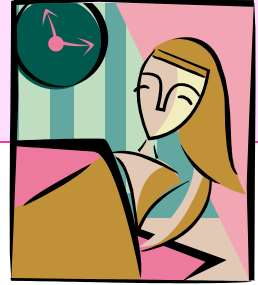
Dad has a napkin and he is blotting the cut above my eye. He looks at it seriously before wiping away the rest of the blood that has run down my face. He turns his face toward mine and speaks softly.

"What happened?"

I can't even try to answer; the words want to come out all at once and become one with my tears. I turn, point, and see the coat rack. Dad's collection of hats is strewn across the floor. Under one of the hats, the one with the curved brim, the one HE had been wearing, I see a hook is broken off the coat rack. The curve of it smiles at me from beneath the hat's brim. I shudder and turn away.



## Working Overtime



Stephanie worked late, although less comfortably these days. Jeffrey, her new boss, often lingered – no problem during fully staffed hours. But his distant, loner ways and awkward attempts at suggestive comments had seeded her growing unease. He'd just buzzed her to turn off the air conditioning for the night on her way out.

With opened purse in hand, she stepped into the utility room, flicked on the light then gasped.

"Thanks for meeting me," Jeffrey calmly stated, leering, a box cutter and roll of duct tape in his hands.

She raised her can of mace. "End game, Jeffrey."

- James Traynor

*Editor's Note: This flash fiction piece won an Honorary Mention prize in the Sept. to Dec. 2010*

*"Original" Category of the 100 Words or Fewer*

*Writing Contest: [100wordsofewerwritingcontest.com](http://100wordsofewerwritingcontest.com)*

*Kudos to James!*

### GUEST WRITER JASON WARDEN

*Jason Warden is the Editor and host of the Shadow-cast Audio Anthology, a finalist for a Parsec award this year. He has been an avid reader and writer of dark fiction for many years.*

*He is a member of the Internet Writers Workshop.*

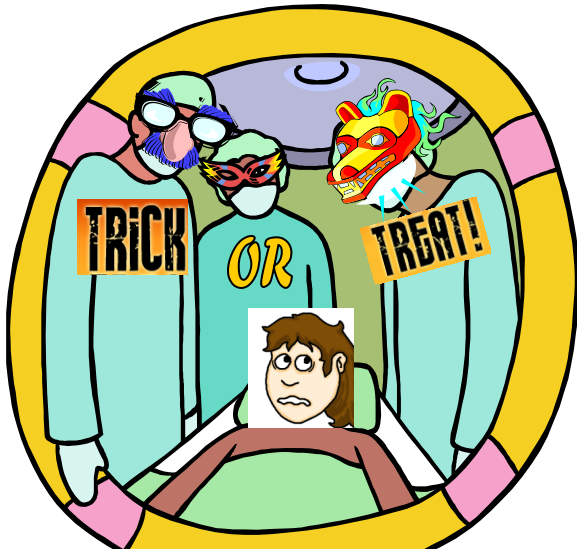
*In 2009 he opened The Shadow Cast Audio Anthology to expand his writing and publishing experience.*

*Recently his short story "Scorned" was selected as the winner of the <http://DeadTimesOnline.info> short story contest.*

*Earlier this year "Assimilation" was published in the "From the Darkside" Charity Anthology which benefits The Office of Letters and Light (the backers of NanoWrimo).*

*Another short, "Once Seen" was published in April in the Masters of Horror: The Anthology by Triskaideka Books.*

*Warden is currently at work on a novel. If you enjoy reading and/or writing dark fiction, Jason Warden is a name to remember. His website: [jasonwarden.com](http://jasonwarden.com)*



This is not the way to spend Halloween. My room is a prison and I am confused. I do remember the goblins. They gave me ... forced on me... some greenish brew. Was it last night? I must have slept well. It's morning. Bars across the east window break the light into stripes across my bed.

Suddenly I am wide awake. I start to sit up and my head swims. It is so quiet that I can hear my heart beat. Now I am frightened beyond belief and feel very much alone.

My prince charming walks into the room. Will he rescue me? I hope so.

But no, he pats my cheek and says everything will be just fine. Just fine? I'm the prisoner here and I want him to rescue me. From what? Everything is out of control and I don't know what's going to happen next. Still I do remember my prince's name. It's Seymour. Yeah, Prince Seymour.

I'm perspiring and nauseated. The sun is brighter now and burning through the barred window. It's too hot for October! My prince smiles at me tenderly. "Don't worry," he promises me. "Everything will be just great." He sounds like he means it and I am grateful for his reassurance. Still my fear is overwhelming.

The door to my room is thick and heavy and has a

tiny window with wire mesh over it. Suddenly this door to my prison of uncertainty swings open and two masked creatures dressed all in white wheel in something that looks like a marble slab. I am unceremoniously lifted on to it. "Seymour, Seymour," I yell with no voice, "Get me out of here!" Someone jabs me in the arm while my prince kisses me and waves goodbye. I am certain I'm having a bad dream. Yet it seems so real and sparks of that reality buzz around my head.

Lying on my back I am acutely aware that I weigh 175 pounds and I can hardly breathe. I'm on this cold slab, creaking along a white hall and I hear voices speaking far away. Something IS about to happen to me. I just can't remember what and I'm scared. Some ghouls and goblins arrive dressed all in green. I give up. Bad dream or not, I surrender to them.

Now I am stretched out on a table. Someone with weird glasses and a long creepy face looks down at me. Why is he dressed so funny? All in bright green with a flowered head covering. After all it is Halloween! I think bitterly. Is this a torture chamber or what? I am pushed into a sitting position and feel a prick in my spine. Sophisticated torture. Now I am flat on my back again and a numbness creeps up my body. I can't wiggle my toes. Oh my god, what next ?!

I feel a slight pressure on my abdomen and am aware of a voice coming from far away. "We're ready to start now, Lillian."

"Ready to start what?" I scream inside my head.

Then I hear the voice talking to some others about last night's baseball game! I am furious with everyone. How can they be so cavalier?

Someone pushes down on my rib cage. For a moment I panic. Why are they doing that? Suddenly there is an eerie silence. "Look at the size of him!" Someone's voice explodes. Then I hear a baby's lusty cry.

*(Continued on page 9)*



(Continued from page 8)

"It's a boy!" Even the voice sounds excited.

Now I lie in a cold shower of reality. It awakens my memory and my senses. I've just had a Caesarian surgery to deliver my baby. Everything comes into focus.

"Is he normal?" I whisper. No one seems to hear me. I remember my brother's warnings that the x-ray of the baby's skull taken last week showed a definite abnormality because of its size. I feel the slither of tears rolling down my cheeks. Still the baby's hearty cry sounds strong and healthy to me. I begin to pray silently.

The late afternoon sun feels warm on my covers. I stretch and am aware of a wonderfully flat stomach. Then a knife of pain and I remember everything.

Seymour looks down at me. His smile brims with happiness. "We've got a wonderful perfect boy!"

"Perfect?" I plead. I am still plagued by fear.

"Ah ha ! And big ... ten pounds and twenty-three and a half inches long."

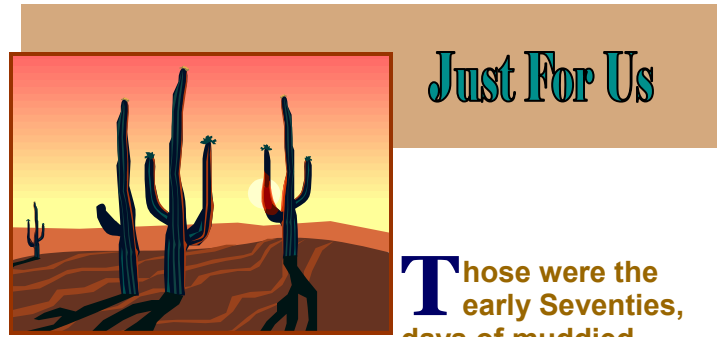
Our son is wrapped in a blue blanket. He feels strange in my arms ... pulsing with life. I am too weak to do anything but hold him for a few minutes. It's beginning to grow dark outside. It will be an orange and black evening.

I feel strange, like someone visiting from another planet. I look down at our baby, the infant who will change our lives forever, and I am filled with the purest kind of happiness. "There will never be a time I'll forget his birthday," I think. October 31, 1952.

#### TRICK OR TREAT



Lillian Rodich



**T**hose were the early Seventies, days of muddled rains and teaching long dark hours with no recess time to relieve the tension. At home our three teenagers filled every nook and cranny with their boisterous laughter and torrential tears. There was no relief from the turmoil except during our Palm Springs weekends.

Retreat into the desert was the gift my husband and I gave each other. A gift of sunshine and love in the afternoon, hot spa soaks, walks in the balmy star filled evenings, dinners in a tiny candle-lit deli on Palm Canyon Ave. and visits to the art galleries and boutiques.

Our few days away each winter renewed the romance in our relationship, changed the perspective with which we viewed our problems and turned fantasy into reality.

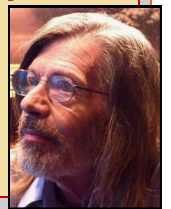
Today, the memories I still treasure remain a special gift to me and always lighten my mood on the dark days.

- Lillian Rodich

### Ray's a Winner

**CWC member Ray Malus was one of two winners in the 2010 California Senior Poet Laureate competition Awards. CCW's Scribbles Editor Wanda Sue Parrot, who appears in this October publication, announced that Ray was a winner in the category of American poets age 50 and older.**

Ray Malus



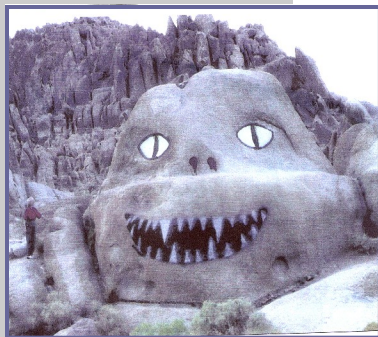
**Ray won for his sensuous poem: "Feast." If you'd like to read his winning entry, the poem is included in the current Scribbles publication at: <http://centralcoastwriters.org/>**

**Or, perhaps you'd like to contact the winner himself at [<raysplays@roadrunner.com>](mailto:raysplays@roadrunner.com)**

A grinning stone ogre -  
symbol of the spirit of the Sierras -  
looks out over the road to Mount Whitney.

- Erica Stux

Photo by William Shore



## *Retirement*

- Ray Malus

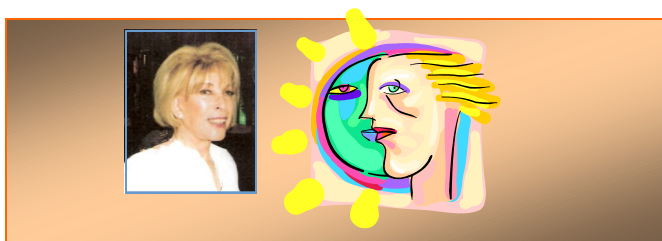
**One fresh fall dawn, a sleeping leaf awoke.  
A portent in the wind proclaimed a change.**

**Its life was always spent bound to its branch  
exchanging sun and air, for sustenance  
with trunk and root and soil — its universe.  
And nodding in the fickle winds of life,  
unconscious of the world beyond its bower,  
it served its time with stolid tolerance  
and complete devotion, never seeking more.**

**Now older, weathered, withered, worn  
and weary of all the numbing daily drudgery  
of endless photo-synthetic toil,  
already loosely tethered — half-estranged —  
it clothed itself in party colored livery,  
marshaled its courage, tore free, and blindly  
leaped**

**and caught the autumn currents in its arms.  
It swooped and sailed the whimsy of the wind.  
It skirled and frolicked in riotous release  
with swarms of fellow rebel harlequins  
that soared for far horizons only guessed.**

**Until, too soon exhausted, it pillowed,  
as all dying leaves must do,  
upon the waiting fertile earth, below.**



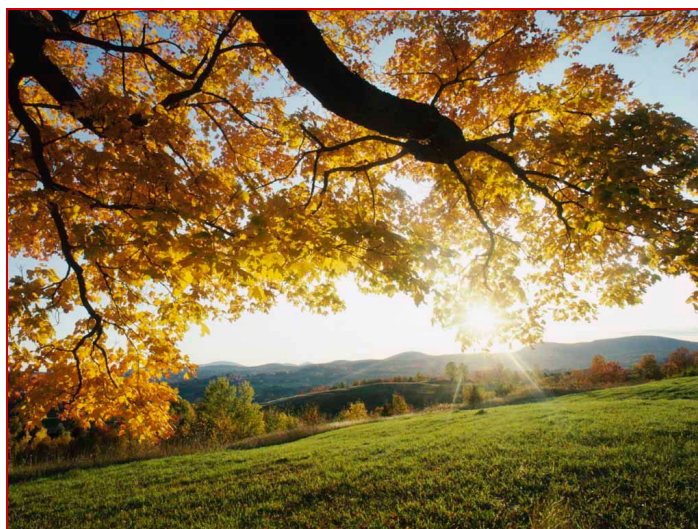
## **My Goblin...My Ghost**

Everyday is like Halloween to me,  
I make up my face to disguise what people will see,  
I select what to wear to enhance my best assets,  
Then I primp as I pose to expose many facets.

I am two different people by day and by night,  
As the makeup comes off and the clothes that were tight,  
There's a ghost in my mirror... what a horror to see,  
Like the face of a goblin she is staring at me.

So who can I be... not a witch nor a saint,  
But the image is strange when I wash off my paint  
I'm stripped bare of my costume no longer the Queen,  
But tomorrow once more....it will be Halloween.

By Leslie Kaplan



# How to \$ucceed as a "Starving Poet"

by Wanda Sue Parrott

*former Beatnik poet,  
Susanina of Venice  
West, 50 years later.*



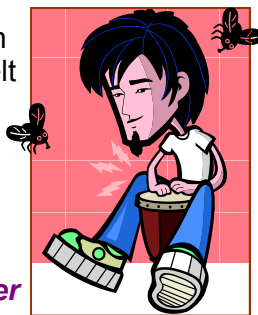
**D**ubbing myself "Susanina of Venice West," I entered onto the Proverbial Poet's Poverty Path (unpublished and practically penniless) half a century ago, never suspecting I would become co-founder and producer of one of the major American poetry contests each year, or that I would publish and sell countless poetry books (my own, 17 editions of *Golden Words* anthologies, and dozens of chapbooks for clients and other events).

If I had foreseen the future between college semesters in summer 1960, would my wannabe-a-Beatnik-poet persona have given up bongo playing? Nah. The open mike reading in The Unicorn coffee house on the Sunset Strip lured me so powerfully with its spell that I never needed drugs. Poetry made me high. And, since money had nothing to do with my personal unfoldment through the *ars poetica*, I was a phony in the right spot at the right time.

Playing the role of someone other than my conservative and overly sheltered middle-class self was exciting. Susanina could expound or opine with the **S** word, whereas I was raised to keep my mouth both clean and shut. The **F** word was so no-no that I never articulated it until the 21st century, and then not often.

Susanina's 1960 ankle-length braid was a weave of multi-colored horsehair falls I got for \$1 each at Woolworths and thrift shops. Home-made wooden clogs were cut from a 2 x 4 with my dad's tools; the belt for my jeans was a length of clothesline rope.

Two lines from my Beatnik-style stream-of-consciousness verse, punctuated with bongo-drum rolls, were: ***Fat black flies buzzed over bloody bulls' tails. . . drummmm. . . on the floor. . . drummmm. . . by the door. . . drummmm. . . of the store"** and **"Men can make an earthquake. Drummmm—drummmm--drummmm. Sometimes. . . drum. . . men. . . drum. . . are. . . boom-boom- boom. . . fools!***



My first poetic *nom de plume* reflected the 1960 scene at Venice West, the beach south of Santa Monica. Devotees of Jack Kerouac (his *On The Road* stirred my muse into action) hung out at a moldy old Victorian-style home on the boardwalk.

For a dime dropped into a gilded wire bird cage, visitors could enter The Gas House. There, near-naked poets played acoustic guitars in a claw-footed bathtub, poets read in ranty raves, and one shirtless black youth my age displayed rats running on his bare arms.

The non-august August poetry was shi--y, the beach scene shabby. The Beat Poets' Path was skin-and-bony. They boasted of existentialistic NOWness while roasting rats over a trash-can fire, and snarfing sour-dough bread scavenged from bakery trash bins.

Sickened, Susanina expired 8/31/60. A Labor Day backyard barbecue at my own clean, comfortable middle-class San Gabriel Valley home served as a muse-resurrecting wake. I have been writing Shakespearean-inspired sonnets in iambic pentameter ever since.

**My advice to a poet: Never give up your bongo drums, or whatever got you started.**

**Eat well, write, and may the Mu\$e be with you.**

**W**anda Sue Parrott, retired journalist and teacher, has 18 pen names. As Diogenes Rosenberg she invented the Pissonnet form of poetry; as Prairie Flower, she wrote *The Last Indian on the Trail of Tears that's a nominee for the 2010 IR-WIN award for best visionary book promotion by Book Publicists of So. California*. She co-founded the National Annual Senior Poets Laureate Poetry Competition for American poets age 50 and older, and is editor of the Central Coast branch of CWC's newsletter *Scribbles*. [www.amykitchenerfdn.org](http://www.amykitchenerfdn.org)

## Truism From An Old Newspaparmen

The time to begin writing an article is when you have finished it to your satisfaction. By that time you begin to clearly and logically perceive what it is you really want to say. ~Mark Twain



## Dad's Foreign Streamer Trunk



I hear the sound of a whistle in the night...

it's not a train, a bell, or a harmonica. I'm afraid because the house is dark, and the night is sliding quietly under my door and windows. There is a faint movement of old lace touching the window panes, and the heavy-lined drapes are whispering an old song between their folds.

I sit up covering my body all the way up to my neck with the heavy feather eiderdown quilt Dad brought over from Europe long ago. It came inside his streamer trunk made of old wood, held together with rusty, metal nails in different sizes. Colorful oversized paper stamps in foreign color and shapes, announce the port of entry and departure of far way foreign places. Old albums are there as well... Pictures of Dad's parents, brothers and relatives I never met, stare straight ahead like in a trance ...Obeying someone's order not to move. They seem to be holding their breath waiting for a flash to explode, then exhaling...letting loose their muscles to fill in the extra-large material of their garb.

It was only yesterday when I was a child, playing with match-boxes, hats, and scarves, rescued from the dust that holds Dad's memories inside the old trunk.

Time spills out in a blur. A glowing mist of summer days, echo gently in my thoughts...my eyes brim with tears of delight. I hear voices as clear as a bell.

Mom saying, "Do not climb trees, nor roll on the grass. Your white dress will stain green."

A clear breeze comes through my open window, and I hear church bells in the distance. I reach out to touch the glass...it turns to water inviting me to plunge through it into the hidden mysteries of yesterday.

What I see is a vision of a time when I was a child, and I lived in the very middle of the world, in Quito, the city of eternal spring, curling smoke from chimneys over red-clay roofs, the old church, sweating liquid gold down its walls, and heavy carved doors covered with enormous rusty-metal-nails

I open a small crack scraping the floor of the heavy door screeching of years of neglect. I inch my head in to see ebony saints with blank eyes staring at flickering candles, dancing shadows in the night. I see walls surrounding the cold space showing lines of Hebrew writings just like in the old books that came inside Dad's old European trunk.

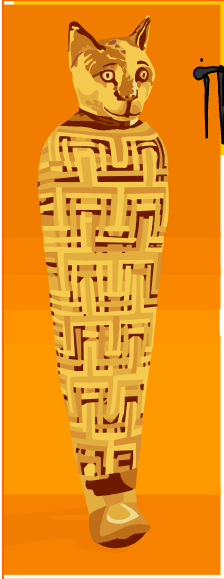
In my vision I can see the old Colonial house, with rooms that creak and groan as I go from room to room. Sunlight bursts through broken thick-windows up in the roof casting undetermined shadows on walls and floors...clogging my ears with familiar echoes. My vision blurs as I pretend walking into this house that knows me, recognizing my young voice.

I stand on the rim of time, staring at the ruins on ancient pieces still connected with relics of then and now.

For a moment I hang suspended in air, floating into forever like dreams do. Dreams that bring Dad's old trunk back and forth, spilling aunts and uncles, cousins I never met, assorted friends, Mom, Dad, brothers, sisters, grandparents and hairy pets.

- Keyle Birnberg-Goldstein @1990





## The Cat Mummy Maneuver

She mustn't hear me, I thought.

I found the cat carrier in the garage and quietly placed it at the bottom of the stairs.

So far, so good. Emmie is still asleep upstairs on our bed.

I tiptoed away.

Why the secrecy? Our claustrophobic cat hated the carrier's confinement.

Each time we tried to place

her inside the cage, shy little kitty turned into a yowling wild cat. Her claws extended, lengthened and slashed our flesh like nineteen switchblades.

I mulled the situation. How can I take those flailing claws out of action so we can travel to the vet?

Ah ha, I have it.

I found an old bath towel, and then sought out my assistant catnabber: husband Joe. He was reading the morning paper on the quiet patio.

"Are you ready?" I asked.

"For what?"

"It's time to take Emmie to the vet for her shots and check-up."

"Are you nuts ?! And do you think I 'm nuts?!" He slammed down the paper.

"Shh! Don't worry, this time you won't get hurt."

"Better not! Almost needed stitches the last time. See the scars?"

"Sure, I remember. Blood ran down your arms...yuck. So... here's the plan: we'll sneak upstairs with the carrier and put it down right outside our bedroom. I'll wait. "

"Swell. You'll wait. What'll I do?"

"She should still be asleep on our bed. Quickly walk in there, open up this bath towel - like this, see? - and drop it over her back. Wrap it tightly around her ... this way, and that way ... before she escapes."

"And then what?"

"Carry her out to me all wrapped up like a mummy. I'll open the cage door and hold up the carrier like a trash can. Drop her through the opening. She 'll still be wrapped in the towel so I 'll have

time to slam the door shut before she can jump out. Got it?"

"Yeah. This better work."

And it did work. Joe grabbed, wrapped and adeptly inserted a startled Emmie into the carrier. I quickly shut the cage door. The carrier rocked and emitted yowls and growls like we'd captured a small demon. In the car, eventually, the cat's protests scaled down to plaintive meows and a few restless turns. Happily, Emmie made her appointment and got medical care. Even better - no humans got hurt.

And that's how we developed and executed the Cat Mummy Maneuver.

- Kathy Highcove

## A Matter of Opinion

**The Professor waited patiently as the other witnesses testified. Finally, the eminent astronomer was summoned to appear before the Special Space Commission.**

**"You heard the prior testimony concerning signals from an approaching space object?" Professor? Good. We need your expert opinion before we decide to fund a space probe of the object," said the Chairman.**

**A hush fell over the visitors' gallery. Cameras tightly focused in on the astronomer's face.**

**The Senate marshal brought forward the Book. Its iridescent cover glowed like a captured moon beam as it lay before the witness.**

**The Proctor spoke to the witness, "Professor, swear on the Book that you will speak truthfully to this Commission."**

**The astronomer placed his sixth tentacle on the Book, raised his eighth, and spoke with sibilant certainty:**

**"I swear by the Gingsplat that I vibrate in tune to the truth as I detect it. "**

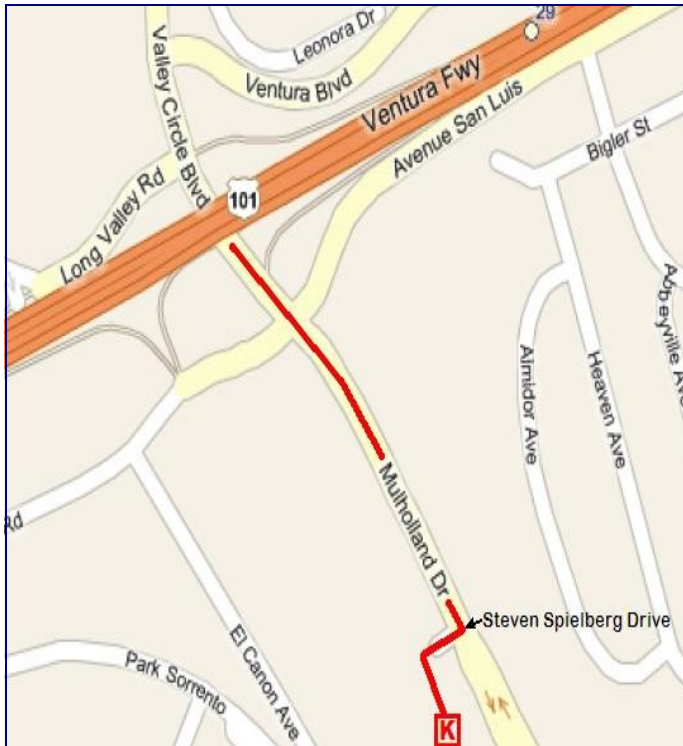
**He turned and addressed the commission:**

**"There is no evidence that intelligent life exists outside our galaxy. Radio signals from a lone satellite? Nonsense. Pure fantasy from some of my over imaginative peers."**

**(possibly to be continued...)**

**- KH**

## How to Find Us



## 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, Oct. 2nd., 2010 at 1:30 p.m.

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