

NEW YEAR NEW YEAR NEW YEAR



# IN FOCUS

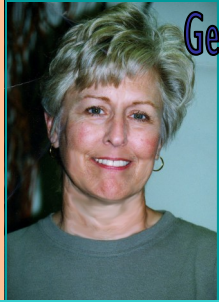
Newsletter of the California Writers Club/West Valley



## JANUARY 2011

Expressions of Expectations :

On We Sail	2
His Happy Trails	
Twenty-Five Word Stories	3
Max Stays In the Current	4
Just Keep It Simple	
Why I Write	5
Members' Messages	6
Graduations Then and Now	7
New Year in the Middle of the World	8-9
Exciting Ethiopia	10
The Scrabble Game of My Life	11
Guest Writer Alice Folkart	12
Highfive	13
Meeting Info and Map	14



Dr. Julie Ann Wambach

### Getting the Word Out

Writers are communicators. We strive to transmit through text our ideas or mental images to our readers.

Our January speaker, Dr. Julie Ann Wambach, is a recognized expert in communication and group dynamics. She earned her M.A. in Speech Communication and her Ph.D. in Adult Development and Aging at Arizona State University. As professor of Human Communication at Scottsdale Community College, she published two textbooks and numerous articles for academic journals and magazines.

Dr. Wambach has led workshops at professional conferences and has been a speechwriter, coach and editor for business leaders and elected officials. She's worked as a community activist for the environment, the elderly and political candidates.

For the last six years, she has mediated dis-

putes for a variety of non-profit and governmental entities, offering insights on conflict resolution in a creative non-confrontational fashion.

Dr. Wambach's mediator and counselor experiences prompted her to write *Battles Between Somebody and Nobodies*. In this book she explores in layman's language the dynamics of power that underlie human interaction.

Why would Dr. Wambach's mediation skills be meaningful to our writers membership? Writing your book is the easy part, experienced authors have often told us. Publishing your book is a different endeavor. Many new and unpublished writers experience conflicts while interacting with professionals of the publishing world.

At the next meeting (**January 8th**), Dr. Wambach will demonstrate ways to communicate more effectively with agents, editors, publishers or bookstore managers.

Please join us for this informative lecture.

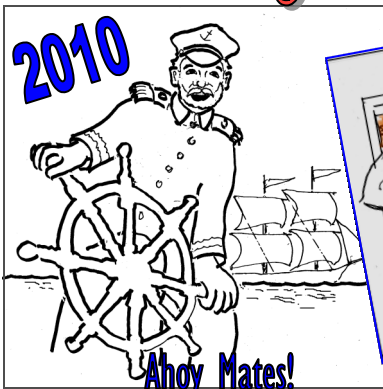
- Yolanda Fintor

### REMEMBER!

Meeting moved to January 8th

## west valley whimsicals

A Schwartz / Highcove Production



Remember last September?



I've emceed, kept order - even played Santa Claus!



## Executive Board

President ... Dave Wetterberg  
Vice-president/Membership ... Sheila Moss  
Vice-president/Programs ... Yolanda Fintor  
Secretary ... Position Open  
Treasurer ... Dean Stewart

## Board of Directors

Editor, Publicity ... Kathy Highcove  
Webmaster ... David Burr  
Photographer ... Ken Wilkins  
On Site Coordinator ... Betty Freeman  
Critique Groups Coor. ... Lillian Rodich  
Open Mike ... Bill Sorrells  
Members-at-Large ... Bill Hitchins  
Karen Gorback

## On We Sail !

And so we come to the end of another year that's passed by in record time. Wasn't so long ago when the year 2000 dawned. So much excitement and speculations about the future! All our family wrote down predictions for the coming decade. Somewhere, those scrawls are stored away. Someday I'll find them and show them to my husband and three adult children. I have a feeling our predictions were far off the mark. No one predicted 9/11 and all that's developed since the year 2000.

Back to our very real present in the CWC/WV... My thanks to all who've sent me material this past year. I've greatly enjoyed tapping the reservoir of talent in our membership. And as we travel into 2011, I'm sure more writers will come on board, and this editor and newsletter will garner more interesting yarns and verses for publication in the months ahead.

Next month's theme is **Love and Pain**. Love is a natural theme for February, but pain, too often the flip side of love, is not often dwelt on in a cheery newsletter. But perhaps you'll think of a poignant, funny or ironic take on the theme.

I'll be waiting.

**Kathy Highcove, Editor**



## His Happy Trails

**J**erry England has lived in the Valley since he was a wee buckaroo. And he's always cottoned to ranch life. England's been riding trails and the local ranges for over sixty years.

This cowboy puts energy into his interests. Through the years he's taken photos of the ranch land and striking rock formations in the Chatsworth area. He's diligently collected lobby cards and copied on DVD's scores of films and Western television episodes. He's collected scripts from these shows.

Thanks to England's talk, our members realized that we're already very familiar with those Chatsworth rocks and trails. Remember those Saturday morning matinees with fellow pop-corn chomping fans of Roy Rogers, the Lone Ranger and Gene Autry? Well, pardner, those oaters were often filmed at Chatsworth's Iverson Ranch.

Movie making at the Iverson Ranch has been going on for quite a spell. In 1913, Cecil B. DeMille made *Squaw Man* and before long, all the major film studios set up shoots on Iverson Ranch. Why the North Valley? Chatsworth was close to Hollywood; yet on the silver screen it looked like the Old West. When early television productions needed a Western set, the trails and vistas in Chatsworth once more filled the bill.

More about the cowboy Jerry England: he has long been an activist dedicated to the protection and preservation of the rustic ranchland of Chatsworth. Through the years Valley herd land and chicken ranches were bought up and carved into small lots. Magnificent rock formations fell victim to contractors and land developers' bulldozers. Legalized destruction – where's the Sheriff? England asked the city councils. For several years he petitioned, publicized and protested in an attempt to preserve the Western tradition of Chatsworth. England eventually realized he needed to write a book to help his causes.

England wrote two books. The first, *Rendezvous at Boulder Pass; Hollywood's Fantasyland* is a study of historical Chatsworth, California ranch locations, the Iverson ranch and other filming sites in the Western Valley. His second book, *Real Cowboys of the Santa Susanas*, is a photographic study of the movie location ranches in Chatsworth.

To round out his talk on the movie tradition in the northern Valley, England screened a series of slides and film clips. We saw many scenes of the Iverson Ranch, a part of our cinematic life for many decades. Hi Ho Silver! Pass the popcorn.

- Kathy Highcove



Programs Chair Yolanda Fintor and our December guest speaker Jerry England.

## Twenty-five Word Stories

Author's note: *These stories each contain a complete plot in just twenty-five words. Try to write one yourself—it's fun!*

- Andrea L. Polk

### Premonition

Sirens wailed. Grandma's premonition commanded her to follow. Two smashed cars, nine injured; five were her family. She watched loaded ambulances drive away. Sirens screaming.

### Sharing

"Want ice cream?" he asked.  
 "At one A.M.? Why?"  
 "I had a craving. Didn't want to deny you."  
 "Everyone awake?"  
 "Dishing up."  
 "Then me too."

### Kangaroo by the Ears

A male kangaroo pinned his keeper to the fence. Screaming. Lauren jumped to her rescue. Grabbed his ears, pulled hard. Keeper's free. What about Lauren?

### Protection

Dad drunk, struck Mom. I slammed him against the wall. "You do that again and I'll kill you! Now get out of here."

### Hidden Meaning

"Son, please check the van; see if I left my shoes there."  
 He returned, "Yes."  
 "OK. Now would you bring them in?"  
 "Oh, You meant....?"

### Powerful Kiss

Toddler touches the hot oven. Cries. Mommy busy.  
 "Kiss it. Make it feel better."  
 Toddler leans toward the oven. "No! Not the oven. Your hand."

### Runaway

She's only six. The suitcases hang from her arms. She slowly walks along the sidewalk, checking to see if I'm watching. She wants a dog.

### Planning Ahead

While cleaning her room I found a stack of notes, each with a carefully written reason for running away. Old? Forgotten? We need to talk.

### Old Man in the House

F. W. lives down the hall. He hates little kids. I'm little. He shakes his cane at me and yells in German. I hide.

## Word Economy

Mark Twain said a writer should strike out one-third of the words in everything he writes without losing any content. In other words, tighter writing is better writing. And why is self-editing so important? Because real-life editors have limited space for content. Listed below are suggestions for learning this essential editing skill.

### Combine sentences

Original: His name was Artimus. He was a crazy friend of mine. He tripped over a garbage can one Halloween evening. **20 wds.**  
 Revision: One Halloween evening my crazy friend Artimus tripped over a garbage can. **11wds.**

### Use short openings

Original: Because she was so disappointed, she sulked all evening. **9 wds.**  
 Revision: Disappointed, she sulked all evening. **5 wds.**

### Avoid passive tense in favor of the active

Original: There was a group of teenagers on the bus laughing and socializing. **12 wds.**  
 Revision: On the bus some teenagers laughed and socialized. **8 wds.**

### Be careful of which and who clauses

Original: The apples, which were finally ripe, begged to be picked. **10 wds.**  
 Revision: The apples, finally ripe, begged to be picked. **8 wds.**  
 Original: Sam, who was my best friend, became a high school dropout. **11 wds.**  
 Revision: My best friend Sam became a high school dropout. **9 wds.**

### Delete meaningless modifiers:

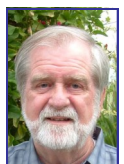
Original: I was very nervous when I was about to meet the President. **12 wds.**  
 Revision: About to meet the President, I was extremely nervous. **9 wds.**

### Avoid trite phrasing

Original: Due to the fact that he was lazy and far too negligent in class-work and homework, he failed English. **20 wds.**  
 Revision: Negligent in his studies, he failed English. **8 wds.**

### Avoid clichés

Original: She's a person who is dishonest and I'll hate her 'till pigs can fly, 'till hell freezes over, or both. **20 wds.**  
 Revision: She's dishonest and I'll always hate her. **7wds.**

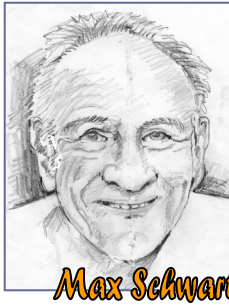


Follow Mark Twain's advice. It worked for him.

- Dave Wetterberg



## Max Stays in the Current



The other night after returning from my class at Community College, I decided to

check the background of an instructor who was bugging me. I punched in his name on Google and it came up only that he was a teacher. There was no biography, no books written, and no awards. Assuming that Google doesn't always provide much information, I tried again with someone I knew well. I keyed in "Max Schwartz, author." I was shocked as there flowed page after page listing almost everything I wrote...over forty hits and twenty-four book titles.

Needless to say I felt proud, but also surprised that only my books remain. None of the buildings, factories, refineries, homes, or infrastructure I engineered during my lifetime came up. Even while those facilities were occupied, no one knew the name of the engineer... but the books remained ...with my name, biography, and professional and military history. I then realized that the written word lasts longer than things of steel and concrete.

I also realized that this fitted into my present writing project, "The Master Builder – in Biblical Times." The title is defined as a combination builder, an engineer/architect (the two terms are interchangeable in Latin) and artist. In a way, this definition is the story of my life, only in reverse order.

As a teenager I wanted to be an artist, but my art teacher said I could not make a living in that field, so I shifted to architecture. World War II broke out so I changed again to work as a surveyor on the Pan American Highway in Central America. I returned a year later to join the US Army Engineers to build bridges with General Patton's Third Army in Europe. After the War, I registered in

USC hoping to study Architecture, but classes were full. I changed back to Engineering, got my degree, a license, and became a Civil and Mechanical Engineer. But during all of these changes of direction, I remained in heart an artist, and like the Master Builder of Old, became skilled in all of his fields.

I now hope to publish my book as a single story, or separately, as booklets or articles on different specialties for professional and trade magazines or as text books for the new generation of craftsmen. I hope to utilize all of the latest digital programs I can with my computer, including Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop, MS Publisher, Websites, Blogs, eBooks, and whatever comes along. These are my expectations for the present and future, but I'll remain the Hidden Artist.

- Max Schwartz

### Just Keep it Simple, Man

I don't twitter and I don't tweet.  
I get my kicks from the obsolete.  
A number two pencil and a rotary phone  
Are the tools I use when I get home.  
And those not much, it's safe to say.  
A hot bath and a cool beer will make my day.  
Still, you get a call from a huckster out there.  
Wants to sell a remodel or a re-fi on your lair.  
I try to avoid these salesman's calls,  
Inconvenient gift that truly galls.  
Another thing with these phones of cell,  
The users don't speak, they only yell.  
I've heard enough talk from the other guy.  
As I stand in a line or stare at the sky.  
As he speaks of the day gone by  
And forced to buy French, cause they were out of rye.  
I wish them all happiness and sublime.  
But I've got better ways to spend my time.  
I flat don't care to be so privy.  
To a stranger's important "jags" and "jiggy".  
And what about the children who are forced that way?  
You just can't talk to a mommy today.  
When a mommy walks with a child in her hands,  
And a cellular phone, her attention demands.  
I long for the fifties, when it was cool  
That mommy was there when you came home from school.

by Bill Sorrells



## After Your Siesta, Try a Sestina

- Ray Malus



The sestina is one of the acmes of "formal" poetry. In contrast to our modern "free verse," the essence of the sestina is form. It consists of six-line stanzas, followed by an "envoi" — a three-line summation. The rules for these components are complex, keying off the last words of the first stanza — which repeat.

Assuming lines of the first stanza end with words: ABCDEF, the succeeding stanzas must end with: FAEBDC, CFDAEB, ECBFAD, DEACFB and BDFECA. In addition, the 'envoi' must end with ECA (or ACE), and must contain BDF within the lines — one to a line. No repeating meter is necessary, as there are no rhymes.

I wrote a program to take six specified words and construct the skeleton of a sestina from them. (The last words of the stanzas are properly organized.) The skeleton can then be copy/pasted into your own word processor. You only need write the lines which contain them. In addition, you can 'randomize' the order of the first stanza to see if that generates a more promising skeleton.

Try it. You'll like it. The page is [http://raymalus.com/Extras/Sestina\\_Request.php](http://raymalus.com/Extras/Sestina_Request.php). Visit and play with the program. For sestina info, go to <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5792>

## Lopsided Laughs

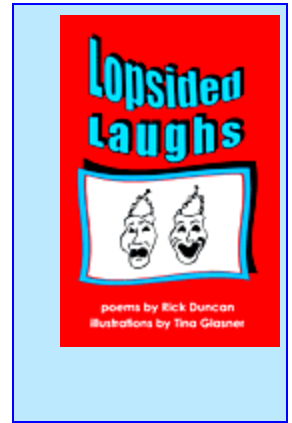
By Rick Duncan & Tina Glasner

Also available as:  
Dust Jacket Hardcover

Published: December 2010

Note from member Tina Glasner:

**Hi all, AuthorHouse has completed the web page for Lopsided Laughs. You can read one of the poems and 'About the Author(s)' too.**



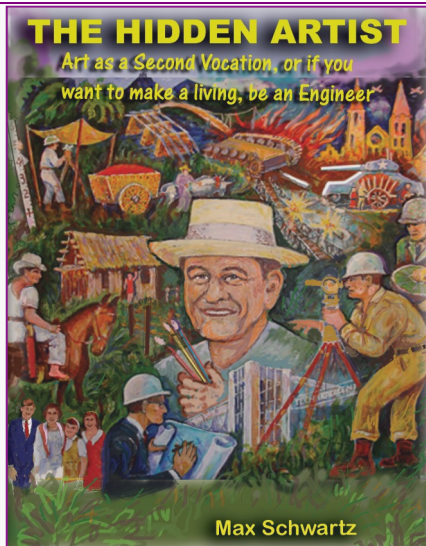
**The creative process to come up with all the illustrations was amazing. Some of the poems seemed impossible, and then inspiration would "strike." Some are Rick Duncan's ideas, some are joint credit, but the majority are my ideas, my input: the selection, editing, and layout of the poems, the decision of how many, the decision of what art style to employ, the cover evolution, the book title, and brainstorming.**

**To ensure getting nice looking art on the pages, I redrew every single image with art pens and rescanned. And overall, Shel Silverstein was definitely a model.**

Find more information on Tina Glasner's book at

<http://www.authorhouse.com/Bookstore/BookDetail.aspx?BookId=SKU-000431749>

Tina Glasner is currently in the South Bay Branch.



## THE HIDDEN ARTIST- Art as a Second Vocation, or if you want to make a living, be an Engineer.

This is a story of an artist who, to make a living, became a surveyor, a soldier, and a civil engineer. Max worked on the Pan American Highway as a teenager, then, drafted into the army in WWII, he served as a combat engineer. After the army he devoted his professional life to civil engineering and traveled widely. Throughout the decades, he sketched the scenes around him.

His artistic subjects varied from classical architecture to biblical scenes, landscapes to the human form and book illustrations. His hidden artistic career extended from 1935 to the present day.

why

i



why

i



why

i



I'm infected by the curse, as I'm sure all the group members are. There is need and compulsion and deadlines and desire and joy and sharing. Our lives are so much the same and yet so different. The individual view is sacred to me. Conversation sometimes reeks of the banal. There, I just used a word that doesn't even come up in my speech. When I write, I mean to say that's what I *really* mean. A personal communiqué. Come with me to this secret place and I will tell you .

- Bill Sorrells

I write for the same reason I swim laps. After a half hour swimming, I feel better. It's relaxing and so is writing. To-day I signed up for swimming in the Crown Valley Senior Olympics this May. My goal in swimming is to win; in writing, my goal is to have my newly written Children's Picture Book published. Even though I have had three books published, there is no guarantee for a fourth. Is it possible that I could win both?...wishful thinking.

- Gloria Kositchek

just  
write

Writing is part of my being, thinking - my very existence. Reliving the best and worst moments in life with people who left their mark on me... like a permanent tattoo...makes me take pen in hand. Hopefully, what I write will make others laugh, cry and relate to experiences in their own lives.

My writing style is meant to be conversational and simple... like I'm a "Once Upon A Time" storyteller. So while I'm still here, while my memory is still in tact, I'll keep on writing, telling and printing my personal little gems. Maybe my writing will inspire others.

- Leslie Kaplan

When I joined the US Navy in World War II and was ordered to become a photographer/ correspondent, I was greatly disappointed. I longed to be on a PT boat in the war torn Pacific. Instead I was stationed in comfortable New Orleans, LA and assigned to interview homecoming war heroes. How dull!

I discovered I actually enjoyed the work and made each "Hero's" story a little more exciting than the last one. (Within limits, of course.) When I later became a missionary/teacher in Ethiopia I wanted everyone back home to share my exciting experiences. Now I HAVE to write...it's part of me!

- Ken Wilkins



## Graduations

*I wrote the following in 1988 about my first grade class who would be graduating high school in the year 2000.*

These are my young students. I have wiped their tears, comforted them through frustration and sorrow and guided them at the very beginning of their perilous path lead-

ing to adulthood.

In the year 2000, by their eighteenth birthdays, they will be entering a constantly changing world. Will they be adept enough to master the new technology? Will they find a way to feed, house and clothe themselves? Will they be strong enough to carry others in need? Will the sun continue to shine upon them? Will the atmosphere still protect them? Will laughter and joy maintain their souls and curiosity nourish their minds? And will some innocence remain?

Will I be here to see them as adults and still recognize their faces?

*Life started to change drastically as my young students faced adulthood. A technological revolution was under way. Still their understanding of technical skills was limited and unimportant. They stayed in "steady" jobs, married, had children, joined the service and got by happily in a simple way if life. Their roles remained pretty well defined. Albeit real and imminent local dangers did exist. Then threats became reality and began to change their lives.*

*These words are written to and about my granddaughters who graduated college in 2010.*

Your world is challenging and changing more quickly and far beyond what was faced by my first grade students when they graduated high school in 2000. After high school you continued school wrapped in the cocoon of college life and, at the same time, becoming knowledgeable about our whole planet: environment, cultures, politics, problems and dangers. And you have become intimately acquainted with the most modern technology and its implications. That said, you have shared with me your goals and inner feelings about the future you face following college.

Now, in 2010 you want to go on with your education with the hope that your professional careers will sustain you through our continuing economic crisis. You want to help society in some way but you don't know where to turn first. You are fearful of financial disaster. You feel a complete lack of privacy and are determined not to be caught in a communication web or lose your identity in cyberspace. You abhor the idea of war and fear for your friends. You want a voice in politics but are frustrated.

Still you are smart, quick and eager. You have chosen fields of social service and are aware of the adult world and its rapidly growing and complicated problems. But, you still have faith in yourselves and the future. We honor your generation and are grateful to them.

**-Lillian Rodich**

## THEN AND NOW

**then was then  
and now is now**

**what can be said about yesterdays**

**except ... they were once tomorrows**

**changes take place somewhere in-between**

**some surprises**

**some ardently pursued**

**all of this fascinating**

**and humbling,**

**sometimes joyous**

**sometimes devastating**

**decades ago**

**could we have imagined**

**this world as it is now**

**has the very nature of truth**

**become an ever-changing mystery**

**yet in all these days and months and years**

**One thing has remained a constant...**

**youth has retained**

**the ability to dream and create**

**and love has remained**

**in our vocabulary**



**- Lillian Rodich**





# New Year in the Middle of the World

It is almost midnight in Quito, Ecuador, where we live. The city of Quito is in the very center of the world. It's very cold, especially at night because of the nine thousand feet high altitude. Quito is surrounded by the Andean and other mountains in different shades of verdant greens.

Papa is going again to the Amazon jungle looking for gold. This New Year he will be traveling by burro (donkey) with a bunch of Andean guides who do not understand his gringo Spanish. He does not understand their Inca-Quechua dialect either. Last New Year he went on the same trip. When he came home, Mom didn't recognize him and almost shut the door in his face. He came back with a long beard, sneezing a bit of gold dust, wild red eyes, and malaria, which kept him in bed under a pile of blankets shaking with cold for a whole month. He also came with some gifts for Mom and a shiny gold and ruby ring for my five year old finger.

On previous business adventures, Papa kept us hopping from house to house every two years where stuff disappeared in transit, stolen by truck drivers or forgotten in the last house. Our maids came and went like revolving doors, taking souvenirs like forks, spoons, anything they could hide under their oversized blouses. Only good old Rosario stayed forever, year after year with a bunch of spooky ghosts hiding in daytime behind old doors scaring me, especially at night.

This year Mom is making her own plans for New Years. I am watching her and Tante (Aunt) get dressed. They are giggling and pushing each other while they get ready to go to a costume party across the street. Nobody is supposed to know, but my Tante Rebecca is divorced and has no money. She is tall and slim, very pretty, with long black hair and red lips. Tante twists her long hair, pushing it inside a brown hat. She is wearing my uncle's favorite blue suit, his best stiff white shirt and French silk tie, the good stuff that he wears on special occasions, like when there is a meeting at the Astronomy Observatory where he works spotting tiny, crumb-like stars.

Rebecca is busy burning a candle against a white china plate. Then she spits softly on a small toothbrush, collects the black soot and applies her homemade mascara to her lashes. I think the spit also has something to do with her lip gloss. Everything she uses is natural homemade neat stuff. I hope to learn all her beauty tricks someday.

Mom is dressed in the embroidered pink silk kimono Papa got her in Panama. She looks beautiful in her duty-free Lancôme makeup. Her face looks extra-white-like-dusted-with-flour. Black straight lines go around her eyes and brows. Her upper lip looks like a perfect red-letter-M. I wonder how she made her hair look so tall. I did notice the half roll of toilet paper missing from one of the bathrooms.

Tante Rebecca brings her knitting needles and criss-crosses those on top of Mom's tall artificial black hair, achieving that special flawless oriental look. They are ready to go.





"Rosario, take good care of the kids," Mom instructs our nanny as she noisily kisses the air next to my face. She digs into her purse and gives each of us a handful of small change.

"You may stay up late tonight," she continues. "At midnight, take the 12 centavo coins and throw them out the window for good luck."

Tante Rebecca brings her red-long-nails to her lips and blows an exaggerated M-M-WAH kiss. She grabs Mom's arm and off they go to the party across the street where the scary world-renown Guayasamin painter lives surrounded with color-oils and turpentine-smelly-rags.

We are looking at them leaning against the tall balcony's iron-gate; the tips of my shoes barely touch the floor. My brother Salem and nanny Rosario are holding me tight just in case I fall over.

I see big rag dolls everywhere made with old clothes stuffed with newspaper. They represent the year that is ending.

Old and young people are laughing. Someone is reading the Last Will and Testament with a list of the worse 12 blunders the government has made in the year that is ending... which my brother says includes dictators, juntas, militarist, commie duds, thief presidents and more.



I look with envy at the neighborhood kids who are down the street waiting for the church bells to chime the twelve strokes at midnight, officially greeting the New Year. All the windows open all at once, and a rain of coins falls into the street.

"Let's go get rich," my brother Salem says with a devilish grin. We bolt out the door, ignoring Rosario's warnings.

"It's bad luck to take those coins. Wait till I tell your Mama," she warns.

She is right behind us bending, picking, and stuffing the 5 centavo coins in her pockets and pointing to where she sees more shiny round monies.

It is five minutes after midnight. The kids are burning the stuffed old dolls and we jump over the bonfire with them. We get home, carefully holding our coin pockets to avoid the noise.

"Sssssshh!"... Rosario says holding a finger to her lips. But Mom and Aunt Rebecca are not home yet. I hope we have time to count our loot.

Dad is probably sleeping off his malaria in the Amazon Jungle or he will soon appear dragging the heavy eider-downs...his hands holding neat rare fossilized New Year's gifts for all of us.

- Keyle Birnberg-Goldstein



## New Year's Resolution

**From now on  
window shades stay closed,  
newspapers, magazines, billboards  
unread,  
TV, telephone and internet  
ignored.**

**There's too much going on out there.  
I'm tired of trying to figure it all out.  
I'm tired of dealing with phantoms,  
chasing will-o'-the-wisps.  
"They" will have to find another way  
to reach me.**

**by Mary Houston Shaffer**

## Exciting Ethiopia

When one hears mention of Ethiopia, many exotic memories come to mind of the high mountainous country in East Africa. The Ethiopian Empire was once ruled by Haile Selassie, who traced his lineage back to King Solomon.



by Ken Wilkins

Much of southern Ethiopia consists of barren desert known as The Ogaden, bisected by a seasonal monster called the Webbe Shebeli, the River of Leopards. Meandering lazily through the desert most of the year, it can become a terrifying and destructive force to northern villages in its path during the rainy season.

As headmaster of an elementary school which I started in the Ogaden in 1956, I felt obligated to offer evening classes in *English As A Second Language* to the tribal leaders and government personnel.

I had experienced unusual interruptions to classroom activities. One evening flying gnats became so thick I could not recognize the last row of students some twenty feet away. It seemed like every flying insect along the river had been attracted by our gaso-line lantern hanging from the middle of the classroom ceiling. Sorry students! See you tomorrow night!

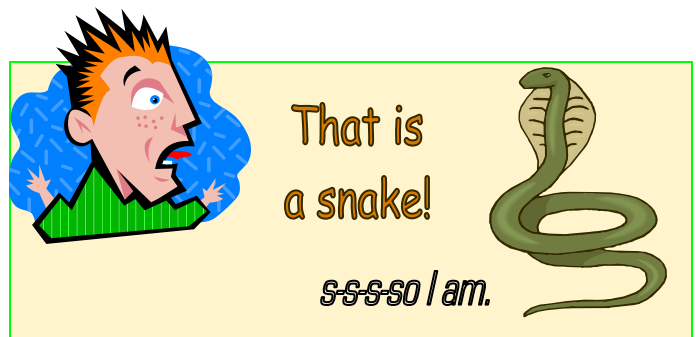
This night's interruption was of a different nature. As usual, I vocally modeled the phrases to be learned that evening, "This is a book," with the students remaining silent.

After the second model "This is a book," the students would respond, "This is a book." This routine would continue with the book being open, the book not being closed, the book open to page five, etc.

What happened next I never expected. I spotted a spitting cobra which had entered the classroom and was making its way down the center aisle, its head fully flared and ready to strike. One might mention that the spitting cobra is the only known reptile to have its fangs pointing straight forward, not downward, making it easy to blind its victims and subdue its prey.

Apparently no one else saw the snake, for when my modeling changed from the subject of a book to the subject of a snake, the students fell in line. When I said, "**There is a snake,**" they dutifully responded, "**There is a snake.**" A little louder, I shouted, "**THERE IS A SNAKE!**" Again the expected response, also louder. "**THERE IS A SNAKE!**"

Seeing I was getting nowhere in my warning, I resorted to the Somali tongue, "**MUS WA GOGA.**" That did it ... pointing helped!



(Continued on page 11)

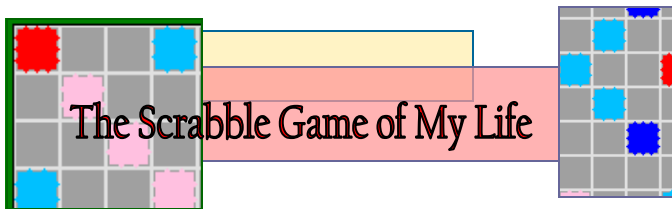
(Continued from page 10)

Now we've all seen cartoons of the housewife who is afraid of something frightful on the floor and who leaps on to the top of a table or chair for protection from the threat.

Apparently a spitting cobra forces the Somali male to respond in similar manner, because within seconds all the students could be seen climbing to the top of the desks.

Almost all Somali males carry heavy clubs with them at night, so the spitting cobra was easily disposed of. But the incident shook up most of us, especially the teacher, who quickly declared, "Class is over for tonight."

The thought of a venomous snake, able to blind someone twenty feet away, was enough reason for this headmaster to call a halt to the evening's educational activities.



The Scrabble Game of my life was one of disconnect. Not a letter connected to another. No words, no concepts, no expectations were part of my disturbed life. I just went through the daily life like a robot. Getting up in the morning, taking a bus to work where I was a sales person in a Los Angeles department store. I returned home at night to an empty, lonesome rented room. I was always "laughing on the outside and crying on the inside."

Then a miracle occurred! I met Marvin! He was between jobs, working with me in the toy department during Christmas. We managed to arrange break times together and met for coffee before work and he often took me home in his 1937 Pontiac. We talked and shared. Sixty-two years later one conversation stands out in my mind. We were walking up Hill Street

CWC/WV

towards the library when I asked, "Marvin, would you laugh at me if I asked you any kind of question? This often happens to me."

He assured me he would not laugh. So I asked, "What does the word 'shit' mean?" I've heard this word so often in the women's locker room. Marvin defined the word in a matter of fact tone. Both of us broke out in hilarious laughter, hugged, and continued to walk towards his car. At that moment I knew I could always trust him. I did, for the rest of our lives together. The Scrabble pieces of my life began to come together spelling LOVE, DEVOTION and SELF ESTEEM.

We married in 1950. At that time he was making \$1.00 an hour and received a 10% increase, the highest increase in his working career. I earned \$.50 an hour. Somehow we made a go of it. Marvin, using the G.I. Bill of Rights, went back to school and earned a teaching degree. This college experience changed both of our lives. I drew upon my improved self-esteem and typed all his papers on a manual typewriter, much to the amazement of my family. "You're not capable," I was told. Helping Marvin proved that I was capable. He believed in me!

After our children were born I went back to school. Over a period of years I received two Associate Arts Degrees, a Bachelor of Arts and a Master's of Arts. The Scrabble pieces of my life began to fit together: EXPECTATIONS and ACHIEVEMENTS. ACHIEVEMENTS beyond my wildest dreams!

Today my life continues to grow. I have more friends who support me and I them, have had papers published, won several contests, and presented a number of lectures. Most importantly, my children love, respect and admire me for all I've accomplished.

The Scrabbled pieces of my life now fit together: LOVE, DEVOTION, EXPECTATIONS, SELF ESTEEM and ACHIEVEMENT all have been realized and will continue to influence my Scrabble game of life.



- Helen Katzman

# guest writer alice folkart

## Language of Love

I had expected that learning a foreign language would open doors for me. I'd expected that it would be easy. All those Frenchmen and Italians seemed to talk to each other effortlessly. It would be an easy A and maybe help my love life.

However, Madame Beaupre, the only French teacher at Franklin High, turned out to be a dragon. It was rumored that she could kill with the hot breath of her pop quizzes, her razor-edged irregular verb drills, and harsh, 'Non, non, non, mes petites! C'est terrible!'

Could she ever have been young, her skin smooth instead of scaly, her teeth any color but piss yellow with glints of steel? We were sure that her fillings were steel, not silver like everybody else's, the better to chew us up and spit us out.

I was desperate. I was in love with the French movie actor Jean Paul Belmondo. I had to learn French to be ready to speak to him in the language of love when we met. But I was pretty sure that agreement of subject and verb had nothing to do with a rapprochement between a man and a girl. The kind of mechanical, ugly language that Madame Beaupre was hammering into us couldn't have anything to do with L'Amour.

Madame kept the door to the room locked between classes, made us wait outside in line until the bell rang. I imagined her curled up in her den, her spiky wings folded, her eyelids heavy, her fires banked. I jokingly told my best friend Louise about Madame Beaupre being a dragon, and she said, 'Well, if her eyelids are heavy and her breath weird, it's not 'cause she's a mythical creature. More likely it's due to her nipping at the Gallo Vin Rose between classes. You want an easy A, just take her sixth-period class. She's half asleep by the end of the day.'

I didn't have to worry. One day Madame called me to her desk and told me, almost kindly and without scorching, that I shouldn't waste my time with French. And, I don't know how she knew, but she said, 'Maybe you'd like Italian film stars better, anyway. That Rossano Brazzi is très beau.'

by Alice Folkart



## Valley of the Shadow of Tax Time

I said a prayer and knelt down at tax time.  
I turned it all over to a mind greater than mine.  
Files and paperwork in abundance I brought to the altar,  
all that I had, all I could find.  
I bowed before keyboard and screen,  
All this, I did  
in the Valley of the Shadow of Capital Gains

Turbo Tax is my sheared,  
I do what it wants.  
It leads me to account for  
all my green pastimes,  
takes me to the edge of my still deductions.  
and, if I follow faithfully,  
it makes me to lie down with the Federal Father  
in a loving fiscal embrace.

Its rules and its queries, they comfort me,  
guide me to plug in numerous numbers  
from boxes one, two and three.  
It fills out forms 1099, interest and other earnings  
the wages of sin and tips on the horses  
profit mongering and loss leaders.

It prepareth a table before me  
in the presence of no accountant, no friend,  
It anointeth my head with aching and pain  
My hard disk runneth over,  
It restoreth my soul with electronic filing  
in the darkness of night.

Surely checks bearing refunds  
shall follow me in just a few days  
and I shall live without audits  
and sleep well forever.

- Alice Folkart



*Alice Folkart lives and writes short stories and poetry in Hawaii. Her work has been seen in a number of on-line and print journals. Participation in on-line writing workshops keeps her in touch with the writing community all over the world, and in her spare time she is learning Japanese and working on a novel.*



# HIGHFIVE

A frigid wind blew across Times Square as New York's finest set up road blocks for New Year's Eve. Sergeant Kelly noticed a scruffy group of musicians next to the Sylvania television store. He strolled over for a few words.

"Youse guys better behave tonight," he told them as his breath steamed out in short white clouds over his dark blue uniform.

"We just entertainin' the folks, officer," the tap dancer replied. "An' hopin' for a lucky break."

"Don't be thinkin' I'm fooled by those innocent looks, young gentlemen. I'll be watchin' you."

Kelly withdrew and the trio got started. The banjo player strummed *Happy Days Are Here Again*, the tambourine player merrily shook his instrument and the dancer shuffled up and down the sidewalk. A small crowd gathered. An elderly man stopped and tapped time with his cane. He hung back as people tossed a few coins in an old derby next to the band.

"Thanks, folks," said the tap dancer. He noted that the old skinflint stuck around after the crowd dissipated.

"Anythn' you wanna hear? Like to see my fancy Fred Astaire moves?"

"Nah. You might hurt yourself. I know talented dancers. Worked with Fred on Broadway,"

"You worked with Fred Astaire?! Hah! You too old and feeble lookin' to be a tap dancer."

"Too old, huh? Watch THIS, bucko." The stranger lithely spun on his heel and a tattoo of staccato retorts came from his flashing heels. He ended in a low bow, cane extended.

"Well...not too bad... but not swell enough for Broadway."

"Burlesque, lo-o-ong time ago," the banjo player suggested, and then he and the tambourine player circled the stranger, jangling *Sweet Georgia Brown*.

"Look here, man," said the tap dancer. He pointed to a Sylvania television turned on just inside the show window. "Now that cat can dance!" The grainy image of Danny Kay spun across the 16 inch screen.

"Worked with THAT bastard too. Don't smirk at me! Hey! Get out of my face with all that damn noise!"

"Calm down, mister. Gonna have a stroke. Why don't you keep movin' on and tell your fairy tales to Crazy Eddie 'cross the Square. He believes in Santy Claus. And you be St. Nick's double. OLD and FAT!"

"Why you..." the stranger swung his cane, the dancer ducked, his friends nimbly jumped aside and the cane shattered the store window...and the television screen.

Sergeant Kelly instantly materialized, "Mother of God! Who did this?!"

The band solemnly pointed to the red-faced gentleman. An onlooker told Kelly, "That guy swung his cane and broke the winder, officer. Crazy old coot!"

"Allow me to explain, officer," the "old coot" began, "I was flummoxed by these rascals! It's their fault!"

"Let's go down to the station, Mister, and you can tell me the whole story." Kelly gave the band a black look as he escorted the still protesting gentleman into the nearby paddy wagon. The combo waved bye-bye.

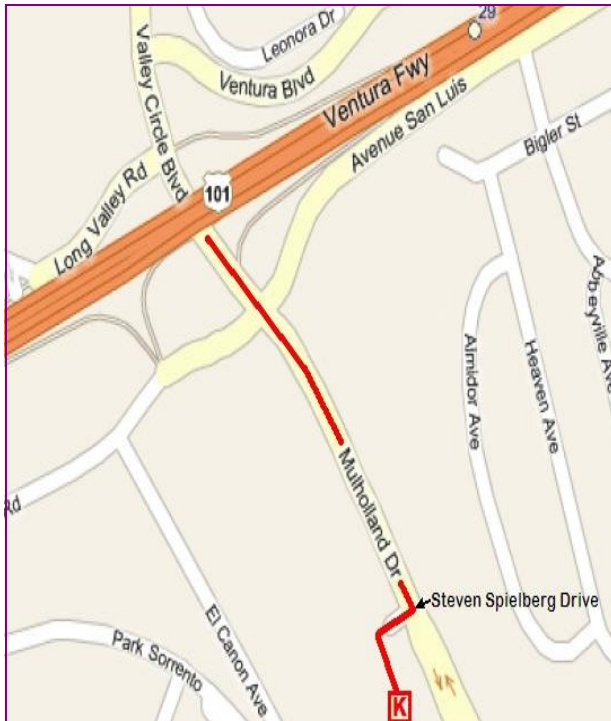
"He's gonna miss New Year's tonight," said the dancer. "Did ya borrow a few fins from our pal?"

"Yup. Mr. Big Shot's wallet is lots thinner," replied the tambourine player.

"An' I got his pocket watch to pawn tomorrow," added the banjo player.

"It's a sign. Mebbe 1950 will be our lucky year!" said the tap dancer. The band swung into *We're in the Money*.

- Kathy Highcove



## MEETINGS

The California Writers Club meets the first Saturday of the month at the Motion Picture and Television Fund complex:

Villa Katzenberg

23388 Mulholland

Woodland Hills, CA 91364-2733

## NEXT MEETING

Saturday, Jan. 8th, 2011 at 1:30 p.m.

## MAILING ADDRESS

c/o Dave Wetterberg,

23809 Friar Street

Woodland Hills, CA 91367-1235

Contents copyrighted by the respective authors.

Unattributed articles copyrighted by CWC/WV.

[cwcwestvalley.org](http://cwcwestvalley.org)



Dave Wetterberg  
23809 Friar Street  
Woodland Hills, CA 91367-1235