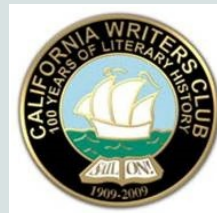


IN FOCUS

California Writers Club / West Valley

in this issue: forces of nature

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I'M a force
of nature!
Unstoppable!



She'll Show You Around the Library



Anne Olivier

Anne Olivier, CWC/WV member, will be our speaker on March 5th. Her topic: **"The Public Library—Should Writers Care?"**

Anne, holder of a MLS degree from UCLA, works in the Catalog Department at the rebuilt and revamped Los Angeles Central Library. She catalogues volumes of philosophy, religion, genealogy, graphic novels and children's books.

In this techie age of Google and Wikipedia, some authors and researchers may think libraries are outdated sources of information and will fade away like once busy bookstores. Not so fast, naysayers. Anne will present the many ways

our libraries remain relevant research centers for writers and scholars.

The library offers several Internet resources available only to those with a library card, such as Ancestry Library Edition, LA Times archives and a History in Context database.

Central Library's files contain several special collections: a patent depository, genealogy department, children's literature and extensive map collections.

Central and regional libraries also schedule writer's groups, personal appearances by local authors and book club meetings.

Come to our March meeting to learn more about the unique resources for writers at your local branch, Central Library, or online. Anne knows the territory.

More info at the LAPL site, www.lapl.org

- Yolanda Fintor

west valley whimsicals A Schwartz / Highcove Production

What's Your Style?

A writer's style depends on the subject matter and the occasion. Style supports content. Form follows function, in other words.

A thesis or lecture is grammatical, organized and logical. The writer, in an official voice, presents information to a specific audience - such as a class.



A pundit's editorial or televised newscast should inform, but his voice might be casual in style. Colloquialisms like "They don't have a clue," or "What's the latest?" abound in today's media.

Here's the REAL
lowdown, according
to unnamed sources.



Executive Board

President ... Dave Wetterberg

Vice-president/Membership ... Sheila Moss

Vice-president/Programs ... Yolanda Fintor

Secretary ... Anne Olivier

Treasurer ... Dean Stewart

Board of Directors

Editor, Webmaster ... Kathy Highcove

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Photographer ... Ken Wilkins

On Site Coordinator ... Betty Freeman

Critique Groups Coordinator ... Lillian Rodich

Open Mike ... Bill Sorrells

Members-at-Large ... Bill Hitchins

Karen Gorback



February Meeting

Collaborative creativity bloomed like flowers after a rain at the February meeting. Attendees were divided arbitrarily into three groups and seated comfortably at tables. Each table was given a different writing assignment.

Writing a short story using only one-syllable words challenged Group One. Group Two completed a story that began with "Don't touch that!" while Group Three developed a plot based on "The window shades were up."

At the end of a half-hour or so, a writer from each group came to the microphone and shared stories that had a beginning, a middle and an end. This exercise demonstrated that creative work can be formed in a collaborative setting.

Finally...Leslie Kaplan paid homage to Valentine's Day by giving out a single red rose to special people...mostly guys. So if you missed the meeting you missed getting a red rose and a fervent hug from a pretty lady in a red dress.

- Yolanda Fintor

whimsicals continued from page 1

A Schwartz/Highcove production

Personal exchanges like emails, blogs, texts and tweets use an extremely casual style. Social networkers make up their own spelling, use emoticons

LOL!
OMG!



freely, and express personal opinions that are usually intended to entertain the recipient. Informative? Depends on the messenger, the topic and the sources. Which may be suspect.

A story - short or long, flash or memoir, fiction or non-fiction - has its own style.

Mr. Alter Ego



The voice and tone often reflect the author's own attitude about a chosen subject or topic. Therefore style and content is determined by the author's POV.

Published writers develop a style anticipated and appreciated by their following.

And furthermore,
last week you
forgot to...

Wish she had
a "mute" button.



A parental text, email or lecture, has a particular style, voice and tone of its own.

A parent may think he or she is being informative, and yet, in most cases, the teen finds the lecture sort of repetitive... clueless...and dreadfully boring.

A teen can be a formidable critic of voice, tone and style.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: MARCH

The poet said "The March winds will blow, and we will have snow," but lucky us! Nothing but sun and a little rain while the rest of the country gets buried.



Dave Wetterberg

Attendance was not good at the February meeting, twenty out of forty-four. But we went ahead, veering from the traditional monthly speaker and having a little fun. Yolanda Fintor writes about it elsewhere in this issue.

We're preparing for the June election a little early this year. All offices are up for grabs. I have held office for five years, one as vice-president the year we were chartered, four years after that as president. Our VP/membership can't stay on. We haven't had a secretary since last June. And our treasurer Dean Stewart has served since the beginning, like me. Dean and I need a break.

Since receiving our charter in 2006, we have had a few ups and downs, mostly ups. Our critique groups are solid. Our newsletter is outstanding, bright and informative. Some SFV loyalists attend every month and that's fine with us. We're still working on getting more MPTV residents to join us. Our regulars have all become tight friends.

Let's keep it going. Should nominating committee members Bill Hitchins, Marganit Lish, and/or Kathy Highcove ask you to run for an office, please accept.

Descriptions of the offices are as follows:

President: Presides over meetings, suggests and supervises activities, solves problems, acts as contact person, attends Central Board meetings or designates a representative to do so.

Vice-president: Assists the president, assumes his/her duties when the president cannot, keeps membership records, assists treasurer, keeps roster.

Secretary: Keeps minutes, handles correspondence, maintains files.

Treasurer: Receives and disburses funds, prepares financial reports., assists membership vice-president.

The rest of the Board positions are appointed by the president with the approval of the Board. **Sail on!**

Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.
Henry Ford



Commonly Mispronounced Words

Source: <http://www.lemondrop.com>

Chipotle

It's a pepper, a mayonnaise flavoring and it's pronounced chee-POHT-lay.

Sudoku

Relax, this one is phonetic: soo-DOE-ko.

Açaí

The popular berry supplement and juice is currently sold at the local health food stores or... Costco. The "squiggly C" cedilla means that the C is soft. Say in three syllables: ah-sah-EE.

Espresso

Not a type of super speedy train, but a coffee product. There's no "ex" in ess-PRESS-o.

Meme

A term that currently refers to social networking on the Net; "meme" rhymes with "team."

Segue

This verb, meaning to make a smooth uninterrupted transition, is pronounced SEG-way.

Asterisk

The last syllable of this word rhymes with "risk," not Rick. It's ASS-ter-isk.

Hermès

The clothing label, not the Greek god, is pronounced in the French way: air-MEZ.

Nguyen

A very common Vietnamese last name is pronounced nuhWEN.

Gyro

Pronounce the G like a Y. This delicious meat dish is called a YEER-oh.

Siobhan

Most appropriate word for a March newsletter. The exotic looking word is an Irish girl's name: she-VAHN.

Qatar

We've all used this word in Scrabble games and crossword puzzles. It's an Arab country pronounced: KAH-tur.

Thinking about Self Publishing?

By Roberto Haro



So... you're thinking about self publishing.

However, you've heard so many negative stories that put you off about taking this step. It doesn't matter whether you write fiction, non-fiction, specialty books like self help, cookbooks, or memoirs. Too many writers believe that only a literary agent will get the attention of a major trade publisher. This results in skeptical anecdotal noise about publishing your own book. It's worthwhile to explore objectively self publishing before deciding to shelve your manuscript, or send out another batch of letters to agents and small, independent book publishers.

Keep in mind that the book publishing industry is changing rapidly. The internet and digitalization of information is conditioning an increasing number of readers to access or buy books online. Mass producing a book and storing thousands of copies in a warehouse, and then doing a targeted and expensive marketing campaign to sell it is economically feasible only when the topic or author has a mass market appeal. The online sales of books by Amazon.com and similar internet retailers have buffeted outlets like Borders and Barnes & Noble, and many small independent book stores. A new wrinkle in the world of publishing is the attention given to on demand publishers by internet retailers. In fact, Amazon.com has established its own self publishing with **BookSurge** and **CreateSpace**, and is actively searching for new writers and titles. Consequently, self publishing is attracting the attention of many writers.

Just so we're clear, it's worth mentioning some of the concerns about self publishing that many of us have heard: It's expensive, with large front end costs; too many firms make promises that are unrealistic; editing costs can be exorbitant; the writer must do all the publicity; and, if you self publish, agents and major publishers will not consider you. There are certainly more concerns about doing your own book, but the above frequently surface in discussions about self publishing.

Given the above, how does a writer negotiate the world of self publishing and make an informed decision about whether or not this is the way for her to go? Investing a little time in learning about different types of self pub-

lishing can be beneficial. Begin by visiting the public library. Libraries have useful sections on publishing that includes directories of agents, small publishers, and texts that offer advice and suggestions on how to get published. Talk with librarians about what they have in their collections, and what is available online.

Here are two websites you can access on a home computer. **The Writers Digests** (www.writersdigest.com) is worth perusing. Most libraries carry this serial, and many purchase the annual yearbook. Another site that may be of interest is **Fearless Books** (www.fearlessbooks.com). Remember to keep an open mind and a critical perspective when exploring these and similar websites.

There are, of course, large and successful firms that provide extensive packages and services for writers interested in self publishing. For a comparison of some of these firms, go to <http://online-book-publishing-reviews>, or go to <http://toptenreviews.com> and in the subject search box, type in online book publishing review. There are, of course, an increasing number of smaller companies that have appeared recently to tap into the growing self publishing market.

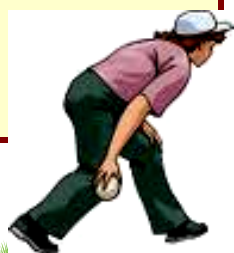
An important recommendation: try to identify writers who have self published. Contact them and don't be afraid to ask about their experience with the firm they used. It is important to communicate with more than one person. Remember, it's important to have a balance of opinions.

Advances in hand held electronic devices, such as Kindle, Nook and other tablets mean a growing demand for new books available electronically. Major trade publishers are quickly tapping the distribution and sales of eBooks to keep up with self publishing firms like *iUniverse* and on demand publishers like Amazon.com's *CreateSpace*. If you are interested in finding a new way to publish your manuscript, do a little research and find out if self publishing is something for you.

Roberto Haro, a retired professor/university executive, taught at California, Maryland and New York universities. He received the B.A., and two graduate degrees from UC, Berkeley. His doctorate is in Higher Education. Haro wrote five scholarly monographs, and 80+ articles/chapters. He's an expert on Latino matters. Under the pen name Roberto de Haro, he has published eight novels. His newest, ***Murder at the Villa Museum***, was released November, 2010. Haro lives in Marin County.

I crouched to roll a winning lawn-bowling shot. The back seam of my pants ripped. I was mortified, but glad I wore white on white!

Ester Shifren



Philly basketball : Harlem Globe Trotters played South Philly Hebrews.... seven foot legs astride. Five footers dribbled under legs. Hilarious! Afterwards the dance began. Fun!

Leslie Kaplan



twenty-five word sports stories from a team of CWC/WV women.

yay!



She was perfect in the swimming pool. After the wedding night, her teeth in a glass, ears and eyes in a box...not perfect anymore.

Kyley Birnberg-Goldstein

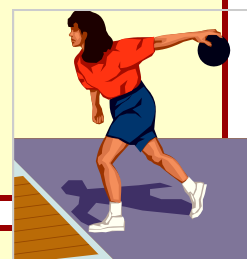


One, two, three steps,

Arm straight, right knee bent, watch me glide in perfect form. CLUNK , CLUNK—drat, a gutter ball!

So much for confidence.

Sheila Moss



Running, walking, jumping, and climbing. That's the challenge. It's a race on its own. Did it all. Loved it. And won a trophy for all!

Marganit Lish

Horseback riding with date. Chose a chestnut colored horse named Nickels.

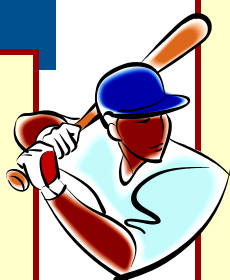
Nickels stopped in the middle of Los Feliz Blvd. Wouldn't budge. Scared, then laughter.

Helen Katzman



I enjoyed the warmth of the Mexican ocean until I saw someone on a roof waving me to return. I was swimming with the sharks.

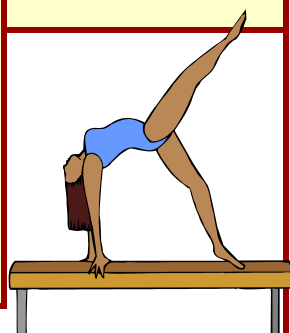
Gloria Kositchek



Just the feel of its weathered leather brought back memories of sandlot baseball games. He loved his old catcher's mitt.

So did his new dog.

Kathy Highcove



Football, basketball, baseball – He'd screamed at the flickering screen every weekend for thirty-four years. She'd had enough. The divorce was swift, but the silence... terrible.

Karen Gorback



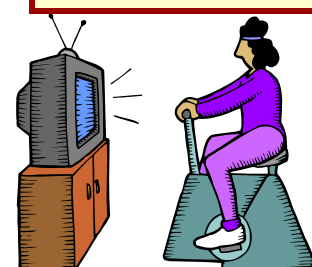
Mom, I pitched a perfect game! I pitched the ball so that each batter could hit it!

But my team was mad at me. Why?

Sylvia Molesko

Above all, she feared the balance beam. Months of practice before the meet resulted in agony. Finally in competition she came in sixth. A victory!

Lillian Rodich



SIGNIFYING SEASONS

Can you fault a tree for
Losing it's leaves?
As it aches for the lushness
And longingly cleaves?

Summers of shade
For the life below
Wind blown leaves
Rustling low.

Children mounting
From limb to branch;
Climbing high,
Taking a chance.

Birds with their young,
Then protestations
As a circling hawk
Bids molestations.

Perhaps a swing
With an old used tire
And a laughing lad
Going higher and higher.

A season seems
To identify
But changes are coming
Bye and bye.

A man's a man
And a tree's a tree
But God, how they both
Yearn to be free.

Rooted in soil
Nowhere to go
Yearly rings
Evolving slow.

He yearns for the sky
And dear blue expanse
The same for the shrubs
And all of the plants.

If you say of a man
That he is a plumber
Or a pearl diving loser
Or something dumber.

You stunt the ascension
To the sought after goal
You picked on a part
And not on the whole.

A man or a tree
Will always be seasonal
Locking them now
In nature's world, is treasonable.

- Bill Sorrells



Retirement

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

*Its lot 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 staid devotion, never seeking more.*

*Now older, wrinkled, weathered, withered,
worn
and weary of the daily drudgery
and endless numb photo-synthetic toil,
already loosely tethered — half-estranged —
it clothed itself in rainbow livery,
and gathering its courage, blindly leaped*

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

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

- Ray Malus

If You Are In the Country

and a storm comes

and you are stranded

in the fury of it,

just you and the elements

Then you make shelter with the one you love.

And if the two of you watch the storm

as you sip hot tea

from behind heavy paned windows

(by the light of the fireplace because the power has just gone out)

and you listen to the mad, raw voice of the wind

and you know that at any moment the storm will topple everything around you

because it doesn't care, and so

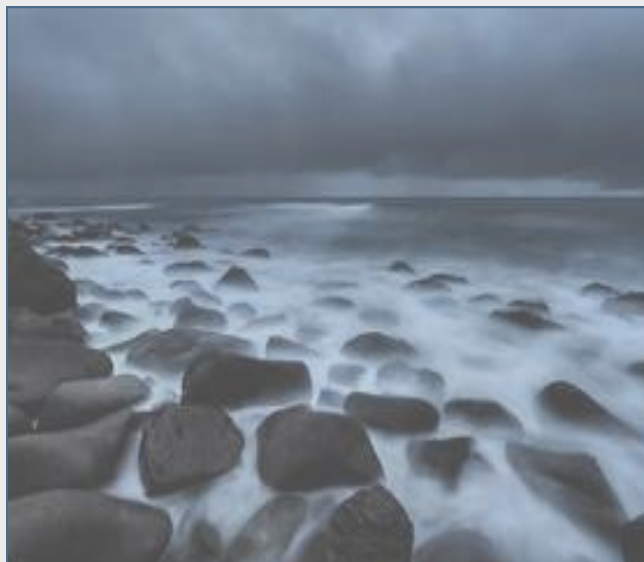
the two of you simply pull close together and watch,

then you would be

maybe for the first time ever

Really alive.

Anne Olivier



igneous

sit, and spread your senses
in the warm southern sun
then unearth from your bag

an Oregon rock

emigrant to integrate

my gray garden path

cool cognate of my California
gravel

but wait, I'll close my eyes

And guess

its shape

and color

and the place

it rested on the land

of my birth, then

I'll press

the cooled drop of sediment

into my cupped palm

and sense the echo

of the pulsing core

the roiling stuff of stars

I'll caress

its smooth surface

touching the compressed

glinting atoms of northern
lights

and listen,

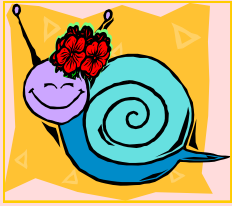
to secrets that

sank

slowly

into bedrock

Kathy Highcove



Class Reunion

-Keyle Birnberg-Goldstein

Clara came home early the day of the Class Reunion. She wanted to be ready with time to spare before going to the dance that evening.

On the way to her front door she picked up dead red geraniums. She avoided tripping over her clumsy albino cat, and stepping on snails' wavy-white-silvery-slimy trails on the front walk.

She hated snails and shivered with apprehension. It reminded her of all the mean pranks her classmates did to her year after year... leaving the snail shells on her seat until she jumped up screaming with fright after hearing the crunch.

She was fat then, had no friends...wanting to hide her misery inside a snail shell of her own.

Clara stood motionless by the opened closet trying to find the perfect dress for the Class Reunion. On the left the big size clothes brought a sad smile to her lips. Grabbing the hangers she put them in a heap for donation in a large box.

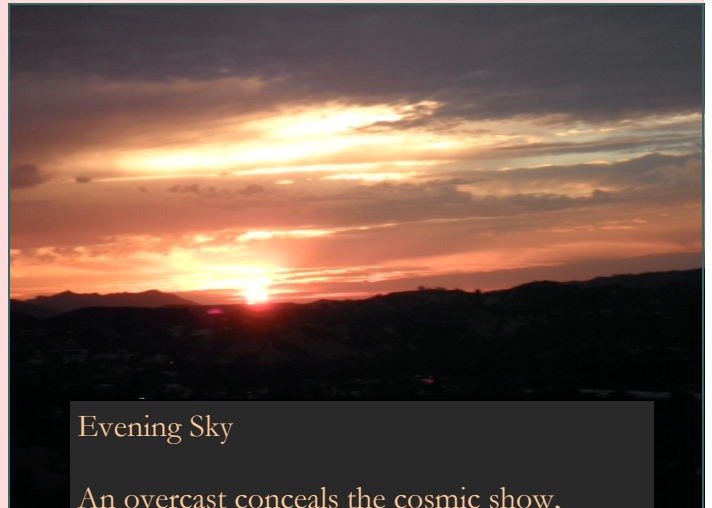
Clara looked stunning in her skinny size five dress. Looking perfect, she got to the dance with plenty of time. Gliding her eyes over... observing each of her old torturers. The former cheer leaders were all fat... dancing with balding men. The music stopped.

The master of ceremonies announced the class names. She ignored hers.

"Dessert donated by Clara," he continued. Heads moved around looking to locate her.

Then...mouths agape... speechless. Round wide eyes stared at the escargot swimming around their desert plates, antennas alert as if looking around for their shells.

Smiling wide Clara walked out...a 'young' vision of loveliness.



Evening Sky

An overcast conceals the cosmic show,
a curtain drawn across the stars' milieu.
Yes, now and then a rift reveals a glow.

The moon lights up a sudden widening gap,
a brief performance from the main revue.
The overcast conceals the cosmic show.

Then Gemini appears 'til clouds enwrap
that brilliant astral pair mid-*pas de deux*..
Yes, now and then a rift reveals a glow.

Applause provided by a thunderclap,
a comet streaks and makes its bow on cue.
The overcast conceals the cosmic show.

The clues accumulate, outline a map,
announce a newborn galaxy's debut.
Yes, now and then a rift reveals a glow.

Although the cloudy sky's a handicap,
it can't erase or rearrange this view.
An overcast conceals the cosmic show.
Yes, now and then a rift reveals a glow.

*This poem won an Honorable Mention in the 2010
Writer's Digest Writing Competition.*

Mary Shaffer

WAITING FOR YESTERDAY

I long for the life that happened before
Buddies on the beach and maidens gal-
lore
Showing your skill on the 'wave of the
day'
Or falling in love but NOT TO STAY

When the seals used to bark from the
rocks out there
And we'd dive neath the kelp in the sea eel's lair
Feeling our youth and the life surging through
Sensory joy from the water blue.

Football played on wet sand or dry
The chance of catching a fair
maiden's eye
Nick-named pals like Hevs and
Crunch
And Neptune and Viking and the
whole darn bunch

Shootin' the bull with all the guys
Racy details and ribald lies
A kinship valued more than others
'Water men' were our brothers



The coursing foam in the path of the light
As the sunset colors precede the night.
'Eastside' beer and a city girl
Down for a sunny weekend whirl.

No ties, no promises, no obligations
To muddy up the invitations.
Lifeguard parties and B.Y.O.B.
Abalone and lobster fresh from the sea

White teeth framed in laughing faces,
Sun bleached hair and tan line traces.
The gals in jeans and maybe skirts,
The guys, always, Hawaiian shirts.

Perry and Dean and Frankie Lane,
Ukulele beach songs that had no name.
'Lovely Hula Hands' and a languid dance
Vacation drama and weekend romance

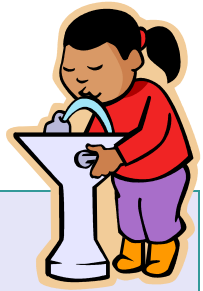
They say it must end, this time in the sun,
And I suppose it occurs for everyone
To lounge in your rocker and lust for the past,
A time you just wanted to last and last.

Where the hell's the reprise, I want to say,
As I rock and I wait for yesterday

Bill Sorrells



The Fountain of Youth *What's the Big Secret?*



Wouldn't it be great if I
were the first one to find the true *Fountain Of
Youth*?? Wouldn't that make me famous? All
over the world? I keep looking for it every-
where! Lots of research has been done on this
subject. It's already happened to some ex-
tent. Especially here in California.

I observe those whose age is a mystery. They
don't have wrinkles such as my grandma Buba
proudly wore on her lovable face. Thinning
gray hair looks more blondish...more thick-
ish. Unfurrowed foreheads are common...like no
one over fifty worries about anything anymore.

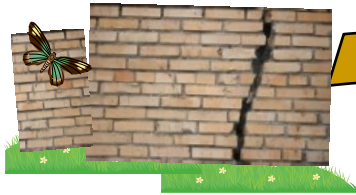
It seems like we're on the right track as far as
looking good, but how about our physical and
mental well being? Stretching out the morning
aches helps a little but the body just doesn't
work like it used to. Wondering why one can't
remember this, that, or the other thing, might be
natural for some but I feel like my train is run-
ning off the track.

Take your vitamins...see your doctor...eat
your spinach. We are doing better and living
longer. But wouldn't it be great if we could look
like twenty ...feel like thirty... think like
forty...and live to be... at least one hundred and
twenty??

So I'll keep on searching for that *Fountain Of
Youth* and if I find it...the fountain drinks will be
on the house! I'll pass it on for free! No
charge!

Leslie Kaplan

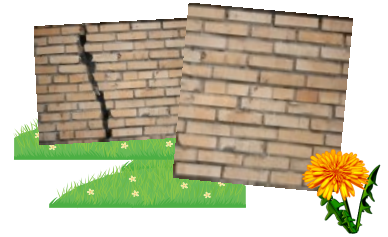




AFTERSHOCK

Northridge Earthquake

January, 1994



Dusk tints the blurry heat waves rising from Reseda Boulevard. I am returning to my apartment after an appointment and find myself almost hypnotized by the shimmering street. The disturbing aura surrounding me causes my heart to beat erratically and, taking a deep breath, I pull over the side of the road.

"I can't believe this," I whisper as I view the piles of rubble, the rows of buildings askew and nested in dying grass and broken glass, their boarded up windows bearing silent witness to the destruction within.

This is just one block on one street ... an echo of many blocks on many streets...and I wonder where all the people are who once lived here. How did they patch up their living quarters and their psyches? Did they run away? Did they decide to stay and plan to rebuild? Are they as tired and discouraged as I am with my own sad scenario?

And yet I hear laughter and see some little ones, like quacking ducklings, following Mommy out of a freshly painted Coco's Coffee Shop. Across the street I notice a new fence, not brick, but wood and plastic, framing a house still missing its chimney. I see mountains of trash...bricks, glass, broken furniture, toys...sitting out on parkways next to long yellow ribbons warning UNSAFE. Construction trucks and moving trucks and dumpsters rumble along while some teenagers nonchalantly roller-blade down the block.

Heat waves swirling around me, I rest my head against the steering wheel and begin to wonder. What was normal? What is normal? What do we really need to go on? How long has it been since we've been challenged to rebuild, renew, improvise and survive?

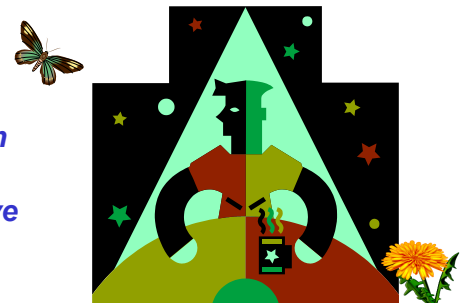
I am overwhelmed by the massive destruction I see. But more than this, the evidence of rebirth like new plants struggling to take root in rocky soil. I am shocked and saddened by the swift and uncompromising loss of life that occurred and overcome with awe realizing how much more could have happened and didn't.

My heart has finally calmed and I think I'll chance driving back to my temporary apartment in Woodland Hills. I wonder if I should swing by my cracked and sagging townhouse in Chatsworth. In a few months, the reconstruction will be complete and it will not show the scars of its agony. Yet will I really feel safe once the walls are strapped and its broken bones replaced?

Turning the key in the ignition, I start the motor. My deep sigh catches in my throat like a sob. The sky has darkened and I turn my headlights on, open the window wider and salute no one in particular.

Lillian Rodich, Journal Entry, April 1994:

Considering what overwhelming natural disasters have occurred since 1994 all over the world, including the United States, my reactions and observations described here are more than pale in contrast to what so many have suffered since. The one consistent thread of reality is the capacity of the human spirit to endure, survive and rebuild.





Lost and Found

By Ken Wilkins

It had been several years since I visited my home town in Northern Illinois. In fact I hadn't returned since my mother's passing in 1984. I was determined to revisit the area in which I grew up and left after my marriage in 1950.

I could sense my general health, especially my legs, would not last forever so I'd better make the trip soon. I made the rounds, visiting the old homestead which I sold in 1978, my mother's burial site, the schools I attended, primary and high school.

The primary school had been converted into a tavern. There were the hangouts for teenagers although several were torn down. The old gas station where I worked the last two years of high school and lost a small fortune on a pinball machine, it had been demolished. Ahhh, the memories of times past.

But one thing was missing as I drove around. One thing that could be lost by now and I knew I had to find out if it was still there.

An uncontrolled inquisitiveness had overtaken me as I headed north out of town to a forested area once owned by my uncle. Most of the farms had been purchased as part of large conglomerate and the houses rented out. I took a side road to the small forest of about five acres. I felt I needed no one's permission to revisit a site once dear to my youth.

I climbed through a barbed-wire fence and headed straight toward the center of the forest. Nothing really looked familiar except the small stream that bisected the area. What I was looking for was not far from that tiny brook so I must keep the sound of the gurgling water within earshot at all times. This land was Blackhawk Indian territory and I wondered to myself how many braves or squaws had tramped this same path in the distant past in search of acorns.

Ahead of me I spotted something familiar. The stream was visible again and beside it was a patch of pussy willows. Now I knew I was close. My heart was pounding. I thought to myself, "You old fool! You could have a heart attack and no one would find the body for weeks to come!" But I MUST find it! It has to be about twenty or twenty-five feet south of the pussy willows. I paced off the distance while my eyes searched every tree.

"THERE IT IS," I shouted as I rushed to an old gnarled oak. There was a heart-shaped carving about eight inches across and almost invisible from the tree's growth over the years. In the center were the initials "KW + MS." I took out my cell phone and utilized the camera to take a picture. This instrument would be completely unheard of when the carving was made. I'll send it back to

my bride of sixty years in California in a blink of an eye, proving the lost was never really lost but waiting sixty-five years to be found.



A Stitch in Crime

by Betty Hechtman

Reviewed by
Sheila Moss



Betty Hechtman, a long standing CWC member, has written her fourth mystery in her Crochet Series. The set-up: When Molly Pink is asked to take over the Get Out of the Heat and Light Your Creative Fire retreat in Monterey, she hopes she'll do her boss - Mrs. Shedd of Shedd & Royal Books and More - proud. She promises, "No murder or mayhem."

At first the retreat disappointments some of the Tarzana hookers, but the rustic buildings and the YMCA casualness grows on them. Commander Blaine, the workshop's entertainment director, thinks of a fun creative idea: designer s'mores.

Later that evening, Isabelle Landers, presenter and author of a new book, *The Needle and the Hook*, is found dead near the campfire. Sgt French of the Pacific Grove Police Department suspects she died of anaphylactic shock. An accident? Molly is not so sure.

A crocheted pouch purse, one of Isabelle's creations, is discovered in the shrubbery near the beach entrance. It contains an EpiPen (injected solution to halt allergic reactions) which makes Molly's murder antennae quiver. And so the latest in the crochet series begins.



Other Anne Hechtman books
in her Crochet Series:
Hooked on Murder, *Dead
Men Don't Crochet* and
By Hook or By Crook.



RAIN

guest writer
by Ruth Douillette

Soothed by the rain, I'd nearly drifted to sleep when the phone rang. I knew it would be Jesse, my oldest. No one else called that late.

"I don't know if I should go in the hospital or not," he said. No hello, no small talk.

I felt Jesse settle on the bed beside me. The cat woke, ears back, as if she sensed his presence.

"For what?" I asked.

"It's what I told you yesterday." He'd told me his paranoia was back.

"What's happening?"

"I'm scared. I feel like the whole place is after me."

"Whole place" meant the veterans shelter where he lived. Two months into sobriety, he had been working the Narcotics Anonymous program.

"I think it's going to work this time," he'd told me only two weeks ago, his voice so full of hope that my heart hurt.

"I think so, too," I'd answered.

Why remind him how often he'd said that? Why think about it? Good things *do* happen. We both believe this. But it's becoming harder to hold on to optimism; it's like grabbing a bar of soap in the shower. The tighter you hold it, the more likely it is to slip out of your hands and land with a thud.

Who am I to deny him hope? But in bleak moments I think that if Jesse's mental illness doesn't get him, his cocaine addiction will.

"They're bumping me, elbowing me, telling me to get out. They don't want me here," he continues. "I don't feel safe here."

"Whose phone are you using?" I'm trying to show him that he trusted someone enough to borrow his phone--and someone cared enough to lend it.

"Some guy's. He can probably hear everything I'm saying. I don't want this to get out."

His voice is calm, like he's telling me he's tired of the rain. But there is a subtle dissonance between his tone and his words.

"Jesse, what you're thinking is just in your mind. You know it's not real, don't you?"

Sometimes, when his paranoia returns — the fleeting kind that breaks through chinks in his medication — my logic works.

"It feels real, but I know it isn't," he'll say. "I can ignore it."

But this time, it doesn't. "The same thing that happened in the Navy is happening now," he says.

"But you *know* that wasn't real. It was your ..." I can't bring

myself to name his illness.

"I think it was real," he says now. His weight is heavy on the bed.

Jesse begins to say, "I can't hear you. You're breaking up." I fling the sheet off my legs, startling the cat. I pace to new locations, calling his name.

He hangs up. All I hear is the relentless pounding of rain on the roof.

I try to feel something. I'm empty — no anger, hurt, worry, no wrenching anxiety. Nothing. I hated those feelings for so many years, but now I hate not feeling them. I'm numb.

I call the veteran's shelter.

A man answers.

"I can neither confirm nor deny he's here," he says.

I'm used to talking around the privacy laws. This man tells me there is no counselor available. When I hint that Jesse is not doing well emotionally, he contacts the floor supervisor.

The floor supervisor has an accent. When I ask his name, he gives only his first. I ask him to repeat it before I understand. I suspect he has risen through the patient ranks to handle the supervision.

He looks up Jesse on a computer — I need to spell his name twice — then says, "He's not here. There's no record of him."

My thoughts bounce like the ball in a pinball machine. I flip the handle hard, not willing to let it drop into the slot that says, "Jesse's lying again."

I fade into sleep wondering if Jesse is now one of the city's homeless, warding off the rain under a bridge somewhere with others like him—or worse, alone. This makes me sad, but it's better than feeling nothing.

I dream that I'm at school, trying to stop eighth graders from running down the corridor. They plow through the younger students, pushing them out of the way. They shake rain from their hair, creating puddles on the floor. Someone might drown, I think. I step in front of a boy taller than I am, and block his passage. He looks like he will shove me aside, but he hands me an umbrella and walks slowly away. I go into my classroom. Someone has turned on the TV and is fast-forwarding a video at top volume. None of my students seem to care.

"Can't anyone fix that?" I yell. "Turn it down."

No one does. I think it's broken.

Author Ruth Douillette often illustrates her writing with her own photos, or accompanies her photos with stories. She believes a picture is worth a thousand words, and a thousand words deserve a photo. See "Ruthie Dee's" photos on Flickr at: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ruthiedee/>

Ruth's blog: <http://upstreamanddown.blogspot.com>



facing the music



Suzy was pleased.

For the past hour, she'd heard Brad teaching Janet basic guitar chords in the family den. No bickering nor arguments. She went into the kitchen to start making dinner.

Those two hardly ever quarrel anymore, she thought. Wonder why?

When the lesson finished, Brad strolled into the kitchen and nodded to his mother.

"I'm proud of you, Brad," said Suzy.

"How come, Mom?"

"Cause I usually hear you callin' Janet a pest - and worse. Now you're givin' her guitar lessons. Real patient like. Lately you two've been friendly as hounds at a hunt!" Suzy pared a potato half.

"We-ell, I just thought it wouldn't kill me to show her the basics. I help out the guys in my band sometimes, so why not my sister? But... can't believe she thinks she's gonna start her own band. HA!" he chorled and searched in the refrigerator for nourishment.

"Now Brad, Janet's gettin' better. I hear her playin' some tunes when you're at baseball practice."

The phone rang and Suzy answered it. It was her sister who wanted to chat for a spell.

Brad left chugging a Coke and nearly collided with Janet in the hallway.

"What're YOU doin' out here? Spyin' again in the hallway?" he hissed and tried to push past her. She jumped back in front of him and said,

"Wait a sec, Brad, you big bastard! I heard you laughin' at me just now. So you think that ME havin' a band is a big joke? Like, that'd be funny? You allus talk like I'm an idiot and can't do what YOU can do."

"Git outta my way!" Brad looked back at the kitchen. Mom was still talking on the phone, so he gave his sibling a shove.

"Stop it!" Janet almost yelled.

Brad grinned, then held his finger to his lips.

"Shh. Mom'll hear. We're s'posed to be pals. You don't want to screw up our plan. I mean, YOUR plan. Looks like we got them fooled. Satisfied?"

Janet glanced over at her mother and then lowered her tone. "Yeah, worked so far. You give me lessons and I keep quiet. But you keep makin' me feel like tellin' Mom and Dad what you done."

"Which you found out by spyin' on my Facebook, you pest!" Brad tried to walk around her. "That was none of your bees-wax! "

She blocked his path again and said, "I promised you. Keep givin' me guitar lessons and they won't find out from me. But someday...they're gonna know about that TATTOO! Even if it's on your butt, under your jeans. Someday..."

Brad bent down and hoarsely whispered:

"Maybe they won't find out. By August I'll be at State U. Besides, a tattoo ain't against the law! BFD! An' when I'm gone, no more guitar lessons! You'll be stuck here milkin' cows. Didja ever think of that, you nosy little..."

"I think you'll help me ev'ry time you come home from school! Oh, yes you will, butthead! But... first of all... you'll tell the folks I need my own guitar."

"Why the HELL should I tell 'em THAT!?"

"I looked al-I-I through your Facebook and seen some really interestin' photos. Like, your girlfriend's got a matchin' tattoo on HER butt. Saw photos that most definitely ARE against the law! You guys could get arrested for what I seen!"

Through the kitchen window Suzy saw Brad chasing Janet around the back yard. "Now they're playin' tag like two ten-year-olds," she told her sister. "What next?"

- Kathy Highcove

MEETINGS

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

Villa Katzenberg

23388 Mulholland

Woodland Hills, CA 91364-2733

NEXT MEETING

Saturday, March 5th, 2011 at 1:30 p.m.

MAILING ADDRESS

c/o Dave Wetterberg,

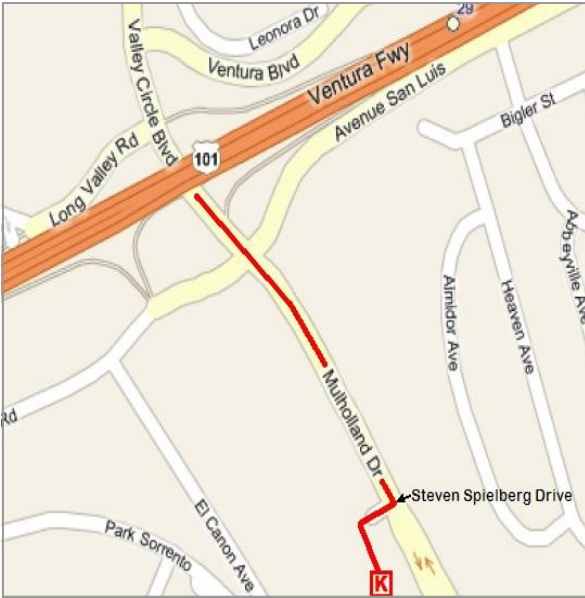
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