



Newsletter of the California Writers Club/West Valley

IN FOCUS

2006 - 2011



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Playing With Words

Did you know we have talented playwrights in our midst?

Come and hear three of them perform their one-act plays at our next meeting.



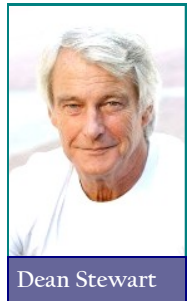
Karen Gorbach

Karen Gorbach will present her play "Cheesecake and Chips." Among 40 entries, it was one of 10 selected to be workshopped in a class in which the director/instructor works one on one with each playwright before presentation to the public. Her entry was part of the New Works Festival at College of the Canyons.

We will hear Dean Stewart's read-

ing of his play "Listing,"

which is currently entered in the Writer's Digest annual writing competition. A previous play received 8th place in the Writer's Digest contest of 2009 while two other plays received Honorable Mention in the WD competition of 2008 and 2010.



Dean Stewart



Ray Malus

Ray Malus, with the help of a friend, will read his 10-minute play "The Ninth Bell," which was a winner in the Tehachapi 10-minute Play Festival in 2010. Ray also won in the same Festival in 2009.

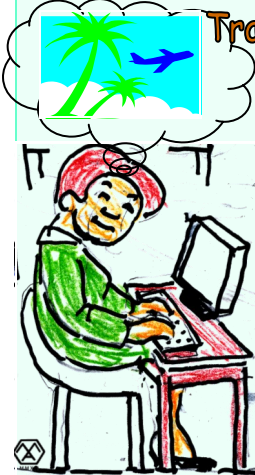
Join us on June 4th.

- Yolanda Fintor

west valley whimsicals

A Schwartz / Highcove Production

Travel Journalism

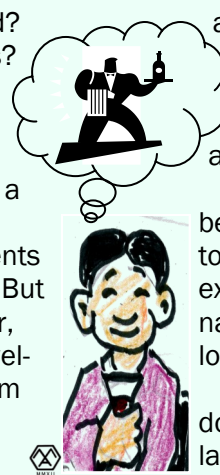


Many writers aspire to take a trip and write about it – for pay! Or blog about it, and collect a following. If you hope to be a traveling reporter here're guidelines.

Who are your

readers and what do they need? Research on airlines or cruises? Restaurants and sight-seeing tours? Best deals in hotels? Great places to shop and find a souvenir? Make sure you have a specific audience in mind.

Find hotels and establishments who'll welcome your reporting. But remember, if you accept a favor, can you remain unbiased? Travelers need honest info. It's a bum deal to read a rave review and then find out, after much effort

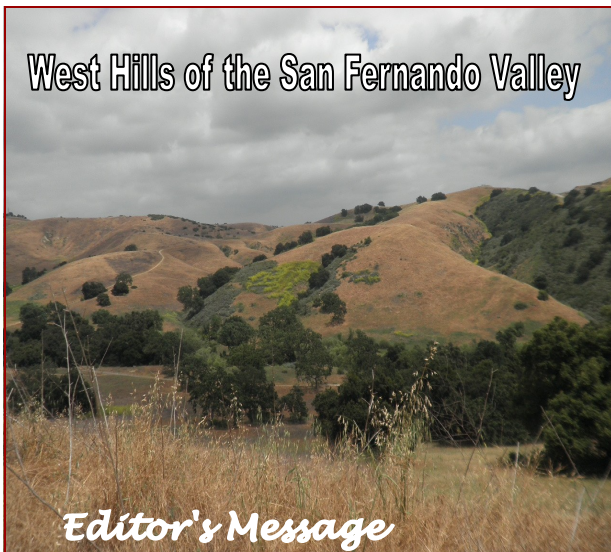


and expense, that the ballyhooed spa resort or cruise is actually nothing special or poorly managed.

When writing your story, be accurate as to times of tours, museum hours and exhibits. Spell correctly names of people, places and local sights.

Ready, set, go! Wait... don't forget your camera, laptop and recorder. - KH

West Hills of the San Fernando Valley



Editor's Message

Happy trails to all of you as the summer begins. I hope you'll find interesting things to do, fun places to explore, make new friendships and touch base with your old friends.

Most of all, I hope you return in September ready to write new stories and compose new verse for the *Valley Scribe*, our newsletter for the SFV/CWC. Goodbye from *In Focus*.

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Karen Gorback

President's Message

With this message, so closes my four years as president of the West Valley branch of the California Writers Club. Also closing is the branch's short history, as we merge with the San Fernando Valley branch.

Five years ago a group of us were surprised at how easy it was to establish a new CWC branch. At the outset, enthusiasm was high. Betty Freeman, on behalf of the Motion Picture and Television Fund, offered us the bright and beautiful Katzenberg Villa for our meetings ... gratis! Volunteers took up the reins then (I say volunteers, because no one ever ran against anybody in our elections). Program chair Leslie Kaplan booked Ray Bradbury. We had to meet in the auditorium for that one. Betty Freeman booked Shelley Berman twice. She also arranged for some residents to speak to us about their experiences in the motion picture industry. Dean Stewart took treasurer and remained for the long haul. A newsletter and a website followed. Things ran smoothly and efficiently, thanks to all those who generously took up Board positions. May I take this opportunity to thank them all.

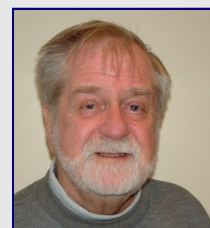
But we expected to build a fuller membership from outlying areas like Calabasas, Agoura, and Thousand Oaks This didn't work out, in spite of the efforts of publicity chair Kathy Highcove. Then more and more SFV members co-joined our branch, and we slowly recognized that we were needless duplications of each other. Attendance at both branches began to drop, which didn't help.

So now we welcome our sister branch and we merge our bounty ... the Katzenberg, MPTF privileges, our membership, and a healthy treasury .. with them.

We should notice very little difference in our meetings from month to month. Our Vice-President Yolanda Fintor will become president of the merger. She'll be great. Kathy Highcove will maintain the newsletter. Speakers should continue to be professional and excellent. Open Mike, featuring Bill Sorrells, should continue as is.

And I will continue to see all my great friends each month (except for July and August, of course), just the way I like it.

- Dave Wetterberg



"Look em in the eye, writers," says Irene.



Program Chair Yolanda Fintor and May speaker Irene Brennick

"Anyone can become an effective speaker by following a few simple rules," declared Irene Brennick, an experienced lecturer and published author who coaches CEO's and celebrities on public speaking skills. Many of our CWC members are also published authors who must market their own books to a variety of audiences and were consequently quite interested to hear this guest speaker's expert advice.

Brennick primarily focused on the major obstacle for most new speakers: stage fright. This fear can make a person freeze up and forget their rehearsed speech. To combat this fear, Ms. Brennick revealed a few useful tricks.

First of all, arrive at your meeting early. Mingle with the audience, chat and eavesdrop. The conversational buzz in the room will give you a feel for the crowd and help you tailor your talk for a more effective delivery.

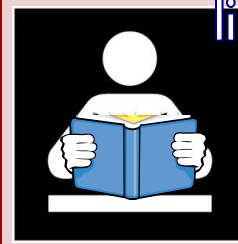
"Stay flexible and loose," our lecturer advised. "You needn't write out a complete speech ahead of time. Instead, you should know the subject well enough to speak without notes. Once you decide on your content, maintain eye contact with the audience to assess their response. Watch for signs of boredom in their body language, and adjust your delivery until they're paying attention again."

Brennick strongly advised that a lecturer should move away from a lectern because it separates a speaker from their audience. "Walk around as you speak to project an air of confidence. If your knees are shaking, then lean casually against the lectern for support. But remind yourself that the audience will be on your side if you appear honest and passionate about your subject."

Finally, Brennick stressed that you don't need to be a polished speaker to make an interesting speech. "Try to relax and make a joke or two. A sense of humor will help you get over a rough spot. Give yourself permission to make a mistake. Most audiences understand nervousness and will root for you."

Irene Brennick told us to always remember: "It's not about you; it's about the audience."

- Yolanda Fintor



library corner

As summer approaches I hope all San Fernando Valley writers will find a reason to visit the local library during the warmer months, and not just for the air conditioning! Do keep in mind some of the great resources at the library as you research your latest book or article. Best of all are these things you can do home at your leisure:

- * You can place a hold on books and pick them up at your local branch when they are ready!
- * Find and print articles from newspapers and periodicals through our online databases.
- * Click the "ask a librarian" button to get some research advice from a pro.
- * Research photographs of old L.A. in our searchable database.
- * Download e-books and audio books.

If you are inclined to visit a library in person, there are book clubs at branches throughout the West Valley area. West Valley Regional branch has a mystery book club Wednesday nights, and Northridge has a Tuesday afternoon book club. Granada Hills has a Wednesday afternoon book club and Platt's club meets Tuesday evenings. Contact the branch to sign up. All branch phone numbers can be found at www.lapl.org.

Have a great summer and happy researching!

- Anne Olivier



Only lovers and fools drive from Los Angeles to Las Vegas in mid August; and in 1973, I was both. My husband had answered an ad in the *Valley News and Green Sheet* for someone to drive a 1969 Lincoln from L.A. to Sin City with all expenses paid. And for a young couple on the verge of broke, it was too tempting to resist. Having been married only a few months and unable to afford a honeymoon, a free trip to Vegas sounded wonderful.

"A free ride to Las Vegas?" Grammy Lil *chevled* in the Yiddish inflections of her youth. "Your Grandpa JoJo and I will come along! I haven't played the slots in a long time. There's a little casino on the Strip with penny slot machines where I can play all day for five dollars – but don't tell JoJo that I'm such a gambler."

"No. Not this time," I fudged, as I was not excited about taking my grandparents along on the romantic weekend. "Besides, it's going to be really hot in the desert, and I know you don't like the heat."

"What heat? That fancy car of yours won't have air conditioning?"

"Yes, I'm sure it will have air conditioning, but . . ."

"Listen, *maidehlah*, if I can live through the summers in the Valley without a cooler, I can go on a little ride to Las Vegas in your fancy *schmancy* car with the nice, modern air conditioning. When do we leave?"

So my 75-year old grandmother who had watched her family executed in the streets of Kiev by the Bolsheviks would not be kept from the penny slots by a little desert sunshine. And on a mid-August morning, my husband rolled up to our rundown Sepulveda apartment in the shiny, black Lincoln. The neighbors must have thought it was a visit by one of the local drug lords.

As Grammy Lil and JoJo settled into the back seat, I noticed the wide, compression bandages wrapped around Grammy's legs under the cotton, floral house dress.

"It's for the circulation, Darling. Just for when I sit for a long time. Not to worry."

So I didn't. We stowed Grammy's aluminum walker in the trunk and hit the road. The Lincoln was a sweet ride and we rolled along in cool, air conditioned bliss --- until noon, when the car began sputtering on the uphill grade just outside of Victorville, in the high desert, where the guy on the local radio station said it was 119° in the shade.

"Turn off the air," JoJo ordered from the back seat. The new husband complied, but the overheated engine hissed louder and louder, sending spouts of steam up from under the handsome hood.

"Didn't the lady say that the car was in good condition?" I yelled.

"Yes," the new husband yelled back, "but it's hot as Hell out there. Maybe it just can't take the climb with the air on."

"It's a Lincoln Continental for God's sake. It's the size of a freakin' yacht. What do you mean *maybe it can't take the climb*?"

"Shaaaah children," Grammy Lil intervened. "Yelling will not help the situation. Just pull over and we'll wait for help."

The new husband complied.

Luckily, I had packed a thermos of water, a chest of ice and a couple of wash cloths – in case of an emergency. I doused a cloth with cool water, wrapped it around a couple ice cubes, and passed it to the back seat for Grammy to put on the back of her neck. Meanwhile, the men stood on the side of the road watching the steam spew out from under the hood.

"Yep, it's overheating," the husband keenly observed.

JoJo just shook his head, less than enthusiastic about the individual his granddaughter had selected to marry. "Well, it doesn't look like there are any police around. We'll have to hitch-hike to Victorville and get some help." After several cars whizzed by, one finally stopped to take the men to town.

Meanwhile, I was becoming more and more concerned about Grammy. She sat in the back seat with door open, but the black car was heating up like an oven. To make matters worse, she wouldn't drink any water, insisting that the wet cloths on the back of her neck would keep her cool, like they did when she sat on the green velvet sofa in front of the open door of her little bungalow in Panorama City.

"Maybe we should take off the bandages to cool down your legs," I suggested.

(Continued on page 5)

"No." The woman was stubborn and there was no use arguing. But a half hour later, when the men had not returned, I began to feel panicky.

"Okay. Let's hitchhike, just like the men did," Grammy Lil offered.

"Hitchhiking is dangerous. You're not serious," I responded. But she was.

"Get my walker out of the trunk and let's get moving."

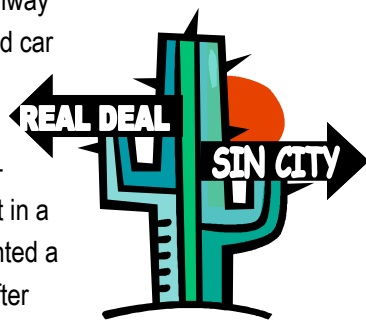
She was right. We had to get out of the sun.

So on a mid-August afternoon, on a desolate incline just outside of Victorville, Grammy Lil, with a white wash cloth draped around her neck and heavily bandaged legs, maneuvered the aluminum walker along the dusty shoulder of Highway 15. And without hesitation, she stuck a thumb in the air. "Is this how you do it, Sweetheart? Should I hike up my skirt, just a little?" Was she becoming delirious or just sassy, enjoying our precarious position a lot more than I was?

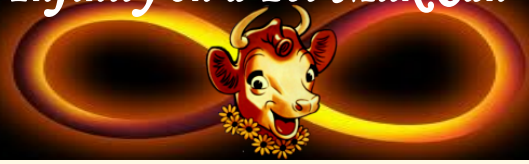
Everything my mother had warned me about hitchhiking disappeared into the hot, desert dust as I stood on the shoulder of the road and stuck my thumb in the air, next to Grammy Lil. Thankfully, an elderly gentleman with a shock of white hair picked us up after just a few minutes. He gently helped Grammy into the front, passenger's seat while I crammed into the back with the walker. Once we took off, I strained to listen to them talking over the noise of the wind from the open windows. Were they just having a congenial conversation or was this guy trying to make time with Grammy Lil? After dropping us off at a Victorville coffee shop, he got back on the highway and circled around to our disabled car to wait for the men and let them know where they could find us.

We never made it to Las Vegas. Instead, we spent the night in a cheap motel in Victorville and rented a car for our return the next day, after JoJo had a few choice words over the pay phone with the Lincoln lady. There were no penny slots that August; but every summer until she died, Grammy Lil loved to recall the adventure of hitchhiking through the desert with her granddaughter and being picked up by a handsome stranger one very hot afternoon when the guy on the radio said it was a hundred and nineteen in the shade.

- Karen Gorback



Infinity on a Pet Milk Can



I don't know why I remember sitting sideways in my red wagon in the shade of a big cottonwood tree. It was a lazy summer afternoon with that Mid-west humidity in the air. It was quiet. I didn't have to be anywhere or do anything. I just sat swinging my legs over the side of the wagon resting my chin on my entwined wrists. Just a kid, not even double digits in age.

My eyes caught sight of something white lying in a clump of dark green grass under the tree. It was an empty Pet Milk can. I knew it was empty because it had those two triangle-shaped holes in the top where you poured the milk out.

A Pet Milk can was a familiar sight in our house. There were several in the kitchen cupboard and one or two opened ones in the frig at all times. My Mom and Dad were huge coffee drinkers and Pet Milk was the cream in their coffee. It was stirred in along with at least two heaping teaspoons of sugar in each cup they drank. It turned their strong dark coffee into a tempting soft milk chocolate color.

And there lay that empty can with its familiar label nearby in the grass. Totally out of context. I gazed at the can label with that picture of a cow's head and those big brown eyes. We looked at each other for a long time. I, too, had big brown eyes.

The label featured a picture of itself - that can with the cow on it. That meant that within each picture was a smaller picture of itself with a yet smaller picture of it inside that...another smaller...inside that...another smaller...inside that... Holy Cow! Where did this end? It just kept repeating in smaller and smaller sizes - a picture of a picture of a picture. If I had a magnifying glass I could keep seeing more and more of them.

This was a strange discovery for me. I didn't know what it meant or what to do with the thought, but I was mesmerized by it. I have no idea how much time passed before I heard Mom calling me. She needed me to run to the store for her. We were out of bread, lunchmeat, cottage cheese, and Pet Milk.

- Rita Keeley Brown

when I close my eyes, I hear these summer sounds...



Mississippi June
Cicadas in trees shrilly
announce vacation.

Time has stopped but for
The deafening chorus of
August cicadas.

- Anne Olivier

While living in Ohio, the sounds of summer
I was most conscious of were the bird
songs. From certain treetops came the
lovely flute-like notes of the wood thrush.
Driving along a country road, one would
eastern meadowlarks perched on fence
posts, piping their four-note song. And at
any marshy patch, there was sure to be a
red-winged blackbird whistling his three notes
over and over..

I rarely do any bird watching nowadays, but I do
miss hearing the bird-sounds of summer.

- Erica Stux

On a summer morning, I'm greeted in my
garden by the raucous songs of mockingbirds.
Hummingbirds buzz around my head if I
come too near their feeder.

Late that afternoon, we walk our dog to the
top of a nearby hill. I hear the sudden screech
of a hunting hawk, the rasping cries of crows
flapping around the treetops, the low drone of
bees in the flowering eucalyptus.

As the sun sinks, we're startled by a coyote
pack's frenzied shrieking, chaotic yipping,
and then...silence. They're on the move.

Neighborhood dogs bark warnings as dark
surrounds our homes. And we listen to owls'
soft hoots as they scan for mice on midnight
errands.

- Kathy Highcove

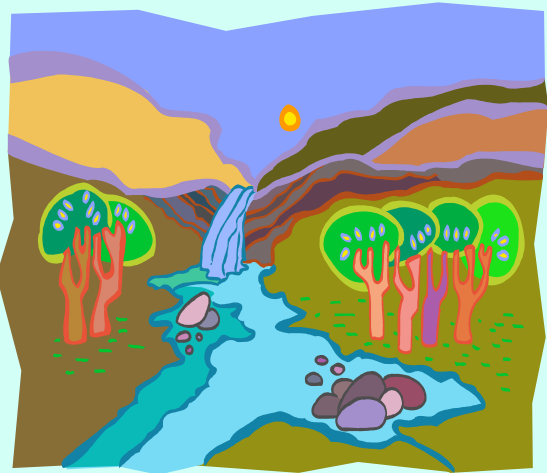
When I close my eyes,
I hear the sound of waves.
"Swaaash," they come to me
as I sit at the water's edge.
"Swaaaash," they tell me softly,
" We have come a long way
to splatter your feet with rolling foam.
Listen to what we came to say:
We have been around for many years
rolling, floating in and out of the sea,
gliding, jetting high and low,
loud and soft,
big and small,
mean and friendly,
but always—yes, always,
coming back to say, " 'Hello!' "

- Marganit Lish

When I close my eyes, I see these summer scenes ...

When I close my eyes I see Williamsburg, Michigan. I see Vinton Road where I turn right and travel on down past the old Vinton home, still standing. Then further down the road I pass the waterfall and the creek below that I used to sit next to with my dolls and play. Further down the road is the cemetery where many of the Vinton's are buried, going back to 1850. I sit next to my mother and father's grave and I remember our life together.

- Gloria Vinton Kositchek



**"Life is an ever shifting
kaleidoscope: A slight
change and all patterns
alter."**

Sharon Salzberg

ROSE AVENUE
Venice Beach 1935

Waves reach far ashore
sometimes.
The porch shudders in salty wind
sometimes.
Clouds scatter on the horizon line
sometimes.
The rocker sits waiting
always...

When I was little, maybe seven or eight, we spent our summers in a smelly dark apartment on Rose Avenue in Venice Beach and called it a *vaca-tion*. Our home for July and August was this half of a duplex whose one redeeming feature, aside from being a block from the beach, was its wide front porch.

Early afternoons I used to change into a scratchy woolen bathing suit and follow my mother and brother Lionel down across the ocean front walk, skipping over the hot sand to the wonderful relief of the Pacific Ocean's fingers of foam.

I remember the sharp sting of the water as I backed into the surf. I remember running away and screaming as the ripples pulled into a giant wall of green and I barely escaped the next lashing wave.

The joy of it, the utter abandonment, the hot, sticky, salty sweetness of it left me singing and dancing in circles.

Then showering and spreading Noxzema over my sun-burned back, I finally snuggled into soft flannel pajamas. I recall listening to Jack Benny, eating cream cheese and jelly sandwiches, sipping hot cocoa ...eventually drifting off to the muffled sounds of the sea and the squeak of our rocking chair in the early evening breeze.

Waves reach far ashore
sometimes.
The porch shudders in salty wind
sometimes.
Clouds scatter on the horizon line
sometimes.
The rocker sits waiting
always...

- Lillian Rodich



Kite

Once upon a time my Kite
aspired the stratosphere,
dared vagrant winds,
rode risky updrafts
to plumb the blue beyond.

When fickle winds withheld
their buoyant waves,
my agile rainbow acrobat
would dive, twist, twirl
until he caught a new swell
and gained the heights once more.

Now, retired to my patio,
Kite's Mylar streamers curl and
stretch to sketch in color
breezes blowing by.

- Mary Schaffer



My Dad

A short man with a tall heart
Holds my hand in his pocket
Rushing in the glow of street lights
Crashing rain spots
Into our squeaky shoes.

My dad said, "Be your own person
Finding your own safe space
It's up to you
But I will be there
Guiding your steps like a shadow
Forever praying for you."

A little girl
Hiding behind his frame
Dad chasing my ghosts away
Day after day.

Darting shadows across the wall
Dad moving hair bangs off my face
Letting my eyes to see.

Cruel time is approaching
Dressed in transparent grayish clouds
The two of us
Running to avoid its touch.

Dad has creases lining his face
Worried lines on his forehead
Halting small slow steps
Bluish-purple lips
Carefully easing emphysema breath
His voice still whispering
Soft prayers only for me to hear.

- Keyle Birnberg-Goldstein @1998

"My father used to play with my
brother and me in the yard. Mother
would come out and say, "You're
tearing up the grass." "We're not
raising grass," my dad would reply,
"We're raising boys."

- Harmon Killebrew



My father didn't tell me how to live;
he lived, and let me watch him do it.

- Clarence B. Kelland

Who? Me?

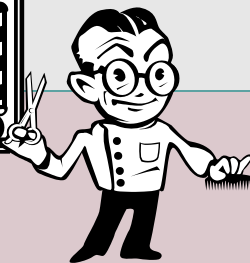


You Just MIGHT Be An Old Guy!

What makes you think...??
It's obvious:

1. If your favorite Christmas present is your Social Security Check -
you just might be an old guy.
2. If you go to bed with a woman just to keep your feet warm -
you just might be an old guy.
3. If your favorite marital aid is a tank of oxygen -
you just might be an old guy.
4. If your favorite cologne is Ben Gay -
you just might be an old guy.
5. If your favorite chair is a foam-rubber donut -
you just might be an old guy.
6. If you think the price of gas is a pastrami sandwich -
you just might be an old guy.
7. If you hire a baby sitter - but don't have any kids -
you just might be an old guy.
8. If your favorite vitamin is Viagra -
you just might be an old guy.
9. If you're the only one at your class reunion -
you just might be an old guy.
10. If you think a "home computer" is someone who does his own taxes -
you just might be an old guy.
11. If your idea of a 'Day Excursion' is a trip to the bathroom -
you just might be an old guy.
12. If your electric shaver is also a de-fibrillator -
you just might be an old guy.
13. If you read the obituaries just to gloat -
you just might be an old guy.
14. If you think "getting hot" is turning up the electric blanket -
you just might be an old guy.
15. If you think of a Hula Hoop as a "Bowel Movement"-
you just might be an old guy.
16. If you consider "Free Love" as "having a coupon" -
you just might be an old guy.

- Ray Malus



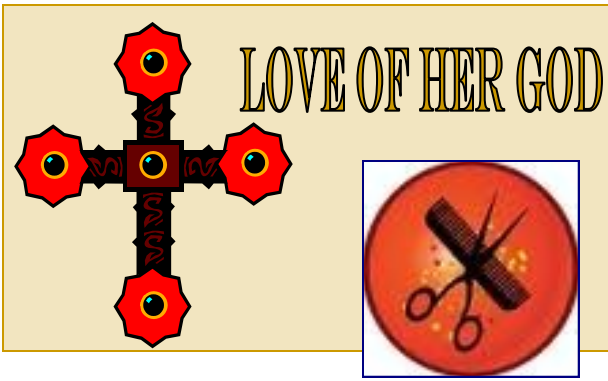
Talkative Barbers

Snip, snip, snip as my hair he does clip,
But the barber has a non-stop lip.

Politics and sports are all I hear,
But much too loud and close to my ear.

Just wield your scissors and shut your mouth,
Before my ears decide to go South.

- Ken Wilkins



Marie, who now prefers to be called Milagros, (miracle in Spanish), is indeed a miracle and an inspiration. She survived and thrived after a horrendous accident in Chetunal, Mexico where she lost her right arm.

I first met Milagros when my hairdresser was not available, and she was. Although skeptical, I made the appointment. With a comb in her right hand of the artificial limb and the scissors in the left she beautifully styled my hair. During this time Milagros spoke about the tragedy of losing her right arm.

"I was married for twenty-one years then divorced. I then met up with a man I had casually known for eighteen years. I thought he was the dream of my life. We married. On our honeymoon, we rented a car in Cancun, Mexico and drove the 'Dead Road' to Chetumal to visit family and friends."

She stopped for a moment. "The Dead Road is brutal, devastating. Three to four fatal crushes occur daily."

They had been drinking all day and into the evening and shouldn't have been driving to Cancun. However, her husband insisted. Milagros fell asleep in the passenger seat, her husband at the wheel. Their car turned over several times. Both were trapped inside in the middle of nowhere. Their cell phone was unable to make contact for emergency help. An American motorist saw the accident and came to their rescue.

Milagros related, "I thought he was Jesus. He

had a fair complexion and was ready to help. In my mind he was Jesus."

The ambulance came within a half-hour and took both of them to the hospital. She was told her right arm must be amputated. Her husband of four months, without a scratch on him, cared little about his wife. They divorced. Milagros related this story with tears streaming down her face.

She told me, "I will survive this horrendous accident, this period of my life. I will gather strength, continue to be a hairdresser, and work in my garden."

One of the first things Milagros did when she arrived home was to pick up a pair of gardening shears, go out to the garden and cut flowers. She tested the strength of her left arm.

Milagros knits, crochets, and sells her handwork in the beauty shop. She also drives.

I asked, "How are you able to do such remarkable work?"

She answered: "I will continue to do all of these tasks, with the help of my God, the sustaining force in my life, along with the support of my children, my sister, fellow hairdressers, and friends."

Milagros is courageous and determined, warm and friendly and greets clients with a warm smile.

- **Helen Katzman**

"Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself."

- *George Bernard Shaw*

The Perfect Peach



My neighbor's dogs are furiously barking as they move back and forth, jumping up and down as they always do on the Fourth of July when fireworks are cracking and sizzling going straight up into the sky. Only it's not the Fourth of July but another hot day with no wind and no air to breathe. I get up tired from lack of sleep and reluctantly tiptoe outside to face the commotion.

Ouch! I step into a bulky slippery pit as a big peach tree branch hits me square in the face. The dogs bark some more. Stupid dogs, after all these years living in this house, thirty to be exact - they don't even know me. Some dogs probably went to dog heaven a few times already.

I pick up the heavy tree branch and make an effort



to leave it on top of the dividing wall. The tree branch is heavy with peaches - some are green and fuzzy with a dot of yellow on the side ending in a tiny point.

The dogs keep barking and I'm here trying to be friendly by whistling a friendly tune which I hope they know - but they don't know... and they keep barking and jumping while I, timid and helpless, search quietly for the perfect peach which I hope to grab when they are not looking my way. But they are. The dogs jump up trying to bite my hand, which I silently retract into my old-faded-blue robe pocket.

The wall is high. I can only see the tips of their pointed ears and their mean eyes as they come up level with mine.

No peach is worth all that trouble - but since the dogs are barking anyway, I take a chance and dart my hand out in a quick move to grab one of the yellow peaches. I step back resting my back on my wall sitting on the step to examine the treasure. The color is perfect - It's a peachy-peach intense yellow with a deep red velvet-blush on the side. The taste buds in my mouth squirt in preparation to the bite - but first I feel the delicate fuzz with my fingers - its velvet all right. Even if the dogs had taken one of my fingers into their jaws - is it worth it? Not really - but close enough - It's not like "My kingdom for a horse". Or, 'My fingers for a peach'? I don't think so.

I look at the color again; it reminds me of a dress I once had when I was six years old. A dog came out of nowhere and took a bite of my heel tearing my new dress and pushing me to the ground with his big paws. Later the same day, my brother Salem accidentally spilled ink on it and he helped me wash it, again and again before mama would find out. The dress was no longer peachy. We dropped it into the bottom of the clothes hamper where it stayed limp and torn just waiting to be discovered.

The peach fits my hand perfectly - I look at it some more, feel it - in a way delaying the pleasure of eating it. Saliva squirts under my tongue in anticipation of the taste. I slowly turn it. The other side of the peach is cracked with some nasty black bruises. Little bugs are crawling out, with fright I scream dropping the perfect peach on the ground, jumping up and down on my side of the wall. The dogs resume barking.

I think I will try juicy purple plums next time, but on another side of the fence, where cats are the only creatures balancing gracefully... taking care not to fall, keeping their nine lives intact.

- Keyle Birnberg-Goldstein

Guest Writer Wayne Scheer



"Prophylactica?"

by Wayne Scheer

My wife and I had the opportunity to spend two weeks living with a family in Tbilisi, Georgia. Our hosts didn't speak much English and we spoke far less Kartuli, the national language of the Republic of Georgia. We approached each other carefully, using our phrase books dutifully and gesturing flamboyantly. Still, with good humor, we managed to communicate.

One day we sat down to breakfast to discover that the man of the house, Badri, was absent. As best we could, we asked, "Where Badri?"

"Badri go prophylactica," replied Manana, Badri's wife.

We had been such respectful guests, but we couldn't help ourselves. My wife and I giggled. It was not a particularly mature way to act, I admit, but something about the unexpected, familiar-sounding word set us off like two children in a playground.

"Prophylactica?" I asked incredulously.

"Yes. Prophylactica."

With the help of our dictionaries, we discovered that prophylactica is the Kartuli term for service station. Badri took his car to be tuned up. Preventive maintenance. After all, he was about to take us on a trip to the countryside and he wanted to make sure his automobile was in top shape. He, at least, acted responsibly.

Now it was Manana's turn to ask. "Prophylactica. Why ha ha?"

This was a bit harder to explain because our phrase book didn't include the words "prophylactic" or "condom" or even "birth control." Vickie, my wife, not what you'd call a shy woman, took it upon herself to describe, using gestures, why we laughed at the

word "prophylactica." (Sorry, but although this is really the funniest part, it is more visual than verbal.) Eventually, Manana understood, and we all had a good laugh.

A little while later, Badri returned home and Vickie, extending the joke, asked, "Badri? Prophylactica?" and winked theatrically. Manana turned red and slumped onto a chair while we all had a good laugh at the expense of poor Badri, an old-world, stern type. He just stared, confused. When Manana explained the joke to him, he pointed his finger at Vickie in mock horror at how she had corrupted his wife, shouting, "You, you, you!"

A few days later, Badri dropped us off at the home of another family with whom we were to spend the night. As he helped us with our overnight luggage, he grabbed me by the shoulder and stage whispered, "Prophylactica?"

We became close after that, discovering that Badri's nonsense demeanor masked an impish sense of humor. When we returned to his home, we found a pack of condoms under our pillow. I tried to comment, but he refused to acknowledge the prank. His facial expression didn't even change when Vickie gave him the thumb's up sign the next morning.

A year later, Badri and his family traveled to the U.S. to visit with us. Enough time had passed so no one mentioned the prophylactica jokes. At the end of the trip, in true Georgian fashion, we exchanged gifts. Amidst presents of pottery and hand-painted teacups, he included a framed newspaper article written in Kartuli. We, of course, had no idea what it meant and neither Badri nor Manana would translate it for us. After they left, we took it to a professor at nearby Emory University who was from the Republic of Georgia. He told us it was a newspaper article advising its readers to tune-up their automobiles regularly.

We had established a friendship based on good humor and bilingual puns.

Wayne Scheer has locked himself in a room with his computer and turtle since his retirement. (Wayne's, not the turtle's.) To keep from going back to work, he's published hundreds of short stories, essays and poems, including, **Revealing Moments**, a collection of flash stories, available at <http://www.pearnoir.com/thumbscrews.htm>. . He's been nominated for four Pushcart Prizes and a Best of the Net. A film adaptation of Scheer's short story, "Zen and the Art of House Painting," can be viewed at <http://vimeo.com/18491827>

My Trip to Mount Fujiyama

At the end of WWII, my engineering regiment was redeployed from Austria to Japan by the way of Panama and the Philippines. Our assignment was to cleanup the rubble of Yokohama which had been fire-bombed to oblivion. I was so depressed that when my buddies asked me to join them on a jeep ride to Mount Fujiyama I readily agreed. The volcano was a beautiful snow covered peak that rose above the eastern horizon.

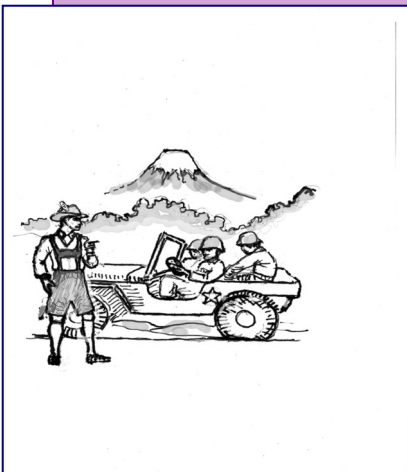
We left the ruins of Yokohama and drove up the green hills where the air was clean and fresh. As we passed a village, I yelled "Stop, look at that". The houses and trees were intact and the streets clean. There were no burned out buildings; in fact, it looked like a quaint Bavarian village in the Austrian Alps.

My amazement continued, "Look at those guys in

lederhosen

(leather pants)."

Most of the men were in Bavarian-style clothing. We couldn't believe our eyes. Only a few miles from the ashes of Yokohama that suffered over 300,000 dead, was this green peaceful community.



One of the men in *lederhosen* walked over with a friendly smile. He was blond, erect, like an officer, but in Tyrolean clothing. "Greetings, gentlemen," he said with a German accent. "Welcome to our little village". This was not like our relations with the German prisoners-of-war where there was no eye-contact or friendly conversation.

Trying my German, I asked what he was doing in Japan. "I work in the German Embassy — in fact, most of us do. *Bitte*, were you in Germany?"

"Yes," I said. "From the Rhine to Austria. Why do you ask?"

"Were you in Schweinfurt, my home town?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Was there any damage there?" he asked.

I looked straight into his eyes and said.

"*Schweinfurt ist ganz zerstört!* (Schweinfurt is totally destroyed.)

The German looked sad, but then said "*Ach*, isn't it too bad we did not join forces to defeat the Russian Bolsheviks."

We were shocked. He apparently sat out the war in this beautiful village with a soft job in the German Embassy and casually asked such a question. I turned my head in disgust and said to the guys, "Let's get out of here. This can't be real."

We decided that Mt. Fujiyama was too far, so we returned silently to our base in the ruins of Yokohama, each in deep thought. As for me, this scene remained with me for 66 years.

- Max Schwartz

MY DAD

4 years: My Daddy can do anything!

7 years: Dad knows a lot...a whole lot.

8 years: Dad doesn't know quite everything.

12 years: Obviously, Dad doesn't know that either.

14 years: Dad? He doesn't understand anything.

21 years: Oh, Dad is SO out of date!

25 years: Dad knows a little bit about it, but not much.

30 years: Gotta find out what Dad thinks about it.

35 years: Before we decide, we'll get Dad's ideas first.

50 years: What would Dad have thought about that?

60 years: My Dad knew everything about it!

65 years: Wish I knew what Dad would have thought about all that.

- Anonymous

The senses of sight and smell are said to trigger a person's childhood memories. With me, it's flowers, Hollyhocks in particular. Whenever I see the tall, stately stalks of white, pink or red blossoms, I'm back in my small town, sitting on our scratchy wool Army blanket in mid July making Hollyhock Dolls.

"My dolly is going to have a red dress, white hair and she'll carry a red parasol," proclaimed my older cousin by two years.

Feeling the sting of her superior tone, I do remember sticking out my tongue in retort. "Well, my doll is going to have two skirts, pink and white, and she'll be using a white parasol to keep her red hair pretty," I added in my best five- year-old manner.

We sat under the old apple tree, its branches providing dappled light for Operation Hollyhock. We had gathered an assortment of Hollyhock blossoms and buds which we would transform into our own dear Hollyhock Dolls.

My mother had given us toothpicks to use in the assemblage. "Remember to be careful when you poke the toothpick into the head (bud). You don't want to poke your finger."

Carol, as predicted, took two red blossoms and a baby bud. The bud looked like an acorn with a green helmet cap instead of a brown rolled hat. The tricky part was peeling off the green and disclosing a small pointed white head. If you looked carefully, you could see two small slits that looked like little eyes.

"My friend," explained Carol, "uses an eyebrow pencil to bring out the eyes".

"Well," I replied, "I don't have an eyebrow pencil and my mom won't let me use hers."

"I was only making a comment," added Carol. "Let's get going. Grab a toothpick."

We sat on the blanket across from each other and

Walking Down Memory Lane



With a Hollyhock Doll

carefully eased the toothpick into the base of the inverted hollyhock, the skirt, joining the head to the body. The finishing touch was making a parasol with the second red blossom and securing it with a second toothpick. We tended to put the anchoring toothpick of the parasol into the right shoulder. "Doesn't she look grand?" asked Carol.

I nodded my head in agreement as I vainly tried to expose the bud. Just when I was about to give up, I saw the characteristic slanted eye slits. "My dolly will be very glamorous with her petticoat and skirt. But we need to get a pail of water," I cried.

"How did I forget that?" exclaimed Carol.

"It happens," I replied, relieved that she could make a mistake. "We need to float the dolls in the pail. It will help them last longer," I added.

We called to my mother for help and she responded by finding us a shallow galvanized tub which she filled with water.

"When I was your age, I loved to make Hollyhock Dolls. Seeing you and your cousin making the Hollyhock Dolls really brings back memories. And sometime down the road you'll get married and if you're lucky, you'll have little girls and carry on this tradition."

But what if we don't have girls?" piped up Carol.

"No problem. Just ask your dad if he remembers how to make a "Hollyhock Doll."

- Sheila Moss

My Sister's Dolls

My sister thinks her dolls look best when dressed in pinks and reds. I think my sister's dolls look best when they have no heads.

- Robert Pottle



Familiar Rhythms



Sister Augusta was very accustomed to heat - African heat, the Congo's heat - but that afternoon she'd endured enough of Rome's summer heat. She and her fellow nuns from Kukala had waited over two hours in St. Peter's Square for the Papal address. Enough waiting, she thought. I need fresh air, fresh coffee and a place to sit down.

She turned to Sister Teresa, "I feel faint, my friend. I'm taking a stroll to clear my head."

"I'll come with you. We aren't supposed to travel alone in this city."

"No, no. Don't worry. I'll just return to the cafe where we ate breakfast. Stay here with our sisters and I'll wait for you there." She quickly turned before Teresa could object again and wended her way through the throng.

Once free, the nun briskly strode along. She loved to move, see the sights, and observe the different types of people who visited the Eternal City.

Nearing the cafe, she heard drumming... African drumming, and immediately walked faster. Around the next corner she spotted a band - looking like a grove of tall tropical flowers in their bright yellow and purple patterned shirts. She joined the small group that surrounded the musicians.

As she listened, her knees began to bend, her hips slightly swayed and her arms moved with the beat. The main drummer looked over at her and grinned. He aimed a staccato explosion in her direction. She smiled her thanks.

A little girl with dark curls watched the nun dance with big round eyes. She tried to imitate Augusta's steps and the two of them smiled like conspirators. Then her parents began to move to the beat, and soon the whole group of onlookers swayed together.

Augusta's dark blue habit now felt uncomfortably warm and cumbersome. She looked longingly at the cool cotton clothing of the drummers.

When did I last hear these rhythms? she asked herself. *When did I wear such joyful colors and clothes? Ah yes, back when my cousin married. I danced with the women of our village. Step, sway, step, sway... Before I left for the convent. My mother cried. So did I. What am I doing here in Rome? Why do I want to watch old men in fancy robes bow to an altar and drone prayers over a loudspeaker? The shaman at home gave better performances. Our priest gave better sermons. Our church choir harmonized like angels, joyful African angels in our long bright robes.*

The drummer and his band moved into a drum pattern she recognized as a Congolese rhythm. She added a few steps to her dance, then closed her eyes and thought of her mother's face and the soft hills around her village.

I'm going home, she decided.

- Kathy Highcove



**Kathy and Nikki say
"bye-bye" until September.**



Have a great summer. Sail on!

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, June 4th, 2011 at 1:30 p.m.

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