



The Valley Scribe

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Newsletter of the San Fernando Valley

Turning Inspiration Into Action



Nan Hunt

Nan Hunt—poet, author, and educator—has been an active participant in Los Angeles literary circles for forty years. Additionally, she lectures and teaches in Mt Hood and Portland, Oregon areas. Locally, she founded and still directs the renowned Valley Contemporary Poets Reading Series.

Nan has taught poetry, college English and led many writing workshops. She directed these Jungian-based writing workshops for UCLA Extension Writing

Programs: **"Trusting the Spontaneous Voice,"** and

"Writing the Transformation of Anger." These workshops proved popular courses and she went on to lecture and teach similar workshops in several U. S. and European cities. Back in the our Northwest, she was preserver and panelist for Associated Writing Programs in Albany and Portland, Oregon.

Nan's poetry has appeared in over one hundred publications and she has received poetry fellowships from Harcourt Brace, Centrum, Suffield College and Hambidge Center for the Arts. Her most recent writings: a collection of poems entitled **The Wrong Bride** and **The Map and the Perfection of Distance**, a memoir recounting her solo journey around the world. The latter will be published in 2012.

In our November meeting, Nan will discuss techniques that enhance form and content, making our writing more lyrical and appealing. She will draw upon her Jungian expertise to suggest ways to explore and use our unconscious resources.

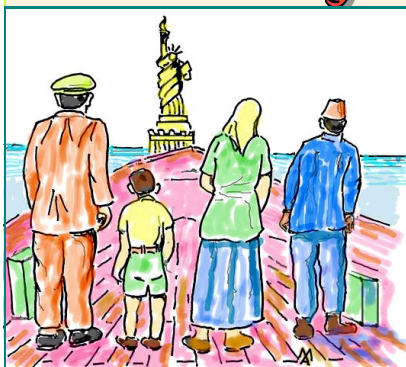
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the title and you're there.

west valley whimsicals

A Schwartz / Highcove Production



They came with
hopes, dreams ...

ALL AMERICAN STORIES

At the holiday table, the conversation often turns to family lore. Favorite stories are told and retold. Over time the stories and the details change, little by little. The real truth about someone's adventures on Ellis Island lose focus as time goes by. Old relatives argue about what happened when and to whom it happened. If not written down ... the stories are lost for future generations..

Many Americans may decide this year

(Continued on page 2)



and treasure troves
of family history.

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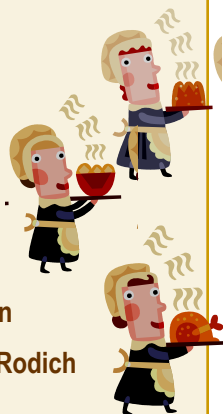
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LET'S GET ORGANIZED

Ray Malus has created a Central Data Base for our branch that contains an on-line Member Roster. This would be offered on our website to REGISTERED MEMBERS ONLY.

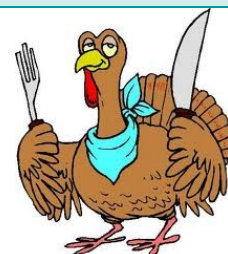
At our December meeting Ray will explain the details of how each member will have access to the directory. He will give a visual demonstration on how to log on to the roster, using your user ID and password. This data base should prove to be a valuable tool not only for the record-keeping our treasurer and membership chair must maintain, but also for giving every member access to a convenient on-line directory.

- Yolanda Fintor



TALKING TURKEY

An invocation for today's modern multi-generational family



We gather together to feast in peaceful breaking of gluten free bread, offering thanks or good thoughts or nurturing mindsets, to the Creator, or The Source or The Universal Truth. We're appreciative of the bounty or produce or life forms, that we'll consume in memory of the Pilgrim or Anglo-Saxon Survivors or Post-Columbian Invaders, who feasted with the Native Americans or The People or The Wronged Ones, after surviving a hellish winter ordained by God or Buddha or Gaia. And so, once more, it's time to feast. I will now carve and serve our holiday tofu turkey, stuffed with pesticide free organic veggies and nuts. Everyone: please pick up your knife and fork ... or chop-sticks ... and dig in. - Kathy Highcove



Kathy is currently a book reviewer for the **Internet Review of Books**. Her latest review is **DAUGHTERS OF THE RIVER HUONG: Stories of a Vietnamese Concubine and Her Descendants**, by Uyen Nicole Duong, can be found at this website:

<http://internetreviewofbooks.blogspot.com/>

(Continued from page 1)

to find out the real truth. How to begin? If one learns the skills and use the tools of genealogy research, the family history will begin to give up its secrets.

Family genealogists get started on this endeavor for several reasons. Some people want to know if ancestors had a particular affliction that should be tagged for future generations; single children need to find out facts for themselves, no one is left to tell them; many folks are history buffs and family history matches their hobby; adopted children, when adult, want info about their birth parents; some people enjoy genealogy because it's like a mystery game; some want to find missing family members or find out where the family originated.

Many of us have accumulated family mementos or photographs of unknown people in their fanciest clothes. We ask: Who's this couple who posed by Niagara Falls in 1902?

If you want to wow them at the next family gathering, get started now. Go online at home or at library to start your work. The international Internet has made ancestral research much easier. More and more communities are making microfilms of their old public records and putting them up on line. Happy hunting!

WRITING THE



Deborah Edler Brown

photo by Ray Rinkus



really goes to work; he/she deletes, rearranges, rephrases, over and over, until the kernel or the desired work of art takes shape.

Under Deborah's guidance, our group attempted a writing exercise. We were given three words -- ripple, smooth, and swing -- paper, pen and a time limit. Why a time limit? Our speaker feels that the best writing is done when a writer feels pressure to

"Let's imagine how Michelangelo might have sculpted his famous statue of David," said Deborah Edler Brown, our October guest speaker. She reminded us that this masterpiece was originally a blank block of marble. But when Michelangelo looked that at the raw rock, he apparently envisioned the figure of an athletic young man "buried" in the marble.

Ms. Brown asked us to imagine the artist at work. First, perhaps, he traced a form on the stone, and then chipped and carved for weeks to free the shape. Around the pedestal shavings, slivers and dust must have collected. What was left? The form the sculptor originally envisioned inside the block of marble: the famous *David*.

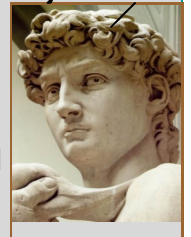
Similarly, Deborah told us, a writer looks for inspiration in his/her thoughts. To continue the simile, a story or verse lies buried in an amorphous mass of gray matter. Out of nowhere one might have a thought that's... hmm ... interesting. At this critical juncture, Deborah advised, the canny writer will sit down and write down whatever comes to mind. Or write down the phrase or sentence on anything that's handy so it's not lost forever. "Don't let that creative idea miscarry" is how Deborah put it. More good advice from the published author, teacher and lecturer: "Write with freedom," she told us. "Dare to be lousy. Dare to be good. Just write anything that comes into your head without judging it. Remember the three dangerous P's of resisting your muse: procrastination, perfection, paralysis."

The raw wordy story must be mulled over, rewritten into a possible final form, and only then the writer

set down words. In her view, creativity must have a catalyst. Our catalyst was a five minute limit. We all got busy. The timer dinged at the five minute mark and then many members took turns reading short adventures that included smooth ripples and swings.

Deborah encouraged us to be ready to write quickly whatever phrases come to mind. And advised us to keep alert and try to suppress the self-imposed censor. Perhaps, if one reads the piece carefully, something interesting might stand out in the text, she told us. If a phrase catches your notice, rewrite to uncover the kernel — your *David*. - KH

Write until
you find me

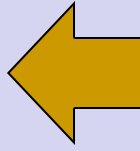


Writers Digest DOUBLE Winner

Congratulations to our fellow SFV/CWC member Dean Stewart! He recently learned that Writers Digest awarded his movie script 23rd place in the *Television/Movie Script* category of the **80th Annual Writer's Digest Writing Competition**. And, more glory: Dean's work, *Poor Little Sheep*, has been awarded 40th place in *Stage Play* category

Winners will be listed at www.writersdigest.com after the December issue of *Writer's Digest* is published. Happily, CWC/SFV member Dean Stewart will be among this year's winners. Kudos to Dean.

To Market



by

Ken Watts



NTH DEGREE is an online downloadable ezine with illustrations, and photos. "We print the best SF/Fantasy from the genre's newest writers and run artwork by the hottest new artists. Our goal is to help make it easier for new artists and writers to break into the field." Needs Fiction: Fantasy, historical, horror, humor/satire, sci-fi, young adult/teen, and comic strips. They also publish short shorts, and poetry. Always comments on rejected mss. Length: 2,000-7,000 words, average length is 3,500 words. Guidelines online, or by e-mail. Contact: Michael Pederson. Website: www.nthzine.com. E-mail: submissions@nthzine.com. Address: 3502 Fernmoss Ct., Charlotte NC 28269.

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It's NaNoWriMo Time

These nine letters are shorthand for **National Novel Writing Month** — thirty days of concentrated writing in an effort to flesh out a long-planned (or procrastinated) novel.

This literary event is sponsored by the non-profit **Office of Letters and Light**. Participants in NaNoWriMo pledge to write 50,000 words in a month, from the first word to "the end." Sound impossible? More than 250,000 people in more than 60 countries will give it a try with write-ins, meetings in coffee shops, bookstores, and libraries. These group efforts provide inspiration, peer pressure and turn your lonely quest into a community effort.

Note that the official NaNoWriMo logo pictured above has a cup of coffee, a laptop, two crossed pens and a box of Kleenex. You can guess what each item symbolizes: inspiration, determination, and a bit of frustration.

Has anyone actually written a best-seller as a result of this writing marathon? More than 90 books have accomplished that goal. *Water for Elephants* by Sara Gruen and *The Night Circus* by Erin Morgenstern, both #1 New York Times Best Sellers, were both started during a NaNoWriMo tourney.

Even if you don't expect to write a best-seller, perhaps there's a story you never finished telling. With the pressure of a deadline, that book may finally take form. Even if 20,000 or 30,000 words are written during the 30 days, it's a major start. Everyone has their own method of parsing out the task. Some go it at a steady rate; some compose in spurts. The trick is to simply **write** quickly in November, then edit at your leisure in December and all through the coming year, if need be.

Every area of the country has a NaNoWriMo center and counselors. Go to www.NaNoWriMo.org for info.

- KH

Will the CWC answer a PLEA FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE?

The California Writers Club has leveraged Jack London's name for the better part of 100 years. The

CWC began as informal gatherings of London and his friends. We cite these stellar origins constantly. Now California State Parks has initiated closure proceedings for Jack London State Park. If we as writers have a voice, we might want to use it now. If we do, we stand to benefit right along with Jack.

This is because PR teaches one lesson above all others: People do not want you telling them what to be interested in. No. They want you to tell them more about what interests them already.

So here we have a unique opportunity. Published and unpublished members alike can attract an editor's eye, or a search engine, by writing about state park closures. The fact that California will shut down 70 state parks constitutes a hot topic. Submit an essay on the subject to a newspaper or magazine and you greatly improve your chances of acceptance. At the same time, you get to wax eloquent about the CWC, and you come away with a publishing credit.

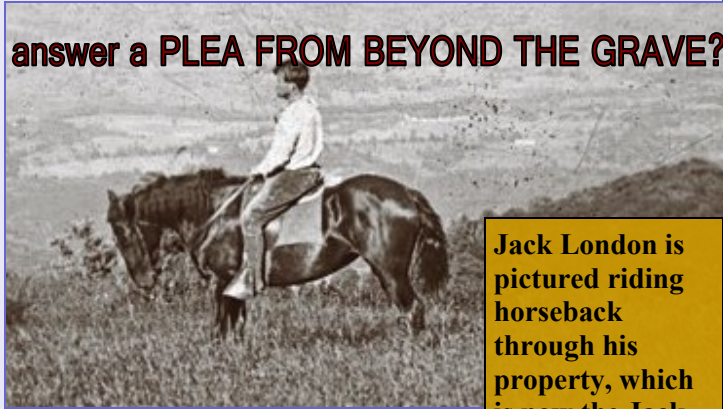
Arguably, we owe Jack London. Consider us one aspect of his legacy. We'd do well to champion the rest of it, including his ranch, cottage and yes, even his gravesite.

For more information, see <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/06/02/fall-of-the-wild/>, <http://jacklondonpark.com/> and http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=712

If you place an article, please let me know.

Good luck and sail on!

- Donna McCrohan Rosenthal, PR chair, pr@calwriters.org



Jack London is pictured riding horseback through his property, which is now the Jack London State Historical Park.

Photo courtesy of the California State Parks

REVIEW AND REFRESH

Capitalization --- When? When Not?

When a word refers to a member of a class larger than itself, the word is not capitalized. These words are usually preceded by an article like *a*, *an*, or *the*, or a possessive pronoun like *my*, *his*, *their*, etc.

my mother (class = *mothers*)
the colonel (class = *colonels*)
his father (class = *fathers*)
her president (class = *presidents*)

The word *President*, referring to the *President of the United States* is always capitalized.

We heard the President's speech.

When a term of address precedes a capitalized name, it's considered part of the name and also capitalized.

Mother Teresa
Colonel Whipple
Father Briggs
President Obama

When the same type of word is used in direct address in place of the proper name, the word is capitalized.

What are your orders, Colonel?
Please sit here, Reverend Parker.

When a relative is described as one of a class of uncles, aunts, mothers, etc., the word is not capitalized.

My favorite uncle is on his way.
Your favorite aunt loves bingo.

When the relative's name is used with the relationship both are capitalized.

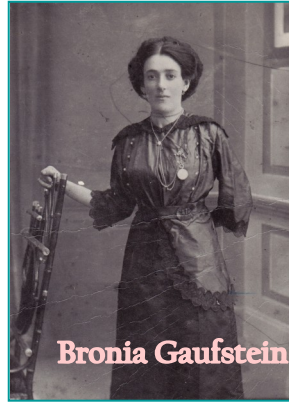
My Uncle Jim sent us an email.
Text Aunt Alita a thank-you note.

- Dave Wetterberg

Swiftly Flowed the Years

After my mother, Becky Schwartz, died in 1963, I retrieved from her things many documents and photographs that painted the dramatic history of our family of which I knew very little before.

My mother and father were born in 1888 in Zhitomir, in the province of Ukraine of Czarist Russia. Zhitomir is about 100-miles west of Kiev, the capital of Ukraine. My mother's



Bronia Gaufstein



Nechemia Schwarzman

maiden name was *Bronia*, or *Brandel*, in Yiddish, Gaufstein. According to family photographs my mother had five sisters and two brothers. Her father, Ephraim Gaufstein, was a glazier by trade.

My father, *Nechemia Schwarzman*, left Zhitomir

before WWI and migrated to the New World. According to the photos he sent my mother, he lived in Buenos Aires, Argentina for a while. Other documents show that my father then traveled to the United States in 1914, where his name was changed to *Samuel Schwartz*. When WWI broke out, my father registered for the draft in Chicago, Illinois. In 1918, he was given a medical discharge and moved to Los Angeles, where he worked for Maler Uniform Cap Company as a uniform cap maker.

During the war years, my mother remained in Zhitomir and lived through the Russian pogroms, then Austrian occupation, and the Bolshevik Revolution. She told

me many stories of how terrible this period was for her. In 1921, she was finally able to leave Russia for the US when my father made out an affidavit for her immigration.

Bronia traveled alone from the Ukraine to Romania, then Germany and Belgium, to board a ship to New York. And finally, she went by train to Los Angeles. After ten years of separation, she was with my father again.

My mother and father lived on Cummings Street in Boyle Heights and on August 15, 1922, I was born. My mother and father bought a small house on Marengo Street, off Evergreen Avenue in Boyle Heights. Our street ended a half block from our house at the city limits. From there a dirt path led to City Terrace and to my grammar school, Harrison Street Elementary School. All of the houses on our block had deep back yards that were used to raise goats, chickens, vegetables and fruit. Most of our neighbors were Jewish and Mexican.

My parents planted many fruit trees, figs, apricots and



Max Schwartz and parents

grape vines. They built a fenced in chicken-coop for a dozen hens and a rooster, and they constructed small hut for two goats. I remember that I was raised on goat's milk, chicken and eggs from our own land.

One neighbor had a stable for a horse and wagon which he used in his junk collec-

tion business. Another neighbor had pigeon coops which he fed for their meat and eggs.

In 1928, my father had to go to a sanitarium for tuberculosis and he never came home again. My mother got a job at the same Maler Uniform Cap Company where she worked for the next 20 years. This enabled her to keep our home.

(Continued on page 7)

Leonardo

I have a beau
a first grade beau
with a jam-smeared face
and seven hundred and forty-five freckles

I have a beau
who never stops
talking or skipping
or jumping about

I have a beau
with green cat's eyes
a Spanish accent
and yellow hair

I have a beau
who brings me bananas
unwrapped sugar cubes
and a single earring for Christmas

I have a beau
who writes backwards
and can't add or subtract
but paints fantastic clowns

I have a beau
who loves me
though I scold him
and insists on holding my hand



- Lillian Rodich

(Continued from page 6)

She frequently wrote to her family in Zhitomir and exchanged photographs. My mother told me many stories of her life in Zhitomir during the war years, but very little of her journey from Zhitomir to the US. I do remember my father although he died when I was very young. During WWII, while I served in Austria, I met two liberated Russian officers and tried to get information about Zhitomir, I was told the town was totally destroyed, and that the surviving families had moved deeper in Russia. I'm still trying to locate any survivors of my family.

- Max Schwartz

Swedish Love Story

When my grandfather Gottfred Wetterberg was twenty-one, he crossed the Atlantic from Sweden to the United States, got a job sweeping up in a factory in Andover, Massachusetts, and saved every penny until he could pay for his sweetheart Augusta's passage to join him. Gottfred and Augusta married soon after the ship docked. Grandpa went back to his janitorial duties at the woolen mill; they raised a family, and lived well into their nineties.



Grandpa spoke English at his job for fifty years and eventually lost much of his Swedish accent. But Grandma stayed home with the kids and spoke Swedish. She tried to speak English to me but I could hardly understand her.

I've seen photos of them when they were young. Grandpa is tall, slim, and mustached. Grandma is also tall, young, and beautiful. They look like leads in an Ingmar Bergman film. But, unfortunately, I remember them as two old people.

Grandpa had had a stroke, and every morning Grandma helped him out of bed, then made the bed again. She helped him dress, got him back on the bed, and he would lie there on his back most of the day. When I visited, I pulled up a chair beside the bed and tried to have conversations with him, talking into his left ear, but he was quite deaf and had trouble keeping up.

Mealtimes he pushed a rocking chair ahead of him to the kitchen, sliding it over the carpet. Coffee time was at four o'clock and often I sat at the kitchen table beside him drinking coffee and eating "Grandma's bread," our anticipated treat.

My dad said that before Grandpa's stroke they loved to take walks together. They always held hands like a couple of sweethearts.

- Dave Wetterberg

A BUCK & TWO BITS

New York airport 1955: I arrived in the United States. All passengers were directed to enter an area of border control and passport identification. Those holding foreign documents were escorted to individual small rooms for interviews.

Once this entry process was finished, I was free to proceed to the exit door. Actually, at that point, I was overwhelmed with the size of the terminal and with the efficiency of administering the arrival of so many people in such an organized way. To some extent I was walking in a daze — more like I was walking on air!

I went through the exit door carrying my one suitcase in one hand, a shoulder bag and coat in my other hand and entered a long walkway teeming with people walking towards me or in front of me. But my eyes were drawn to the shops which lined both sides of the walkway. Then ... I stopped. A certain item in a window caught my eye, and I entered the store.

I could not understand what kind of a shop it was. Back home every store was a specialty, while this store seemed like a mix to me. Was it a pharmacy? Was it a perfumery? Was it a grocery? A cafe? I dared not ask. Instead, I concentrated on the item I saw in the window.

I walked to the counter and in my hesitatingly English asked to buy the item. The clerk did not move but motioned for me to pick it up from a nearby shelf. I followed his instructions, and then walked back to him. I asked him, "How much does it cost?"

He said, "A buck and two bits!"

That answer confused me. What is he talking about? I thought. All I want is to pay and walk out of this funny store.

The clerk noticed my hesitation (and probably realized that in an airport there would be people unfamiliar with the American culture). He motioned to me to show him if I have money. I took out of my bag twenty five dollars — all the money I'd brought from home. He took the five dollar bill, gave me back the change with a receipt and put the item in a small bag. He said, "Thank you."

As I walked out of the store towards the Arrivals area where my relatives waited to greet me, tears of joy welled in my eyes.

Not only was I happy to arrive in the United States to pursue my education, I was also able to make my first independent purchase: Yardley Talc that my mother liked to use. I planned on going to the post office first thing and send it to her, which I did.

Years later I learned that my mother received my gift. She was so moved by my action that she was unable to use the talc. It was a symbol of my love and appreciation for her.

- Marganit Lish

She Loves LA

Before I was an immigrant, I had to become an emigrant. On August 21, 1968, the armies of the Warsaw Pact occupied Czechoslovakia overnight. The "Prague Spring" was over. We were entering a political winter. Our whole extended family, about 25 people, decided to leave our homeland. I was sixteen years old as we boarded the train for neutral Austria — Vienna being our destination. It's a short trip if you count the miles, but I felt like we were going thousands of miles. I was leaving not only my friends but a way of life. My parents and I must have been an interesting sight hauling several suitcases and winter coats for a "four-day trip" that our visa described. Could the soldiers tell we were not coming back? Did they care?

We had numerous interviews at the American Consulate in Vienna to ensure we weren't Communist spies. Then we each had a health exam. And then waiting, waiting, waiting.

In January, 1969 we flew to Los Angeles. What a shock! Not only did we leave on a snowy winter day and arrive to warmth, but the air smelled differently — smog? The food tasted better, the TV had many more channels, and there were cars everywhere. The movie *Moscow on Hudson* comes to mind. I can totally identify with the scene in the supermarket when Robin Williams sees too many choices in coffee.

In a few weeks I became my family's interpreter. I learned other languages easily but English is very complex, even though the grammar is relatively simple. But I may never grasp all the nuances of being an American even though I am now a citizen. My Chicago-born husband sometimes needs to explain things to me.

I still look over my shoulder if somebody asks my political views or my religion. I will never lose my accent, and that's OK. I will continue learning — about English, about America, about baseball, etc. I will always feel just a little bit an outsider.

But this much I know: A "rare steak" doesn't mean it's hard to find!

- Darina Watts

MY LIFE

*By Morris Y. Rubin, from tapes recorded
and transcribed by Sylvia Rubin Molesko*

Eighteen ninety five...the name of the little town was Bogenslav. I was the first born. My sister Jenny was born two and a half years later. Then Bella was born, two and a half or three years later. Then Anna was born, and then Rae. Grandma, Papa's mama, lived with us after Jenny was born.

I had a tanta <aunt>, her name was Simka. For Hanukkah, she gave me a wooden egg that had four eggs inside one another. That was the only toy that I can remember. We used to play with pieces of *sherblachs*, broken dishes or plates.

I could never go to school, they wouldn't allow me to go to school. Russian people did not allow Jewish people to go to school. My Rabbi had a son; he had a book that had pictures in it from Russia. He started teaching me Russian. In six months time I knew Russian. I knew how to read a book good. I also knew how to write good. Because I wanted to know it so much in six months I learned more than somebody else would learn in three, four years. And this is my life in Russia.

When I was thirteen. I was Bar Mitzvah. My father was already in America. He went to America that year, before I was thirteen years old. After my Bar Mitzvah he sent for us, and we came to America.

When we came to America, my mother was so happy about it that she went down on her knees and kissed the ground, that she was in America, not Russia. Russia she did not like. She was a revolutionist.

My father, he was working in the sweatshop, naturally, like everyone else, because that's all there was, the sweatshops. He made a poor living. He was a very good worker. He was an expert in his field, but he still made a poor living, because we were ten people, no...four...five...and my grandmother was six, and my father and mother...was eight.

Well, after being here I went to school till 5B. When I was in 5B they skipped me five classes in one term. I had a teacher by the name of Miss Phillips.



"Violinist"
by Morris Y. Rubin

She was really a jewel. She took me to the Museum of Art and she took me to the Museum of Natural History. She told me that I should go out and sell from door-to-door, because I wanted my working papers, I had to make a living. I was a fellow that liked food very much, and my father and mother couldn't afford to give me what I wanted. So I did get a job for \$2.00

a week. I bought eggs, I used to bring them up to my Aunt Anna, and I bought a jar of jam, and she used to make me eggs, and I used to put jam on the bread, and eggs, and that was a picnic for me. That's all that money carried me. I didn't have any more. I couldn't give my mother much of it.

Finally I started getting a different job, and my sister Tillie was born. When she was born, I was already working a little bit, so, at the time of Jenny and Anna I had no opportunity to buy any kind of toys, but Rae, I already did buy some toys. I remember buying her a little carriage, and a doll in it, just little things, whatever I could afford. When Tillie was born, I was already getting more money. I was already working on a different trade. I was making \$18.00 a week. So, for Tillie I used to buy more than what I did for them. I bought her a doll which she liked very much, and a carriage, and so on, and so forth.

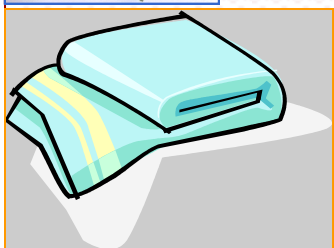
Then, my brother was born. My brother Sam. He had all the opportunities. When I was in 5B, I had to take out my working papers. My sister Anna, she wanted to be a bookkeeper. So it was already easier, they used to work with mamma, help mamma take out work, so she could afford to send them to school. So Anna went to school and she became a bookkeeper. Rae became a bookkeeper. Bella had to work in a shop, and Jenny also had to work in a shop, the same as everybody else.

- story provided by Sylvia Rubin Molesko



The Shvitz with Buba

- Leslie Kaplan



I'm six years old and we have moved in with Buba, which is what I call

my Grandma, because Daddy died and Mommy has to find a job

My Buba is what grandmas look like. She has white hair, pulled back in a little bagel bun, and wears cotton house dresses with flowers on them. Her black lace-up shoes are clunky. She goes shopping on York Street for fresh food every single day. York Street has a bakery, a butter and egg store, Stein, the kosher butcher, a deli, and a bunch of other little stores.

They all know my Buba whom they call Mrs. Lemberg. She always carries her own shopping bag and has a special twinkle in her eye. Buba speaks mostly Yiddish and Russian, with a few broken English words thrown in. Her job is to shop on York Street every day, to cook supper, and to take care of me and my brother while Mommy works. We always have milk and cake after school. Buba sees to it.

I'm in the kitchen watching her. She's making something. "Umm, Buba, what smells so good?" She says, "Eech mahch kukletten," which I know means, "I'm making hamburgers." I watch her mix bread and meat with eggs, onion and lots of garlic in a big wooden bowl. With her hands, she shapes fat patties and fries them in a black iron pan.

She packs some of them up in her shopping bag with a jar of her sweet and sour cabbage and beet borscht and says, "Meer gayen in Shvitz." I say, "Shvitz?" I'm not sure what she means, but it sounds like a picnic, since we are taking the food with us.

Well, we walk a lot of blocks away from our house 'til we get to a building which Buba calls the Shvitz. Inside, I see different white tile rooms filled with naked ladies. It feels very hot and steamy to

me. Buba puts our food in a locker and we get undressed. Now we are naked too.

I see all different shapes of naked ladies. Some have breasts that are very long and almost reach their bellies. Others have bellies that are very round and cover their thighs. Some are very skinny and don't even look like ladies.

"Buba," I say, "Why is your belly so big and round?" She smiles, looks down at her belly and says "Because boobelleh, I had seven kinder and they all grew in here," pointing and patting her belly with a kind of affectionate look on her face.

As I look at all the different sizes, shapes, veins and scars, I wonder if I will look like that when I am old. Nobody seems shy or embarrassed, except me. I don't have any breasts and I don't have a round belly or hair on my body.

In one of the tile rooms there are wooden benches and it is so hot! It is called the dry steam room. Some ladies are hitting each other with short brooms made of long leaves. They make sounds like, "Ahh, Ooh,...Oiy!" I can't tell if they feel good or bad.

Another room has long tables and benches. We get the food from the locker and sit down to eat. "Umm, Buba, these kukletten are so good!" I love the taste of garlic. We wash them down with the borscht, and then Buba says, "We go take ah rest now." This room has a bunch of cots and is darker than the other rooms.

My Buba speaks with some of the ladies in Yiddish. I hear her say, "You should hear my granddaughter sing Russian and Yiddish songs and dance ah *kuzachkeh*." So naturally, the ladies say, "All right already... so sing ah song."

I get up from the cot with a towel wrapped around my waist and begin to sing a Russian song my mommy taught me. They all clap their hands and Buba looks very proud, and I think that Shvitz is fun.

Besides making good kukletten, my Buba is also a fortune teller. So when we come home, I sit at the foot of her bed and watch her deal out the cards. She says, "I see ah Qveen of Hartz. She is singink and dencink, and she got her start in di Shvitz!"

Hudson + 3 = Love

- Yolanda Fintor

“Welcome to my world, Hudson,” I whispered to my two-day old grandson, as my daughter handed him into my waiting arms.

I drank in those sweet little rosebud lips, wispy eyelashes, wavy hair. Perfect in every way.

Grandma at last!

I thought of my own grandmother and wondered if she felt the same kind of joy I felt at



that moment. Did she greet me as eagerly with open arms or was I just another mouth to feed during those dismal depression years when extended families lived under the same roof out of necessity?



As I held this precious child whose existence was so carefully planned, I looked around the room. I saw not a traditional family of mother, father and child, but one that consisted of two mothers, a father and a child. My daughter is gay with lots of heart but no

uterus. Her partner had the uterus, but a third factor was missing for the creation of a miracle. The possessor of the missing factor was a long-time friend of both women who also had a great desire to be a parent. After much discussion, the three decided they could become a family and make it work.

The long process of insemination began, followed by nine months of pregnancy and all that it entails. Because this was to be a home birth, there were many consultations with the midwife. The prospective father was fully involved until finally a healthy boy, weighing 8 pounds, 6 ounces made his appearance: Hudson, my first grandchild.

Seeing the three parents and three sets of grandparents hovering over this precious child, I thought how lucky he is to have so much love surrounding him.

I wonder what my stern and very traditional grandmother would have said about such an arrangement.

On second thought, it really doesn't matter what others might say or think. What really matters is what's in my heart and in the world of a newly-formed family.





Armenouhie

By **Bill LaFond**

Armenouhie stood at the railing with Mama. Papa had turned to talk with the man next to him, but nobody was talking now. The city of Poti, Georgia, loomed in the fog.

She should have been excited, but she just wanted the trip to be over. She ached for Alexandria. The sun would be rising in Egypt too, only it would be glorious and bright, not struggling against clouds, gloom and smoke like here.

Armenouhie hadn't liked the ship from the first moment. It smelled of oil and burnt electricity, and below decks it smelled of crowded humanity and poor sanitation.

Papa said they were lucky to find such a good ship. Many returnees traveled on worse ships, on longer journeys. Many people were returning to Armenia from the shattered cities of Europe.

To Armenouhie, it all felt unreal. Her first memory was Papa railing against Stalin and his thugs. They'd given Mount Ararat to the Turks — unspeakable! — and deported Armenians to Siberia and Kazakhstan.

But recently, Papa started blaming Armenia's tragedies on the two world wars on the Turks, and then on Lenin, and the Bolsheviks. He said politics change, and talked of how Stalin was trying to reclaim Kars, and Ari, and most of all, Mount Ararat.

"Mama," Armenouhie spoke softly and wrapped her arm around the older woman's waist, "is Stalin not the monster Papa always said? And what of these Georgians? Are they going to attack us? Stalin is Georgian."

Mama replied swiftly, "You must never

speak of Stalin in public, not anymore, not here."

The ship bumped and shuddered as it came to rest against the long pier. Ropes and cables snaked from the ship as people ashore shouted to people on the ship. Mama looked down at the crowd.

"These Georgians? My God, they must be very friendly indeed. Look, they welcome us by throwing bread upon the water!"

Armenouhie watched the Georgians shout and wave, and throw bread.

"It must be very easy to live here, if the people can throw food in this manner."

Mama didn't reply, but her expression brought back Armenouhie's anxiety.

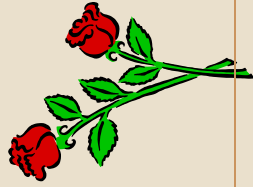
After picking up their few bags from the tiny cabin they shared with another family, they made their way down the gangway. A babble of voices and languages assaulted them as they descended, and people jostled and bumped them as they headed into the customs building.

The strident voices felt like blows to Armenouhie. She tried to shut them out. Finally, a man speaking Armenian made himself heard, "What's the matter with you people? We warned you not to get off the ship. Couldn't you see us throwing bread into the water? Didn't you see the bread sink? There's not enough wheat — the Soviets mix in cement dust. There's nothing to eat here."

Bill LaFond lives in the Washington, D.C. area with his wife, who doubles as his muse, and his St. Bernard, Mango. He has worked as a linguist, editor, and soldier. His interests include writing, language, the Middle East and Native Americans.

Eds. Note: Bill and I are members of the Internet Writers Workshop. Dave Wetterberg joined this year. For more info on this helpful free online organization: www.internetwritingworkshop.org

Maria's Rite of Passage



The examiner picked up his clipboard and walked slowly toward Maria's car. As she watched him approach, her hands gripped the steering wheel so tightly that her wedding ring pressed painfully into her finger. Then she tried to slow her breathing and calm down. She had to feel confident that this time she'd pass the California driving test.

She'd promised Edmundo that she'd try again. She remembered what he'd said before heading for the waiting room ten minutes ago.

"Tell yourself it's just a game and you know all the rules. Madre de Dios, Maria, you've gone through this test twice already. We've practiced so many times! You need a driver's license cause who else is gonna drive our kids to school this year. Correct?"

True, but ... her spirit was willing but her nerves were weak. She wiped her sweaty palms on her skirt and gripped the steering wheel again. Past mistakes flashed through her mind: the missed stop sign, the late freeway signaling, the botched parallel park maneuver ...

Fight the fear, Maria, she thought. Remember what my sister Lydia told me this morning:

"Maria, pretend the examiner is Father Sanchez sitting down for a chat. That's what helped me pass the second time."

That advice helped for about five seconds, and then Maria remembered that Father Sanchez was her confessor who judged her sins.

She reached over to lightly touch the statue of the Virgin Mary affixed to the dashboard.

Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe, help me get through the next half-hour and I will buy roses for your shrine in St. Joseph's Church. Oh no, he's opening the door. Look confident, Maria. Smile. The Virgin gives you courage.

The examiner slid into the passenger seat, buckled the seat belt and readied his clipboard.

He peered at her through his dark sunglasses.

"Well, hello again, Mrs. Gomez. Welcome back. Please start the car and proceed to the exit sign. You'll probably pass this time. Three times the charm, right?"

"Si, Father Sa - , er...yes sir."

THE NEXT DAY

Edmundo handed Maria the car keys. "Now you can drive me to work and have the car all to yourself. I'll ride home with Walter."

"Are you sure? Won't you worry?"

"I'll worry, sure. But I don't wanna be a crazy husband — and run errands when I want to watch football. Go ahead, sweetie. You passed the test. The State of California says you're a driver."

Maria took the keys and gingerly got in the driver's seat. Edmundo climbed in on the passenger side.

"We're like our American friends now, sweetheart," he said. "I don't have to take the kids to school, and then drive to work. Walter says we'll car pool and split the gas bill. Win-win situation." He fastened his seat belt and grinned at her.

Maria started the car and looked over at the Mary figurine on the dashboard. "Our Lady helped me pass the test. I'm going to thank her."

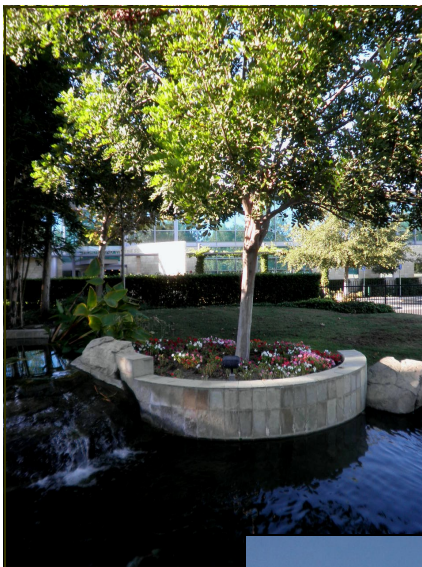
"How? Too late to become a nun, Senora Gomez!" He chuckled.

"Oh, you're funny, Edmundo. I'm gonna pick beautiful roses for Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe. There're plenty roses in my mother's garden. I'll drive there today."

"Fine. Thank the Virgin. But she didn't teach you. I did. What's my reward?" He reached over and gave her thigh a quick squeeze. Maria smiled and drove slowly toward the freeway onramp.

"A reward, let's see." said Maria. "Maybe I'll go to the grocery store and buy skirt steak for dinner. And go find something sexy in my size at *Victoria's Secret*. That kind of reward?"

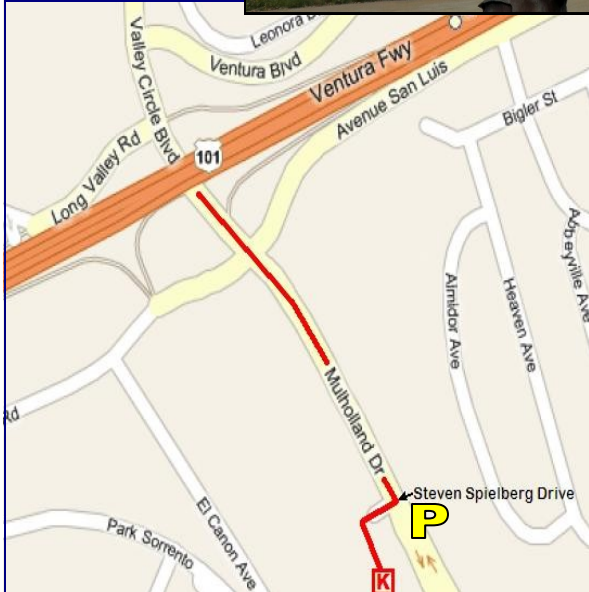
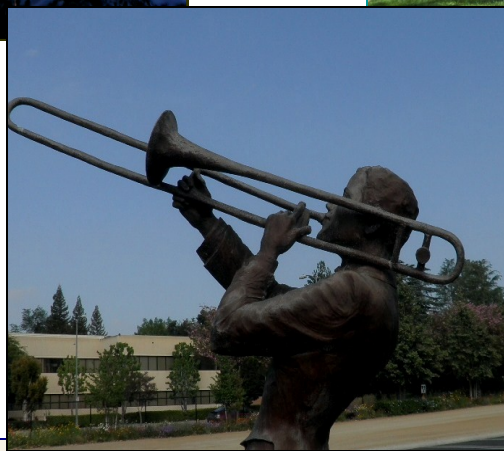
"Absolutely. Think I'm really gonna love my new American-style wife." - Kathy Highcove



*Please
join
us
in the*



Katzenberg Room



Free parking is available in a nearby lot behind the Katzenberg Room. Look for the trombone statue — he welcomes you to the CWC/SFV meeting's parking lot.

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 Nov. 5th, 2011, at 1:00 p.m.

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