



The Valley Scribe

Newsletter of the San Fernando Valley

VOLUME 4 ISSUE 4

DECEMBER 2011

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Blog Builder Bill Belew



© Benjamin Belew

Our December speaker, Bill Belew, is a self-described pro-

blogger (a professional blogger) and he believes that maintaining a blog is the most efficient way to sell a product, skill, or service. He certainly practices what he endorses; type his name into any major search engine, and watch multiple sites flower on-screen.

Belew has cannily crafted ten topics into his main blog that attracts Net surfers who're hoping to improve their own blogs, websites, and social networking skills.

In addition to his blog craft, Belew

speaks at writer conferences all over the global map and visits meetings at CWC state branches.

This prolific blogging entrepreneur, has much expertise to share with our SFV/CWC members. His speech on December 3rd in the Katzenberg Room will cover:

1. Four reasons why a blog is today's social media platform of choice.
2. Four of the biggest obstacles that may stymie a new blogger.
3. Four key ingredients to attract significant traffic to a blog/web site.
4. Four follow-up steps to build one's writing platform.

To learn more about Belew's writing background and *raison d'être*, check out: <http://billbelew.com/speaking/>

- Kathy Highcove

west valley whimsicals

A Schwartz / Highcove Production



The Santa Situation

Ever witnessed an interesting scene that gave you an idea for a story? For instance, let's pretend you saw a little boy pull the beard off Macy's Santa Claus. How would you tell that story? A writer has several choices.

Maybe you'd be a reporter: **Joey Smith pulled off Santa's beard, and his mom yelled at him.** Perhaps you'd

(Continued on page 2)



Executive Board

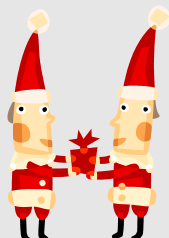
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(Whimsicals continued from page 1)

also interview the mother: "Joey told me, 'That's not Santa! I'll show you!' And he did!"

Or — you could tell the story through a character: **Santa thought the next kid looked like trouble. And sure enough, the little brat made a grab for his beard. "Stop it, or else!" Santa hissed.**

Another choice — The Santa scene might inspire a totally fictional tale, such as: **Back in the North Pole a warning light flashed on the Xmas Internet Screen. "Uh, oh," said Jingle, "I see that Joey Smith has been naughty again at Macy's Department store."**

Your story's style would depend on where it's published. A journalist writes for a news source. Non-fiction writers compose memoirs or history pieces. A fiction writer writes for fantasy fans — or him or herself. What's your style? Once in a while, try on a different "look" and enrich your writing skills.

President's Message For December, 2011

Several members have asked about bringing their books for sale to the December meeting. We indeed want authors to have the opportunity to do this, just not at the next meeting. The board feels that authors who have books to showcase deserve to have a full meeting devoted to this activity. Given time to come to the podium to describe their work or read excerpts provides authors practice to hone their marketing and promoting skills, skills they will need at any book signing event.



We will not have time in December to do this because a full program has been planned beginning with a visual demonstration by Ray Malus on how easy it is to log on to our online membership directory. Our featured speaker, Bill Belew, will tell you *why* you should blog, show you *how* to blog and explain how *using* your blog is an effective platform to get the word out on that book you wrote or are writing now.

The month of February has been chosen to feature our talented writers. There will be no speaker. The stars will be authors of books written by our own members. We thought **Book Bazaar** to be a fitting name and will make a gala affair. Remember, books make excellent **Valentine's Day** gifts.

In the **January Scribe**, we will remind you to notify one of the board members if you plan to bring your book so we know how many tables to set up. And also email Editor Kathy Highcove so she can publish your info in the **February Valley Scribe**.

A writing contest is on the horizon and will culminate in February when winners will be announced. More on this later.

Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah to all who celebrate these holidays. May you enjoy this and all seasons in good health.

- Yolanda Fintor



New Venue for Old Recipes



Yolanda Fintor's publisher included her book, **Hungarian Cookbook, Old World Recipes For New World Cooks**, in a special promotion for Kindle cookbook editions. Her book is up for sale on Amazon.com Kindle owners can sample Yolanda's cookbook with Kindle's Preview feature.

Dream Along With Nan Hunt

"My dreams have taught me so much about my psyche," said our November speaker Nan Hunt, a firm believer in the Jungian mode of self-discovery through dreams. She advised our SFV writers to make unconscious material conscious by keeping a journal of our dreams



Nan Hunt

train again and who knows why?" wouldn't satisfy the Jungian devotee. Nan emphasized that a dream needs more than superficial musing. She asserted that dream reflection is "wisdom building" that may lead to better understanding of oneself and the complexities of human nature.

"A dream must be understood and brought to a realization," she told us.

"Meditation on our dreams can be a powerful catalyst to write from one's soul, from deep within the psyche."

Recording the dream is an initial step, according to this acclaimed lecturer and author. Nan believes that "intensive journal writing" leads a writer to focus on and record specific events that were deeply felt and influenced later life choices. A journal allows the writer to move back and forth in time while gathering and inserting recollections that might be used in a memoir. She reminded us that a memoir is not expected to be accurate in all details. "A memoir is one person's interpretation of truth," Nan told us. "It's approximate truth, poetic truth."

Of course, a layman needs professional input and research sources before embarking on dream interpretation. Nan recommended two books: *Cerlot's Dictionary of Symbols*, which helps interpret dreams, and *Writers Dreaming* by Naomi Epel.

She shared poems her own book, *The Wrong Bride*, choosing verses that expressed the poetic truths she realized and recorded after dream exploration.

In conclusion, Nan Hunt challenged our members to record our own poetic truths with an emphasis on visual imagery and lyrical language.

A once-over-lightly, "I dreamed about missing a

coauthored by Y. Fintor and K. Highcove

CWC'SFV Member Gagik Makes the Cut



**GUILTY
UNTIL PROVEN
INNOCENT**

Antioxidants,
Foods,
Supplements,
and
Cosmetics

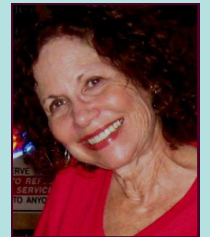
Gagik Melikyan

On November 11th, SFV member Gagik Melikyan's book — *Guilty Until Proven Innocent: Antioxidants, Foods, Supplements, and Cosmetics*, — was named a finalist in the science category of The USA "Best Books 2011" Awards, sponsored by USA Book News.

For the full list of the winners go to <http://www.usabooknews.com/bestbooks2012awards/bestbooks2011results.html>

Click on Gagik's website www.csun.edu/gmelikyan for more info on his informative book about food choices, popular supplements and cosmetics. - K.H.

More from Stephanie Sharf



In the last few months, I've gone from a freebie poster on two sites (www.simply-showbiz.com and www.dirt.com) to a paid contributor. I've appreciated your advice, support, kudos, etc. despite some of my writing (particularly on Dirt.com) not being what you quite expected of the "Steph" you know — edgier, more sarcastic, raunchier, but biting funny ... I hope. Check out my contributor page on Dirt if you want to catch up (at bottom of first page, click on Meet our Contributors, then click on my name on next screen -- my pic and bio are there too.

- **Steph Sharf**

MARKET TO MARKET



by Ken Watts



Kimberley Cameron & Associates currently handles: nonfiction books 50%; fiction books 50%. 30% of her clients are new/unpublished writers. Nonfiction: biography, current affairs, foods, humor, language, memoirs, popular culture, science, true crime, women's issues, women's

studies. Fiction: adventure contemporary issues, ethnic, family saga, historical, horror, mainstream, mystery, thriller, women's. See website for submission guidelines. Query via e-mail. Agents receives 15% on domestic sales; 10% on film sales. Offers written contract, binding for 1 year. They suggest that authors consult their submission guidelines and send a polite, well-written query to their e-mail address. Contact: Kimberley Cameron. Address: 1550 Tiburon Blvd., #704, Tiburon CA 94920. Fax: (415)789-9177. E-mail: info@kimberleycameron.com Website: www.kimberleycameron.com.

THE SCBWI WORK-IN-PROGRESS GRANTS ARE AVAILABLE TO BOTH FULL AND ASSOCIATE MEMBERS OF SCBWI — SOCIETY OF CHILDREN'S BOOK WRITERS & ILLUSTRATORS. The SCBWI Grants assist children's book writers in the completion of a specific project. There are four categories: (1) General Work-In-Progress Grant. (2) Grant for a Contemporary Novel for Young People. (3) Nonfiction Research Grant. (4) Grant for a Work Whose Author Has Never Had a Book Published. Completed applications accepted February 1 – April 1 of each year. In any year, an applicant may apply for any of the grants except the grant awarded for a work whose author has never had a book published. Five grants of \$1,500 will be awarded annually. Runner-up grants of \$500 (one in each category) will also be awarded. Address: 8271 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles CA 90048. Website: www.scbwi.org

Betsy Amster Literary Enterprises is looking for nonfiction books and novels; fiction in ethnic, literary, women's, high quality. Responds in 1 month to queries. Responds in 2 months to mss. Offers written contract, binding for 1 year, 3-month notice must be given to terminate contract. Agent receives 15% on domestic sales, 20% on foreign sales. Contact: Betsy Amster. Address: 6312 SW Capital Hwy #503, Portland OR 97239. Website: www.amsterlit.com

Ms. Magazine is a quarterly magazine on women's issues and news. They need international and national women's news, investigative reporting, personal narratives, prize-winning journalists and feminist thinkers. Address: 433 S. Beverly Dr., Beverly Hills CA 90212. Fax: (310)556-2514. E-mail: mkort@msmagazine.com Website: www.msmagazine.com.

Something to Ponder: *Self-confidence is the first requisite to great undertakings.*

– Samuel Johnson

Red Hats And Green Dragons



Nance Crawford

David & I went to Tehachapi to see the final performance of the *Playwright's Festival at the Tehachapi Community Theatre* on November 6th. My one-act play, *How To*

Make A Red Hat, was a winner and actually opened the evening. It was received very well — the whole experience was delightful and I met a bunch of really nice folks who appear to be interested in other pieces I have written, so ... who knows?

My *Dragon Solstice*, a new American fable for the holiday season, until now available only on Kindle, will be available in print from Amazon starting on December 1st.

- Nance Crawford

Karen's Kaleidoscope of Online Courses

Ventura College Community Education offers online courses for



Karen Gorbach

people unable to commute to our campus and attend a class in person.

For more info click on <http://www.communityed.venturacollege.edu/> and check out the hundreds of online courses accessible 24/7 from the convenience of your home. Please take a look.

- Karen Gorbach Ph. D.
Assistant Dean, Adult Education
And CWC/SFV member

The Comma --- Part One

Note: Let's get it straight. There is no rule that says you insert a comma somewhere within a sentence because of some vague notion that a comma belongs there. And there is no rule that says you insert a comma because you can feel a “hesitation” in the sentence. And there is no rule that says that when you're in doubt, plug a comma in “just to play it safe.” (On the contrary, whenever you're in doubt, leave the comma out. You'll be right more times than you're wrong. I guarantee it.)

The Comma with Items in a Series Something New ... NOT!

Put a comma before each item in a series when the series has more than two items.

The only dissenters of the plan were Bill Murphy, Al Newman, and Mark Kitahara.

Some would say that this rule has changed and leave off the comma after Newman.

The only dissenters were Bill Murphy, Al Newman and Mark Kitahara.

This change in the serial comma is a recent phenomenon and seems to be found in newspaper articles. A publication often needs a bit more font space and so the last comma has been deleted in recent time.

The Comma and the Appositive

An appositive is a word or a word group placed after a noun that identifies or supplements the noun. Commas are necessary to set off an appositive. (“Set off” means one before and one after.)

I haven't seen Tillie and Barbara, two of my closest college chums, since 1977.

In some cases commas are not necessary when the proper name comes first and the appositive shows a close relationship.

My brother Bob and my sister Sue are in the Air Force.

A reverse order would call for commas, however.

Bob, my brother, and Sue, my sister, are in the Air Force.

The Comma in the Compound Sentence

The conjunctions *and*, *but*, *or*, *for*, *nor*, *so*, and *yet* are the only words that can join sentences together correctly. When they do, a comma before the conjunction is necessary.

The car raced off after the shooting, but a bystander got the license number.

If the compound sentence is a short one, the comma may be left out.

The dog barked and Melissa screamed.

Sometimes the pronoun *it* is confused with a conjunction and is used incorrectly as a conjunction.

He looked down at the map, it was drenched. (incorrect)

The following are examples of the pronoun *it* used correctly in the same situation:

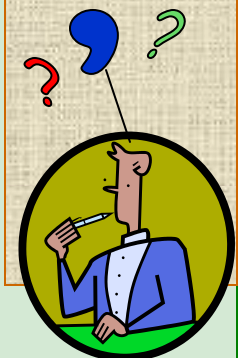
He looked down at the map, but it was drenched.

He looked down at the map. It was drenched.

He looked down at the map; it was drenched.

*I have spent
most of the
day putting in
a comma and
the rest of
the day taking
it out.*

- Oscar Wilde



The Mickey Mouse Watch

We are in the dining room having breakfast. I want the clock to run faster so I can rush to Beth's house party to celebrate the New Year. I am pushing my food around my plate trying to stop Mom from saying, "There are a lot of starving children in the world." She says it every time we are eating breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

I don't care about the starving children of the world today; all I care is about Beth's party. Yesterday she announced for the whole class to come and that meant me too. I think my sister Norma wants to go but she wasn't invited. Mom is so strict about etiquette.

"Mom, Beth gets lots of gifts every year and in between. In school she announced that she would be wearing her new green organza dress. Everything she wears is so beautiful."

I close my eyes just thinking of the rustle and bustle. I think those materials do some sort of noises, like soft clapping.

"A monkey even if dressed in silk is a monkey still," my brother Salem says. He doesn't like Beth and I don't think I like her either. "The best thing you can do is not go, especially to see her dress and whatever else she gets for New Year's. That would really piss her off," he continues.

"Shah, children," Mom says, interrupting him. "Anyone would think you are green with envy."

"May I?" I say, getting up.

I bet they think I am going to the la-di-da powdered room with the bidet for you know what — but I really want to see if my face is green with envy, even though I haven't seen her green organza dress yet.



Whatever that material is ... I don't know.

I'll ask Papa when he comes home for lunch. He knows everything, especially materials. Mom says Dad is now an importer; he now imports Guipure lace from France and bolts of Marzotto wool from Italy. HE would know what organza is.

"What are you doing in there so long? Norma is waiting outside the door," my brother yells.

"Nothing. I was just ... " He doesn't let me finish.

I go to the party carefully holding a small wrapped gift Mama bought for me to take. The front of her house is extra wide from side to side. The main door (I think it's called a portico) is very large and painted white with sharp metal spikes going way up just in case crooks dare try to get in. You have to strain your neck to see how far up they go. Bashfully I open the front door and enter quietly hoping to control my blushing face. I run my hands down my favorite flowered blue dress trying to smooth the wrinkles out. It has a pretty white lace collar.

I see a long table full of gigantic wrapped Christmas gifts. Shyly, I sneak my gift into the back, taking away the home-made card and hiding it in my pocket ... I don't know what is in the small box. I only remember Mom saying:

"It's not the size of the box that counts, but what's inside."

Everybody at Beth's house ignores me as if I wasn't even there. All the girls giggle covering their mouths with their hands ... and only then do I realize that I haven't been invited!

I quietly edge my anemic body behind the long table set near a long wall holding a mountain of big colorful gift boxes. I take back the small gift realizing that it couldn't compete with the other large boxes all wrapped in green. Are the boxes wrapped in gorgeous green "taffeta" paper?

Beth is showing everyone her new patek-Phillippe watch which looks just as beautiful as the ones advertised in "borrowed" magazines left at the dentist.

(Continued on page 7)

Nobody notices when I leave, my feet softly cushioned by the whitest thick carpets I have ever seen. I run all the way home, falling several times and injuring my knees in the same old spots where previous scabs have not yet healed. Holding back my hurt and my tears I get home, push our living room door open. Everyone looks at me, surprised to see me back so early.

"What a house," I say taking a big breath. I describe Beth's palace-like house. The butler dressed like a penguin, the furniture edged with liquid gold ... and Beth walking around shaking her arm showing the gorgeous watch, a gift from her parents.

"What's a patek-Philippe Genève watch?" I ask my brother who always knows everything — even when he really doesn't. He invents things.

"You ignoramus," he says, giving me his know-it-all look.

"It's almost THE MOST expensive watch in the whole world," he tells me.

"I hope she loses it," I say, spitting on my two forefingers to make my wish come true. Mom says that spitting like that is an old tradition which always makes your dreams come true.

"For your New Year's gift next year, I'll get you a Mickey Mouse watch," Mama promises. I can't wait. I bet Beth's face will turn green with envy when she sees it.

"You see, Norma?" I tell my sister. "You didn't miss anything ... the party was very boring. There was nothing great to see. And I wasn't even invited."

She smiles as she walks away.

"Wait," I say. "Let me tell you ... I never even found out about the green taffeta material. Maybe Dad has some leftover scraps of Swiss green organza material when he imported things from Europe. Maybe we could make some small dresses for your doll Diana and my Sonia doll."

Holding hands, we open the small French doors and walk into our toy room where everything we pretend ... really happens.

- **Keyle Birnberg-Goldstein**



Hail To The Solstice

Beware of public pageantry
For winter holidays;
Some folks may take offense at such
Sectarian displays.
We don't dare sing of Hanukah
Or spread good cheer for Christmas;
The only thing that's safe these days
To celebrate: the solstice!

Banish now those long dark hours,
Night-time's on the wane.
Hail the sooner-lightening sky,
Daylight's on the gain.
Proclaim the news, the year is up,
It's time for a renewal,
As Merry Old Sol wins again
The age-old annual duel.

Oh, winter solstice,
Day of anticipation.
Oh, winter solstice,
We greet you with elation!



- Erica Stux



GIFTS FROM NATURE

My husband Lance and I took a bus tour in Costa Rica recently. The tour included the steaming Poás Volcano, hiking the rainforests, visits to coffee, pineapple, and banana plantations, a butterfly garden, traversing hanging bridges, and canal cruises.

My favorite days of the trip took place in Tortuguero Park. The rustic rooms had no TV, no air conditioning, and no telephones. Tropical flower gardens at our Laguna Lodge were home to iguanas, sloths, and many insects. We ate our meals in a huge open-air dining room. We certainly did not feel like we were “roughing it.”

At Tortuguero Park, we witnessed the amazing green turtle life cycle. We had signed up for a 10:00 p.m. tour. Participants on the tour wore dark clothing. No cameras or flashlights were allowed on the beach so as not to disturb the giant turtle.

This special program is run by volunteers called “Turtle Spotters.”

Rather than having visitors walking the beach at night, specially- trained Turtle Spotters search for nesting females, while certified guides wait with the tour group in designated areas. When a Spotter spies a turtle leaving the ocean, the location is communicated to the guides via cell phone. They then bring visitors directly to that area.

From a distance we watched the female turtle crawl out of the ocean onto the dark moonlit beach and drag her heavy four-foot body above the high-tide line to build a nest. Using her large paddle-like flippers, she dug a hole and began dropping her ping-pong-ball-sized eggs into the cavity. At this time, we were allowed to approach the turtle from behind in small groups of ten to witness the event. The female seemed to be in a trance during the egg-laying. After depositing about a hundred eggs, (about a two-hour process) she would cover them with sand and trudge slowly back to the sea.

On an early (5:30 a.m.) tour, we witnessed hatchlings emerging (after about two months incubation) from their nest. Guides who could “feel” sand vibrations led our group to a nest bursting with tiny green turtles and their quick ten-minute journey from nest to ocean. About a hundred cookie-sized turtles had broken through their buried eggs (twelve to eighteen inches down), and climbed on top of each other to follow their instinct to get to the ocean before crabs or shore birds get to them. The excitement of this event is a true gift from nature!

- Judith Janda Presnall

ANDY ROONEY: GREATLY MISSED

Ever wonder why Andy Rooney's short segment on **60 MINUTES** was so popular with the American public? Because he "let off steam" with subjects we all can relate to. If he chastised a soup company for charging *more* for a product that had *less* sodium and fat in it, we'd stand up and cheer! "Sock it to 'em, Andy!" We miss that kind of honesty in writing.

Andy's observations and complaints served as an effective therapy for his frustrations. Fine for Rooney, but the rest of us do not have a TV Network to serve as our soapbox in venting our irritations. Personally I find putting one's frustrations in poetry form can help. For instance, when I'm walking back to the parking lot and the loops of those dreadful plastic bags are about to sever my fingers, I'm inspired to say:

At the checkout stand I go spastic
Upon finding my food bagged in plastic.
Only two cans of soup
Will cause them to droop.
Give me paper! It's not so elastic.

Some relief perhaps, but at home and trying to reach my cable company, I am compelled to compose:

"Press one, press two, press number three."
This new voice mail is not for me.
My fingers are all sore from punching keys
Still the robot's voice will question and tease.
I begin to fret, grumble and groan,
"Why can't a human answer the phone?"
A simple answer is all that I need,
The rate I'm going I'll have gone to seed.
When put on hold I begin to slumber
Only to find I've dialed the wrong number.

I know you seldom used poetry in your Sunday night chats in "getting it off your chest," but in my case it works. Thanks, Andy. You'll be missed.

- Ken Wilkins

VALLEY COMMUTE

(Sung to the tune of:
We Three Kings Of Orient Are)



We the Valley residents are.
City-bound we travel too far,
Street and freeway, morn 'til mid-day
Following every car.

O, Mister Mayor, listen on
Cause this tie-up to be gone.
Build a railway, head it our way.
Get us home before the dawn.

- Ken Wilkins

Wrapping Packages



Wrapping packages for presents or mail.
no matter the practice I always fail
to get it straight, to tuck the ends,
to choose them so the paper blends
with colors of ribbons
which are never the right length,
to string and tape that have no strength.
The scissors won't cut, the tape twists,
becomes hung up on my hands and wrists.
Now where are those scissors?
They were right here.
I don't know how they could disappear.
The wrapping's too short, too narrow, too worn.
The corner's split, now the sides are torn.
Finally, I finished! My heart feels light.
Then the label wrinkles, my pen won't write.
While shopping next Christmas,
I'll pass lighted trees,
go up to the counter and say,
"Gift wrap, please."

- Lenora Smalley

Gift Wrapping



Each Christmas as my family opens gifts, I mentally compare today's gift opening ritual with that of my childhood and teen years.

Today we tear the ribbon and wrapping off the packages and casually toss it aside for the recycling bin. The scene was quite different in the frugal Depression days and the years of WWII shortages.

Even as children we sisters painstakingly untied the knotted ribbons and carefully pried off the colorful seals in an effort to minimize damage to the paper which would be trimmed and reused on smaller and smaller packages each succeeding year.

One of the advantages of this time-consuming procedure was that it prolonged the delicious sense of suspense as we tried to guess the contents of each package while removing the wrapping. It also served to stretch the opening of relatively few gifts over a longer period of time, giving the illusion of a more bountiful Christmas.

Today as I waded through the jumble of torn paper, stick-on ribbons and gift boxes that litter the floor after a gift-opening orgy, I remember how carefully we smoothed and folded the used wrappings and ribbons then carried them up to the attic in the old days.

The next holiday season, they were brought downstairs to dress up our gifts again -- along with one or two newly bought designs to replace the ones that were no longer usable. A certain amount of ingenuity was required to make second and third hand gift wrap look new. We often resorted to ironing the paper as well as the ribbon. Much thought and experimentation with ribbon and cut-out Christmas motifs went into disguising damaged areas.

In our fussy pre-teen and teen years, we sisters took great pains to wrap each gift uniquely. Many featured cut-out designs and scenes backed with scraps of red or green cellophane, gold or silver paper too small to be used for anything else. We spent hours making bows and devising new ways to wrap ribbon around our gifts. The challenge was to make the gifts beautiful. The beauty of the wrapping was as important to us as the gift we gave.

Although I look back with nostalgia to those elaborate gift wrap creations, today I have other challenges and welcome the convenience of stick-on bows and brand new paper which enable me to create beautifully wrapped gifts in a minimum of time.

However, I do make one concession to the old days. In gathering up the trashed wrappings, I salvage those ready-made stick-on bows and re-use them year after year after year.

- Mary H. Shaffer



*For the will and not the gift
makes the giver.*

~Ephraim Gotthold Lessing

The Gift of Friendship

“Come on, Goldie. I made these sweet and sour meatballs just for you. I stayed up last night and cooked the sauce. Remember it was your recipe, but I added just a little more lemon juice.”

Goldie’s eyelids flutter open. Her opaque stare sweeps the ceiling and finally focuses on Theresa’s familiar face. “Oh!” Her eyes glaze with tears. “It’s you.”



Theresa smiles. Her eyes are sunken, and false teeth distort her profile. Still her skin retains its alabaster beauty and a wig of red-gold hair is sculpted around her face.

“Goldie, darling, I brought you some lunch.”

Goldie’s hand closes over Theresa’s. It seems no hand at all, but a bony limb, clawed and shaking. “It’s you.” The trembling voice is barely audible.

Theresa clears her throat and lifts her friend’s head up on the pillow. “Come on, chum, it’s chow time.” She puts a baby spoon into a small container and scrapes out a minute quantity of sauce. A smile quivers on Goldie’s lips as her tongue savors a first taste. She presses her friend’s hand and raises her head for another bite. Theresa sighs. “I turned out to be a pretty good cook. You like it, huh?”

Goldie rolls the morsel around in her toothless mouth and swallows. “Okay,” she whispers, “but it just needs a little less lemon.” She turns toward the spoon for more.

Theresa struggles to keep her own hands steady. She gently blots Goldie’s mouth and spoons a bit of meat and sauce into her friend’s mouth.

Goldie sucks and licks and dribbles. “No more ...,” she sighs. Her face is a tiny triangle set in a cobweb of white hair. She clings to Theresa’s arm. “I love you,” she says and her eyes roll upward..

Theresa lifts her friend’s hand gently from its perch. Then she recovers the plastic food container and puts the sticky spoon in a sandwich bag. “I baked some fish,” she says to Goldie’s sleeping figure. “It’s stewed the way you like it. I’ll bring it for lunch tomorrow.”

Goldie is ninety-two and Theresa is ninety-one. The words between them are simply spoken, the magnitude of their feeling merely implied.

A tiny sauce stain sticks to the lace of Goldie’s pale pink nightie. Her arms are bare and make small ridges under the bed sheet. Theresa stares at her friend for a long time.

“You finally think I can cook,” she whispers as she picks up her cane and closes the nursing room door.

- Lillian Rodich

Minty's

Gourd

by Jan Smith

"Granny's dead, Lizzie," Mama said as soon as I answered the phone. "You need to get on home, baby."

After college, I'd accepted a job at a luxury resort on Barbados. I liked the glam scene. I met celebrities, and people with big money but every time I called home, I'd end-up feeling annoyed and guilty about where I came from and where I was. For one thing, my parents talked like some black characters from an old movie which just irritated me no end.

And somewhere in the conversation, without fail, Mama would get in a little dig about my "roots," not staying in touch, and she always made me feel like I'd committed a crime by moving away from home.

Crazy as it seems, I blamed Alex Haley for her nonsense. I would get off the phone and swear if that man were still alive, I'd put a curse on him because of that damn *Roots* book, which my parents swore was true even though I showed them all kinds of proof that it wasn't. So ... I saved us all grief and didn't visit.

"But mama, I'm not ..."

"No excuses. 'Sides, I got somethin' Granny wanted me to pass on. Time you got back to your roots."

Damn you, Alex Haley, I thought, as I hung-up.

The first evening I arrived, Mama and me sat in the kitchen drinkin' raspberry mint tea from chipped porcelain cups. With a smile, she pulled a flat red box from her pocket and pushed it across the table.

"Go on, sugar. Open it."

I lifted the hinged top and stared at the item inside: An oval-shaped, roughly engraved brass plate centered between finely braided strips of black and white thread. The inscription was faint from age and from fingers rubbing across the metal surface. It took me a few seconds to make out the letters, "**M-I-N-T-Y**." Next to them, eight tiny stars had been etched in a familiar sign—the "drinking gourd."

"Mmm, mmm, mmm," I hummed. "Where'd this old thing come from, Mama?"

"Girrrl, I told you, this come from Granny exceptin' she wasn't your granny; she was my great aunt, well ... my step great-

aunt, I ... wait, lemme start again. She was my great grand-daddy's step sister's child...no, that's not right neither. She was..."

"Mama," I cut in, "I got it. Granny ain't blood but she shoulda been."

"Yes m'am, that's what I meant. Anyhow, Granny was the last of her kind."

"Last of her kind what?" I asked. I wasn't paying all that much attention as I was trying to puzzle out how in the world I could wear the thing in that box without being totally embarrassed. I mean it was ugggg-lee, so really, what was I gonna do with it?

"Last relation to Harriet 'Moses' Tubman; none nowhere left in Maryland now she's gone. Granny's daddy? He be Miz Tubman's youngest brother. He made this for Miz Tubman then took it back after she died. See here? That brass come from the gun she carried leadin' all them colored folks to freedom. Minty was her chil'hood name. 'Course the stars, well, they guided her north an' that woved cott'n thread come from her kerchief. Granny sure did prize this trinket!"

"But why me? Why didn't Granny give this to you?"

"'Cause you the one who's done left home, baby sistuh, jus' like Harriet Tubman did." My mother stood-up, ending the conversation.

"C'mon now, let me help you git this on. When you was little," she said in a low voice, as she gently tied the braided bands around my wrist, "Granny'd sit at night right out in that back yard an' tell you 'bout brave 'Moses' Tubman. An' you'd say to her, 'I'm gonna follow stars, too, just like her, and I won't lose myself, neither.' This gift, it be Granny's way of making sure you staying the course."

When she finished, my mother put her hands on my shoulders and looked me hard in the eyes. I could feel her searchin' the very corners of my soul like she was searchin' ticks on a hound. I knew she wanted her laser stare to burn out all the vain notions she was certain were pulling me in wrong directions.

I glanced down at Granny's gift. "I know, Mama," I said, leaning forward to give her a kiss, "roots." But goodness, I thought, sure would've been nice if Harriet Tubman's brother had been a goldsmith.

Jan Smith is a freelance writer living in the Finger Lakes region of New York State. Her short stories have appeared in various online and print publications including Ether Books, Eclectic Flash, Every Day Fiction, Flash Me Magazine, Moon Drenched Fables, The Battered Suitcase, Allegory, and more. She is also a member of the Internet Writing Workshop.

December Deceptions



Eddie went outside and studied the night sky. I used to come out here on Christmas Eve and look for Santa's sleigh, he thought. Now I know better. Just stars and airplanes up there, no magic reindeer.

He looked back through the living room window and watched his twin sisters dancing around the colorful Christmas tree.

And there's Lindy and Louisa blabbing about Santa Claus and presents, he thought. Mom told me I'd better not tell them the truth about Santa and make 'em cry. Gotta keep the secret. I'm trying... but they're really getting annoying.

He kicked a pine cone, and then noticed that the garage light was on.

Hey, someone's in there. Who?

He tip-toed over to the side door. Slowly he tuned the door knob and peeked through the narrow opening. And beheld Uncle Bill dressed in a red Santa Claus suit! Eddie giggled while he watched Bill slip on a fluffy white beard. Bill heard the snicker and spun around.

"Well ho, ho, ho! Look who's spying on Santa Claus! C'mere, you bad little boy! Say hello to old Santa!" He beckoned entry with a mittened hand.

Eddie ran in and hugged his favorite relative and then said, "I know there's no Santa Claus, Uncle Bill. And I woulda known it was YOU in that suit even with a big beard on your face. I'm not stupid!"

"That's right, you're not stupid. And smart Eddie will keep my secret tonight, right?"

"Uh, I'll try. But ... you look sooo funny. It's hard not to laugh."

"Listen, Eddie, don't let on that it's me. If you promise to keep my secret, you'll get something special from Santa."

"Okay, I promise, but I know that Mom and Dad

give us presents, not Santa."

"This Santa Claus DOES have a special present for you. Remember what you told me in September? After you heard about my dog Racer's new puppies?"

"Uh ... I said I wanted a puppy. But Mom said no."

"Your mom is MY little sister,"

said Bill with a grin. "Maybe she listened to this Santa Claus."

Just then Eddie heard a whimper in the corner of the garage. He ran over and looked in a cardboard box. A golden Lab puppy looked back at him.

"A puppy! One of Racer's puppies? I never expected ..."

"See, Eddie? This Santa knew your secret wish. He's yours."

"Gee ... thanks, Uncle Bill!"

He picked up the warm little dog and it licked his nose. Bill watched with a smile, and then asked,

"What will you call him?"

"Not sure. Maybe ... Frosty?"

"Well, he is a white Lab. Sort of appropriate."

"Yeah, I like that name: Frosty. My sisters will think it's a good name too."

"For sure," agreed Bill. "But I better get on inside and surprise your sisters before they come out here looking for Santa. Want to come with me?."

"Sure. I'll tell 'em that I signaled with a flashlight and helped you and Rudolf find our house."

"And how will you explain the puppy?"

"Hmm. I know. I'll tell the girls that you stopped by Bill's house first and brought Frosty with you."

"Sounds good to me. Remember, no giggling, Eddie! Let's go."

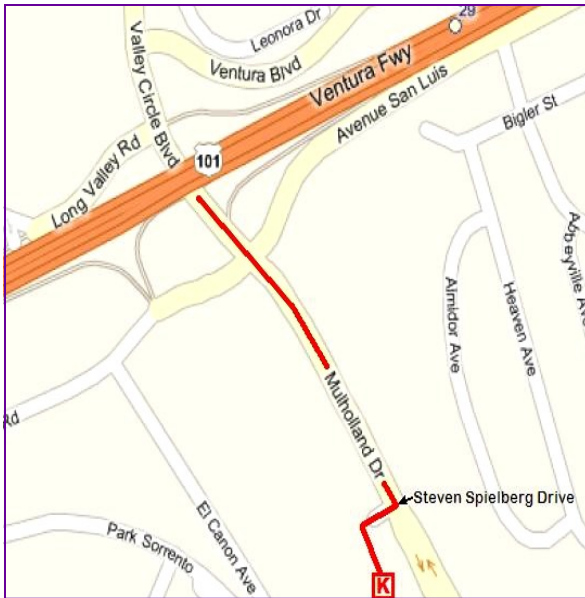
The three of them headed for the front door.



Happy Holidays Folks!



- Kathy Highcove



Free parking is available in a nearby lot behind the Katzenberg Room. Look for the trombone statue — that's 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 Dec. 3rd., 2011, at 1:00 p.m.

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