



The Valley Scribe

Newsletter of the San Fernando Valley



FEBRUARY 2012

IN THIS ISSUE

President's Cookbook	2
Whimsicals Cont'd	2
Mary Rose Betten	3
Ken's Pet Peeves	3
Market To Market	4
Spelling Numbers	4
Book Bazaar Presenters	
Ken Wilkins	5
Max Schwartz	5
Rita Keeley Brown	6
Diana Johnson	6
Ray Malus	6
Betty Hechtman	7
Gagik Melikyan	7
Paula Diggs	7
Nance Crawford	8
Erica Stux	8
Judy Presnall	9
Just Have to Have It	10
My Sexy Computer	11
Oprah and Me	12
Take Out	13
Map & Meeting Info	14

Come Hear Their Stories

Inside this February issue you'll read about twelve SFV authors who'll present their published books—or recorded DVD's in one instance—at the next meeting. Congratulations to these members who have persevered and published their creative work in a variety of genres.

Yes, our presenters are a varied group. Some specialize in adult and juvenile fiction; some research to write historical fiction; others find their niche writing about scientific research, ancient engineering, or even Hungarian cuisine. One member at our bazaar will reveal a gripping domestic drama. A varied group, that's for sure.

Each published author has labored hard to reach this high water mark in their writing careers. Any serious writer knows that an individual embarks on a long laborious journey from the conception of a book to the final published product.

Marketing one's book is the next logical step for a published author, and many authors testify that marketing can be more challenging than writing the book. Our SFV Book Bazaar is an attempt to give our authors an opportunity to market their creative work on their home territory to a supportive audience.

You're invited to attend our bazaar on this coming Saturday. Listen to the twelve authors present their publications, and then look over their creative works. Show support for our SFV writers at our first Book Bazaar in the Katzenberg Room.

Sail on, San Fernando Valley Branch!



west valley whimsicals

A Schwartz / Highcove Production

Hurts So Good - Your Critique Group



Thelma had labored long months over her first book, chapter by chapter. She stared at the book's bright icon on her computer screen and wondered if it would ever attract an editor ... or if anyone would even enjoy reading her story. What should I do?

"You need a critique group," her friend Lillian told her.

After looking around, she found a suitable group who met every week. Dave was the leader. Thelma sent the group the first chapter of her book via email. Five days later she

(Continued on page 2)

Executive Board

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President's Cookbook

Hungarian Cookbook, Old World Recipes for New World Cooks by Yolanda Fintor

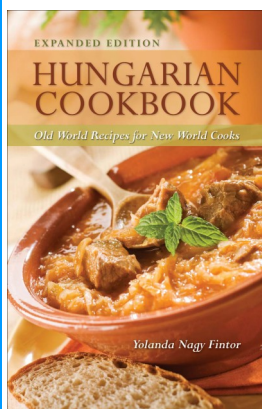
This cookbook is not just a selection of traditional Hungarian dishes. It includes the culinary history of Hungary as well as historical notes and the origins of some of the recipes. Described are holiday and seasonal traditions brought from the 'old country' by the author's grandparents and practiced by succeeding generations of Hungarian-Americans.

Yolanda Nagy Fintor is a first-generation Hungarian-American who learned Hungarian cooking from her mother. She is co-author of *Souper Skinny Soups* and conducts workshops on writing and promoting cookbooks. She resides in Northridge. For non-Hungarians, this cookbook of easy-to-make recipes offers a taste of Hungary, a nation known for its excellent cuisine and good music.

Our membership knows that Yolanda like to share her "wealth." Our meeting's cookie supply is often supplemented with Yolanda's homemade Hungarian goodies from recipes found in this very cookbook. Love those taste tests, Madame President!

Available through amazon.com, bn.com, bookstores, and hippocrenebooks.com in the holidays/celebrations section.

— KH



west valley whimsicals 'Critique Group' continued from page one

(Continued from page 1)

sat mum at Dave's dining room table as the group took turns discussing her chapter's strengths and weaknesses.



Violet thought the chapter was a good first effort. Ann found it boring, and told her why in explicit detail. Derek thought the piece had possibilities. Reina didn't like the main character. Maggie had forgotten to read it. However, Dave was prepared: he talked a long time about content, dialog, and plot. And punctuation.



Maybe coming here was a mistake, thought Thelma. Until today, she'd thought her story was pretty good.

But she said, "Thanks for all your comments. I made notes about all your suggestions. But ... do I have any talent? Or am I just

wasting everyone's time."

Dave patted her arm and replied, "Don't worry. You're a good writer, but you're a beginner. Stick with us and you'll get better. Here ... have a brownie."

"Dig in, Thelma, Dave's brownies are almost the best part of our critiquing," laughed Reina.

"What IS the best part?" asked Thelma.

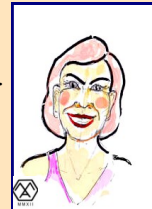
"Learning to be a better writer," said the group with one voice.

"And that's the whole point in a nutshell," said Dave. "Which reminds me ... I've got M&M's with peanuts this time."

And little by little, each critique group session, Thelma became a better writer.

To be continued ...

— KH





Mary Rose Betten

Prepare, Pause and Project

Mary Rose Betten came to the Katzenberg Room on a mission: She was enlisted by our Program Chair, Rita Keeley Brown, to help our talented members read their writings with aplomb and élan. After all, we were told, how can one do justice to one's fervent verse or engrossing personal essay if one flubs the lines? Or reads the carefully chosen words like someone reading the ingredients on the back of a box of Kashi cereal?

Betten, an experienced character actress, lecturer, comedienne, playwright, and drama coach, made it clear that she doesn't hold with holding back, mumbling into the microphone, or slumping like a sack of Idaho potatoes at the podium. And the main reason for the experienced public speaker's lesson? Sales. The up-beat Betten came to help us learn to present our books and creative work. And how to sell our books, essays, poems and stories by pitching them effectively. Successful sales people must be confident speakers and know how to present their product.

What this orator is doing right according to Mary Rose Betten:

- Has calm hand action
- Keeps his head raised
- Stands straight
- No hands on hips
- Breathes from his core
- Speaks slowly and clearly
- Lowers tone of voice
- Doesn't lean on podium
- Doesn't clasp his hands in fig leaf territory
- Pauses for effect
- Makes eye contact



New Feature Ken's Pet Peeves

FOUR WHEEL BOOMBOXES

As the signal changes I apply the brake,
But waiting for the green my car starts to shake.
Seeking the cause I start looking around
And in the next lane comes the throbbing sound.
The vehicle quivers with megadecibels
From pounding drums of a thousand hells.
The driver keeps time by tapping on the wheel.
He must be partially deaf or have ears of steel.
Now a warning siren he could never hear
Endangering the lives of all who are near.
As he spurts away and the music fades.
You can rest assured he'll need hearing aids.

— Ken Wilkins



"Reading your work is like riding a bicycle. When you speak to a group, don't rush into the read. Hold up your text, don't look down. Pause, look at the folks, take a deep breath, and wait until all are ready for your speech. Be comfortable with a moment of silence. Balance yourself like you're up on your bike ready to start your ride – and then begin to speak."

Betten made it all seem so simple, but anyone who's tried Open Mic at our meetings knew better. There's a definite art to reading a work out loud to a waiting audience. Even if your listeners are a friendly receptive group, an audience becomes restless and fretful unless the reader knows how to project and communicate their message and hold their attention.

Thanks to Mary Rose Betten's efforts, our Book Bazaar participants—and our audience members—will benefit from her clear lessons in effective presentation of one's creative work.

— Kathy Highcove



market to market

by Ken Watts



MacLife is a monthly magazine for Macintosh computer enthusiasts of all levels. Submissions must be from proficient users of Macintosh computers and/or iPhone. Nonfiction: Needs how-to, new product, technical. No humor, case studies, personal experience, essays. Buys 10-30 mss/yr. Submission method: Query by mail, e-mail. Length: 250-7,500 words. Columns/Departments: Reviews (always assigned) 300-750 words, How-to's (detailed, step-by-step), 500-2,500 words, features, 1,000-3,500 words. Buys 20 mss/year. Pays an average of \$0.35/word, depending on the nature and length of assignment. Address: 4000 Shoreline Ct., Suite: 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Fax: (650)872-1643. E-mail : editor@maclife.com. Website: www.maclife.com.



Boys' Life is a monthly four-color general interest magazine for boys 7-18, who are Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts or Venturers. Guidelines: SASE and online. Contact: Send article queries to the attention of senior editor, column queries to the attention of associate editor. Needs nonfiction: Scouting activities and general interests (nature, Earth, health, cars, sports, science, etc.) Buys 60 mss/yr. Average word length for articles: 500-1,500 words, including sidebars and boxes. Average word length for columns: 300-750. Pay ranges from \$300 and up. Photo guidelines free w/SASE. Address: Boy Scouts of America, P O Box 152079, 1325 West Walnut Hills Ln., Irving, TX 75015. Fax: (972)580-2079. Website: www.boyslife.org.



Smart Computing is a monthly magazine that focuses on plain-English computing articles with an emphasis on tutorials that improve productivity without the purchase of new hardware. Guidelines for #10 SASE. Queries accepted by mail, e-mail. Needs: how-to, new product, technical. No humor, opinion, personal experience. Buys 250 mss/yr. Length: 800-3,200 words. Pays: \$240-960. Query with published clips. Address: Sandhills Publishing, 131 W. Grand Dr., Lincoln, NE 68521. Fax: (402)479-2104. E-mail: editor@smartcomputing.com. Website: www.smartcomputing.com.

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Something To Ponder

Our belief at the beginning of a doubtful undertaking is the one thing that ensures the successful outcome of our venture.

— William James

Numbers --- To Spell or Not to Spell?

That is the Question



Spell out numbers of one hundred or fewer.

When I was eighteen, I lived on Melrose.

When a number can be expressed in three words or fewer, spell it out.

The room holds three hundred people.

...unless the digits have **st**, **th**, **nd**, or **rd** after them

I used to live on 18th Street.

Yesterday was my club's 300th birthday.

When a number requires four or more words to spell, use the digits. (Count the "and" as one word)

At the time, there were 335 sweating bodies packed in the auditorium.

We had 123 boys in my Boy Scout troop.

Try not to begin a sentence with digits.

Revise *179 baseballs were in the pail*

To *In the pail were 179 baseballs.*

Hyphenate compound numbers under a hundred that take two words to write.

thirty-two

seventy-nine

twenty-two

When pluralizing a digit use an **'s** after it

6's, 9's, 100's

This goes for single letters also.

A's, b's, z's

When writing two or more numbers in the same sentence, don't mix styles. Use the same style for both numbers.

Not: *One hundred delegates voted for Romney and 250 delegates voted for Gingrich.*

But: *One hundred delegates voted for Romney and two hundred fifty voted for Gingrich.*

— Dave Wetterberg

THE TWELVE PRESENTERS OF THE SFV 2012 BOOK BAZAAR

Ken Wilkins



Ken Wilkins received the prestigious Jack London award in 1998 from our San Fernando Valley Branch of the CWC. Ken began writing while in the US Navy, near the end of World War II. He wrote feature articles for the photos he took of naval heroes, sending the pieces to the troops' hometown newspapers. Since then, Wilkins has won fiction and nonfiction short-story contests.

Ken has finished a children's novel, *MARVIN'S MANSION*, and has self-published it through Wine-Press Publishers. He is presently working on a book of humorous verse dealing with people's pet peeves and welcomes suggestions from the public.

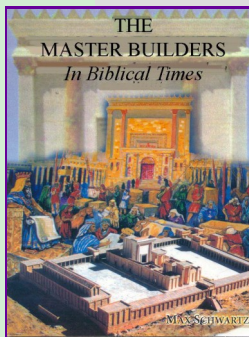
Wilkins lives in Northridge, California with his wife Mabel, a retired nurse.

He can be reached through his distributing company, Honeycomb Tales, 16822 Itasca St., Northridge, CA, 91343-2513.

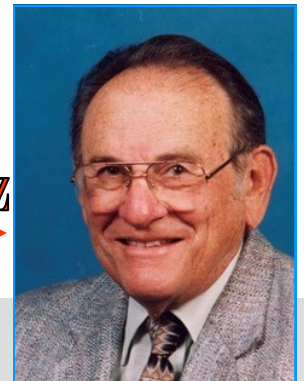
Marvin's Mansion is written for readers eight to twelve years old. A community of mice find life on Farmer Williams' farm full of new terrors when Pouncer the Cat arrives. Marvin and his friends decide to hitch a ride out of the farm among a truckload of pumpkins headed for the city. Hours later the truck loses some of its load beside the highway, including Marvin and his friends. A natural leader, Marvin quickly takes charge, leading the band to a new home and a "safe" haven: a miniature golf course!

Max Schwartz, formerly an Army engineer and now a civil engineer, has passionately pursued an understanding of the tools and techniques of military and civil engineers through ancient and modern history. He describes in-depth the main functions of the military engineer, which are the technology of building or destroying fortifications, bridges, roads, harbors, and the machines of warfare.

His life has been spent in the fields of art, architecture, civil and military engineering, construction, writing and the study of the Holy Land. In fact, these are the same fields that make a Master Builder. Maybe, that's why he wrote *The Master Builder in Biblical Times*.



Max Schwartz

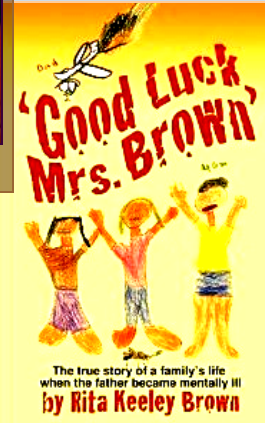


Master Builder was the term used in the Ancient and Renaissance periods for the person responsible for a building project—the architect, in other words. This book gives people a new perspective on the cultures, civics and geography of Biblical Times and a new dimension to familiar Bible stories. *The Master Builder* describes feats of the ancient world like sanitation systems, means of transportation, defensive weapons and housing.

Rita Keeley Brown



Born in Nebraska, majoring in music and English at Northwestern University and UCLA, Rita Keeley Brown is now into a writing career. She writes nonfiction, does editing, and gives workshops on helping others write their life stories. After raising six children she has published a memoir, *Good Luck, Mrs. Brown ...* and a biography, *A Pawn of Fate*.



Her memoir, *Good Luck, Mrs. Brown ...* tells of their experience when mental illness struck the father of the family. Rita and her six children jointly contributed to the book, giving a unique perspective from seven people who experienced the same situation. More info available at

<http://www.amazon.com/Good-Luck-Mrs-Brown-mentally/dp/143276859X>

Diana Johnson

A Life Member of the California Writers Club, Diana Johnson has

served the San Fernando Valley Branch as president and treasurer as well as a delegate to the State Board of Directors and State Treasurer. In 1995 she received CWC's prestigious Jack London Award for service to the writing community. In 2006 she became the founding president of the West Valley Branch of CWC.

You may contact Diana at billndi@verizon.net



Wagons to Hangtown is the story of Diana's great-great-grandfather, Edward Daingerfield, who left Greencastle, Indiana in 1850, headed for the gold fields of California. At age twenty-two he assumed he would spend a year or two in California, then return home—pockets full of gold—and marry the girl he'd left behind. Well... that's not even close to what happened!



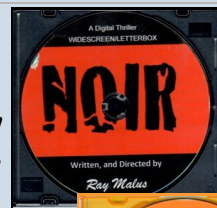
Traveling with him were his cousin Richard Chenoweth and his friend Louis Rudesil. Their journey across this vast, beautiful, and frequently terrifying country took far longer than planned.

But once in California he did discover gold—and much more. He also discovered a free-wheeling, exciting lifestyle, where no dream was too big, and disaster lurked as an ever-present possibility. He also discovered a most unexpected love. How then, could he return to Indiana? More info: www.SuperiorBookPublishingCo.com

Ray Malus

Ray Malus tells us: *Since I'm listed in the SFV/CWC directory primarily as a playwright, I will be exhibiting and selling DVD movies of performances of my plays.*

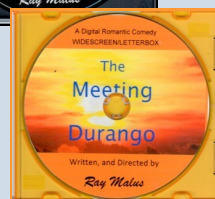
These are HD, Widescreen movies. Four will be available:



'**NOIR**,' a feature-length crime mystery
'**The Meeting In Durango**,' a feature length romantic comedy.

'**Brothers**,' a 1/2-hr. Chancel Drama

'**Amelia**,' a 1/2-hr. Chancel Drama



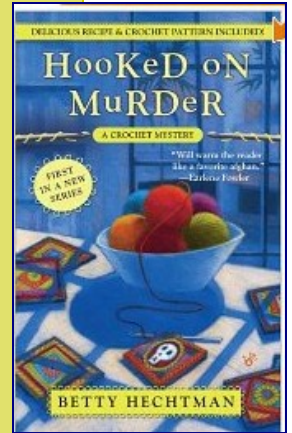
Betty Hechtman



Betty Hechtman writes the national best selling mystery series featuring Molly Pink and the Tarzana Hookers who solve murders and crochet. She has also written newspaper and magazine pieces, short stories and scripts, along with a young adult mystery. She is a long time member of the California Writers Club and lives in Tarzana with her family.

Listed below are Betty's **CROCHET MYSTERY SERIES**

Hooked on Murder, Berkley Prime Crime
Dead Men Don't Crochet, Berkley Prime Crime
By Hook or By Crook, Berkley Prime Crime
A Stitch in Crime, Berkley Prime Crime
You Better Knot Die, Berkley Prime Crime
Behind the Seams, Berkley Prime Crime
All Published by Blue Schwartz and Nefertiti's Necklace-
Brown Barn Books



On November 11th, Gagik Melikyan's book — *Guilty Until Proven Innocent: Antioxidants, Foods, Supplements, and*

**GUILTY
UNTIL PROVEN
INNOCENT**

**Antioxidants,
Foods,
Supplements,
and
Cosmetics**

Gagik Melikyan

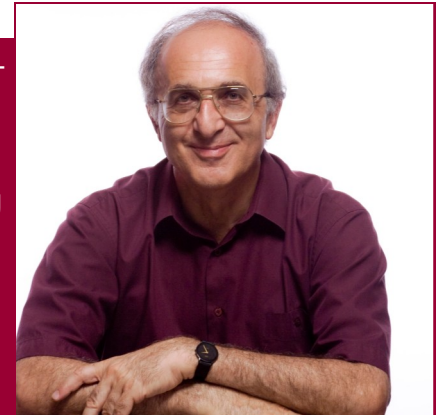
Cosmetics, — was named a finalist in the science category of **The USA "Best Books 2011" Awards**, sponsored by USA Book News.

For info: www.csun.edu/gmelikyan

Gagik Melikyan

Professor Melikyan's book explains in laymen terms why — despite public beliefs — green tea, red wine, coffee, antioxidants, polyphenols, food supplements, sunscreen lotions, hair colors, and women's cosmetics, can cause irreparable damage to vital body systems. It arms the general public with critical knowledge that will allow them to make educated choices, when it comes to exposing their bodies to harmful chemical com-

pounds. Reading this book can be a truly eye-opening, and life-saving experience. Gagik also promotes two pioneering, groundbreaking concepts that, if adopted by our society, will allow for the transition to science-based food consumption.



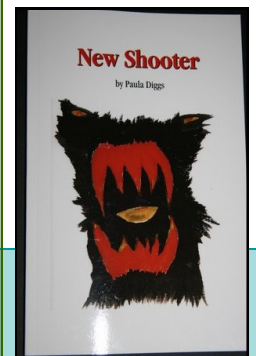
Paula Diggs, MA, MS is an educator writer and artist. She has received many awards for her paintings and has published articles on the topic of "art and autism."

Paula Diggs



What happens when a little girl with great insights and a quirky personality decides to be a detective? **New Shooter** reveals how she solves crimes by driving everyone crazy including the bad guys. She sees through adults' hypocrisies, lies, and discriminations. The mystery she seeks to solve is not only who committed the crimes but who she is and who she will be.

Paula illustrated *Shadows in the Mist* by the poet John Epstein. She is a member of the Watercolor Society of the San Fernando Valley.



Nance Crawford



Nance Crawford grew up in Hollywood, began working in film at age six, followed into the business world by brothers Bobby ("Laramie") and Johnny ("The Rifleman"). She was twice a produced playwright by age sixteen and columnist for a national teen

magazine at twenty-one. However, for her generation, maturity meant being a successful homemaker with limited spare time spent writing whatever the muse inspired: plays, musicals, country/western songs and humorous poetry. Five children and six grandchildren later, she returned to theater, becoming a local award-winning actor and writer/director. A participant in the initial program of the Lincoln Center Directors Lab West, she belongs to ASCAP, The Dramatists Guild of America, the California Writers Club-San Fernando Valley Branch and is a Lifetime member of the Alliance of Los Angeles Playwrights (ALAP). Nance can be contacted through her website: www.NanceCrawford.com

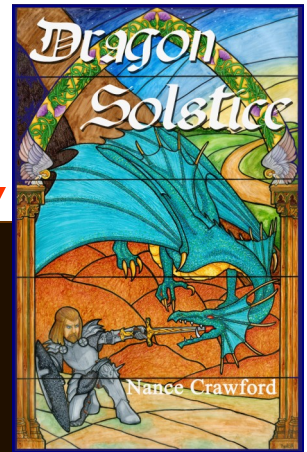
Cover illustration:

"St. Bobb and the Dragon"

by SMH RedElk

DRAGON SOLSTICE

Synopsis: The pleasant, ordinary lives of citizens in a tiny Medieval kingdom are interrupted when an angry witch "vanishes" their young beloved royal twins. William of Linke, the Whipping Boy, is immediately promoted to King's Champion. Enchanted armor, shield and sword are William's weapons. The sword, broken in half during an ancient battle, now has a double-pointed blade and the armor is too big. The enchantment is completely confusing. When eight-year-old Sarai gets lost in the royal forest, meeting a young Dragon who wants to be friends, William, with the help of Sarai's brother, sets out to rescue her and slay the Dragon. This new American fable confronts the mysteries of dragons, vampire bats, sea serpents, time travel and the North Pole with wry, heartwarming humor. For lovers of OZ and Potter.



Expressions of Nature Through Photography and Words: a coffee table book of nature photos (landscapes, flowers, birds, etc.) combined with poetic captions

Landlady: a fictional account of problems encountered in owning rental properties -- both deadbeat tenants and overly particular bureaucracies.

Eight Who Made a Difference: Pioneer Women in the Arts: Features the biographies of eight prominent women in various branches of the arts. A suitable book for teenage girls.

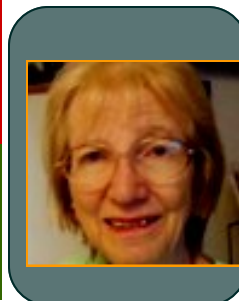
Who, Me? Paranoid? a collection of humorous essays dealing with family life and challenging situations, like driving a newly-purchased car, or finding strange items in the refrigerator.

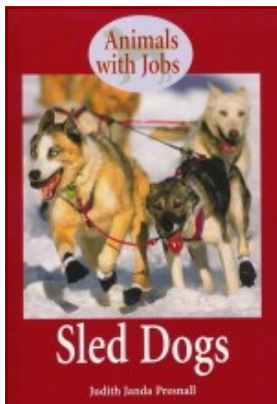
Sequins and Sorrow: a memoir of her co-author - a black woman raising an autistic son while seeking success as an exotic dancer. Boyfriends came and went, but her truest friends proved to be white men.

Erica Stux

Erica started her professional life as a chemist. When she had children, she began to write--first poems and prose pieces for children, then light verse for adults, and finally longer works for teens and adults.

She's published many poems in several different publications. Her published books include four biographies for young people, a collection of humor pieces, a memoir of a co-author, a series of bird poems for children, and a book of her late husband's nature photography for which she wrote captions.

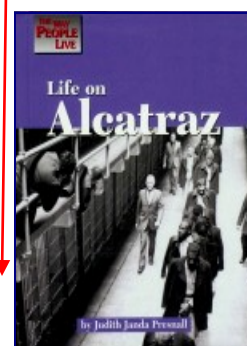
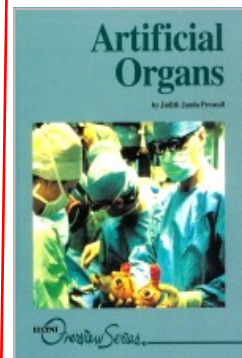




Judy tells us: *I'm a children's nonfiction book writer who has had twenty-three books published by Franklin Watts, Lucent Books, and Kid-Haven Press. Most of my books can be found at city and school libraries.*

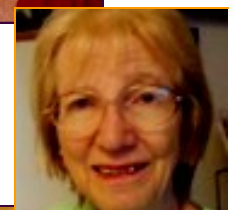


Judy Presnall



My books tell exciting information about bioluminescence (or glowing animals), skeletons, circuses, the giant panda, man-made body parts, Alcatraz prisoners, Mount Rushmore, capuchin monkeys, U.S. Navy dolphins, guide dogs, horse therapists, sled dogs, hearing dogs, canine companions, carrier pigeons, police dogs, animal actors, racehorses, rescue dogs, Oprah Winfrey and Rachel Carson.

Find out more about Judy's twenty-three book collection at
<http://www.judithjandapresnall.com/index.html>



**WE hope to see you soon
 in the Katzenberg Room!
 February 4th at 1:00 P.M.**



Just Have to Have It

That morning Mike and Karen decided to eat breakfast outdoors on the brick patio. Mike read the sports section as he did every Sunday morning. Karen listened to one of her favorite classical compositions. -- *Four Seasons* by Vivaldi. She spotted a line of birds perched on the telephone wire. They hope I'll feed them some grain, she thought.

Mike lowered his newspaper and asked, "Have you decided what do you want for Valentine's Day – the anniversary of our engagement?"

"Well, I don't really need anything."

"There must be SOMETHING you really want. How about perfume?"

"Nope. I still have every perfume you bought duty free on those European trips. I have so many perfumes that Cleopatra could take a bath in them and there'd still be some left over."

Mike scratched his head. "Okay, then let's take a short trip to Melrose Avenue in the Fairfax District? Those Melrose stores have one-of-a-kind imported curiosities. It's fun to just look around. I know a special store you'll like."

"Let's go right now," Karen answered and cleared off the breakfast trays.

They dressed in a hurry and drove to Melrose Avenue. The traffic was bumper to bumper and there was no place to park near the store.

"Go on ahead and buy anything your little heart desires. I'll find a parking place and join you later." She agreed and got out of the car.

In Mike's special store she had a good time looking around and lost track of time. She soon spotted Mike's head moving between the aisles looking at things that interested him. The imports were exotic, to say the least. She was happy just going from aisle to aisle, and then she saw — THE BIRD CAGE. She had to have it! It was MAGNIFICENT— built in the shape of an old Russian castle, with four cupolas in the front and two in the back. The light honey-colored wood structure had four small doors. She stretched her arm high up and tried to grab it.

OUCH! It felt like a bolt of electricity raced from the tips of her fingertips to the end of her spine. She saw her husband nearby.

"Mike, can you get this bird cage down for me?" she asked.

"Do you really want that – THAT THING? Do we have room for it? We don't even have a bird," he muttered under his breath, but he lifted it down and handed her the bird cage.

"Look how beautiful it is," she said and hoped he'd take the hint and buy it for her. His eyes stared at it for a moment but only because she held it right under his nose. It could have been a rat's tail to judge by his disdainful reaction. She waited hopefully to hear him say he'd buy it for her. Instead --

"It's getting late," he said, and took her arm. "Early closing time on Sunday. Let's go." She reluctantly put the cage down, and looked back at it as they left.

I hope no one else will buy it, she thought.

"Men's room," Mike suddenly announced and disappeared for several minutes. When he returned they rushed to the exit.

"Where would you like to dine tonight?" he asked her.

"At home! I just want to go HOME!"

It got dark early in late January. Upon entering the house she felt chilly seeing all the chotskies picked up here and there. So what if the house is a bit crowded? All her friends loved the small collections when she arranged them attractively.

"Should I prepare your dinner tray?" he asked.

"I'm not hungry."

He made dinner anyway and brought the trays into the small den where she waited. He clicked on the television before he even sat down.

"Bad news is the same all over," Karen said.

She thought about the bird cage all night. She couldn't sleep, so she tried to read a book but couldn't concentrate on the words.

It's my own fault I didn't get it, she thought. I could have charged it. But, why didn't HE get it for me? Not so long ago we could read each other's thoughts, knew what the other one wanted without words. But perhaps ... Mike bought it ... and hid it from me like in the old days. She got up and quietly checked every closet. Darn. No birdcage anywhere!

Mike left for a meeting early the next morning. Karen called the store. The manager himself checked for the birdcage.

"Nope," he told her. "We had one cage and it's been sold."

She drove over to the store anyway just in case someone put it in the wrong spot. She continued to drive there every day in hopes that someone returned it. A week passed ...

(Continued on page 11)



And how was your day?" he asked when he came home.

"Busy. Very busy." He doesn't have a clue anymore, she thought. He should have known how much I wanted that cage. But ... I've got to forget about it. Don't even have a bird to keep inside it. Hmm. Maybe I'M the bird, peeking out of my imaginary bars for a glimpse of the life that used to be. Forget it. Don't look for it anymore. Phooey, it's hard to let go.

She remembered her painting which she'd neglected for a while. Good distraction, she thought. I'll paint some tiles and forget about the cage. She gathered her oil paints and brushes, entered her studio and got to work. No use. She found herself painting a different type of bird on every tile.

She noticed after cleaning up her paints that the house had gotten bitter cold that evening.

I must ask Mike to get the heavy blanket down from the top shelf in the linen closet. Oh, never mind, I'll do it myself.

She got up on the small step ladder kept next to the closet shelves and reached for the blanket. Then she realized that something big was placed behind the blanket. She looked closer. OHHH! Miracles of miracles! THE HONEY-COLORED-BIRD-CAGE. She couldn't believe her eyes. Carefully she took it down from the shelf and carefully placed it on the floor. Karen sat down next to the cage and opened the tiny doors. She saw that it was filled with little folded pieces of paper: Every single note she wrote to Mike during the year was folded carefully inside the cage.

She felt her heart swell with sudden emotion. Tears fell from her eyes and blurred words on some of the notes. But luckily, the word "Love" remained intact.

She returned the cage to the exact same spot in back of the blanket. And once more she felt an electrical surge from the tips of her fingers to her toes. However, this time there was no pain, just joy. She felt reassured that their love was still intact ... just like it used to be between the two of them.

"And how was your day?" He asked when he got home that night.

"OH! Very, very chirp-chirp, cheerful," she replied and gave Mike a big smile.

How was she going to pretend that she didn't find the precious cage? Valentine's Day was getting closer ... but she would think of something. And she had already decided that the beautiful birdcage would be a perfect fit on top of her small antique table, where all her friends would see and admire it.

— Keyle Birnberg-Goldstein

My Sexy Computer -- The APPLE Of My Eye

He waits for me to "turn him on." I watch him warming up. I love the way he says, "You've got mail" -- or is it "male?" He's my lover these days and sometimes keeps me up very late at night.

Trying to entice him, I stare at his face, flirting shamelessly with the hope that he'll help me create a master piece. I speak to him. "Dear Mac, tell me what to write today."

He is silent. I love deep silent men ... sometimes ... but not when I need help. He usually comes through for me just as I'm about to give up. In his own silent way, he eggs me on.

Think, think, think! My brain is on a trampoline going up and down, up and down. I concentrate hard. "Okay!" I say, "Your starting to heat up! And so am I! I'll just begin writing anything before you decide to turn out the lights and go to sleep leaving me unfulfilled and very frustrated. So here I go."

Once upon a time there lived a little girl in the city of brotherly love known as Philadelphia. She would look up at the sky and imagine that the clouds were in the form of people or animals who have died and gone to heaven. And she believed this with all her heart. Sometimes she saw her bunny rabbit Snowball, who ran away from home and never came back. She would take her drawing book and sketch the cloud formations turning them into recognizable people and animals. When no one could hear her she would speak to them -- the clouds that is. She once looked up and saw her Daddy lying down peacefully on a fluffy white cloud so she smiled up at him and said,

'Hello Daddy, you look happy resting in the sky on your marshmallow bed. I'm so happy to see. But I miss you so much!'

Mac, you did it again! It's just a silly little childhood memory, but you have a way of looking at me a long time until something unplanned happens. Like a new baby. I just hope that next time we meet face to face, I can think of something more grown up to write about. Because when you say, "You've got mail," you really turn me on, making me feel... very SEXY!

- Leslie Kaplan



Oprah and Me

By Ray Malus



I'm sure you've seen her. She's at all of our meetings. She waits outside, patiently sitting until I'm ready to leave. Then we go home together. She lives with me, you see.

Her name is, 'Oprah.' She looks like a cross between a silver *art deco* Buck Rogers rocket ship and a 1950s hot rod. And she's my baby — the last gift I gave to myself before I went 'fixed-income' in 2004.

Oprah was already an adolescent when we met, having been born in 2000 at the Chrysler Motor Company. ('Car years' are even shorter than 'dog years.') I, on the other hand, was well past middle age. It didn't matter. We had too much in common not to bond.

We both love the open air and making people grin.

Of course, there are differences. She's more of an exhibitionist than I, and loves to take her top down and be stared at. I indulge her because, after all, she is stunning.

And I'm sure she's fonder of speed than I am.

On the other hand, we're both kinda private people.

What's she like? Well, I guess she won't mind my telling you.

Oprah is a 2000 Plymouth Prowler roadster. Her good looks come straight from the factory. Yup, she was 'born like that.' The only 'cosmetic augmentation' she's ever had was the addition of her front license plate. Not only was this necessary for California law, but it may have helped to 'balance' her. Her rear end was designed about 10 inches wider than her front to accommodate larger tires and provide more weight. No doubt about it. Oprah has a big butt.

Although she's a glamour girl, she loves intimacy.

She only has two seats — nice soft leather. She's accommodating — shifts her own gears. She's a romantic — she has a full stereo music system. She loves comfort — even though she's a convertible. She has a great air conditioner. And the heater? Better than a cozy fireplace!

And she came to our relationship with no 'baggage.' As a matter of fact, she has no place to carry baggage — even with that extra wide caboose, she has no trunk at all.

She's peppy and perky. She has a six-cylinder engine, but her body is lightweight.

She hasn't many siblings. Prowlers are a leisure-person's acquisition, and not many were sold. They're simply not practical. (And that wide backside of hers makes her hard to park.) But those of us who are lucky enough to have one are devoted.

On Sunday mornings, I'll dust her off, put her top down, start her up, and climb in. She caresses me with her bucket seat. I rev the engine a bit, just to hear her purr. Then, feeling like Cary Grant in a 1930s movie, I drive her off to church.

People love seeing her, and wave. I suppose if I were younger, these would be gorgeous, leggy girls in running shorts and sports halters. As it is, they're mostly kids. "Cool car, Mister!"

I grin and wave back. "Yup. She sure is!"

'Car years' being what they are, our age gap is closing. As with me, Oprah's showing some wear and tear, and parts are getting harder to find. I imagine we'll reach the finish line at about the same time. That's good. I wouldn't want to replace her.

As for her name... well, I probably won't ever get on Ms. Winfrey's book list — but see, there *is* that extra wide caboose ...



Take Out

Libby waited till Bev and Rob had gone to work and then she went looking for her car keys. Didn't take long. She'd known where Bev would put them. So predictable, that Bev. Of course she'd hide them in her jewelry box. Libby had always been able to sniff out Bev's secrets.

And why did she need her car keys?

She'd awakened that morning with a real hunger for pizza. She just had to have a few slices of *Papa Joe Amato's* sausage pizza. Bev and Rob never wanted to visit that pizza restaurant back in the old neighborhood.

"So depressing in that old part of town, Mom. Why do you want to go back and eat fatty food again? You gotta eat healthy at your age."

And so Libby ate healthy and could only dream of pizza and pepperoni and pastrami and rich ice cream at *Ethan's Shoppe*. She used to drive herself over there once in a while until Bev and Rob thought she couldn't see good enough to drive. That's when her car keys disappeared.

So after Libby found the keys, she got a little bit dressed up – maybe one of her old friends from the neighborhood would see her at *Amato's* – went out to the garage and started up her car. It ran a little rough for a few miles and then settled down.

Felt good to drive again, although the traffic lights were a little hard to see till she got close to the intersections. And she noted that folks were more impatient these days and blew their horns all the darn time.

Luckily, she found a parking place right in front of the restaurant and walked in ahead of the lunchtime crowd. So far, so good. She should be able to get served quickly, eat her lunch and get home before three o'clock, when the grandkids came home from school. She'd park her car again in the same place in



the garage, and change clothes. No one would ever know that she'd been gone. It'd be her little secret.


She asked for a table by the window where she could watch folks go by and the light helped her read the menu. The menu had changed. Gluten free bread? Organic veggies in the minestrone soup? Vegetarian pizza? When she asked where Papa Joe was, the waitress said she didn't know that there'd ever been a real Papa Joe. Strange. Never heard of Joe Amato. And the girl didn't know about Joe's fantastic homemade sausage. What an ignoramus!

A half hour later, she slid into the driver's seat, still angry that the cashier had given her back the wrong change. And he'd kept saying *Libby* was wrong until she started yelling – called him a dumb wetback who didn't know American money – and then the manager showed up and finally gave her the change she wanted. She simmered when she thought of the way the waitresses all rolled their eyes at her and acted like she was just a wacky old broad, and not someone who used to be a good customer.

She jammed the car into gear and almost stamped on the gas pedal. The old Buick lurched over the curb, careened across the sidewalk, smashed through *Papa Joe Amato's* front door, and pinned the cashier against the wall.

As the loud shouting erupted all around her, she focused at the manager who stared through her shattered side window. She beckoned for him to come closer, then hoarsely whispered, "Would you call Bev for me? Tell her to bring my Medicare Card. I think it's in her jewelry box."

—Kathy Highcove



A Sad Note

Longtime SFV member and a former Jack London Award winner, Cara Alson, recently passed away. Cara was a truly gifted poet and writer. The March issue of *The Valley Scribe* will honor Cara with a memorial by Lenora Smiley and selections of her past writings.

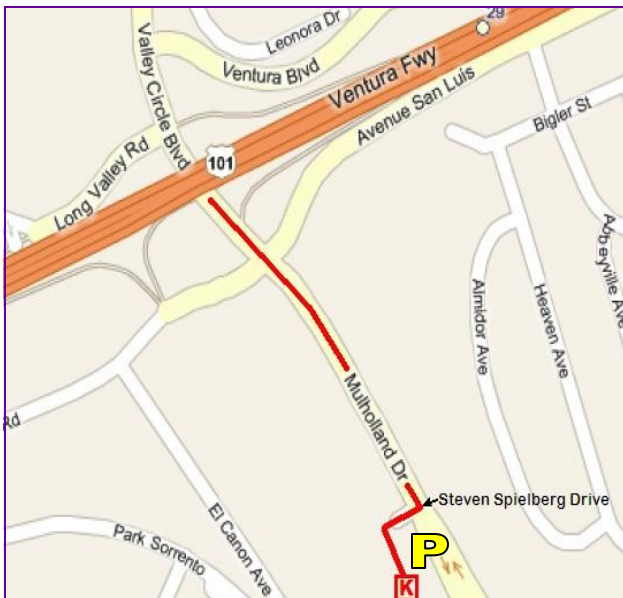
— KH



Cookie Time in the



Katzenberg Room



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 Feb. 4th, 2012 at 1:00 p.m.

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Free parking is available in a large lot behind the Katzenberg Room. Look for the trombone statue — that's the CWC/SFV parking lot.

