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The Valley Scribe

Newsletter of the San Fernando Valley Branch
of the California Writers Club



VOLUME 5 ISSUE 2

OCTOBER 2012

Clues In Cursive



Sheila Lowe

Our next speaker, Sheila Lowe, might be called the ultimate multi-tasker. She's a forensic handwriting expert who testifies in court cases; she holds a Master of Science in psychology and instructs marriage and family therapists; she lectures to audiences around the country on graphology and also writes informatively about her science. Her latest book: *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Handwriting Analysis and Handwriting of the Famous and Infamous*. Her articles on celebrity handwriting have been featured by *Time*, *Teen*, *People*, *Us*, *Mademoiselle*, and

several other publications. In her spare time, LOL, Lowe adds to her Forensic Handwriting Mystery series. One of her books in this series, *Written in Blood*, was on the Independent Booksellers top ten list.

What an appropriate guest speaker for the month of October! Sheila Lowe is sure to put our club members in the mood for spooky Halloween events. Don't be scared. Come and hear her riveting revelations.

KH

west valley whimsicals

A Schwartz / Highcove Production

Bob's Ego



Bob Newhart

Sometimes I ask myself: Why do I want to write comedy?

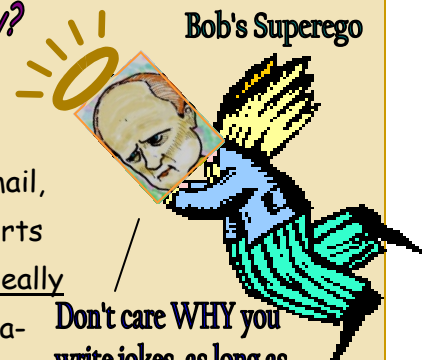
Bob's Id



Don't know why - but I just flashed on a killer of a joke.

There's writing, and there's writing. Everyone writes letters, email, tweets, and all kinds of notes and reports for all kinds of work. But some folks really want to write - all kinds of creative material such as fiction and non-fiction,

Bob's Superego



Don't care **WHY** you write jokes, as long as you mind your P's and Q's!

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President's Message

TENNIS ANYONE?

I love tennis, even though I no longer play. This year I've watched tennis matches all summer long - Wimbledon, the French Open, the US Open, et al. Tennis players remind me of writers. Why compare those who participate in a completely physical world with those who are often sedentary and cerebral? It would seem that the two activities are worlds apart. But there is one word that is at the core of each pursuit: MOTIVATION. What motivates or drives participants in each group to be winners?

Tennis commentators bandy about tired truisms:

It's important to believe in yourself.

Mindset makes the difference between winning and losing.

When you lose, you can't get discouraged—you try harder.

These comments aren't novel bits of wisdom, but they are mantras used by both successful writers and professional tennis players to stay motivated and play at the top of their game.

How else do writers keep motivated? Like tennis players who must practice daily to keep in tip top shape, writers find ways to replenish their drive and fuel their energy. They go to writers conferences, network with other writers, listen to published authors and join critique groups. Writers hone their skills by taking classes and attending workshops. Good writers write every day. This is *their* practice to keep them in the mindset for success.

Of course writers face more than one opponent at a time. They must outshine hundreds, perhaps thousands in their field each time they submit a manuscript.

Oh, if only hours spent at the computer keyboard earned the same payoffs as those lucrative prizes won on the pro tennis court—it would be a perfect world.



Yolanda Fintor

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mysteries and children's literature, historical fiction, memoirs, or poetry and flash fiction.

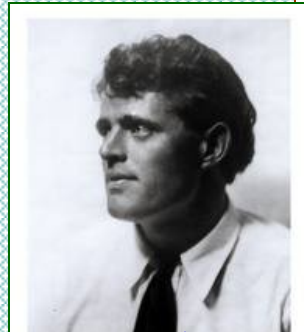
Writers are compulsive types who really NEED to sit down and type out a story. If you consider yourself a compulsive writer, did you ever ask yourself why you work so hard to spin a tale?

Each writer has a reason. Some of us want to write down a collection of family stories or a family history. Some want to make up stuff and keep a reader coming back for more. Some like the mental challenge of a writing exercise. But perhaps the most basic reason: writers have a story to tell.

Writers are story tellers. Just that simple.

California Writers Week

In 2003, the Central Board of the California Writers Club lobbied the State Legislature to establish a **California Writers Week**. CWC members sought to officially honor famous California authors. Happily, the motion passed on September 4, 2003. As a result, the third week of October has been designated California Writers Week. We made a difference! Our founder Jack London would most definitely approve.



**CWC Founder
Jack London**



September Speaker Tommy Hawkins

Tommy's Unguarded Moments

Tommy Hawkins, a college all-American, a former professional basketball player, an Emmy-Award nominated radio and TV broadcaster and communications executive for the Los Angeles Dodgers, and our September guest speaker, revealed to his audience a less publicized vocation: poet. Published poet. Hawkins is the author of *Life's Reflections: Poetry for the People*, which he presented at our meeting.

Before reading a sampling of his poetry, Hawkins spoke at length about his days as a Laker player and recounted a few experiences while working for the Dodgers. Then he focused on his book and told us of his drive to become an all-American poet.

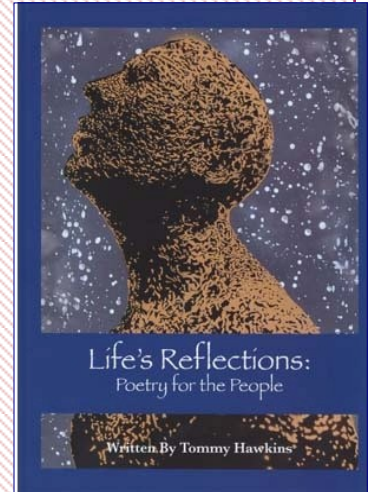
His interest in poetry dates back to his first English Literature class at the University of Notre Dame. The instructor

swept in the door that morning and announced to his class: "Good morning, my name is Father Chester A. Soleta. It's a pleasure to be your teacher. My specialty is poetry. I will make it live in your soul." The priest then read T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of Jay Alfred Prufrock" with dramatic intensity. Young Hawkins was extremely impressed with both the poetry and the instructor, who became his friend and counselor.

Hawkins divulged a second reason for writing his poetry book: "I just wanted to show people that I could write, something folks might not expect from an ex-jock."

Pictured at right is the striking cover of Hawkins' coffee table book. Each of his 45 poems in his book is accompanied by a painting by a major artist, such as LeRoy Neiman, Ernie Barnes, Tim Townsley and Anatole Krasnyansk.

The Valley Scribe sat down with Hawkins to discuss his writing.



Q: When did you begin writing the book?

A: I have been writing these narratives over a period of years, dating back to the time I left the University of Notre Dame.

Q: Were you writing poetry when you played for the Lakers?

A: Yes, and I had to hide it because professional athletes were not supposed to be writing poetry.

Q: How rare is it for a professional athlete to write poetry?

A: To my knowledge, no other athlete has ever written this type of publication. I know very few people in sports who have the ability to put together a poetry book illustrated with works by major artists like LeRoy Neiman, Ernie Barnes, Tim Townsley and Anatole Krasnyansk. This is a very, very unique book of which I'm very proud.

Q: What has helped you become a better writer besides writing itself?

A: I took the time to study writing: a year of effective writing and publishing extension classes at UCLA.

Q: For you, what is the most difficult aspect of writing?

A: To select a universal subject—nothing in my book should be foreign to society or to people. The challenge is to have something meaningful to say about that subject.

Q: Is it easy for you to transfer your creative thoughts onto paper or onto a computer screen?

A: Sometimes I curse the day that I decided to become a poet because it is so difficult. I have a piece in my book called "Music of My Mind." What I wanted to

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

describe are the different types of music that influence my thoughts and feelings. But the more I got into composing that poem, the more I felt like I was wrestling a double-sided octopus.

Q: Have you shared your poetry with anyone else over the years?

A: Yes. People will come to my house and say to me, "Tommy, you ought to put this in a book." So I published this cocktail table book. Hard cover, and every page is LAMINATED. You can just wipe away any spilled coffee or red wine!

Q: What are some tips you have for writers?

A: Writing is not for the weak at heart or the impatient. Writing is re-writing and revision. Nobody cares how erudite or flowery you can be. Readers want to be taken on a unique journey that captures their fantasies.

Q: Are you writing any other books?

A: I am currently writing a book about my pioneering ten years in professional basketball. I am also writing about the superstars I've met during my career as well as the evolution of talk radio in Los Angeles.

Q: Do you wish you would have published the book earlier in your life?

A: Publishing will not always take place on your preferred timetable. I am happy to have done this in my lifetime.

For more info on *Life's Reflections: Poetry for the People*, please visit www.tommyhawkins.net



Racing with the Moon

Racing with the moon
Midnight Cowboy in despair,
decked out in his 'finery'
with tonic on his hair.
Shirt opened to the navel,
on his neck a chain of gold,
checking out 'the action'
if I may be so bold.

Lady killer on the loose
sucking down a beer,
looking for a woman who will
let him hold her near.
Lasered in on every glance
'Mr. Goodbar' on the prowl,
certainly there's a chick around
that will listen to him howl.

Smoothly he surveys the scene
with calculated motion,
smiling here and winking there
when he has the notion.
Fly-casting in the disco using social bait,
will he get a nibble?
He can hardly wait.

The night turns into morning,
the club's about to close,
and his last chance at 'some action'
has just turned up her nose.

So, he downs his draft and starts to leave
reeling in rejection,
all alone and needy
with no hope of resurrection.
Hey, there will be another time,
a more seductive day
when he will leave the nightclub
having swept some 'skirt' away.

But, tonight he simply must accept
there will be no horn of plenty,
like the mug left sitting on the bar,
Don Juan had come up empty.

— Tommy Hawkins ©2011

A member of SFV, Sheila Moss, was published in the *LA Times* on Aug. 28.

Letter to the Editor

Re: "On Path to Repairs"

Los Angeles has a new strategy on damaged sidewalks. City officials want to catalog the damage city-wide, tally the total of what it would cost to repair the sidewalks and then ask property owners to tax themselves to pay for the work.

Why spend \$10 million to document what many property owners know already? Why not start dividing the \$10 million to cover the cost of repairs that homeowners agree to pay half of? We did this for the pine tree that cracked the sidewalk outside my house. It would be a start.

So many times a study confirms what you already know.

Sheila S. Moss
Northridge

On Saturday, Oct. 27, at 2 p.m. I will give a reading of my humorous essays and light verse at the Woodland Hills Library. Everyone's invited of course—I need an audience.

Erica Stux

TAKE NOTE

Not Just Playing Around

Gary Wosk and Marc Littman haven't been lazing around this past summer. Gary, trying out his new flash fiction genre, has been published in two e-zines the past few months. His story, "Bubbe to the Rescue," appears in *the e-Fiction* e-zine at <http://www.efictionmag.com/store/> Uninvited, buttinsky Bubbe takes action to help her grandson. Both writers submitted flash fiction stories that were accepted by *Fiction Brigade, A Collection of Flash Fiction* (September 2012). Go to <http://www.fictionbrigade.com/shop/fictionbrigade-a-collection-of-flash-fiction/> Marc's story is titled "The 1000th Ghost," — a Disneyland inspired fantasy — and "They Are Here," is the title of Gary's eerie tale of futuristic class warfare. Congrats to Gary and Marc.

From Rita Keeley Brown:

I have been deep into final preparations for a talk on *Good Luck, Mrs. Brown* and a 1-day workshop on writing — "You Have a Story Waiting to be Told" — at the library in my hometown of Scottsbluff, Nebraska. My book was reviewed by the *Scottsbluff Star-Herald*.

Locally, I will be doing another series of four writing workshops at St. Bernadine's Church in Woodland Hills after the first of January and will also be leading workshops at several senior citizens meetings in the Valley — dates not finalized yet.

Good Luck Mrs. Brown has also been submitted to the **USA Book News Best Book Award Contest** — winners to be decided in November."

The **Henry Miller Memorial Library**, a non-profit art space, co-sponsors the upcoming **Big Sur Writing Workshop, Nov. 30-Dec. 2**, for children's picture books, early reader, middle grade and young adult fiction.

And from Yolanda Fintor:

Maralys Wills, our June speaker, emailed me over the summer for permission to print a portion of my article, "Senior Olympic Surprises" to be included in her just published book, *So You're Seventy, So What?*

Of course, I was pleased to give my permission.

The Greater Los Angeles Writers Society meets monthly at the Palms-Rancho Park Library Ray Bradbury Room 2920 Overland Ave., L.A.

More info on the GLAWS meetings and activities at <http://www.glaws.org/events/monthlyeventcalendar.html>

October's topic: "Writers of Color." Speaker TBA

Ken's Pet Peeves

TASTELESS MEALTIME COMMERCIALS

It is most disgusting when one sits down to eat
To see a TV ad direct from the street.



They cross the line for us
delicate diners
When they air commer-
cials about panty liners.

Hemorrhoid cures have
little appeal
When one is trying to
enjoy a meal.

Hyperkeratosis, a word I cannot spell
Is an itchy scalp that is far from being well.

"Use Depends! You've got a lot of living to do."
But, must I be reminded while eating my stew?

Without warning they will discuss jock itch.
So, it's best right now I flip off the switch.



GUM CHEWERS

Now up and down their
teeth do pound

And most of the time go
round and round.

They try to talk as they chew their cud
But it comes out sounding more like mud.

Some blow bubbles between their chews,
With a splattered face they pay their dues.

It's OK to freshen your breath
But please don't work your jaws to death.



MORE PUNOGRAPHS

I'm reading a book about anti-gravity. I just can't put it down.

I did a theatrical performance about puns. It was a play on words.

They told me I had type-A blood, but it was a Type-O.

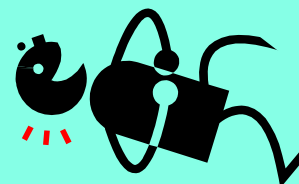
When you get a bladder infection urine trouble.

Why were the Indians here first? They had reservations.

I didn't like my beard at first. Then it grew on me.

Broken pencils are pointless.

- anonymous



"She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah!" The Beatles yowled on WINS-Radio.

I sat in my father's old 1956 Plymouth and looked east on Canal Street. The motor had been running for the past half hour to keep the car warm and power the radio.

It was March, and typically crappy weather for New York. Up ahead about four blocks, I could see the place where Manhattan gave way to the East River. The specter of Brooklyn lurked several miles across the water, hiding in snow flurries.

Every few minutes, I'd 'flick' the windshield wipers to clear the glass. There was nothing much to see but I was waiting for someone.

The snow wasn't 'sticking' yet and the roadway was wet and glistening. Here and there, puddles sulked in the potholes the city never seemed able to keep filled, and brownish-gray piles of slush from some recent snowstorm rotted against the curb like small graves. The car stank from stale cigarette smoke and the heat of the tubes in the radio.

But it was great to be home.

It was hard to believe a day ago I'd boarded a flight from Los Angeles, where summer lived all year long. The band I played in had just finished a road trip to Las Vegas and California. It was our first time out of New York and we'd been gone for four months. Typical New Yorker, I'd enjoyed the trip and bored all the West Coast natives with observations about how much better things were in "the East."

Ernestine, the person I was waiting for, was at ballet class. She wasn't exactly a girlfriend; more like a friend who happened to be a girl. But I had missed her. I'd written several times a week with wry commentary about the pseudo-life 3000 miles away.

"They call 'Hollywood Beds' 'Twin Beds.' "

"All the Chinese food comes from a can."

"Priests in New York are more Jewish than rabbis in L. A."

"Out here, bagels are called 'croissants.' "

"All the Puerto Ricans come from Mexico."



*Written and submitted in honor of
California Writers Week: October 14-21.*

painting with legs that started at her shoulders — she adored me. But I'd been slow out of the gate, and — in the still-naïve early 60s — we'd barely progressed past the good-night kiss stage. I was home now, for good. And that was going to change.

As a new song came on the radio, I saw her striding down the block — black leggings under heavy knee-length wool coat, knitted cap pulled down to her eyes. "All the leaves are brown, and the sky is grey ..." The Mamas and The Papas were singing about California.

I watched Ernestine climb the steps of the stoop that led to the entrance of the building and waited for the song to finish.

She let herself in.

"I went for a walk on a winter's day ..."

I looked out at the grey sky, the slush, the people buried in heavy coats, gloves and earmuffs.

"I'd be safe and wa-arm if I was in L.A. ..."

I turned off the engine and the radio died as The Mamas and The Papas sang, "California Dreamin' on such a winter's daaaaay ..."

I turned up my collar to keep the snow and wind out, ducked out of the car and dashed across the street.

I rang the bell, and Ernestine buzzed me in. I climbed the five flights to her loft. She stood on the top landing, ecstatic to unexpectedly see me.

I gave her a huge hug and crowed, "I'm moving to California!"

— Ray Malus

Review and Refresh

Modifiers (call them adjectives and adverbs if you will) alter the view of nouns and verbs. With a modifier, a dog can become a *vicious* dog. A cat meows, but with a modifier she can meow *plaintively*. And modifiers come in larger sizes—call them phrases and clauses, if you wish—but they *alter* the view the same way.

Growling viciously at the salesman, the dog leaped at the screen door.

The cat meowed as if she had lost her best friend.

Use care in the placement of modifiers. Otherwise confusion and sometimes unintended humor can result. Grammarians classify the most rampant errors of this kind as *misplaced modifiers*, *squinting modifiers* and *dangling modifiers*.

Misplaced Modifiers

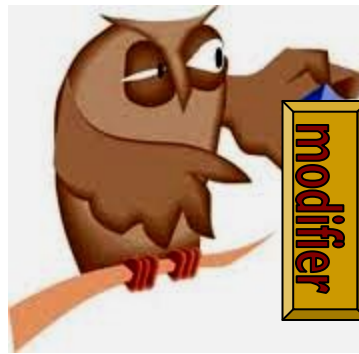
A misplaced modifier gives the impression that it modifies something other than what was intended.

We have some new bicycles for serious riders with adjustable seats.

(Adjustable tushes? Try ... *We have some new bicycles with adjustable seats for serious riders.*)

Bobby continues teasing the goat with a smile of satisfaction on his face.

(A goat with a smirk? Try ... *With a smirk of satisfaction on his face, Bobby* etc.)



Squinting Modifiers

When a modifier “squints,” it might be taken to modify either of two words.

Mr. Holburn said on the first day of class he would ask us to keep a journal.

Did Mr. Holburn say it on the first day or did he want the journal on the first day?

(Try ... *On my first day of class, Mr. Holburn* etc.)

I thought all this time you were in Grand Forks.

Did I think it all this time or were you in Grand Forks all this time?

(Try ... *All this time I thought you were in Grand Forks* or

I thought you were in Grand Forks all this time.)



Dangling Modifiers

A dangling modifier is a modifier with nothing in the sentence for it to modify.

Driving across the range, some buffalo came into view. Buffalo at the wheel?

(Try ... *As we drove across the range, some* etc.)

Cleaning the garage, the shelf collapsed. Who's cleaning the garage?

(Try ... *When I was cleaning the garage, the shelf collapsed.*)

— Dave Wetterberg

The women arrived promptly for the Wednesday 10 a.m. critique group. I had already taken a seat at Andi Polk's dining room table and I watched the others settle in with their coffee, notebooks and papers.

One by one, each member read her story and then, in classic critique style, each listener responded to the reading.

"Work is sent out to group members before we meet. We read through the document and write detailed comments in the margins," critique coordinator Lillian Rodich informed me.

In this intimate gathering, the writer responded spontaneously to the person critiquing, as if they shared a one-on-one conversation.

I noted that the critic initially made several positive points about the writer's composition. I heard: "I loved the way...", or "You showed me how...", "Your story reminded me of...", and "I admire the skillful way you...". Negatives were few and always phrased as tactful suggestions.

And so the morning pleasantly passed as each member read to her

SHARON'S SISTERHOOD



— Kathy Highcove

may not have been shared before," said Paula Diggs.

"And that need to be shared — without worrying about typos," added Lillian with a chuckle.

A couple of the members divulged that they joined SFV specifically to find a critique group. They wanted to write and then be critiqued by their peers — people who were good listeners and made helpful suggestions in non-negative terms. And critics who wouldn't try to mold the piece into their own type of writing styles.

"It's interesting to see the reactions to our stories," said Andi Polk, "But after we share a story we still 'own' that piece. We don't feel forced to make changes that'll please others, but not ourselves."

The Wednesday participants told me that they've learned — together—not only how to critique but also to effectively nurture each



attentive listeners.

During the break we sipped fresh orange juice and nibbled on fresh figs and cheese. I wondered why I was not familiar with some of the women, and why I may not have seen

other's writing.

"Our critique group has been a gift," said Sharon Yofan. "We've stimulated each other's creativity, and yet we've learned how to structure our stories



them at our monthly meetings.

"Why did you join the SFV?" I asked.

"Well, I didn't join to go hear speakers," said one. "I rarely want to read at Open Mic," said another. These women prefer the intimacy of their group. And they frankly admitted that the all-women circle had been a pleasantly unique experience.

The women, I was told, have felt safe,



and writings."

A win-win situation for these six SFV members, it's clear. Sail on, Sharon's Sisterhood.

On the following pages are samples of this group's writing. I know you'll enjoy the variety of their styles and stories.

WRITING IS HARD ...

Saturday morning, 6 a.m. I'm reading Jack Hefron's *Writers Idea Book* which arrived in the mail yesterday. I want to write, but feel dry. His book has a lot of ideas, called "prompts" to help start the creative engine.

First prompt: Show up on a regular basis. Preferably at the same time, in the same place every day. Can I do it? Can I be that disciplined? Time will tell.

Next, Jack says to create a writing space that's comfortable. I look around the house. Hmm, which room will moti-

vate and support my creative self? Not the den, with the plush recliner for reading and watching TV. Too comfortable.

I don't have a desk. Too confining, too structured. As a student, days were spent restricted by a desk. Later, as a teacher, confined to a desk. Brief summer jobs as a secretary; eight hours trapped at a desk. And there was a desk when I was a counselor, writing notes about clients. Always a desk.

I walk around contemplating the furniture in the living room. Like Goldilocks, I test each chair and sofa. There's a dark, cherry wood table, I bought for playing bridge. It sits in front of the large window facing the driveway. That might work. I sit down in one of the chairs; I don't think this is the place. It's not about being too big or too small; rather, it's about being comfortable and welcoming.

Is this a place to spend time while waiting for my creative self to emerge? Will the critic remain in the background or take charge? How about the distracted, restless one who hates doing the same thing for very long? What of the dreamer, who just wants to stare out the window and watch the birds



dart from bougainvillea to feeder? I want all parts of me satisfied. Is that too much to ask?

After trying each chair and couch, I head back to the den and into the Lazy Boy recliner. I feel cozy as I nestle into its soft, velvety fabric. I stare out the window at the leaves of the jacaranda and eucalyptus trees that stand tall and mighty. Their thin leaves are dancing, cheering me on.

Now where did I put that pen?

— Sharon Yofan

Another Time

Another time

I would have travelled
to Argentina,

danced the tango
in high heels

and a tight red dress



Now I only dream of it
in my recliner, happy
in my long cotton skirt,
peasant blouse, and
sassy
silver
earrings.

— Sharon Yofan

The ants come marching in ...

My elderly, eighty-four-year-old Auntie, as I affectionately refer to her, is perhaps the most stubborn person I know. You cannot change her mind on anything, from believing in the existence of God to how to make the perfect turkey gravy.



Fortunately for me, I am her favorite niece, kind of like the daughter she wished she'd had. I love spending time in her home which happens to be three blocks from the beach. Yep, right in the center of Hermosa Beach where one can see the ocean, pier, walkers, bike riders and all sorts of people, in very little clothing, hanging about. From Auntie's deck I have viewed squadrons of pelicans, sail boats and even a fireworks display.

It was the enjoyment of the beach which led me to contact my aunt to see if I could stay in her home over the Fourth of July. I knew she had travel plans and wouldn't be at home that holiday. I could have the run of the place.



"Of course you can stay," said Auntie, "but please be careful because the last time you stayed, the ants arrived. You must have left food out or didn't properly wipe off the kitchen counters."

In addition to being very stubborn, Auntie is extremely frugal. She recycles everything from plastic bags to used paper napkins. Nothing that can be reused gets thrown away. This habit definitely contributed to her ant problem, unbeknownst to me at the time.

"Oh, don't worry, I'll be very fastidious and leave absolutely nothing that would attract even one pesky little ant."

Boy, did I wipe and wipe. But on the second morning, disaster! One determined ant was crawling on the counter.

I explained to the ant that I knew he was some type of scout and must die before being able to alert others to follow his lead. With that admonition and a swipe of a finger, that little soul was gone.

Later, I noticed a second ant. Now I was getting nervous because obviously



the word had gotten out before the first scout met his demise.

A second talk with the new scout and again...lights out! By the time the third ant arrived, I was really getting nervous, fearing that Auntie might not be so eager to have me as a house guest if ants came with me.



Talking out loud to the third ant before ending its life, I said, "Now listen ant, this isn't funny. Why are you here? There's absolutely NOTHING for you here...not a crumb or a scrap of anything. Why don't you and the others go look somewhere else?"



A few hours later Auntie arrived back home. We were in the kitchen chatting and I decided that just in case a fourth ant showed up, I'd better confess.

As we stood watching the area where the three ants had earlier been spotted, lo and behold, there came the fourth! And it was headed straight for some used napkins Auntie was saving after drying washed strawberries.

As Auntie never throws anything out, even a used paper napkin can be recycled to dry damp strawberries or other washed-off fruit.

And that was precisely what Auntie had done...she used old napkins to drain washed fruit.

"Auntie, these used napkins that you're saving are what's attracting the ants!" I cried in dismay, observing the fourth little creature headed directly toward the fruit stained paper.

"Oh, I guess you may be right. Well, we'll just have to move the napkins to another area so the ants can't smell them."

"Where shall I put them?" I asked.

"How about down in that cupboard there?"

she responded as she hit the fourth ant with her special green earth-friendly spray, leaving it to die and hopefully warn others of their fate should they dare to follow.



Well, Auntie may think she's outsmarted those pesky ants by moving the fruit stained paper napkins, but I know better and it's only a matter of time before the ants come marching in.



— Kimberly Wilson

Vanity

I park my car in the garage and sigh. A wave of nostalgia and guilt washes over me as I view the decrepit vanity, still a work of art in spite of its obvious neglect and dismal surroundings. Just an old piece of furniture pushed against a cold plaster wall and piled high with some boxed tax files and bags of clothes ready for Goodwill.

The wood is cracked and mutely begging for attention. My reflection in its large round mirror is all inclusive albeit mercifully misted over in the dull glass. Still lines in my face press into the reflection like a stamp of reality. I turn my back on this piece of junk which once graced its middle shelf with an Erte statue and resided as an honored guest in my bedroom.

How many times as a teenager did I sit in front of that round and revealing mirror and let my emotions play themselves out in a private moment of despair! How many times did I cry at my ugly reflection and wonder why I was blessed with brains instead of beauty. How often did I sit there and pray that pancake make-up would cover my flaws and send a certain boy to me. My vanity lived and suffered with me for fifteen years as I grew up.

When I married, the vanity moved with me from apartment to apartment and house to house from year to year. As busy as I was, I hardly acknowledged its presence; a passing glance, storage drawers for old letters and lace hankies, a shelf for my wedding picture. And then when my daughter Carole moved out on her own, the vanity went with her. While it was there perhaps it listened to her secrets and reflected her joys and sorrows.

I don't remember why and how it finally ended up in our garage. Twenty-five years of neglect and broken promises have taken their toll. Now the mirror is tarnished and bits of silver reveal scratches. Its surface is cracked and roughened and insults the beautiful



rounded lines and bleached wood. The drawers are held in place by shoe-laces woven through broken handles.

Still, its design remains graceful and it retains some dignity. I cannot part with it. And so it will remain in our garage, dilapidated into junk, not revealing what it has seen or heard and pricking my conscience every time I park my car.

— **Lillian Rodich**

SAILING

Sailing
in Santa Monica Bay,
ripples.... smiles in the water
welcoming me.

A faint breeze,
soft as a sigh
fills the canvas
just enough.
Suddenly a dash of wind
powders my face with foam
and salts my lips.

I grip the tiller and approach
the corner of the bay
and an open sea becomes
a threatening stranger.

The painted sky
brightens my mood,
freedom invites me to dare,
then a gust of wind
whips the sail.
And I race the waves,
knowing fear
and exhilaration and profound peace
in that moment.

— **Lillian Rodich**

Spring has wrapped her arms
around the Boston Commons
I sit outside on a chipped wooden bench
and watch students clad in wool
hurrying along gusty pathways
in the old city's chilly April
and I am intrigued by what I don't see
for no one wears tennis shoes in Boston

clunky black sandals
stamp over rusty grates
long woolen coats flap
against polished boots
dark skinned loafers
thick-soled and scuffed
meet tweed skirts
and no one strolls about in tennis shoes in Boston

sweat-shirt hooded students
whispering academics
bend like saplings in the wind
while nearby twisted branches
softened by new greenery
battle the same icy gusts
trash skitters across sparse lawns
finally trapped against benches and curbs
and statues in the Commons
yet no tennis shoes race from April chill in Boston

aging fruit trees
thickly frosted with pink blossoms
release petal showers as they shiver
and tulip patches beneath them
revel silently in their own perfection
while young girls dance nearby in brown oxfords
their faces whipped by scarves and hair
still no tennis shoes pirouette on Boston sidewalks

No One Wears Tennis Shoes In Boston

clumps of students, their focus lost in the wind's sharp gusts
haul lap-tops into steamy coffee shops
old buildings reeking with neglect
erase the fresh scent of youths
who rush towards the screeching T's
train doors snap open
loading and unloading leather shod students
young commuters in careless queues
push against strident voices
and bodies stiffened with cold
their arms clutching text books
their eyes cast downwards

and in the sun-lit ripples on path or walk or street
along the leaf-strewn curbs
and windswept brick courtyards
or darkly entered hallways
no tennis shoes can be seen in Boston

I sit outside on a chipped wooden bench
and watch the people passing by with awe
looking for something I find oddly missing
the chill is numbing me as I stamp
my worn white tennis shoes
against the frost
and wander away
in search of anonymity
and a warm coffee shop
on a gusty Spring day in Boston
where no one wears tennis shoes

— Lillian Rodich

The River Rat

When I was eleven, my father bought a small shack nestled in the side of a cliff. We were the last house on a gravel and dirt road next to the Palisades State Park along the Hudson River. The last house in a corner of town. River on one side, woods and mountain on the two other sides, no kids anywhere.

The house was shotgun style; you had to walk through

each room to get to the next. Every room's windows looked out to the river below so you could walk through the house and never lose sight of the pewter band of water framed between the maple trees. On sunny days the water reflections sparkled and danced off our ceilings as we moved from room to room.

A trailhead to the river began by our parking space. My dog Zanger and I became the self-appointed guardians of the trail. He'd bark and I would peer from behind the cotton curtains to see who was walking by. Happy faces moved in and out of the light and dark of the maples and oaks, as nostrils widened to the sweet breath of nature.

There were unending woodlands behind my house, all mine to explore. And explore it I did. I carefully climbed the cliff on all fours, securing three toe-holds before moving up. One day I discovered a cave hidden behind a wild blueberry bush and stocked it with candles and matches. I found a secret trail behind a rock in a bend of the common trail and followed it above the road along the water. By carefully placing one foot, toe down first, in front of the other, you can walk noiselessly like a fox, so on Saturdays I ran quietly along the upper trail through the trees, spying on the weekenders below.

I spent hours by the riverside watching the tides change and wash up new examples of humanity's flotsam. I found tangled fishing line and crab cages abandoned among the rocks. From



my hillside cave, I saw boats of Swedish fishermen spreading their nets across the river current. They were catching schools of Shad. Each day they hauled their nets to shore to dry them. My curiosity drew me closer. The fishermen saw my interest and Old Charlie taught me to knot string into squares using wide wooden needles to repair the seine holes.

The fishermen taught me how to toss the crab cages out over the water so that as they sunk, the four sides swung open. "When hauling it in, the central rope pulls the four sides together and up you pull quickly so the crab won't escape," said old Charlie, my new fisherman friend. My first crab was undersize and he threw it back. The second ... well, my friend prepared a pot of boiling water. Not caring to capture and eat live food, I settled for throwing in some fishing droplines tied to bells that jingled when fish bit. Fishing became an excuse to hang out by the river.

Eventually, I met other river rats. Together, we searched for smooth flat rocks to sling across the water and watched them skip along the surface. We leapt from rock to rock across pools and swishing eddies. Our feet flew over the nearly invisible trails worn along the top of the rocks by generations of rock hoppers.

One day while sweeping the living room floor, I heard high voices and water splashing; I paused and turned to look out between the trees. I could see figures jumping off the rocks into the water. I dropped the broom, ran out the door and down the trail to a place where I could scuttle and slide down the hill to a spot just above them. I didn't know you could swim there, but now I crouched watching them through the bushes, inching closer as I carefully climbed down the slope. A girl about my age looked up and said, "Hi! Are you going swimming?"

I slid down to the water's edge. "Aren't there rocks under the water?"

"Yeah, but we know where they are. That big rock," she pointed, "has no rocks by it on the left side, so we can dive in right there."

At dusk when the tide was low, I inspected the now exposed rocks and felt secure enough to brave them the next time the tide was in. I began to swim there everyday at high tide with my new swimming friends.

—Judy Garriss

In 1953, I was eleven and riding for two years—mostly bareback. Neither of our saddles really fit me; besides bareback was quicker and easier. The only problem was my horse, an ornery black Morgan mare named Susanna. I called her Suzy. She was spooky and unpredictable. Riding her was a challenge. My dad said she was basically barn-sour. The previous owner neglected her, so she was lazy and hated leaving our stable.

Riding her reminded me of the hours I spent practicing the piano—lots of drudgery and a few moments of joy. Along our dirt road I trained her: galloped and stopped her, backed her straight without her rearing up, spun her left and right and practiced all of her gaits. When she performed well enough I'd treat her with a carrot from the carrot field across Bull Creek.

One day she deserved a carrot and we rode down our road to the creek. Although we've done this several times, she always balked at first. She gave in after a few hard kicks with my booted heels. I encouraged her to slide down the steep side next to the pepper tree and race up the other side next to the scrub oak.

The fluffy carrot tops were tall and covered with light powdery dust of the Valley. I could see that the carrot crowns had grown since we were last here. I hopped off Suzy and pulled two healthy carrots out of the field; one for her, one for me. After I rubbed the dirt off on my jeans, I gave a carrot to Suzy, "That a girl. Enjoy it. You did well today."

Munching with a bridle bit in her mouth wasn't pleasant. Chunks of her carrot were falling on the ground. Suzy swung her head to grab mine. "No!" I shouted and punched her mouth. That was what I did when she tried to bite me too. "You don't *take* it. I *give* it."

Startled, she shook her head and her eyes rolled open wide. I picked up her carrot droppings and gave them to her. She finished eating before I did. "Time to go." With my remaining carrot hanging out of my mouth, I hopped on the nearest cement irrigation pipe and swung on to her back.

About then I heard a fighter jet coming in for a landing at the Reserve Air Wing airport just a couple blocks south of us. It was too low, skimming the tops of the walnut orchard. "Suzy look. It's gonna crash!" I said as if she could understand me. "Dad says they're widow makers. Whaddaya think?"

We trotted closer to Hayvenhurst Avenue to get a clearer view. "Nope. It made it this time."

As I looked down Hayvenhurst watching the jet land, an old



dark blue coupe came toward us. The dust trail behind it was low and thick. Slowly the car came to a stop near our intersection. There was nothing around us but walnut and citrus orchards, the carrot field and vacant dusty land. Must be lost.

The man in the car motioned for me to come over.

"Lost? Need directions?" I shouted.

He waved again. I kicked Suzy twice to get her to move. I could see he was about my father's age, early thirties, with dark hair. His car windows were open, his blue shirtsleeves rolled up and his arm on the window ledge was tan.

"Come over closer," he said with a big smile. "I've... got something... to show you." His tan arm dropped to his pants.

Although on my horse, I couldn't see what he was doing. My body signaled a chill, my stomach tightened and my heart started to race.

"No!" I shouted and spun Suzy around and kicked her hard. "Go!" I shouted leaning into her ears. "Home!" I knew that Suzy loved running home to the barn. I yelled, "Fast!" and I kicked her again. She ran fast as the wind. I didn't look back.

We raced down to the bottom of the creek and I ran her north to the deepest part hidden by scrub trees.

He can't follow me down here, I thought.

Carefully, I lifted my head and saw his car speeding north on Hayvenhurst with the dust trail climbing high. I waited until he was out of sight. Calmer, I whispered, "Thank you for being so barn-sour." And I rubbed Suzy's neck. "He doesn't know where we live. We're safe." I hugged her. "You get two carrots next time."

We leaped up the creek side and I let her gently gallop home. In our corral I hosed her off and rubbed her down, cleaned her hooves, then ran the hose water over my face and realized I had been crying. I never told my parents about my getaway.

Fearless, I rode horses for years.



By Andrea Polk

Another hairpin curve. He wonders why does she think this is so much fun? The road's always in bad shape at this time of the year. His headlights pick flocks of matted ice and snow in the bend of the road.

She reaches and turns up the blower to clear the windshield. Then wipers. Back and forth, back and forth. So much snow. The wipers can't keep it clear. Ahead red lights from cars ahead snake up the road.

"How much longer?" she asks.

"Quite awhile. The road's really bad. Icy. They'll make us put on chains soon."

Around the bend a man in a yellow slicker stops them. "The road's closed ahead. Better stop in White Lake."

"How far is that?"

"Not more than a half mile."

White Lake: a spot passed so many times on the way to the mountain. Never noticed in the excitement to get to the destination. Soon a few lights on the side of the road ahead. Buildings. White Lake.

He pulls into the parking lot next to the café. Long low building with a lighted sign in the window. **Food**. Inside the restaurant she spots an empty table for two in the back by the kitchen door. Sticky table top, cold drafts blow in from the back door.

"We were here before five years ago," she says.

"No, ten years." he answers .

"Ten years?"

"Ten years. Have you forgotten?"

"Forgotten?"

"Yes, forgotten. That was the year you skied

every day with Dicky Holcomb."

"I did? Every-day?"

"Everyday."

"I forgot."

Her chair wobbles and a leg slips off the edge of the linoleum. She looks down to right it. The top layer of the linoleum has

pulled back and she sees the old pattern of yellow flowers. A memory floats up. She stares out the window. Slabs of sleet twist in the light. A rich smell of old grease undulates out of the kitchen.

"Oh, right, I remember this place. I came here ten years ago. I remember this pattern. Flowers. That was a long time ago. I'd hoped ... "

"I'm getting coffee. What do you want?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing."

— Paula Diggs



Brandi Takes the Cake

By Paula Diggs

Shoot! There goes my sister Brie running across the street. That's forbidden, but what can I do? Just because I'm an alpha dog they expect me to guide her. Hah! Too hard. I set a good example--that's ALL I can do. She makes some bad choices. Thinks she's some kind of free spirit. "Lady Gaga," the humans call her. Now we'll both have restrictions. Like, not get to go in the front yard. I'm so upset now that I have to eat



Hi, I'm Brie. The cute friendly one. The rotund one, Brandi, is off looking for more food. Alpha dogs are sooo greedy!

something. I'm so emotional. When I'm upset I just have to eat, have something in my mouth ... and chew. I'm very oral. Helps me cope. I feel responsible for everyone.

Once when Brie got in trouble for barking and got sent to her crate for a Time Out, I ate a whole chunk of fresh sod from the backyard and got an upset stomach. So they took me to the

(Continued on page 17)

(Continued from page 16)

vet. Here's the first thing that happens when I visit the vet: I have a weigh-in. Then I watch my humans' faces very carefully. If the vet says, "Overweight again," everyone looks at me with serious expressions. Trouble.

I know I have a weight problem. Our She immediately says "Diet!" and cuts back on my food. That's a problem. I really like my big soft round self. But humans want me to look like some scrawny show dog. So I'm always on a diet. It wasn't always like this. When our humans brought us to their house He gave us SO MUCH FOOD. I thought it was wonderful. He used to make pancakes and hamburgers for breakfast. Chicken for lunch and more meat for dinner. Maybe I got a little overweight, but I was a puppy—less than a year old. I was growing.

The vet got concerned that our bellies couldn't hold it all, but Our He told him that he thought that dogs were smart enough to know how much to eat. And He had NO IDEA why I'd put on so much fat.

"I like to watch them GROW!" said Our He.

The vet looked at the ceiling and replied, "Less food!"

Then I knew it was going to be bad for me.

So all the extra food stopped, which made me depressed. Didn't bother Brie one bit. She just bats her eyes and acts like she's some sort of ditz.

My sister's not a food lover like me. Brie, Miss Beta, is always watching her weight. Obsessed. I'd eat everything she left but they won't let me.

Last week Our He and She were talking about us. One said, "Their fourth birthday's coming up. We should celebrate." I was so happy.

I remembered when Our She had a birthday. There was cake. When we celebrated Our He put a big scoop of ice cream and a piece of lovely cake on Brie's plate. On MY plate he put a TEASPOON of ice cream. I licked it up and waited, but no slice of cake. Darn. Maybe next year ...

All I can do now is sigh and wag my tail.

If only ... I'd
even give
Brie a slice.

Thanx, Sis



Their big 04 is coming up ...



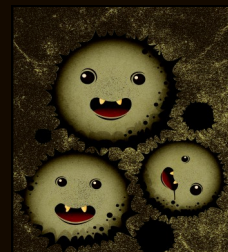
The Old Broom

Out you go, out the door,
you'll sweep my dirty floor no more.
Out of the closet, into the trash,
believe me I'm not being rash.



I finally threw the broom away,
that old straw broom has had its day.
It swept the feathery bits of hair
from under the table and behind the chair.

So gathered the demons in fuzzy balls
beneath the couch and down the halls,
around the corners and behind the stair,
shreds and threads everywhere.



Unbidden along the base of the floor
to roll behind the bedroom door,
hidden dust balls gone astray
all waiting for another day.

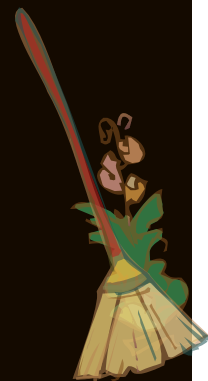
I've heard it say a new broom sweeps clean,
If that is so, what does it mean?
If an old broom is washed in the rains from the roof,
is it clean or dirty and what's the proof?

And how many times have I washed this broom
to clean once again another room.
And why would I keep a broom to sweep,
though frayed and bent its days long spent.

Only a servant of the sweeper, you say
but it swept much better than new brooms may
whose manmade fibers resist stiffly
where only a grass broom whisks so briskly.

Because to sweep is such a bore
and not my favorite household chore,
it waited patiently in its nook
for me to finish another book.

The old broom was my friend, a saint,
it swept 'til the end with no complaint.
But I would not say the same for me
and so I weep for the sweeper, you see.



— Judy Garriss

Come join us for
the October
meeting.

Walk right in,
sit yourself down!

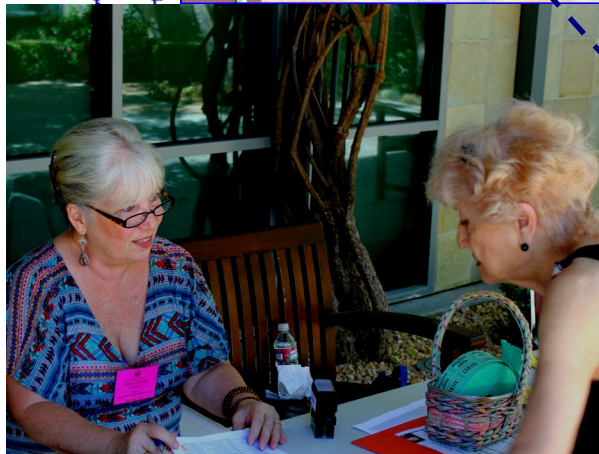


Lillian Rodich chats with Gabriella Owens.

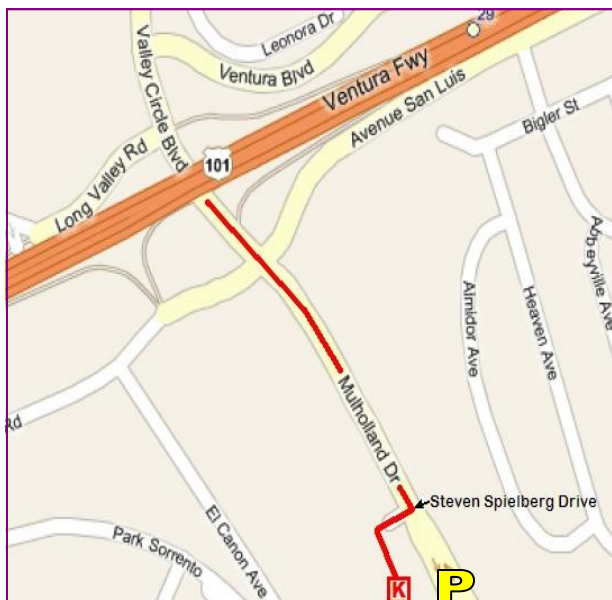


Back in Business
at the
Katzenberg Room

September 2012 Photos



Mary Freeman and Geri Jabara get organized.



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, Oct. 6th, at 1 p.m.

Sign up for Open Mic at 12:30 p.m.

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



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