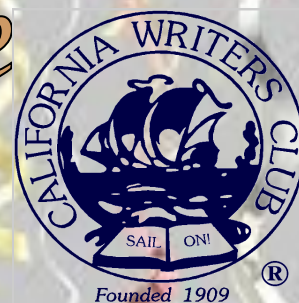




The Valley Scribe

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



Lawyer-Proof Your Writing

More and more authors self-publish to reap greater percentage of profits and to keep tighter control of their works. Dealing with a busy agent or large publication house is more complicated and expensive than an on-line publisher's generic program. But before a new book goes public, a self-publisher might find it prudent to pay an attorney to look over the manuscript. Large publication companies have staff members who read manuscripts and flag legal problems and inaccuracies before publication. Without this help, a self-publisher may unintentionally invite an expensive lawsuit.

"How will a lawyer help me?" a self-publisher might ask. Here's a list of legally sensitive issues:

1. Use of images, quotes, and other materials found in copyrighted works

2. Use of public domain works

3. The amount of previously published quotes used in another publication

4. Portrayals of real people in fictional and non-fictional works

5. Portrayals of famous and non-famous persons in a new work

6. Copyright registration importance

Attorney Kendall T. Jones knows the ins and outs of these complicated issues and has helped many self-published authors mind their legal Ps and Qs. On Saturday she'll speak about legal issues and traps faced specifically by writers. There'll be a Q and A after her presentation.

— KH



KENDALL T. JONES

CONTENTS

- 2 President's Message
- 3 Brian Fagan Review
- 4 Ken's Pet Peeves
- 5 Review and Refresh
- 6 Dave's Prose Pros
7. Georgie and the River
- 8 Weather Vain
- 9 Infinity Redux
- 10 The Eyes Have It
- 11 A Good Day To Shop
- 12 War Hurts
- 13 Priceless Magical Moments
14. Take Note Meeting Details

west valley whimsicals

A Schwartz / Highcove Production

Speak Up For Yourself - And Your New Book



Ready for your star turn? A published author must be prepared to take the stage and morph into an effective public speaker to market a new book.

Public speaking usually means speaking into a microphone. Are you an experienced mic user? If not, here's a few guidelines.

First, grip the microphone firmly, and make sure your hand is comfortable so you don't continually re-grip it as you speak or read.

Hold it at least 2 to 3 inches away, slightly below your mouth. If the mic is too close, it'll lead to a

distorted sound. Too far away and only the front row can hear you.

Place your notes and/or reading material where they can be easily read at the podium. Don't lower your head and mumble into your chest. Glance at your notes and then look up and speak outward.

Even if the microphone is placed in a stand, it should be in front of you, not to one side. Speak only when your face is toward the microphone.

Try to perform a sound check in advance, making sure that the mic is

(Continued on page 2)

Executive Board

President ... Yolanda Fintor

Vice-president/Membership ... Andrea Polk

Vice-president/Programs ... Rita Keeley Brown

Treasurer ... Mary Rubio Freeman

Secretary ... Gary Wosk

Board of Directors

Publicity ... Karen Gorback

Editor ... Kathy Highcove

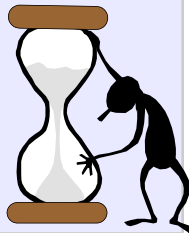
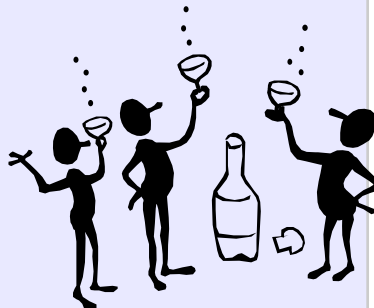
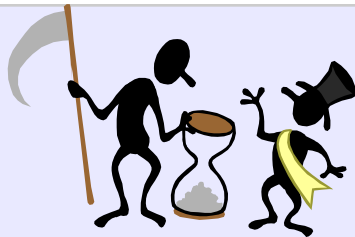
Webmaster/Photographer ... Ray Malus

Critique Group Facilitator ... Andrea Polk

Critique Group Consultant ... Lillian Rodich

Member-at-Large ... Judy Presnall

Open Mike ... Bill Sorrells



President's Message



Yolanda Fintor

As SFV club members bid farewell to 2012, we face the challenges of a new year with optimism, growth and publishing successes.

To help us reach these goals, Rita Brown has lined up exciting programs for 2013.

Our January guest speaker will be Kendall Jones, an entertainment lawyer, who will discuss legal issues faced by writers today. She has much valuable information to share with our members, so come prepared with your questions about the topic.

Here's a peek into the coming months' activities:

In February there will be a panel presentation by three of our own members. Each will describe his/her individual path to publishing. An author of young adult books will speak to us in March. Poet Carol Davis is scheduled for April, national poetry month.

We can look forward to the return of SFV writing contests. Dave Wetterberg has volunteered to take charge of this activity. More info later.

By now you should all have received an email regarding the San Francisco Writers Conference to be held February 14-18. To create interest in all CWC branches the CWC NorCal Group will organize a display of members' book covers. Each branch may send between 10 to 15 book covers. SFV will participate to promote the published authors of our club.

If you're interested, here are the details:

1. Send a clean crisp representation of the front cover of your book.
2. The cover must represent a book published in the last TWO years.
3. Book cover size is 5 inches by 8 inches; books can be from any genre.
4. Publication can be traditional, small press, self and e-published.

Email your cover photo in JPEG format to Ray Malus at rmalus@roadrunner.com. He'll send them on to the SFWC organizers. FYI, here's the contest website: <http://sfwriters.org>

Ray must have all SFV covers by January 5th.

— Yolanda Fintor

(Whimiscals continued from page 1)

placed exactly as it will be during the live event or perhaps if you are interviewed for a radio audience.

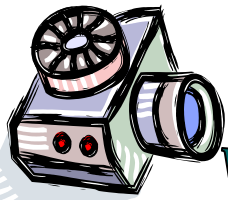
When you begin speaking to a group, listen to how your voice sounds as it comes through the loud-speaker. Are you too loud, or do you hear popping sounds? If so, move the mic a tad further away from your mouth. Ask, "Can everyone hear me?"

When speaking or reading your speech, it's a good idea to use a bit more volume and intensity than you would in conversation. But don't shout. Find a volume that works for your audience.

If you need to sneeze or cough, please do a "star turn" **away** from the microphone.



— KH



Brian Fagan Finds New Stories

Wherever He Digs Up Old Stories



Brian Fagan

SFV Programs Chair Rita Brown introduced December speaker Brian Fagan as an archaeologist, anthropologist, museum director, former UC Santa Barbara professor, sailor, world traveler and now ... a fulltime author.

"Eat your heart out, Indiana Jones," she quipped.

Actually, Brian Fagan's appearance was not quite in the Indiana Jones mode. Not one story was shared about racing against Nazis to find the Ark of the Lost Covenant, and he bears no resemblance to Harrison Ford. However, his presentation of **"Pharaohs, Aleuts and Grinding Stone: Writing about the Past for the Present and the Future and How Not to Write a Best-seller,"** proceeded at a fast clip.

Fagan's aggressive oratory style was complemented by his slide show of illustrations, paintings and graphs. Fagan described some of the ancient and medieval lost worlds he has studied in the last fifty-two years. Other subjects touched on: the black market of African elephant ivory, seafaring peoples, farming, and climate change.

Our speaker didn't wear khaki shorts or a pith helmet, but his words were pithy and a bit piercing. For example, he spoke about the eventual need to relocate up to forty million people from Dhaka, Bangladesh, because of rising sea levels.

"There isn't any plan to deal with this future emergency," he said. "Bangladesh is a place of unskilled peasants—and I don't say that in a pejorative way. Nobody wants to help them. The

politicians seem to be more interested in campaigns and the Fiscal Cliff."

The author rushed on, making academic subjects such as fishing on the North Sea, monsoons in Indonesia and the Chumash Indians of Santa Barbara "juicier" topics to his laymen listeners.

Perhaps far more profound to members than excavated African villages, ancient Egypt, a 30,000 year old skeleton with gold beads, seafaring, Cro-Magnon tools, and reindeer antlers fashioned into weapons, was when Fagan delved into his writing techniques. His books have made obscure academic subjects interesting to the general public. And with all the distractions of tweeting, the Internet and reality TV shows, that's quite an accomplishment.

During Q and A, Fagan was asked about his layman oriented writing style. He responded: "In the final analysis, it's not about artifacts, it's about people. It's the story of human diversity. I write books that have contemporary elements; archaeology can tell us how the ecological choices we make today will affect our future lives.

I tell a story, and that's the key. I put my scientific information in the context of a story; otherwise, the content becomes sleep inducing trivia."

He had the following tips for any budding archaeology writers: "Throw out the jargon, explain clearly what you mean and tell a story."

For more info on Fagan and his books:

www.brianfagan.com and www.amazon.com

— Gary Wosk

I'm off to visit my friendly MD,
He'll draw some blood and ask me to pee.

To ease my fears he'll maintain a smile
While dreaming of golf the entire while.

I'll stand before him with body stripped bare
As each orifice is checked with care.

He'll ask me questions about heart, lungs and liver
As naked I stand and my skin starts to shiver.

I'll be asked to say "Ah," my breath I will hold
As he applies a stethoscope cold.

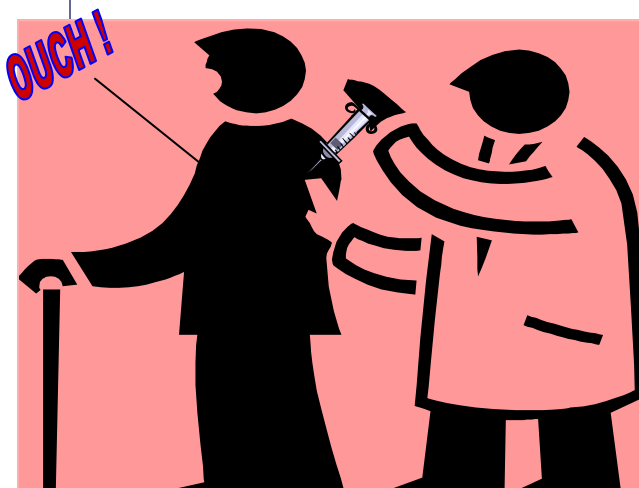
I'll listen for comments that will determine my fate,
But the most I'll hear: *I should lose some weight.*

I'll be asked to breathe in and then to breathe out
While probing fingers will cause me to shout.

He may want to operate on my watch-ma-call-it,
But the greatest pain will be felt in my wallet.

— KEN WILKINS

ANNUAL CHECK-UP



KEN'S PET PEEVES

UNLEASHED DOGS

You'll see it on walks ten times over;
Some senseless jerk who doesn't leash Rover.

The owner plods on, or perhaps in a jog
With little concern of his untethered dog.

The monster running free, ahead of the dope
Will pounce on the pup at the end of your rope.

Or if you're alone, no mutt at your side
You may be attacked with no place to hide.

But don't blame the dog, the roving canine.
It's only its master who's asinine.

— KEN WILKINS



Review and Refresh

Showing and Telling

Remember Show or Tell way back in first grade? Well, long after grade school, writers still show and tell in their stories. But good writers *show* more than they *tell*, and they do it 1) by being specific 2) by making careful word choices and 3) by using imagery.



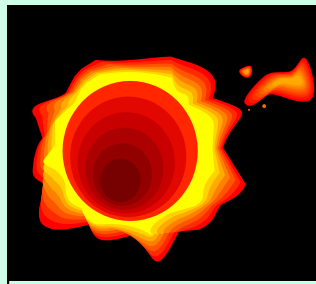
Specificity

Think of specificity in relationship to a funnel. Words at the wide top are general words. Words at the narrow end --- the neck --- are specific.

Hence, *hot* is at the top, and *scorched* is at the bottom. In the same way, *The sun was very hot that day* would be at the top of the funnel, and *In five minutes the two o'clock sun had turned Leticia's neck crimson* at the bottom. In each case, the first version tells; the second shows.

Word Choice

Anything is better than *the hot sun*. The sun is always, permanently, endlessly hot, anyway. Why not write *flaming sun*, *burning sun*, *fiery sun*, *boiling sun*, *blistering sun*, or *sizzling sun*, to better describe the sun? Use your thesaurus. I did.

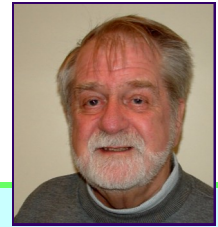


Imagery

Like everyone else, writers experience the world through their five senses. They see it, hear it, smell it, touch it, and taste it. In their stories and poems and columns, most effective writers try to convey an experience, real or imaginary, through images made out of words—visual images (*blue eyes*), auditory images (*crashing waves*), tactile images (*rough hands*), olfactory images (*onion-breath*), and labial images (*murky coffee*). Most writers use the first two—sight and sound—because they're easiest. Tactile comes next. Smell and taste tie for last. (Except for poets. They like to do smells and tastes.)



by Dave Wetterberg



Next time you read your rough draft, check the text to see if you *told* what happened in a scene or if you *showed* the action. After you check, maybe you'll decided to make a change or two, such as:

From: *The room smelled bad.*

To: *The flooded basement reeked of run-off from the town's sewage plant.*

From: *At this point, Kellerman became angry.*

To: *At this point in the argument, Kellerman slammed his fist through the wall.*

From: *Stanley was shy.*

To: *Stanley's cheeks caught on fire.*

From: *Sam's mutt had fleas.*

To: *Sam's mutt jerked his head around and bit at a flea crawling on his rump.*

From: *"Don't touch me!" she said.*

To: *"Don't you dare touch me!" she snarled.*

From: *Brent was unkempt in his appearance.*

To: *Brent always wore loose tee-shirts and baggy jeans, no matter what the occasion.*

From: *He spoiled Sherry terribly.*

To: *He treated Sherry like she was a new car.*

From: *Dad liked to be in charge.*

To: *Dad would have made a good drill sergeant.*

From: *The news was upsetting.*

To: *The news of the shooting destroyed us.*

From: *Jamal didn't want to spend any more time with his high school buddies.*

To: *Jamal knew he'd outgrown Willie and Ali and the rest of his old neighborhood gang.*

From: *Would you like to sit here?" she asked.*

To: *"Would you like to sit over here?" she cooed.*

From: *The Christmas decorations pleased the kids.*

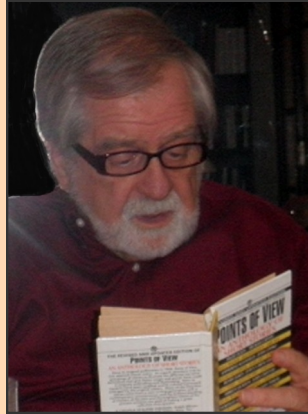
To: *The tall Christmas tree's blinking lights, silvery garlands and colorful ornaments dazzled the smallest Holiday Village visitors.*



DAVE'S PROSE pros



Andrea Polk



Dave Wetterberg



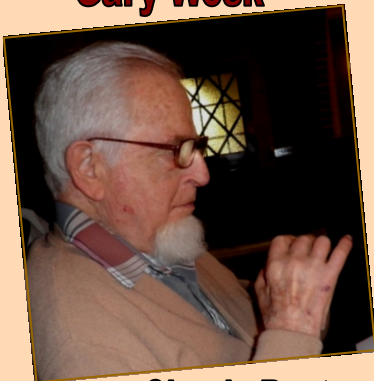
Sheila Moss



Kay Henden



Gary Wosk



Claude Baxter

The Prose Pros Group is composed of experienced writers who have a strong sense of who they are and how they want to participate in a critique group.

During my visit I noted that a critiquer's comment often led to a spirited discussion, a parry and thrust of sorts, and an abundance of good-hearted laughter.

The group's interaction reminded me of a good dinner party: a bit stiff initially, and then after the courses are consumed, the wines imbibed, folks get real, have sudden inspirations, share thoughts, react and reminisce.

Dave's Prose Pros are a well-matched group whose members show high regard and interest in each other's literary work. Their submissions on the next seven pages showcase their group's writing talent.

— Kathy Highcove



Linette Stone

I'm very proud to be in the Prose Pros. We are a professional, high-ability, hard-working, friendly group. Our ground rules: First, we e-mail our contributions to fellow members two days in advance of each meeting. This allows us adequate time to read, think, and, if so inclined, write comments about the piece. Second, we don't read our contributions aloud at the meetings because they've already been read at home. This is time saved for the discussions. It works out well for us. — Dave Wetterberg

I enjoy our group of varied personalities who mesh amazingly well. We are supportive while giving both positive feedback and suggestions for improvement to each other. At every critique group meeting I pick up many "nuggets" from these talented friends.

— Linette Stone

Georgie and the River

by Dave Wetterberg

Saturday, Andy gave his wife a tour of his home town. A city girl from Milwaukee, Erin envied her husband's rustic beginnings and wished from time to time she had been brought up in this innocent picture-book town.

The road was barely narrow enough for one car. The autumn trees and their golden leaves leaned in from either side. Then the road took a roundabout curve to the right and a bridge seemed to appear out of nowhere.

Andy stopped on the bridge.

"Let's get out," he said.

They stepped out of the car and Erin breathed in the fullness of the countryside. The scattered rainclouds that had brooded overhead earlier in the morning had passed along completely now, replaced by a sky of blue peppered with a few delinquent baby clouds.

"This is the Merrimac River," Andy said, leaning over the rail.

Erin stood at his side and looked down at the river with him as it flowed darkly under them. She could hear the water splashing. In the distance were two abandoned mills, empty, lonely shells. Their windows were stark, like sockets without eyes. There was still not another car in sight.

Andy walked to the other side of the bridge and stared out for a quiet minute or two where the water made its way toward the bridge.

He came back to his wife's side and looked over the rail again. "My friend Georgie Nichols drowned here," he said.

Erin didn't know what to say. Then she said softly, "Really?"

"Yes," Andy said. "It was winter. He went through the ice."

"Here?"

"Over there." He pointed towards one of the mills. "Georgie was a nice kid. He liked electricity. Once he rigged up a cigar box like a doorbell. It had a button to push on the outside, and inside he had a bell and some batteries. It worked fine. Press the button, the bell rang. I never could have fixed up anything like that."

"Did you see it? When he drowned, I mean?"

"No. I wasn't here when it happened. I was here the Satur-

day before, though. I'd come down on my bicycle. I couldn't come that day for some reason. I don't remember why."

He went on, "I remember once when the ice was breaking up and floating along in chunks. We sat under the bridge, right under here where we're standing now. Georgie kicked at them when they'd get close to shore and push them along with his feet. He had no fear. When the river was iced over in winter, he'd go out on it, even when it was making those hollow warning sounds underneath. He'd pay no attention. Not me."

After a pause, Andy continued.

"They said that after he went through he tried to climb out, but the ice kept breaking in his hands. He kept himself afloat freezing in that water for a while. Georgie was a good swimmer, but he was no match for the Merrimac River in the middle of the winter.

"Who saw him go through the ice?"

"Someone in the mill happened to be watching from one of the windows. Saw it all. The mill emptied. All the workers ran outside. A couple of them tried walking out on the ice to get him, but they couldn't do anything, of course.

"It took a while before Georgie gave up. The police and the fire department came and tried to get him before he went under. They laid a ladder on the ice and tried to reach him on their bellies, everything ... but he got pulled under by the current before they could get to him. He must have just been too exhausted and gave up."

"How do you know all this if you weren't there, honey?"

"Mostly from school. Everybody talked about it. And it was in the paper with his seventh grade class picture. I still remember it."

"What a horrible experience. The poor parents."

"A lot of kids went to the funeral."

"Did you?"

"No. I wish to this day that I had. My parents didn't think it was a good idea. I was devastated and they were worried about me. I was only in the eighth grade. I'd never experienced a death before, and this was my best friend."

His voice cracked, and he drew a breath.

"You never told me this before, honey," Erin said, offering him a Kleenex from her purse.

"Now you know why," said Andy.



Kevin was upset. His dad, Robert Greenleaf, had decided to ride out the huge storm Sandy on the New Jersey Barrier Island with Max, the family's aging beagle.

People who knew Robert thought he was a rational civil engineer, the last person on earth who would take unnecessary chances. But they were wrong. A self-described weather junkie, Robert longed to experience a nor'easter or a hurricane. The native Californian was bored with the state's mild climate. After months of discussions, he talked his wife Kathy into moving their family to New Jersey.

"The San Fernando Valley only had Santa Ana winds," he told his new Eastern neighbors. "If it sprinkles, the media goes on Storm Alert. I wanna feel the wrath of a super storm. Just tie me up to a telephone pole and I'll video the storm for posterity."

"You're crazy, dude," commented one neighbor.

"How about the tornado hunters on the Weather Channel," Robert retorted. "Are *they* crazy?"

And now he had his chance to ride out a big storm: a nor'easter and hurricane Sandy were predicted to collide over the East Coast, right above the Greenleaf's home on Mystic Island.

He ignored Governor Chris Christie's orders to evacuate, but he did want his family to be safe. He escorted them to a friend's waiting SUV for the trip to the mainland.

His wife Kathy knew pleading with Robert to leave the island was useless. He refused to believe that he could drown in the expected storm surge, or be swept out to sea.

"We love you Robert," said Kathy, soft rain moistening her face under rapidly darkening skies.

"And I love the both of you," said Robert.

Before pulling away, the driver of the SUV, Bill Hastings, tried to change Robert's mind.

"A 'Frankenstorm' is on its way — a real monster," said Bill.

"Max and I are far from any predicted surge. We'll be okay."

"It's not just a storm that's the problem," said Bill. "But ... looks like I don't have time to explain. Good luck, neighbor."

Robert waved goodbye as the SUV drove off.

"Let's board up some windows, fella," he told Max.

Hours later in the upstairs master bedroom, he was on his laptop researching a story he planned to write for the local news-

paper: *How I Lived Through the Superstorm.*

Then he heard: *Wwwwooooosssshhhh...* and Max barked at the eerie sound of the wind.

Both dog and man jumped when a nearby tree toppled with a *kkkkrrrrrrrrr*. The rain pounding down on the roof sounded like a spray of bullets. Max's startled barking suddenly stopped. Robert looked around the house. No dog.

"Max? Where are you boy?" he called and whistled loudly.

The doggy door whooshed and in came Max, drenched and panting hard. He was wearing a

party hat and had a blower in his mouth. Robert took them off his pet.

"Where did you find these?" he asked. "How did you get the hat on your head? Let's make sure you don't do that again."

He inserted a piece of plywood into the doggy door to block another escape. As the wind grew stronger, Robert decided to try to get some sleep.

The cell phone rang and woke him at about 1 a.m.

"Hello, is anyone there? Hello?"

There was only harsh laughter.

"Now I can't get back to sleep. So ... I'll do some more research." Robert worked on the Net as the wind grew stronger.

"Hey, listen to this, Max. The houses on this block were built on the former site of the Grand Hotel, destroyed in the Great Hurricane of 1938. The hotel had a hurricane party. Fifty guests refused to evacuate and drowned after the waves came crashing through the walls of the ballroom."

The house lights flickered, and then the power went out.

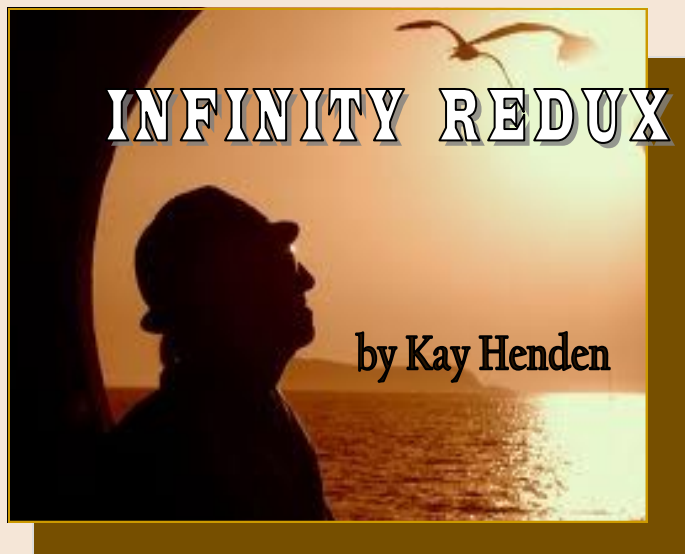
He heard a loud bang on the front door. Perhaps it's a neighbor in need, he thought, I should help. He slowly made his way downstairs, guided by his flash light. Opening the door slightly, he glimpsed a ... translucent white figure.

"I'm here for the party," it said. Trembling, he quickly shut the door, only to turn around and see dozens of ghostly guests.

Kathy and Kevin found Max several days later cowering under the dilapidated porch, but Robert was never seen again. Only his shredded yellow rain slicker, and a frayed rope were found next to their light pole.



by Gary Wosk



It concerned him a little sometimes, those annoying little lurches in memory that seemed to happen at odd moments. “Premature senility” he called it, only half in jest. But it never worried him, not really. It was just a passing annoyance, it never lasted long, and it never seemed to affect any of the critical areas of his life. Of course, it usually happened only when he was tired, or not feeling well.

Blessedly, he was rarely sick. He’d been fortunate that way—all his life he had enjoyed good health, despite a slight propensity for too much good food, too little exercise, the usual. Yes, he’d been very fortunate.

Except for those minor, very minor, lapses in memory.

He leaned back in his seat and opened the newspaper. The ferry ride to work was forty-five minutes, just time enough to catch up on the news, get ready for the day. A full day at the office, then the ferry home, and the evening with Laura.

Laura. He smiled gently, the newspaper slipping into his lap as he looked out at the gently undulating surface of the bay. The water rippled and rolled past the bow of the boat as the heavy diesels rumbled below decks, and the brilliant sunlight on the crests gave the lie to the chill wind that whipped the ferry’s flag into a frayed trapezoid.

It had been a day like this, a warm spring day with the bite of winter still lying in wait, the strengthening sun pouring through the pale-green translucency of new leaves on the trees lining the city boulevard. A city bus had just passed in a swirl of grit and exhaust fumes, and the woman walking in front of him had stopped abruptly when a piece of dirt lodged in her eye. Still admiring the new growth on the trees, he had bumped into her, apologizing at first perfunctorily and then with real sincerity as he noticed her streaming eyes.

“Just contact lenses,” she’d assured him, smiling through

the tears. “A nuisance, but worth it to see without glasses. At least,” she added with a wry smile, “most of the time.”

The offending bit of grit washed out and she gave him a more relaxed and natural smile. He smiled back, suddenly aware of her deep brown eyes and the copper highlights the dappled sunshine brought out in her hair. She looked familiar, somehow. She told him later she had had the same reaction, as if they had known and recognized each other at that first meeting. Euphoric recall, he was sure. He smiled fondly at the memory nonetheless.

Their first meeting was no more than that. It lasted only a few moments, then she gave a smiling little half-shrug. “Well, have a nice day.”

She turned and walked on, and after a brief hesitation he did the same. For no particular reason he felt happy, contented, just for that moment.

It had been a difficult time in his life, and moments of contentment were few and far between. Carol had died only a year prior, and he was still recovering from the shock. He had been gradually putting his life back together again, and for the first time that day he felt young, free of the leaden weight of recall. It was, after all, spring in one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

He and Laura had married in the fall. It was a crisp, cool autumn day, the smell of wood smoke drifting into the little chapel where they said their vows, just the two of them, the minister and the two witnesses ...

The ferry docked and he stood up, stretched, folded the paper. Time to go to work.

It concerned him a little sometimes, those annoying little lurches in memory. But it never worried him, not really. It was just a passing annoyance ...

He sat down at the worn Formica table on the top deck of the ferry, opened his paper and began to read. The ferry ride home was forty-five minutes, just time enough to unwind from the day, finish the newspaper, maybe catch a short nap. Then five minutes home, and the evening with Laura.

He didn’t hear the deckhand at the doorway, gesturing at the lone passenger as he told another worker, “Poor old guy—he rides back and forth all day, sometimes. We don’t bother him—he’s not hurting anyone, just reads his paper and looks out the window, smiling like that. Gets up when we dock, then sits down again and off we go. He seems happy enough—not a bad way to go, I guess.”

The deckhand turned away, went to cast off the line.

It concerned him a little sometimes, those annoying little lurches in memory that seemed to happen at odd moments ...

The little tow-headed boy with big chocolate-brown eyes was just two and a half. Everyone said he was exceptional. The family called him G. His grandpa called him Super Kid. He had a huge vocabulary, was polite, quiet, and ... watched. He first watched, then he did.

He loved to push buttons and see how things worked. Mommy hid the transistor radio, the kitchen blender, and encouraged him to play with his own toys. Daddy's tools were locked up.

The little boy loved to paint pictures, but he would rather operate the TV remote, the phonograph and the receiver. He was fascinated with music and the grooves in the record albums. He asked about sound and why the needle moved sideways in the groove as the record turned round and round.

He was quick to memorize words and mimic what you said and how you said the words. He was fascinated with counting and patterns. "What comes first, what comes next?" He played this game.

"First put on your shoes then your socks," his mommy teased.

He laughed. "No Mommy, that's wrong!" He was trying so hard to get things right, to figure things out. His eyes and ears were recording the world around him. So he watched how mechanical things worked, how adults did things and said things. What were the rules? People had buttons he thought. They were word buttons. When Mommy said certain things Daddy did certain things.

He watched the older children in the neighborhood walk to school. "Mommy, may I go to school, too?"

"You're very young, I'll see if the pre-school will accept you at your age." The lady said she'd let him try. During his first visit at pre-school he watched the other little girls and boys pretending. He just watched. And when a little girl left the play stove with the burner knobs turned to ON, he carefully went over and turned them all to OFF.

"Would you like to play outside? There's a sand box," the teacher said.

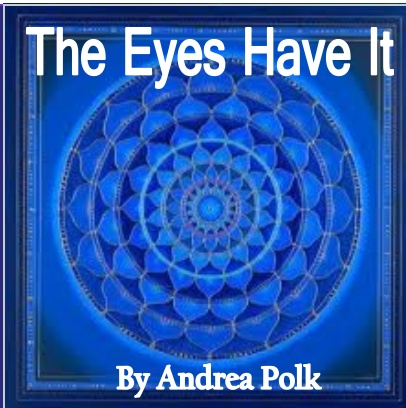
"Go on G," his mother encouraged. The teacher held his hand and walked with him outside.

In a few minutes G came back with a tin cup full of sand, carefully leveled off. The teacher accepted the cup and pretended to sip it. "Oh thank you," she said. "This is a lovely cup of coffee."

G's brown eyes opened wide and exclaimed, "Lady, it's SAND!"

Months later, G was probably three years old. On this Satur-

The Eyes Have It



By Andrea Polk

day Mommy had to balance the family check-book before shopping. The family did not have a lot of money and every month it was down to the wire between income and expenses. Mommy couldn't find the calculator. Of course Daddy had hidden it from their button-pushing son. G watched her looking for something, but didn't ask.

Finally the mommy asked her inquisitive son, "G, did you happen to see where Daddy put the calculator?"

"No Mommy. But let me think."

G stood in the hall outside his room and closed his eyes. In a moment he opened his eyes and walked into her bedroom and pointed to the top shelf on the wall. "It's there."

She got the stool, stood on it and sure enough there was the calculator. She took it down and asked her son, "How did you know it was there? Did you see Daddy put it there?"

"No Mommy. I used my third eye."

"Your what?"

"My third eye."

"Your third eye?" She paused, stunned. "Where is it?"

He pointed to a spot on his forehead between his eyes, "It's right here," he said. "Everyone has one. Why don't you use yours?" "I didn't know I had one."

My God, she thought. She had never heard of the third eye and she hears about it from her three-year-old son. He doesn't make things up. But who will ever believe me? How could he have invented a third eye? Maybe he has one.

A couple of years later the mommy relayed this story to an East Indian co-worker. "I see a dot on the foreheads of Indians. What does it mean?"

"It represents a kind of eye, a special consciousness." She continued, "You're blessed with a star-child; and one so young," and she paused. "He is right. We all had a third eye, but we lost its use before we knew we had one. In this American culture peer pressure makes this difficult to talk about. He will probably lose his by middle school."

Many years later, his mother asked, "Do you still use your third eye?"

Now a college student, he said matter of factly, "No, I stopped using it before high school."

Hmm, she thought, what a shame.

How long did I work as the store detective for Manchester's, the jewel of Madison's department stores? Seventeen years. Sometimes I thought I'd seen everything and then something else would happen that'd make me shake my head. But what happened with Mrs. Spencer Edwards had to be one for the history books.

You didn't have to be a Madison old-timer to recognize the name Edwards. Everywhere you looked, the name appeared prominently in our town.

In 1951 I was just a poor working stiff in a three-piece suit with a fondness for Scotch. And when I saw Mrs. Spencer Edwards walk into the store one morning, I stood a little straighter. And fought the urge to salute her.

"Good morning, Mrs. Edwards. Fine day for shopping."

At fifty, dressed in Chanel, Mrs. Spencer Edwards cut a stylish figure. Her asymmetrical coiffure showed her gray hair to advantage.

"Good grief, Ben Dexter, *any* day is a good day for shopping," she replied. I chuckled at her little joke, but noted a cold look in her light blue eyes and a equally cold tone in her voice.

"Well, enjoy your shopping, Mrs. Edwards. Perhaps you're going in my direction: the second floor?" She gave a curt nod and preceded me into the elevator.

When we emerged, Mrs. Edwards strode past me to the jewelry department. The glass of the mahogany display cases reflected glittering objects—all with substantial price tags. I stopped, as was my custom, at the fresh floral display on the jewelry counter and snapped off a white carnation for my label. And eavesdropped.

"Mrs. Edwards, what a pleasure! What can I show you today?" The well-modulated voice belonged to Ms. Phoebe Plant, newest and prettiest member of the department's staff.

"Well, this is a bit awkward. I need to check on something that Spencer ordered."

"Oh, yes. The order arrived from the engravers yesterday. Your husband has exquisite taste. I'll get the piece so you can try it on."

In less than a minute, Ms. Plant returned with a small box. She opened it, brought out a ruby bracelet, and draped it around her customer's wrist.

As Mrs. Edwards stared at the bracelet, her complexion flushed almost as red as the rubies.

"Please fasten the catch," she asked and held out her arm to the saleswoman.

A Good Day To Shop



"My—it's a tight fit," exclaimed Ms. Plant. "I can't imagine ..."

"Not to worry. I *hate* loose bracelets. I plan to wear it to the opening of *The King and I* this weekend. Let's see ... what did my clever husband have engraved on this brace-

let? My eyes aren't what they used to be. Let me borrow your loupe."

Loupe in place, Mrs. Edwards read aloud: "'To Molly. Love, Spence.' That's Spencer, full of surprises and pet names. Does he have anything else tucked away back there? Our thirtieth anniversary is in three weeks," she explained with a conspiratorial wink.

"Oh dear, I couldn't. It wouldn't be ... ethical," said Ms. Plant. "And ... it **WOULD** spoil his surprise."

"Nonsense—it's MY money paying for these expensive trinkets. I want some idea of what my husband spent so I can spend a comparable amount on him." Her voice was high and shrill.

"Well ... I guess it'd be okay, if you put it *that* way."

As Ms. Plant returned to the vault area. She soon returned, and said, "I didn't find anything labeled as your anniversary gift, but I did find two more ruby bracelets. Obviously, there's been a mistake."

"Oh, I think not," Mrs. Edwards replied. "Spence must have ordered three identical bracelets—one for me and two others for our ... nieces."

"Why, yes," replied Ms. Plant, looking relieved.

Mrs. Edwards continued, "He bought them for Lisa and Can't recall her name."

"Lynn," announced Mrs. Edwards. "Her name is Lynn."

"Thanks for reminding me. I have their addresses right here in my little red book. I'll help you choose gift boxes and we'll address them together—just in time for today's mail."

And so, two identical bracelets went special delivery to the Edwards' "nieces," but there was a gigantic mistake: Lisa's went to Lynn and Lynn's went to Lisa. I knew the score because I wasn't just the store detective; I moonlighted as a private eye.

Later, when Mrs. Edwards came to my office to pay me, I tried to brush her off—politely—that is. I wasn't comfortable taking money from a woman who'd discovered that her husband was a three-time cheater. But, I relented. After all, I'd earned it.

As for the "Molly" bracelet, Mrs. Edwards kept it, perhaps as a sort of insurance. As I remember, she wore it almost every day until Spencer died.

Someone yelled, "A battalion got ambushed nearby! Fifty dead! Wounded coming in now."

I was playing a fast-paced game of ping-pong with a soldier on the veranda of one of our Red Cross recreation centers in South Vietnam.

Dropping my paddle, I sprinted across our large open lawn and the dirt road to the Lai Khe Hospital ready to do ... whatever, I didn't know what. But I had to get there right away. I was a Red Cross "Donut Dollie" working in recreation programs at military bases around South Vietnam. It was October of 1967 and I was twenty-five years old.

As I rushed across the hospital veranda and into the large entry room, I instantly took in a horrifying panorama on the crowded floor. So many of our guys in their bloody camouflage fatigues lay motionless on olive-drab stretchers. The rows of stretchers were separated by narrow passages of linoleum just wide enough to allow walking space between the injured men. The odor of mud, blood and sweat overpowered the hospital's usual medicinal smells.

The sound of chopper blades slapping the still air was normal for us volunteers. But not so many, and not so constant a sound. Choppers were setting down right outside the hospital, with more injured men being rushed in on stretchers. Medics in the hospital called out urgent instructions to each other.

Tuning out the noise, I looked for an injured soldier who was conscious. I made eye-contact with one man and moved toward him. I squeezed myself down to the floor to sit next to him. Gently touching his hand, I leaned forward and asked, "Hi. What's your first name?"

"Hi, ma'am. I'm Eddie," he said, as he grabbed my hand and held on. Although mud was clinging to his short Afro, his smooth dark skin was mostly clean and his injury was not visible. He started talking about the ambush. The Viet Cong had been sitting in trees with machine guns poised, waiting silently for the American G.I.s to walk into their area. The massacre began without warning.

Eddie continued talking with one sentence running on top of the last. He changed subjects without missing a beat, from his mama's sweet potato pie, to his good buddy who had just been blown up right next to him, to his girl-

War Hurts — A Memoir

by Linette Stone



friend waiting for him back home in Mississippi. He talked and talked as though he was afraid if he stopped talking he would die.

As I listened to Eddie, I heard different voices coming from the veranda just outside. A stream of stretchers was being carried to the back of the hospital. I figured they were being taken to the overflow area. When I saw a hand dangling off one stretcher by the wisp of a tendon, I shouted a warning to the medic, "Be careful! He's going

to lose that hand."

The medic replied, in a matter-of-fact manner, "Oh, don't worry, ma'am. He's already dead." Later I learned they were carrying him to a makeshift morgue that had just been set-up at the end of the veranda.

The next couple of days my unit of four Red Cross girls visited our guys in the hospital. We also returned to our recreation center's routine of activities, while survivors came in, staring with vacant eyes, just to talk.

Friday morning the battalion held their memorial service for the many who had died, including their much-beloved commanding officer. According to his men, their colonel was the old-fashioned type who believed in leading by example. He didn't say, "Hey guys. You go play war and report back to me." Oh no. He believed he should endure the same dangers and hardships as his troops by being right there with them, encouraging, cajoling, supporting. And it got him killed, right alongside so many of his men.

At the service they followed the Army tradition of planting a rifle butt into the soil and placing a helmet on top, with well-worn boots leaning against the rifle.

During the solemn service I finally stopped to really focus on all that had happened. I thought: *Please, tears. Don't fall now. Not in front of all these guys who are fighting so hard to keep it together.* But my tears defied me. At first I tried to stifle them, choke them back. But the torrent had to come out.

As I silently cried, I thought of all those brave nineteen-year-old kids in this war who had either died or would be going back home missing an arm, a leg, or even a face. War hurts so many.

Priceless Magical Moments

by Claude F. Baxter

(excerpted and modified from autobiographical writings)

In my youth I experienced magical moments when encountering the incredible beauty of nature. Many years later I rediscovered those same feelings of awe and wonder while on a family camping trip.

For example, I sensed such a unique feeling when standing in complete silence under a black starlit sky, surrounded by the grasses of an unspoiled meadow with insects chirping and buzzing all around me.

The feeling of that magical moment was mine and mine alone. It could not be shared with others. I felt that trying to express my feelings aloud would break the silence and dissolve the magical spell.

Similarly, when I stood in a grove of thousand year-old redwood trees and looked upward toward the top of their spires high in the sky, I suddenly had a feeling of deep reverence for the ancient giants. I shared that moment with my wife Eleanor. She spoke for both of us when she exclaimed, "This place makes me feel more religious than any grand cathedral we visited in Europe!"

Yes, a feather blowing in the wind, the silent stalagmites in a cavern, a cascading waterfall, or the reflective waters of a mountain lake, all can have a mystical aura all their own!

Nature's majesty has often manifested itself on our family camping trips. For example, early one morning on a camping trip in coastal Northern California, one of our three children found a really large slug the size and shape of a banana. It glistened in many colors as the sun's rays reflected from the surface of its wet, black skin.

I had read that such slugs were used for medicinal purposes by the American Indians. Here was a creation of incredible beauty that I had never encountered before.

Yet to some family members, it appeared to be a horrible giant black turd. Even my wife could not be totally objective. Having killed hundreds of little slugs to protect the flowers in our garden, she had no special affection for gastropods!

As the slug greased its way back into the damp

underbrush, I then felt it my responsibility to extol the virtues of this black giant. It is dubious that at six a.m. I was able to praise the wondrous creature with as much enthusiasm as I felt the occasion demanded. But encountering that slug was—for me—a magical moment.

On another occasion, we camped near the shores of a lake in the vicinity of Yellowstone and GrandTeton National Parks. When we visited the lake in the morning, the gray fog still lingering over the water, a flock of waterfowl suddenly rose in unison from out of the heavily reed-covered shoreline and disappeared into the fog.

What secret sign, I wondered, had impelled the birds to take wing at the same moment? Did they all know their destination? Here was an intricately complicated community of animals that evolved precariously alongside humanity, governed by laws about which I knew very little. To this ignorant viewer such a manifestation of coordinated nature was wondrous and beautiful to behold. It represented a true magical moment.

Finally, I recall when we camped near the Russian River in California. At a time when most of the family was still fast asleep, I saw a family of raccoons, the parents in the lead and about five young ones following the adults single file.

Where are they going? I asked myself. Then my question was answered by a loud clatter. Momma and Papa Raccoon had taken the young ones along to show them how to raid garbage cans! The mess we later encountered was sensational.

How did those animals know that this one morning the cans were unlocked? Communications by non-verbal means had given them that vital piece of information. Somehow I felt elated. In spirit I had joined the raccoons on this adventure.

Slowly it dawned upon me that becoming privy to nature's wonders is like learning a new language. When on camping trips, that new language exposed me to feelings that were unique and provided magical moments obtainable by few other means.

Those moments are certainly priceless.



take note

The Tale of the Rings



The Life Story of My Parents
Arye (Vizgerdski) and Hadassa (Reznik) Vardi
Or, How a Sabra Found Her Roots.

By
Marganit Vardi Lish

Marganit Lish announces:

This is the book I wrote and published for family and friends. It has been a rewarding experience for me from the time I decided to write it until I had the physical book in my hands. (especially since I decided to self-publish it)

The book's theme is the biography of my parents, their lives which span through the 20th century on three continents: Europe, The Middle East (Asia), and the United States of America.

It is a journal which took me thirteen years to hold on to until this year, when I was able to finish it, edit it, and print it. I am considering translating parts of it into Hebrew.

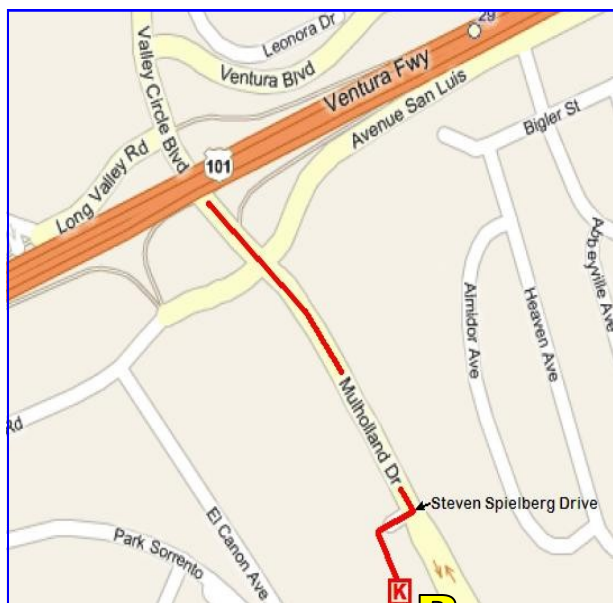
Karen Faye Gorback has good news:

I was notified this week that my new one-act play, "A Delicate Dance," was selected for inclusion in the 2013 New Works Festival at College of the Canyons.



A poem by Norm Mole-sko was recently featured in the newsletter of the **National Center of Creative Aging**. Here's the NCCA url if you'd like to read his verse:

<http://www.creativeaging.org/>



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:

January 5th, at 1:00 p.m.

Sign up for Open Mic starts 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 nearest to the CWC-SFV.



Contents copyrighted by the respective authors.
Unattributed articles copyrighted by CWC/SFV.

cwc-sfv.org