



The Valley Scribe

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



Panel Presentation on Publication



Gagik Melikyan



Ester Benjamin Shifren



Judy Presnall

If you're an unpublished writer, making a choice for your book's publication can be a formidable task.

To assist our undecided and unpublished authors, three publication paths will be featured at our February meeting.

A panel of published SFV mem-

bers — **Gagik Melikyan**, **Judy Presnall** and **Ester Benjamin Shifren** — will discuss traditional publishing, self-publishing, and the increasingly popular e-publishing.

Program Chair Rita Keeley Brown, herself a recently published author, will direct the action.

- KH

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west valley whimsicals

A Schwartz / Highcove Production



Tell Them What They Came To Hear

New authors are sometimes asked to speak to a group about their book or writing tech-

niques. If you become a "star," thoroughly prepare for your performance.

First of all, fashion a talk for the specific needs of your audience. Consider: What do they hope to learn from your talk? A description of your book? Helpful websites you discovered? Why you chose self-publication, or why you used an agent and the traditional publication process? Costs of publication and promotion?

Here are a few helpful ideas for any type of presentation:

1. Review and organize your speech. The audience has come to learn from your expertise so ensure that their attendance is time well spent.
2. Practice using your Power Point slides or visuals BEFORE the meeting. Arrive early to check out the sound system and the equipment.
3. Feature key words and

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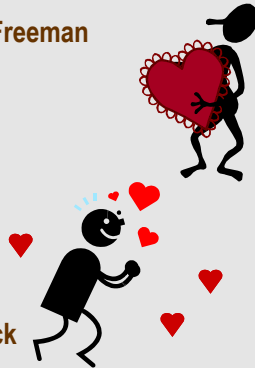
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(Continued from page 1)

concepts in your slides. Images are available on Flickr, Creative Commons or iStockPhoto.

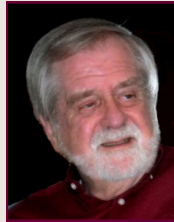
4. Keep handouts and business cards handy. Make sure your URLs are on the freebies.

5. Keep an eye on the clock during Q&A. Offer to meet later with those who still have questions.

6. Pass out short questionnaires afterward so your audience can critique your talk and provide feedback.

7. Bring copies of your book to sell after the meeting. Be a pro.

- KH



REVIEW AND REFRESH

by Dave Wetterberg

Word Economy

Good writers don't waste words. Mark Twain said a writer should eliminate one-third of everything he writes without losing any content. Here are some suggestions for learning this essential skill.

Combine sentences

Original: *My friend 's name was Artimus. He ate half of my box of Valentine chocolates while I was busy making dinner.* 20 wds

Revision: *While I cooked dinner, Artimus ate half my box of Valentine chocolates.* 12 wds

Use short openings

Original: *Because she was so disappointed, she sulked all evening.* 9 wds

Revision: *Disappointed, she sulked all evening.* 5 wds

Avoid *There is/There are/ There was/There were* in favor of the active

Original: *In Starbucks there was a group of retirees who were noisily socializing.* 12 wds

Revision: *In Starbucks a noisy group of retirees socialized.* 7 wds.

Be careful of *which* and *who* clauses

Original: *The apples, which were finally ripe, begged to be picked.* 10 wds

Revision: *The newly ripened apples begged to be picked.* 8 wds

Original: *Sam, who was my best friend, moved to Seattle.* 9 wds

Revision: *My best friend Sam moved to Seattle.* 7wds

Delete meaningless modifiers

Original: *I was very nervous before I was about to meet Dr. Lee.* 12 wds

Revision: *Before meeting Dr. Lee, I was extremely nervous.* 9 wds.

Avoid trite phrasing

Original: *Due to the fact that he was always late, he received a bad review.* 14 wds

Revision: *Always late, he received a bad review.* 7 wds

Avoid clichés

Original: *She's a person who lies through her teeth and I'll hate her 'till pigs can fly or 'till hell freezes over, or both.* 23 wds

Revision: *She can't be trusted and I'll always hate her.* 9 wds.

She asked, 'What would Weird Al Do?'

Why would entertainment lawyer Kendall T. Jones ask her audience a question about Al Yankovic's personal choices during her talk on copyright laws? Here's why:

Popular performer Yankovic specializes in poking fun at famous celebrities and politicians. He takes well-known songs by well-known people and gives them a whole new slant with satirical lyrics. The tunes he uses are often identical to popular hits, and his lyrics are very close to the original material.

How does Weird Al get away with apparent copyright infringement and not get sued by his "victims"?

"Simple. He gets permission," said Jones. "He's a writer who knows the copyright laws and he makes sure that he can't be sued for infringement. Every writer in this room should be familiar with the copyright laws. One infringement error can change your life." And not for the better, she implied.

Jones revealed the two most common questions



January Speaker
Kendall T. Jones

that she's asked by her writer clients:

1. When do I need to get permission so I don't get sued?
2. How can I base a fictional person on a real person so I don't get sued?

These questions engendered several more questions from the audience, such as: "What if the person I'm writing about is dead? What if the poem was written in the 1800s? What if something I describe really happened and the person who caused me problems is still alive? What about characters in a well-known book? Can I mention them?"

Jones patiently answered each inquiry and yet managed to pace through her prepared speech and the promised material within an hour. She received a loud ovation and our fervent thanks for a solidly informative speech.

Armed with her helpful handout on copyright laws, we left the meeting wiser and warier writers. Many members suddenly realized that they had little knowledge of even the most basic copyright laws. Hmm. Perhaps legal consultation before publishing might be a smart move for new authors.

For further info on Kendall T. Jones click on www.KendallJones.aw.com & www.HollywoodAtty.com For US copyright laws: <http://www.copyright.gov>

- Kathy Highcove

She's A Ventura County Winner

SFV member and PR Chair Karen Gorback won 2nd Place in the Ventura County Writers Club Short Story Contest. Karen holds a longtime membership in the VCWC.

The three winners were presented with cash prizes and read their stories at the monthly meeting on Tuesday, January 8th at the Pleasant Valley Senior Center in Camarillo. The first place story was published in the Ventura County Star.

If you'd like to read her winning story, "Dancing With Dreams," here's the URL:

<http://www.vcstar.com/news/2013/jan/20/winners-of-12th-annual-short-story-contest/>



Karen Gorback

✓ Check It Out

The **Members Only** page of our SFV website has a new feature—a nifty critique group page that lists and describes our current SFV critique groups. The page also asks for feedback from members who hope to join a new group.

If you're interested, simply click on cwc-sfv.org and take a look.

PANHANDLERS

With their cardboard signs or coming face to face
They will beg for money all over the place.

The freeway ramps are a favorite spot
Or between the cars in a parking lot.

And among airport crowds they circulate
Approaching you twice if your plane is late.

Now you want to believe their hard luck tale;
Maybe fate's harsh hand has caused them to fail.

For who really knows where their feet have trod?
It could be you, but for the Grace of God.

You wonder if they live in mansion or shack;
If they travel by bus or by Cadillac.

But you reach for a quarter or maybe a buck,
A reluctant donator, you mumble, "Good Luck."

There must be a law, or one we can make,
Perhaps like the one you've just helped them to break.

KEN WILKINS



RINGTONES

The place is quiet. It's a romantic scene
When silence is broken by a noise obscene.

By mistake or intent a ringtone is heard
Shattered is the mood as quiet turns absurd

The music is junky and rattling the nerves
Could it possibly please the owner it serves?

Curse them or bless them it seems they're here to stay
Irritating ringtones will just have their day.

Ken Wilkins





Judy Presnall
Member-At-Large



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President



Andi Polk
Vice President
Membership



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Vice President
Program Chair

Different Souls with Common Goals

We've finally arrived at the last issue of the critique group series. But this group—MY group—is not the usual writers' critique group featured in the earlier issues. We meet monthly, true, but we don't critique our writing. Instead, we critique or discuss our branch's budget, the speakers, the website, the newsletter, special events, future projects, and ways to network with other local and state writer groups. We're your SFV Board members. This month's issue is our turn in the spotlight. After all, our love of writing and our desire to share our writing with other writers is what originally drew us into the CWC-SFV.

We're all experienced writers—and active writers—as you'll see from this issue's creative content. Several Board members have published books; others write and publish articles, fiction, flash fiction, essays, memoirs and poetry. Most have served on past SFV boards.

We Board members may write in different genres but we share common goals. We try to follow the main maxim of the California Writers Club: nurture local writers and provide stimulating speakers and activities for our membership.

We appreciate helpful feedback on our efforts towards these goals. If you have a good idea, share it. We'll soon have a blog set up for our members to discuss our meetings, speakers and to pass around good suggestions and information.

When vacancies open up on our Board, consider volunteering. The Board experience might become as personally rewarding as a good critique group.

—Kathy Highcove



Bill Sorrells
Open Mic Coordinator



Ray Malus
Webmaster/Photographer



Mary Freeman
Treasurer



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Karen Gorback
Publicity



Kathy Highcove
Editor

DIALOGUE WITH MY EARLY GIRLS

By Yolanda Fintor

This is the day for action I tell myself as I cast a long look at the garden just a few feet from my back door. What draws my attention are two Early Girl tomato plants that almost fill the tiny 24 square feet of garden space. I marvel at how they are thriving still, though I planted them late last spring. Not being a true green-thumb gardener, I overwatered them. This brought forth verdant heady-scented leaves but, alas, no fruit. By the time a neighbor pointed out my mistake and told me to cut back on the watering, it was late summer. After that correction they took off and made up for lost time. By fall, and all winter I was picking dozens of tomatoes each week.

The plants are still full of tomatoes. Don't they know they are supposed to be finished producing? Here it is spring again and now I need the room for a new 'crop' of vegetables. There is nowhere else in the yard where I can put in cucumbers, parsley, peas and onions. I need to make room for the seedlings waiting to be planted. I am torn, but I must be the bearer of bad news.

I walk over to my Early Girls and have a discussion with them. As I speak, my pulse quickens with feelings of guilt.

"I'm sorry, but it's time for you to go. You've been loyal providers, but don't you know your life cycles should be completed? You should be withering on the vine, leaves turning yellow and indicating, 'We're done.'"

"But, look at you. You look like you're ready to go another season. What is your message here?"

Of course they don't answer as I take my

garden clippers and begin separating strong, green stems from their entwinement onto the tomato cages. Their tendrils cling so tenaciously, I can almost feel them screaming, "No, we're not ready to go yet!"

I hear myself saying over and over again, "I'm sorry" as I whack away at lemon-yellow buds heralding the advent of newborn tomatoes, which I am in the process of killing.

As I clip away, I gain access to the interior of the "Girls" where I find a few ripe tomatoes and a dozen green ones waiting to ripen. Now I feel as though I am separating mothers from babies, husbands from wives. Do tomatoes mate? If I remember my biology lessons, tomatoes are not hermaphrodites. Still, why do I feel so guilty?

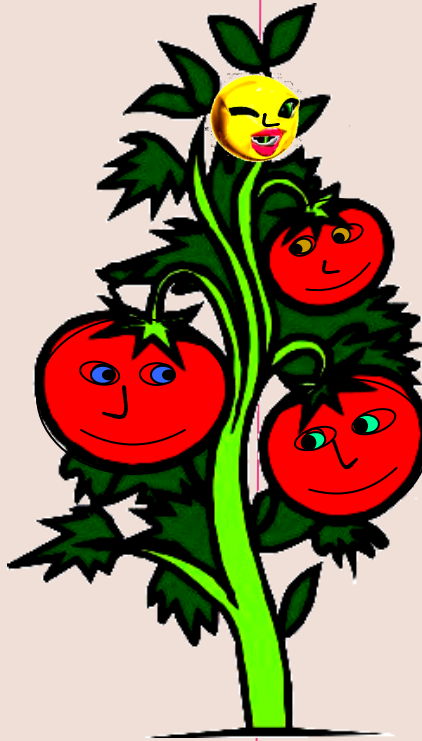
A quiet voice in my head says, "Because you bonded with these tomatoes. Never in your history of amateur gardening have tomato plants rewarded you so well with so little care. They have been beaten down with heavy rains, bent over by strong winds, even invaded by rodents, yet they have continued to produce for your pleasure."

Even as I continue to decimate my Early Girls, I must let them know something. "Thank you for your gift of abundance. I want you to know I have enjoyed harvesting your fruit, but now it's time to terminate our relationship and for me to look toward a new season of growth."

As I prepare to shovel the pile that is now debris into the green barrel, my husband, who has been watching the entire desecration, tells me to let the gardener do it.

I cannot. The least I could do as a final tribute to my "Girls" is to dispose of the remains myself. If I didn't think my husband would have me committed, I would put the remnants into a box and pray over them.

What? We all do as much for beloved pets!



Seascape

There is an aroma from the hot sand, as intoxicating as any drug. I guess the rocks and minerals and salt water and seaweed that have formed these beaches deliberately set a trap.

Feel the warmth of the grains on your bare feet, inhale the whiff of mother ocean's lilting breeze and all sense of responsibility deserts you. You MUST stay too long, by hours or years. Many have, some never leave.

Lying on the beach, you see beauty everywhere ... it assaults your senses. The warm sun feels just right. It melts your bones and turns your brain into a pleasure seeking device. You become hyper aware of the churning surf. From two blankets away you catch a whiff of perfume when a tawny beauty splashes sun tan oil on her thigh. You covertly watch the beads of perspiration beginning to form between short blonde and golden hairs on that already tanned leg. And now the aroma of burgers frying at Neal's stand on the boardwalk mixes with the scent of her sun tan lotion.

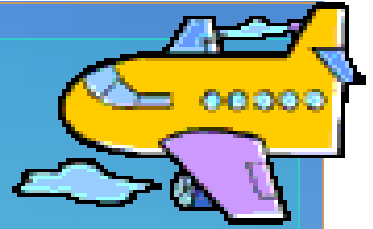
Beyond lies Catalina, silhouetted against the blue horizon's line. You can even make out that round spot—that's the Catalina pavilion. You'd like to stay in this moment forever, absorbing the beach with all your senses.

And maybe help that girl put sun tan lotion on the places she can't reach.

Yeah, that'd be true bliss.



Keeping It Simple



I don't twitter and I don't tweet.

I get my kicks from the obsolete.

A number two pencil and a rotary phone

Are the tools I use when I get home.

And those not much, it's safe to say.

A hot bath and a cool beer will make my day.

Still, you get a call from a huckster out there.

Wants to sell a remodel or a re-fi on your lair.

I try to avoid the salesman's calls,

Inconvenient gift that truly galls.

Another thing with these phones of cell,

The users don't speak, they only yell.

I've heard enough talk from the other guy.

As I stand in a line or stare at the sky.

As he speaks of the day gone by

And forced to buy French, cause they were out of rye.

I wish them all happiness and sublime.

But I've got better ways to spend my time.

I flat don't care to be so privy.

To a stranger's important "jags" and "jiggy."

And what about the children

Who are forced that way.

You just can't talk to mommy today.

When a mommy walks with a child in her hands,

And a cellular phone, her attention demands.

I long for the fifties, when it was cool

That mommy was there when you came home from school.



- Bill Sorrells

From the Window of the Coast Starlight

By Karen Gorback

Better than a sky suite at Staples
or a garden box at the Bowl,
my coveted window seat on the northbound
Coast Starlight.
LA to Seattle.
Thirty-three hours.

With the Channel Islands disappearing on the horizon,
the conductor lectures on the
convergence of currents,
sunken pirate ships and
whale migrations.
What a delicious afternoon soaking in the view,
accompanied by a passionate dissertation
on the beauty and the beast of the sea.

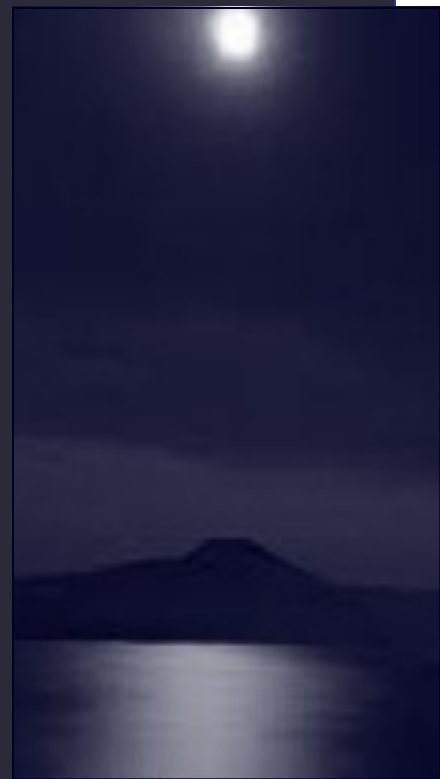
Leaving the coast, we shadow the Sacramento River,
with an unscheduled stop in Dunsmuir —
something about an overheated engine.
But city slickers on a train trip don't fret over such delays.
"If we wanted to get there fast, we would've taken a plane."

All too soon, our coach chugs back to life, skirting snowcapped Shasta.
"Isn't it remarkable!" fellow travelers gush,
captivated by the imposing summit filling our windows.

Midnight brings a brilliant full moon reflecting off Crater Lake,
turning night into day.
I press my nose against the cold window,
desperate to imprint the image on my drowsy brain.
Will I ever again see anything so remarkable?

With the fingers of Puget Sound drawing us into Washington State,
Mount Rainier looms in the distance,
like the mysterious peak
in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.
And like Richard Dreyfuss, I am mesmerized.

Inching toward Seattle Station,
my window frames the cityscape.
Nice, I suppose, in a Frank Lloyd Wright sort of way —
but trivial in the company of the
vast Pacific and Channel Islands,
snowcapped Shasta,
the historic hamlet of Dunsmuir,
and that remarkable midnight moon
glistening off Crater Lake.



Writing to the Right Brain

By Ray Malus

An excerpt from his up-coming book.

Let's define some terms:

The Four I's

It seems to me that there are four basic kinds of content in writing. (I managed to find 'I' words for them. Cute!):

Information: journalism, almanacs

Insight: op-ed, background pieces, commentary, essays

Instruction: technical writing, cookbooks, manuals

Inspiration: poetry, stories, advertising, propaganda (All provoke an emotional reaction.)

I will term this fourth kind "creative-writing"—using the hyphen to differentiate it from writing of the other kinds that may yet be "creative."

The Two Brains

For many years, psychologists have agreed that the human brain operates in two very different modes, which are apparently located in the left and right hemispheres of the brain.

Can you see the vast difference between the I-1 through I-3 and I-4?

While the first three target the Left Brain, I-4 needs to target the Right Brain. This is where emotion lives. This is where it's "accessible."

I-4 has always been my primary interest. (A strange admission for one who is writing an example of I-2.) Not only am I passionately focused on evocative writing, but through it one has the opportunity to produce work that provides direct insight into the universal human condition and experience.

When one accomplishes this, one has Literature—ART.

Art is a slippery concept. One person's "art" is another's banality or worse "kitsch."

Moreover, pieces of "art" go in and out of fashion. How can this be?

The usual answer is, "Well, 'it's 'subjective.'" This is no answer at all; it is simply a restatement of the situation.

I believe the answer is that the piece of art has simply failed to stimulate the audience's Right Brain—the "banal" one because it doesn't "resonate," and the "kitsch" one because it has been too overt in its attempt—it has betrayed its techniques, revealed itself as "manipulative."

I also think the primary reason a piece of art can go "out of fashion" is that its imagery is no longer evocative—either because of unfamiliarity or overuse.

The challenge then is this: Writing is composed of words—fundamentally *Left* Brain tools. How then does one use a *Left* Brain tool to accomplish a *Right* Brain goal?

My belief is that one cannot.

LEFT BRAIN

VERBAL
LOGICAL
SEQUENTIAL
RATIONAL
ANALYTICAL
OBJECTIVE
LOOKS AT PARTS



RIGHT BRAIN

Conceptional
Random
Intuitive
Holistic
Synthesizing
Subjective
Looks at wholes

In writing that targets the Right Brain, words become simply the raw material of the work—much as oil and pigment is to painting and marble is to sculpture.

The true "tools" are analogous to—and adapted from—other forms of art: Image,

Tempo, Form, Focus, Nuance, Symmetry ...

Creative-writers constantly get into disagreements with editors over "errors" in punctuation, grammar and usage. Viewed through the lens of "Left vs. Right Brain," this is inevitable. Neither one is "right" or "wrong." They are simply evaluating the work differently.

Editors function primarily as Left Brain people. They analyze, and follow sequential rules. They deal with words.

Look back at the table of Left Brain characteristics! These are what serve the editor.

It is the Right Brain characteristics that serve the creative-writer.

To state it succinctly: A creative-writer strives to punch you in the gut; an editor wants to grade the writer's paper.

In the kind of writing I espouse, scholastics are way down on the list of priorities, and if a work has lipstick on its collar or dirt under its fingernails, so be it!

This is not to say that these rules are unimportant. A writer who strays too far outside of the norm risks being dismissed by the reader's Left Brain as inept, incomprehensible, and uncredible before the Right Brain ever gets a chance to react. You will need to balance the risks for yourself and to a large extent your success will depend on your audience.

In the following pages, I will attempt to discuss the tools and techniques of targeting the Right Brain. However, right here I will give a guideline for evaluating this writing:

Have you given the reader value?

Writing is not a dialogue; it is a monologue—a lecture rather than a conversation. You have asked the reader to devote time and attention—precious commodities—with no way to respond. What have you given in return?

This is a criterion of any writing.

Specifically, in creative writing if you have not provided the reader with an emotional experience, you have not returned your reader's investment.

For example, poetry that doesn't "stir" the reader is not successful, no matter how many rhymes it has, how strict the meter, or how the lines are broken. Inversely, poetry that "moves" the reader is successful, no matter how many "rules" it breaks.

So, in creative-writing the first question is "Did this 'move' me?"

The second is "Why and how?"

Let's see if we can find some answers.

A LIFE-CHANGING DISEASE

by Judith Janda Presnall

As I sat on my small porch in front of a dusty road, an island visitor asked me if I was willing to share my life journey with him about how I had arrived in Kalaupapa. How did I come to live here in the settlement on Molokai Island? Ah, it's difficult to tell an outsider my bittersweet memories. But I'll try. Others should know our history. Here's my story:

I was in the sixth grade when the school nurse noticed a raised reddened blotch on my face. My clothes had covered other blemishes. She worried that I had Hansen's disease—more commonly known as leprosy about seventy years earlier. The dreaded disease swept the Hawaiian Islands in the 1860s.

At that time, King Kamehameha V passed a law stating that severe cases of leprosy must be separated from the public. People feared losing their loved ones, and sometimes hid them. However, the law required teachers, police, doctors, and nurses to report suspicious blemishes. To keep lepers (an ugly, hated word) isolated, they would be sent to Molokai Island. A smelly cattle boat took the first boatload of nine people in 1866. Because of the rocky shore, the crew shoved the lepers out of the boat and they had to swim ashore.

A man on horseback met the lepers on shore and gave each of them a blanket and told them to follow a path to their crude dwelling. Their open sores and stubby feet ached with pain after the nearly three-mile walk. The victims had to grow their own food and find water. As the years went by, more and more lepers arrived on the island of death. Eventually they numbered more than 8,000.

My own traumatic experience with leprosy began that day in school in 1937. Official papers ordered my mother to take me to the Board of Health in Honolulu. Within a week, I was a patient in the Kalihi residential hospital. Twenty-three children lived there and we attended Mount Happy School in the compound. It wasn't a bad place. We even had movie nights. I loved the Westerns with Gene Autry and Hopalong Cassidy.

The doctors at the facility performed experiments. We all

had an animal assigned to us. Mine was a rabbit. They'd inject the rabbit with medicine. If it lived, then they'd give the medicine to me in hopes of a cure. But after four years, none of the pills, serums, or painful oil injections worked. Oozing sores covered my body. The staff even kept my "burying clothes" in a handy box because I was not expected to live much longer.

Sunday, December 7, 1941, changed my life again. I happened to be waiting for my mom and sisters to visit when planes

flew over the play yard. I crouched in a tree and watched as bombs darkened our sky. That day 2,400 American soldiers died in Pearl Harbor. For fear of more bombing by the Japanese enemy, the staff decided to move all sixty patients to Kalaupapa, the settlement for leprosy victims on Molokai Island. I was sixteen years old.

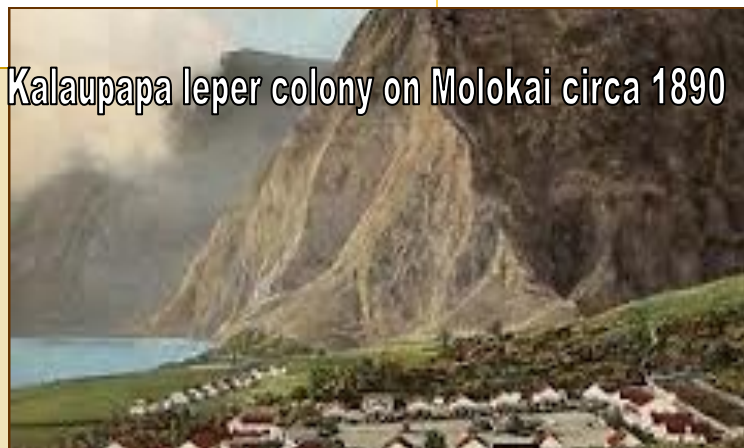
By the time I arrived here on the island, the residents had built a small community. A hospital, cottages, several churches, a general store, a bakery, a few streetlights, and even a few cars dotted my new home. There were horses, cattle, chickens, fishing boats, fruit trees, and thousands of graves.

After five years, doctors from the mainland sent a new medicine that promised to control and cure leprosy: a sulfone drug called Promin. They pumped the Promin into my body. After a year of treatments, the sores and pain began to disappear.

In two years, this miracle drug flattened facial lumps and healed hands and feet of pus-filled sores. For most patients, the disease became inactive, and they were no longer contagious. They could leave the island. Many patients had corrective surgery on their limbs and faces in Carville, Louisiana, on the mainland. This modern research residential facility had developed the sulfone drug. Some of the cured leprosy patients came back to live on Kalaupapa. They didn't feel comfortable or welcome in public, and this town was their home.

Me? After surgery, I passed a high school equivalency test, learned to play instruments and sing, and earned a bachelor's degree. I also became an advocate for leprosy patients. I learned to speak persuasively for those who have been shunned, feared, and excluded from society. I have found joy, laughter, friendships, and appreciation. I believe that people should treat others with respect and dignity, even if they are victims of a disease.

I feel fulfilled in my life.





HOUSES BUILT ON SAND

By Rita Keeley Brown

Smack in the middle of a vast dry wasteland with a climate that would rival a sneak-peek at Beelzebub's abode, lie today's houses built on sand.

These houses have stunning exteriors. The interiors are also magnificent, very impressive and comfortable with fascinating features – all those things you have always wanted. You can even be in faraway lands you have read about – or at least you think you have been taken there. The truth of the matter is, of course, you've just been taken! Period!

On a tour of the houses it's like entering with the impression that you're in line for *Masterpiece Theater*. Then when you reach the back part of the house, you find you've ended up on *The Jerry Springer Show*. Glitz and glamour turn into groping and gambling. Money flows like honey and it gets just as sticky. "Out of money?" the voice on the nearby ATM asks. "We offer casino credit"...so you can have even more fun (until the eventual reckoning) at your convenience and their connivance. Cameras watch you from the ceilings and the walls. Scantily-clad legs and bosoms bring drinks and offers of pleasure. It is exciting and fun if you have the fortitude (and enough money) to stick to your limits. And, of course, who will know? After all, as everyone says, "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas!" (Ask O.J. Simpson about that.)

I have family and friends that seem to keep things in check and enjoy themselves, but that is very hard to do, human nature being what it is. It's all so

enticing, and everybody's doing it. I'm reminded of what Screwtape, that high level demon assigned to training demon novices, wrote in a letter to his nephew trainee named Wormwood:

"... these are very small sins; ... you are anxious to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, ... It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing."

*"What I want to fix your attention on is the vast, overall movement towards the discrediting, and finally the elimination, of every kind of human excellence—moral, cultural, social, or intellectual. [from C. S. Lewis's satire *The Screwtape Letters*]"*

Well, it is an exciting place, but—call me the poor man's composite of Andy Rooney and "Maxine"—that's how I feel about neon lit Las Vegas when it's finally time to go home.

IN REMEMBRANCE OF MY BROTHER

A loving gesture observed by hospital staff and shared with family.

Always and in all ways
a very loving person,
Alzheimer's robbed him of knowing
who he was smiling at or hugging
but could not block his love for others.

Seeing a fellow patient
in a state of continual tears,
sensing her tears were not to stop,
he said to her quietly,
"Why don't I just cry with you."

They walked the hallway,
his arm on her shoulder,
crying softly together.

by Rita Keeley Brown

From Good Luck, Mrs. Brown ...

The Hay Shed

By Andrea Polk



**Autumn's crisp morning air
Wet with dew fills the mountain canyon,
Drips off fence rails and tin roofs
Falls into small puddles
Outlining their edges in dirt below.**

**Dry straw cracks underfoot.
Truckloads of winter hay
Stacked high in the shed
Their tower of feed in the making.**

**Leathery hands
Cut by dried green alfalfa
Swing bales from truck to stack.
Twenty-four bales high, thirty bales wide
Already ten rows deep.**

**Lazy breezes stroll through the hay shed.
Twisting dust beads hang in thick air
Lit by the early morning sun.
Shards of straw roll along the ground
Resting on dust-covered boots
Striding in rhythmic work.**

**Distant sounds of horses
Snorting and sneezing
Nuzzle through their troughs
Seeking choice rolled oats.**

**A chorus of Canadian geese
Soaring south in formation
Honks in staccato
High above.**

**Two silhouetted men
Stand in silence
Listening
Awaiting the next load.**





Bubbe to the Rescue

By Gary Wosk

Bubbe traveled light. Carrying one small piece of carry-on luggage that contained her pajamas, a change of clothes, toothpaste and a tooth brush, cosmetics and ten plastic medicine bottles, she inched her way along to the outside of the Oakland terminal.

"Be a *mensch*," she told the taxi driver, "and get me to Berkeley within 15 minutes. Don't try any monkey business and drive around in circles to get me *farblondjet*."

"Okay lady. No problem."

Fifteen minutes of *kibitzing* later, Daniel's *schlocky* wood apartment building came into full view.

"Oy vey! Oy *gevald*! What a tinder box," she said to the cab driver as she paid the fare. "I'm going to *plotz*."

Bubbe slowly entered the apartment building and approached Apartment No. 8, where Karl Krueger, the landlord, was enjoying a pizza and watching Sunday football on TV. He expected Ginger, his girlfriend, to join him momentarily.

He heard a loud knock and thought, *Ginger must have forgotten her key to the apartment..*

"Nu?" a voice said.

Obviously it wasn't Ginger -- sounded more like Betty Boop.

"Yes, yes, one moment," he answered with a burp, brushing a few scraps of pepperoni off his tomato sauce stained undershirt. He opened the door and beheld a tiny woman wearing too much makeup for her age — some of the red lipstick extended slightly beyond the borders of her lips.

"Do you know who I am?"

"No, but you look very serious—too serious for a Sunday afternoon."

"I am Bubbe, and I have a big kosher beef with you. You're Karl the landlord, right?"

"Yeah, that's me. Everyone here has a big beef. Join the club."

She had come to the end of her rope, which was not long.

"Listen to me, you big fat *lummo*. I don't care about any club. My grandson Daniel, a student at UC Berkeley, lives in Apartment 24, and he is suffering because of your neglect. There's mold and a water leak. Did you know that? Did you? Did you? Would you like

living with such *dreck* around you, MR. LANDLORD?"

Karl didn't like being badgered and began to hyperventilate.

"Yes, Bubbe, I did know that. It'll be fixed soon!"

"How soon is soon?"

"A week, maybe."

"Over my dead body, you slumlord. Fix it today or I'll call my friend, Congressman Brad Sherman. Got it?"

"Well, you know it's Sunday and..."

"I don't care if it's Yom Kippur. You should also know that I serve on the board of my condominium and I know Congressman Howard Berman, too, so you better take care of it right now."

Daniel was in his apartment studying for finals with his friends when he heard a few light taps on the front door.

"Open up, it's your Bubbe."

"What?" He opened the door and there stood his grandmother with three men wearing blue Blassinger Plumbing uniforms.

"What are you doing here, Bubbe?" asked a stunned Daniel.

"I told you I'd surprise you one day, didn't I? So here I am, signed, sealed and delivered. I'm yours."

"Why now?"

"I didn't like what I heard about your apartment. I had a nice little conversation with your slumlord, Karl. You will no longer have to live in a filthy pigsty."

"I spoke to Karl already! When will you treat me like an adult?"

"And you ARE an adult, but sometimes your Bubbe knows better. They wanted a week to make the repairs. That *schlemiel* of a landlord of yours finally listened to reason. It's all about being diplomatic."

"Thank you Bubbe. You'd better rest."

"I'm fine. I did it for you, the joy of my life. *A bi gezunt*. Study. Become a doctor. It's time we had a doctor in the family."

While the three men worked on the bathroom, Bubbe socialized with Daniel and his friends.

Occasionally, Bubbe would get up from the couch and glance into the bathroom to check on the work's progress.

"I'm going to *plotz*. What *dreck*."

"We're doing the best we can," said Jim Anderson, the boss. A few hours later, the plumber called in Bubbe for her approval.

She folded her arms and inspected their work, carefully scrutinizing every inch of the walls and ceiling. Finally she gave the all clear signal and declared that the bathroom was sanitary enough to be used by human beings again.

The original overnight stay turned into a three-day visit. Before she left, Bubbe made enough chicken soup for Daniel to last a week.



Out of Time

By Mary Rubio Freeman

It has been laying in wait for her for months. But today, con-

tact is inevitable. Her breath comes in short bursts. Her time has run out. The deadline is here.

Helen tries to unscramble her tumbling thoughts, "Woulda coulda shoulda. Procrastination is not my friend. Killing time is killing me. I am tired of avoiding phone calls and emails from the editor wanting to know my progress. What made me think I could do this?"

As she nears the antique desk in the corner, she knows what she has to do. Opening the top desk drawer, she steels herself for the inevitable abuse awaiting her.

She takes a deep breath and exhales, "All right. No excuses. I know I have been neglecting you."

"You call two months in a drawer neglect? I call it death," her unfinished short story taunts.

"You aren't dead. You live in my thoughts, my dreams and haunt my every waking moment. You never shut up. You are not dead or dying, just unfinished."

"Oh, do you mean suffocating like my sisters and brothers in this tablet? Or my cousins on your laptop? We are dying from your abandonment."

Closing her eyes and seizing the tablet, Helen whispers, "Stop mocking me. I am rescuing you and finishing you now. See?"

"I see as usual you committed the ultimate writing sin, promising your editor a feature article but avoiding the work."

"I haven't been avoiding writing, just busy with real-life. And you know the flu took me down for a time." Whining wasn't Helen's usual modus operandi but she wanted sympathy.

"Excuses. Answer me this, why did you start to write me longhand instead of on the laptop? Double the work, better get typing! Oh, and I see you can't even read your own scribbles."

"I am re-writing you anyway. Feel my love? However painful to send one of my babies into the world, I always meet my deadline." Helen sighed, put on her glasses and took charge of the story's future.



MY TOWN



by Mary Rubio Freeman

To the north and west lie the rocky hills
dotted with sagebrush, wildflowers and oak trees.

Echoes of the Chumash Indians
remain carved in those boulders.

The Old Stagecoach Trail makes the steep climb
slashing its way into the next valley.

Train tracks bisect this town
then tunnel their way beyond.

Ghosts of real-life and film cowboys
roam the hills and lowlands here.

This is John Wayne and Roy Rogers country
covered wagons, Indians and cattle stampedes.

Guns blazed as white hat heroes
captured black hat vermin.

Shouts of "action," "cut," and "one more take"
float on the afternoon breeze.

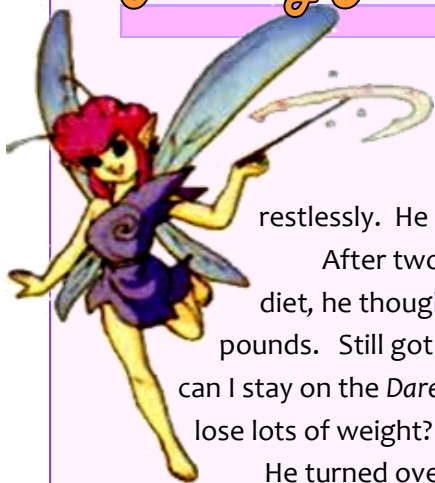
Many traveled through this valley
hurrying, on their way to someplace.

Still others chose to stay as
progress consumed orchards and farms.

This dry riverbed has been watered
and in it flourishes life.

A Very Personal Trainer

By Kathy Highcove



Peter Simpson slept

restlessly. He was hungry. Famished.

After two weeks of my “miracle” diet, he thought, I’ve lost just eight pounds. Still got 157 pounds to go! How can I stay on the *Dare to Dream Show* if I don’t lose lots of weight?

He turned over in bed, punched the pillow, too worried to sleep. He finally got up for a drink of water, pausing at the open window to gaze at the stars. Suddenly, he caught a glimpse of what looked like a large white insect fluttering around in the moonlight.

“Real purty moth,” he said. “Looks sorta like a fairy. Wish you WERE a magic fairy. BIPPITY BOPPITY POOF! and away goes my big gut!”

The fluttery thing paused in mid air, made a u-ie and sped through the window screen like it wasn’t there. Not an “it,” but a “she.” A teensy weensy woman with delicate wings who lightly lit on his dresser.

“Whoa! Who are you? WHAT are you? You look like Dolly Parton crossed with Tinker Bell,” he said.

“What a welcome,” piped the winged newcomer. “Don’t you remember who me? Ambrosia—your personal fairy! Didn’t you just call for me again? My, you’ve really grown up and out since I last saw you!”

“A fairy? I thought you were a moth.”

“Thanks, big guy. And here I was hoping you’d learned better manners in twenty-five years.”

“We’ve met before? Seems like I had a dream about a fairy once ... before my jerk of a stepfather disappeared on a fishing trip.”

“Yup. I sent him to Troll Land. But what d’ya need now? The Head Fairy says I’m supposed to watch out for Peter Simpson. So ... what’s wrong? Run out of food?”

“Don’t mention food. That’s the last thing I need. Look at me. I’m huge. And I’m supposed to be on a diet that could win me big bucks on a TV show. I need your magic again, I guess.”

“Well ... I’m a little rusty on the body enchantment

spells, but here goes: BLIPPITY BLOPPITY BLOOP!”

Alex collapsed on the floor with a loud thud. His dog barked out in the yard.

“OWW! Magical malpractice!” he yelled.

His legs and arms were the perfect size for a farmer’s cornfield scarecrow.

“Oh, sorry, Peter. Stop that wussy whimpering this minute! Hold on while I try another spell.”

She aimed her wand and shot some fairy dust at his midriff as she shouted, “PIPPITY POPPITY POT!”

Now Peter lay flat on floor with a his torso blown up like a balloon. And his limbs were still scrawny.

“HELP ME!” he yelled. “Worse and worse!”

“Whoops! Wrong again. Oh, I remember the right spell now. Once more: FLIPPITY FLOPPITY FAB!”

And finally, every part of Peter was in proportion—like a Body Beautiful winner. He slowly got up from the floor and rotated in front of his closet mirror.

“Wow! I’m trim and muscular! I’m gorgeous.” Then he started to tear up and sniffle.

“NOW what’s the matter?!” the fairy asked.

“I can’t be seen in public like this. People will think I put on a fat suit just to get on the show. My neighbors would call the cops when they see me come out tomorrow morning looking like a young muscle builder!”

“You’ve got a point.” Ambrosia flew over to his pillow and reclined. “Hmm. Let me think. Okay, I’ve got it. I know how to help you stay on the diet.”

“How? I get sooo hungry, I just have to eat.”

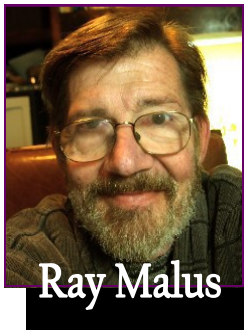
“Here’s my plan: you’ll be fat in the daytime but every night I’ll come back and change you into Mr. Body Beautiful. To keep you motivated. After a few weeks, you’ll be in shape and won’t need my spells.”

“And? How about my eating jags at night?”

“Don’t worry. I have Sleeping Beauty type spells that’ll keep you snoring. I GUARANTEE that you won’t scarf up midnight snacks. You’re gonna lose all that blubber, buddy!”

“Okay, let’s go for it. And when I’m a hunk, not a hulk, I’ve got one more wish for you. For us.”

That’s how Peter Simpson lost 165 pounds, won a car and a \$100,000. Everyone wondered how he lost all that weight so fast. And where he found the hot girlfriend who looked quite a bit like Dolly Parton.



Ray Malus

Ray Malus announces the publication of his literary novel, *Ashes In Yonkers*. He tells us: *The book is a contemporary drama. It interweaves a single day in the life of a mysterious character*

called, The Courier, with four decades in the life of an Irish-American family, The Kearneys.

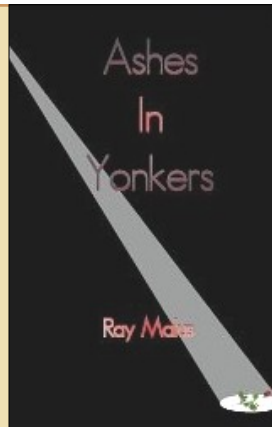
I wanted to write a 'classical' novel—one where the images are glowing and rich, and the plot is involving. I aimed for a modern Shakespearian tragedy, with insight, deep textures and truly human motivation.

In addition, I tried to create characters with whom the reader would bond. These people are wounded and deeply flawed—but in human ways. I want the reader to feel their joy, pain, and passion.

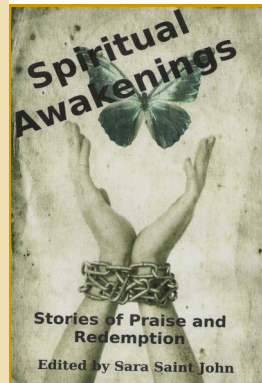
At least for me, I've succeeded. There are passages I still can't read aloud, because they 'get to me.'

I have had people tell me that they have re-read the book several times. That's as good as it can get.

Ashes In Yonkers is available on Amazon and Kindle.



take note



Gary Wosk's short story titled "Flameout" will be published in the "Spiritual Awakenings: Stories of Praise and Redemption" anthology.

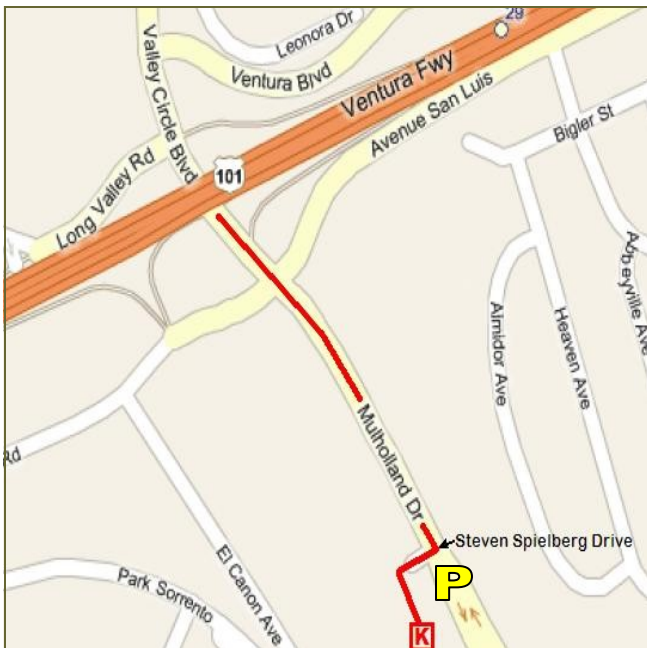


Gary Wosk

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When will it be published? "Fairly soon," says Gary. Stay tuned.

- KH



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: February 2nd at 1:00 p.m.
Sign-ups for Open Mic begin 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.



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