

APRIL 2013

VOLUME 5

ISSUE 8

The Valley Scribe

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



CONTENTS

- 2 President's Message
- 3 Howard Goldstein
- 4 Review and Refresh
- 5 Crime in Rhyme
- 6 Ilan Sendowski Book
- 7 Take Note
- 8 Columbian Tea Afternoon
- 10 Bad Words
- 12 Verbal Acoustics
- 13 High Jinks
- 14 New Ray Malus Book
- 14 Map and Site Info



Poetry and Place: A Reading

Our April speaker, Carol V. Davis, is a poet with a long list of honors and awards. She received the 2007 T.S. Eliot Prize for *Poetry for Into the Arms of Pushkin: Poems of St. Petersburg*. She's written *It's Time to Talk About ...* published in a Russian bilingual collection in 1997, and two chapbooks, *Letters From Prague* and *The Violin Teacher*. She was a senior Fulbright Scholar in Russia in 1996/97 and 2005.

Her poetry has been read on National Public Radio, Radio Russia and at the Library of Congress. She was a 2008 Poet-in-Residence at Olivet College in Michigan and is currently an adjunct professor at Santa Monica College where she teaches English and creative writing courses.

Her work has appeared in such publications in literary journals in many countries including Great Britain, Sweden, Canada and Australia. In the US she has published in the *Atlanta Review*, *Bellingham Review*, *Mid-American Review* and *New American Review*. Her poetry has also appeared in several anthologies.

She tries to participate in young poet mentoring

programs. To further that aim, she's received two PEN grants (2002, 2005) to teach poetry in PEN's writer-in-the-classroom programs for high school students. She also teaches English in the large émigré community of Los Angeles, as well as

Contemporary Jewish American literature there.

And that list of accomplishments and honors is not Davis' total resume. More about this prolific writer and active instructor can be accessed on the Internet. And for those who'd like to see Davis read her work, she's easily found on YouTube reading selections of her poems.

Please come to our April meeting and hear this internationally known artist in person. Davis will discuss the role of place in poetry and read from *Into the Arms of Pushkin: Poems of St. Petersburg* and from her new collection *Between Storms*.

— KH



Carol V. Davis
April Guest Speaker

west valley whimsicals

A Schwartz / Highcove Production



Helen Wasserman
new author

Helen has been learning some new skills as a newly published author. Back in Febru-

ary we met Helen as she first took the stage, book in one hand, mic in the other. Now she's a real pro.



As the weeks went by, Helen became a very adept speaker. She learned to

prepare for each group of listeners who came to hear her speech.



At her talks, she passed out flyers, her business card and info about her book. And she always brought

along extra copies of her book to sell to her latest audience.

What's next for Helen? See page two.

Executive Board

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President's Message



Ah, spring has finally arrived. And just as the spring season traditionally signifies, something new and exciting is about to happen within the California Writers Club.

First I'll set the stage. As one of seven CWC branches in Southern California, CWC-SFV is part of a group labeled the SoCal arm of the statewide CWC. (NorCal consists of 12 branches north of us). Each Southern California branch sends a representative to SoCal meetings to discuss branch activities, exchange ideas and decide what concerns will be taken to Central Board meetings which are held biannually.

The good news: This year SoCal is set to launch a web-based writers' showcase, possibly as soon as May. The site will have a magazine format with categories such as: *The Writing Life*, *Short Fiction*, *Memoir*, *Poetry*, *Nonfiction Essays* and a *Question and Answer* column. There will be links to resources, news of upcoming conferences, contests, and workshops. Each branch will submit creative work from their membership.



In other words, the website will not only be a place where writers can get information, but all CWC members in the southern region will be invited to contribute to the website. Our members will have the opportunity to get published on an e-zine site.

The webmaster, Catherine Kitcho, will be looking for articles with a maximum 500-word count to post in the categories aforementioned. Submissions must be as carefully edited and polished as were submissions for the *CWC State Literary Review*.

There are still a few details to work out, but next month I will have more information about guidelines and information on where to send submissions. In the meantime, start working on articles with such themes as "Why I Belong to a Writers Club," "Creating a Writing Schedule That Works," "My Best Marketing Strategies," or polish up an excerpt from your memoirs. There will be many possibilities here.

— Yolanda Fintor

west valley whimsicals

continued from page one

Helen really has no choice. She's a published author, and authors need to write. So ... what's next for Helen Wasserman? It's obvious. She's going to WRITE ANOTHER BOOK!



Helen Wasserman hard at work on a sequel.

Book Cover Design

By Howard Goldstein

I spoke to the California Writers Club at the March meeting, filling in for someone who had an emergency. I talked about book cover design, colors and the features a writer needs to consider when selecting artwork for a new book.

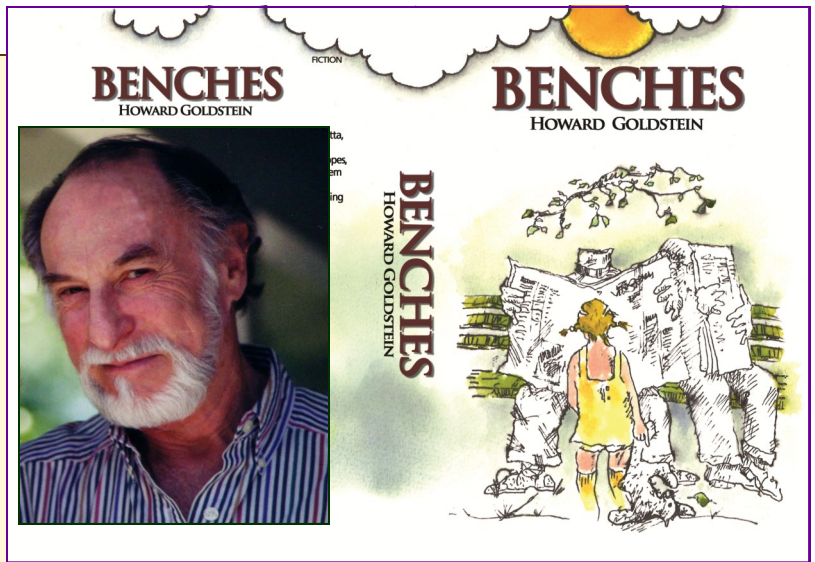
After a writer has spent hours and sometimes years assembling a book, obstacles often appear. Foremost among those obstacles is a cover to represent and introduce the work to a potential audience—bookstore browsers, for example.

My response as an artist is to offer a writer client my design and empathic skills. What, you may ask, are those skills, and what should an author expect? I suggest that the cover is a wrapping for the entire package which should be designed to convey the words, emotions and meaning of the book.

Look at the packages in your kitchen, work and living area. How well do they work and why did you buy them? Did you ever think of a book cover as having three major parts? Each of those parts works together and separately! Here's how:

1. The front cover describes the emotions, title, author and intent of the content in typographic selection, colors and image.
2. The spine continues that message as closely as possible in matching font style(s) and colors.
3. The back cover offers a great opportunity for another expression of the title, possible imagery, possible copy description(s) of author intent, description of the story(ies), emotion, reviews, author photo and biography, ISBN, barcode, publisher logo and address, email, etcetera.

All three parts should match to enable immediate recognition to that particular book even if only one



SFV-CWC member Howard Goldstein is a professional graphic artist who for over fifty years has completed countless designs and illustrations for book covers, CDs, brochures and chapter pages. He recently published his own book, *Benches*, and is currently working on a sequel.

panel is seen.

How does a writer find such an artist? Search through your resources and find one whose work you like and admire. Ask for a meeting, send them a sample chapter and/or talk to them about your intent and expectations. Tell them what you like about their work and how you feel about how closely it seems to fit the expectations you have for your own book.

Ask how much they might charge for a preliminary study and layout. Tell them about your budget and ask if their fees are negotiable. Design often is.

Book cover design by Howard Goldstein howodd@pacbell.net

The cover is comprised of three panels that wrap the book like a package.



Review and Refresh

Music in Poetry

Rhythm

In poems, “the beat goes on” according to the words and the syllables in the various lines. For example *unique* has two syllables (*u-nique*) and the heavy beat is on the *-nique*. The word *reference* has three syllables (*ref-er-ence*) with the stress on the *ref*. *Traditional* has four syllables (*tra-di-tion-al*) with the heavy beat on the *-di* and so on. These syllabic beats occur in everyday speech and prose.

I can't imagine diving from that high.

... but in rhythmic poetry the beats take on definite, predictable patterns.

Whose woods these are I think I know,

His house is in the village though ...

Rhyme

Rhyme is the repetition of the same sound or of a similar sound.

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;

Close to the sun in lonely lands

Ringed with the azure world he stands.

But usually poets alternate the rhymes

"You are old, Father William," the young man said,

"And your hair has become very white,

And yet you incessantly stand on your head.

Do you think at your age, it is right?"

A single word can also rhyme with the end of a longer word.

Worships language and forgives

Everyone by whom it lives.

Further on in the same poem, the last syllable of a three syllable word rhymes nicely with the last syllable of another three syllable word.

Time that is intolerant

Of the brave and innocent.

When the rhyme is in the last syllable, as in the lines above, it is a masculine rhyme, generally a more forceful sound, whereas the agreement of sound in two consecutive syllables is a feminine rhyme, usually more light and delicate, as in *laden* and *maiden* below.

With rue my heart is laden

For golden friends I had,

For many a rose-lipt maiden

And many a lightfoot lad.



Meter

The following combinations of stressed and unstressed or accented and unaccented syllables are referred to as feet.

The *iamb* (delay) - unaccented syllable, accented syllable

The *trochee* (only) - accented-unaccented

The *anapest* (in my heart) - two unaccented-one accented

The *dactyl* (happily) - one accented-two unaccented

Two feet in a line is called ... *dimeter*.

Three feet ... *trimeter*. Four feet ... *tetrameter*.

Five feet *pentameter*. Six feet ... *hexameter*.

And so on.

Thus ... *and the sheen on their spears was like stars on the sea* is *anapestic tetrameter* and ... *beside the lake beneath the trees* is *iambic tetrameter*.

The master poets were experts in combining words with rhythm and music. If you enter these waters and choose to follow a basic rhythm pattern, you must be consistent throughout. If you drop the pattern even slightly (without a good reason) the reader will spot it and the poem will be ruined in the same way a pin can destroy a balloon.

Some poets won't attempt rhythm and write free verse. If you attempt a rhythm pattern and you carry it off, however, the words of your poem can provide a beautiful musical background as it speaks, as Shakespeare did in this sonnet.

Sonnet 73

That time of year thou may'st in me behold

When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang

Upon those boughs which shake against the cold

Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.

In me thou seest the twilight of such day

As after sunset fadeth in the west,

Which by and by black night doth take away,

Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.

In me thou seest the glowing of such fire

That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,

As the deathbed whereon it must expire,

Consumed by that which it was nourished by.

This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,

To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

-- Dave Wetterberg

Crime in Rhyme by Ken Wilkins

CHILLING EFFECT

Not a popular boss was Hubert McBride
He angered his workers so much that they cried.

For with a stern hand his meat plant was run
Little time for laughter, no time for fun.

Now especially teed off was Molly O'Neal
Who felt that Hubert had dealt her a raw deal.

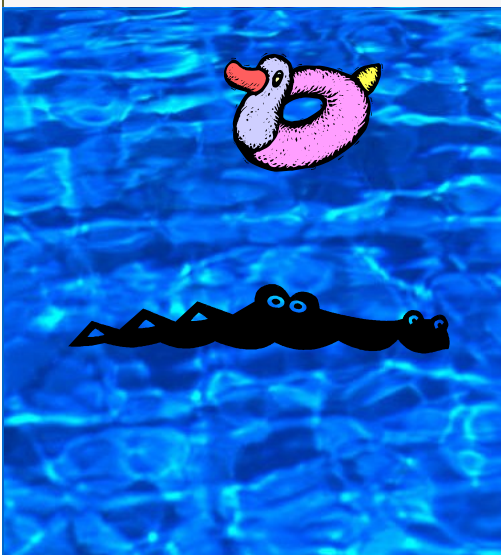
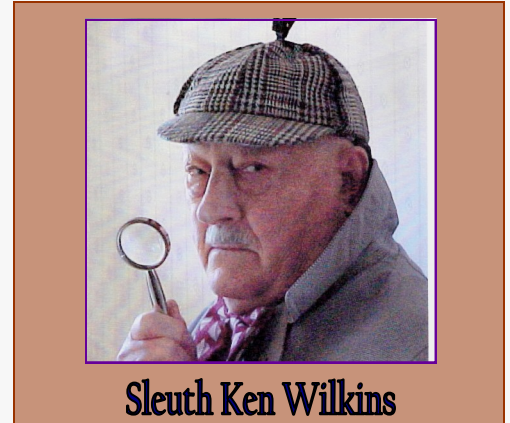
In a job best suited for Molly to fill
He chose a cousin causing feelings so ill.

So, on a Friday night Molly worked late
A move that would help seal mean Hubert's fate.

For when McBride made his last freezer inspection
Molly slammed the door to even his rejection.

On Monday morn they found him all frozen
Not quite the end that he would have chosen.

All around the plant workers showed little grief
That their boss wound up like a cold slab of beef.



COOL FOOL

How did she vanish that hot, humid night?
Not a breath of air, no moon to give light.

Now to find a way to keep herself cool
She'd take a quick swim in her neighbor's pool.

Alas, it held the fam'ly's pet 'gator
Which, during her dip, completely ate her.



Ilan Sendowski

Ilan's Story: Patience and Persistence Pays Off in Publication

I got the initial idea for my book in 2005. First, I wrote just a little Power Point presentation that hardly anyone wanted to watch. When my initial idea was rejected by a person I very much re-

spected, I started to do serious Biblical research in the library. More and more ideas came to mind and I got more and more support and encouragement from Biblical scholars.

I wrote my story as an article for a well-respected magazine but it was rejected. I was told that my topic wasn't sufficiently academic, and not historical fiction. So I wrote my story again in English and published *Court's Intrigues, The Magnificent Tale of Esther and Mordecai* with crossbooks.com. This first publication staked my claim to prevent someone else from publishing my ideas.

Then I decided to publish my story in Hebrew because I realized that only a few English readers were interested in the book. I hired artists to create several drawings that correctly illustrated the events in my story.

Still ... no publisher. After I was rejected **four** times by traditional publishers, I took my manuscript to a Jewish self-publishing house. They accepted my story and I got an excellent support in re-editing and publication. But my expensive illustrations were rejected because traditional Jewish books are not illustrated.

My book attempts to answer many unresolved questions regarding the *Book of Esther*. Below is a sample of a few prevalent questions:

- Was Esther really selected because she was beautiful?
- Why did Mordecai not kneel before Haman when there was no Jewish prohibition against doing so?
- Why did the king not take the bribe from Haman?
- Why was Mordecai confident that God would help the Jewish people?

In order to understand the hidden meanings of the book of Esther, one must investigate every word and sentence as

if it is a legal document presented to a court or a contract. Sometimes we close our eyes to acknowledge the truth and are stuck in a fairy tale story we learned as young children. We skip words and invent stories to explain something that is in our imagination which creates a false world. In contrast, I believe that my book educates and enlightens the reader.

— Ilan Sendowski

Editor's note: I'm reading the English version of Ilan's book at www.crossroads.com. I appreciated these comments found in his preface:

The traditional explanations of the Megillah are not complete. As I will show in this book, the king was not a drunkard, but a wise and worthy ruler.

Esther did not win her position as the queen simply by being beautiful and sexy. Haman played a childish game that escalated to a full-blown attempted genocide.

Mordecai was a wise man, and we can learn from him how to think and how to overcome our nemeses.

This is the goal of the Megillah—to force us to think and solve problems. As Esther learned from Mordecai and became a

strong leader, so should our children learn from Mordecai and Esther to become upstanding members of society.

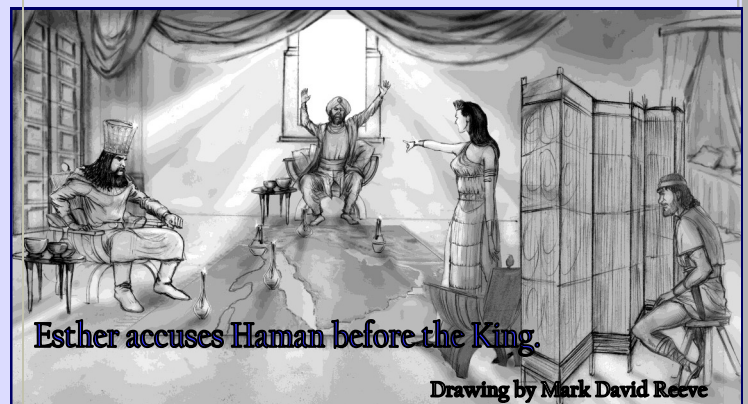
The Hebrew version of Ilan's book can purchased at E-vrit's website: <http://www.e-vrit.co.il/>

Ilan's Ynet interview (in Hebrew) about his book can be found at this website: <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4341463,00.html>



In Hebrew, Ilan's book is titled *Megilat Hhipuchim - Megilah of Inversion*

The English title:
***Court's Intrigues
The Magnificent Tale
of
Esther and Mordecai***



Esther accuses Haman before the King.

Drawing by Mark David Reeve

An illustration found in the English version of Ilan's book.

— KH

APRIL 2013

TAKE NOTE

FIRST PRIZE WINNER

Erica Stux has won first place in the poetry division in the annual competition of the Federated Women's Clubs. The General Federation of Women's Clubs is an international women's organization dedicated to community improvement by enhancing the lives of others through volunteer service.

This past month, Erica read her poem, "A PRISM," in the Granada Hills Women's Clubhouse at the Arts & Crafts Festival. Kudos to Erica!

A PRISM

Here are colors in the order,
red and violet at the border,
just like in a rainbow's arching span.

It shows white is just a mixture;
colors are the basic fixture,
held together through some magic plan.

Much as splitting light asunder,
leaving us awestruck in wonder,
in relationship this rule applies.

We should be alert in seeing
facets of a person's being,
for his inner aspect may surprise.

Just ignore inconsequential;
look for traits that are essentials,
showing what a person's like inside.

So just like the rainbow's hues,
we should look for latent clues
where one's finest qualities may hide.

- Erica Stux

*Here's a poem by SFV member Keyle Birnberg-Goldstein.
As the weather warms this spring,
her verse reminds us of the taste and feel of heat.*

Summer

You came one day

Uninvited and rude

Jalapeños pepper hot

Burning trees and me

With sticky humidity

Summer is outside

Blanching my windows with fiery Van Gogh yellow

Keeping me prisoner

In the artificial cool of my house

Dreaming of sand castles on the beach

Where ANOREXIA sun golden

Statues wrapped in leopard skins

Walk worry free

Ignoring the heat of LA VIDA LOCA

With blisters on their feet

Leaving me behind exhausted and weak

Like a sand statue shrunk by the wind

My thoughts collecting dust

On blank yellowed pages

Where poems grow no more

I can't sleep I can't write

No place to hide

It's Hot everywhere Hot, Hot, Hot...

- Keyle Birnberg-Goldstein



Free E-book Offer Until April 5 - Act Fast!

If you'd like to download a free children's e-book, Judy Presnall's publisher—**LearningIsland.com**—is having a promotion. Choose one book—by Judy or another featured author—by using the coupon found at <http://www.learningisland.org/>. Judy's free book is **How Do Monkeys Prevent Mosquito Bites?** However, you may order ANY one free book by other authors on the website. Download any free E-BOOK between now and April 5th! Additional books are offered at deep discounts. Even if you miss the deadline, look around the site. Many of us know very young readers who'd enjoy downloading a new e-book. Take a look!

— KH

Colombian Tea Afternoon

By **Keyle Birnberg-Goldstein**

"What are you presenting for the year's end design exhibition?" asks my friend Leonor after our last workshop.

"I'm not quite sure," I reply. "Perhaps one of my centerpieces for table settings. Are you presenting too?"

Leonor looks at me with her enormous hazel eyes. Curving her long fingers, she combs her silky brown short hair ... a habit she picked up when she is deep in thought.

"Do you think I should enter some of my sculptures?"

"But of course! Your pieces are wonderful!" Thinking ... her sculptures look almost like her in miniature. Leonor has bronzed skin with soft rose petal cheeks, and auburn-brown hair just like the bronze coiffure on Edgar Degas' *Petite Danseuse*.

"Now that that's settled, help me put the final touches in the tea room," she says ... softly fluttering her lashes ... the way she does when she wants things done "pronto."

"We have been working in that room for two months," I protest.

I haven't had any contracts lately for my "Magic Touch Interiors" ... so I agree. Anyway, she always gets her way. And being the good friend that I think I am, I accept the new challenge. All it needs is merchandising, which in Interior Design lingo means details, chachkies, pillows, and accessories. We finish the room, making it warm and inviting. The color, a deep peach

and the accents, fit like magic. Everything looks peachy, including our skins. As a final touch, I place one of her sculptures on a pedestal and hang some ivy branches behind it.

"There ... it's perfect ... it doesn't need any more," I say, taking a few steps back to admire the results.

We are still wearing jeans, big t-shirts, and dust from our last workshop, and a big appetite. Leonor prepares a superb lunch just like the society women do in Colombia. I set the table with

hand-carved Colombian silver, Limoges china, tapestry runners and her Lalique centerpiece with flowers from her garden. Breaking all the Colombian society rules, we sit down with our dusty jeans to have tea-lunch in the afternoon.

Later I see her garage is just like mine, full of all the artistic junk we have collected in going-out-of-business-shops, sidewalk freebies, and friendly garage one-of-a-kind finds.

"Let me help you make the pulp for your next sculpture," I volunteer. I know her projects need more time than my centerpieces.

We select the modeling wax, wire hangers for the armature, hemp for arms and legs ... pouring it all with a thin layer of wax including her secret invention of Colombian glue, light cement dust, clay, plaster, and a pinch of sandy-salt. She wets some old rags with rose water and works rapidly covering and molding the selected wire form with her hands. There is dust floating everywhere.



(Continued on page 9)

"Here, wear this mask," she insists after I start coughing, sneezing, and searching for a clean rag to cover my nose. We finish our Colombian tea ... still coughing with creative dust and dried flowers. Later that week, we jump with joy as our one-of-a-kind pieces qualify for display at the exhibition.

"Beautiful, but can't afford it!" people say, almost running away from temptation.

At the end of the day, Leonor sells one of her sculptures and two of my centerpieces. A blond woman hands me her card.

"I want all your creations on consignment for my new shop," she says. I am shaking with excitement ... the big smile stays glued on my face well into the night. The next day we deliver thirty of my centerpieces and one sculpture. We celebrate our good luck. The Colombian tea never tasted so good.

The following week all of my creations are gone. Leonor's small sculpture is displayed in a special niche facing the entrance of the shop. I go around searching the shelves of the store for my pieces.

"You have a real nice check coming. I'll have it ready for you right after inventory in a couple of weeks," the owner says.

I feel Leonor's disappointment crawling into me. I offer to split my future check with her, but she grabs her statue and storms out of the novelty shop.

A couple of weeks later, the store is gone. In dismay and, in disbelief, asking neighbors and near shops, we discover the blonde-haired-woman's NEW address. She lives in a secluded mansion with a circular drive flanked by old, tall trees.

"Someone is peeking out of that window," Leonor says, pulling me over and stretching my blue sweater to the max. We ring and ring the



bell, but no one comes down to open the door. We stretch our necks as far as we can in an effort to see the top window of the house. My heart skips what seems like a hundred beats all at once, and I start crying, knowing that my center pieces are gone forever.

"Don't worry," Leonor says, lending me her handkerchief to wipe my tears.

"We'll find the woman ... you'll see."

We go back day after day, but Judy (if that was her name) has disappeared.

After that day, the Colombian tea at my good friend's house tastes bitter, my creative centerpieces are taking too long to create, and we cannot find the good junk anymore. Then by chance we spot the blond in a new store. She almost faints when she sees us coming.

"Well, surprise, surprise!!! My husband took it all. We are getting a divorce." She gives us his "address" to collect my check ... no funds.

A good lesson about trust painfully learned. My centerpieces lost forever, the search for unique vases, metals, and containers temporarily stopped.

But the memory remains of our Colombian tea in the afternoon surrounded by Leonor's beautiful silent statues. They were like mute sentinels encouraging us to continue, and perhaps ... to try a new medium?



- Dave Wetterberg

Jill was a sweet little kindergartener. She never used bad words. One evening that all changed. At dinner, I could tell she was troubled about something. I touched her arm.

"What's the matter, kid?" I said.

"I don't know."

"Yes, you do."

"No, I don't!"

"Yes, you do."

She looked down at her fingers and mumbled something.

I turned her chin up with my finger.

"What did you say?"

"I want to use bad words."

"Oh? You want to use bad words?"

"Am I bad?" She was close to tears.

"Well, no, Jilly," I said. "Of course not. You could never be bad."

Her eyes were moist. She went on. "Sometimes I want to use bad words so much, my stomach gets all twisted up," she said, clenching her fists, reddening them.

My stomach started to get twisted up watching my little Jill's misery. I frowned across the supper table at my wife. This strange little scene between

Jill and me had stopped her from eating, too. What was this? My wife and I had no hang-ups about cussing ... "using bad words," as Jill called it. I'd used plenty of them and my wife could hold her own in that department (when she had a mind to). But we never swore in front of the children.

"Jilly," I said. "Look. If you think Mommy and I don't like to hear you use bad words, you're probably right. But the reason we don't, isn't because the words are evil and you're evil when you say them. It doesn't have anything to do with that. Words are just sounds. Most cuss words don't mean that much anyway."

Jill looked puzzled.

"You see," I went on, "Mommy and Daddy know you. We know you're a nice little girl. We know you're sweet and good. But a lot of other people don't know you, and when they hear these particular words coming out of your mouth, they think, my gosh, she can't be a very nice girl, talking like that. They don't know you, and they might think you're bad because they don't. And as far as that feeling when you want to use bad words ... next time it comes, just say a few bad words till the feeling goes away."

Jill cocked her head up at my last words, like ... Had I said what she thought I said?

"You mean it?" she said.

"Sure. Just don't let any of the neighbors hear you."

"She glanced at her mother, who shrugged her shoulders, but smiled, putting her rubber stamp on it.

Jill looked like she was going to giggle. "Any of the words, Daddy?"

(Continued on page 11)

"Absolutely. Any of them. As a matter of fact, why don't you do it right now? Go in the bathroom. Go ahead. Close the door and just cuss for a while. Use all the words you can think of. All the filthy, rotten ones. The filthiest ones you've ever heard. As many times as you want."

She couldn't get into the bathroom fast enough. After five minutes, she opened the door.

"How was it?" I asked.

"Good!" she said, beaming like a lighthouse.

"Did you use all the words?"

"Yes."

"The filthiest, most disgusting ones you ever heard?"

"Yes"

"How do you feel?"

"Good!"

"Good? Or great? You look like it felt great?"

"It did!"

"Any twisting in the stomach any more?"

"No."

"Glad to hear it. Okay now, let's hear some cuss words. Come on. Say some."

For a second, her joy deadpanned out. But I was on a roll.

"Go ahead!" I said. "Say some dirty words."

"I don't know, Daddy."

"Just one, then. One dirty word. Go ahead, Jill. It's okay."

Like she was about to recite a poem, Jill held her hands at her side, breathed in, and, out loud, briskly, and confidently, she said a bad word.

"Fart."

I was disappointed. Here I give my daughter a

guilt free, punishment free opportunity to say anything to her heart's content—any revolting, puerile cuss word that she had ever heard. And she chooses fart??? If there were a list of all the filthiest, most disgusting, stomach churning, hell condemning words in the English language, fart, I thought, would surely be at the bottom of the list. But I tried not to show my disappointment.

"Good girl," I said. "Say it again."

"Fart."

"Again!"

"Fart."

"Yes."

"Okay, then," I said. So any time you start to get those feelings in your stomach, just go ahead and cuss. As far as I'm concerned, those words are no big deal."

"You mean it?" she said.

"Yup. Just do it when nobody's around who can hear you."

I raised my fork like a baton.

"Again!"

"... fart ... fart ... fart ... fart ..."

Then the family joined in.

"...fart, fart, fart, fart."

We chanted until all the fun of being evil was exhausted, and from then on, we all cussed like truck drivers.

But only in the house, of course.

Writing for adults often means just increasing the swearing. But find an alternative to swearing and you've probably got a better line.

— Steven Moffat



Verbal Acoustics

By Mira Desai

Banshee yowl ... there it went off again, blissfully off key. A note trembling high like a ballerina's pirouette and then a spoiler quiver that was guaranteed to shatter glass. Sound that was worse than a hooting siren on this cold winter afternoon. Sunanda grimaced as her firstborn valiantly attacked the medium scales, the notes of the *sargam*. At least he tried.

Jal, or Jallaluddin Ali Khan, second grader at Riverdale Primary, and the twenty-fifth-or-something direct descendent of a forefather feted as a *navratna* or classic jewel at Emperor Akbar's sixteenth century court, was attempting to learn Indian classical music. Rather valiantly.

The snow-covered neighborhood of their house on Cedar Drive, New Jersey, was quiet, even serene. As quiet as it could be on a week-day winter afternoon, with just the sound of tyres swishing on the distant highway, and most of the homes snow-cocooned.

Sunanda shut her eyes and tried to count to hundred with each grating set of notes. She set her jaw and tried now to focus on the sweet base notes of the accompanying harmonium and block the pleas and growls from their Labrador, Raja, whom she'd banished outside. Despite the cold.

A sound like a cat's warning screech rose from her son's vocal chords. There ... this once his voice sounded like a car stalled on a slope, trying to rev up to the next note. Who could ever believe his illustrious lineage, the acclaims bestowed on his ancestor at palace concerts, all the rivalry and vying for prizes all those centuries ago?

He'll get better. He'd better get better ... by and by ... she willed her breath to an even pace.

It wasn't his fault really, it was the distance and the price one paid for living in this country, cut off from one's roots.

Next year, they'd be returning to Allahabad, where the extended Ali-Khan family lived in a rambling mansion. Where even a newborn cried in the right pitch and

tone. It was in the blood, the lineage. It was expected.

Where Jal had better sing, and sing in tune and pitch, if he were to fit in. Hence these offensive afternoon sessions, these wrestling bouts with pitch and tone, with notes sounding like thunderous colliding planets or demonic bat screeches.

~

In the house across the street, Mr. Smith tossed in bed and groaned in his first floor bedroom. His sinuses were playing up again, and his head felt like a truck had roared over it. Trust the neighbor's cat to keep him from some well-deserved rest on a day when he'd called in sick.

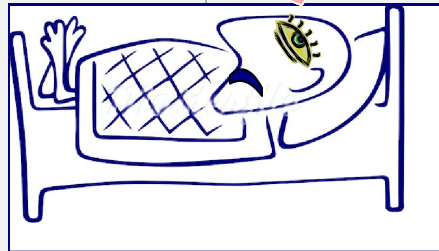
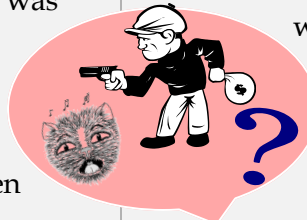
What a cacophony! Serenading ferals, this place was worse than a zoo ... whatever next? He never should have moved to this neighborhood.

He fluffed his pillow, pulled his blanket over his head, turned and tried to sleep but those strange yelps continued. But this once there was no warning hiss between cries.

He knew cats and their screechy territorial battles over back alleys and fire escapes. But this screech was different. He listened closely. Sounded quite human, now that he thought about it. Almost like a cry for help. A cascading scream for help, from someone who was gagged, perhaps. An abduction? The things that happened these days!

He rushed out and stared at the house across the street. The front door was half-open, a Labrador was growling, and the cries seemed frantic, desperate.

He hurried back, reached for his phone, and dialed 911.



Mira Desai writes and lives in Bombay and works in pharmaceuticals. Her translations have featured in *Words without Borders*, and *The Massachusetts Review*. She's currently translating a novel. She has contributed fiction to *Reading Hour*, *Birmingham Arts Journal*, *Six Sentences*, *Flashes in the Dark*, *Granny Smith Magazine*, *Pure Slush*, and this newsletter. Creative non-fiction is a recent interest, with essays in *Annalemma*, *Frostwriting*, and *Real*, an anthology. She's a member of the Internet Writing Workshop, as is *The Valley Scrbe's* editor. — KH

high jinks

Julio stepped out of the van, stretched, and put on his painter's cap. He waved at the gardener and shouted: "Hey, Rodrigo, thanks! I owe you one, man!"

The gardener straightened and put a cautionary finger to his lips.

"Quiet. You'll get us in trouble. Your brother just came out here looking for you. You better go back to work."

"Okay, I'll shut up. Hi ho, hi ho, It's back to work I go ..."

He whistled the perky Disney tune all the way through the house and into the nursery, where he found his brother Romero still working on the circus mural.

"I'm back, bro. Let me finish the elephant."

"Okay, but you'd better speed it up. Señora Wilson wants the mural done by Friday. Hey. How come your eyes look funny? What were you doing in the van? Smokin' some weed? I know that Rodrigo, the gardener, sells it from his truck."

"Yeah, I bought one little smoke. Big deal."

"Rodrigo sells some really strong stuff, my pals tell me."

Julio shrugged and outlined the elephant's ear.

"I'm okay. Don't be a nosy big brother. Go paint somewhere else and stop worrying about me."

"I have to worry about you. This is my gig and you're helping me get the job done on time. No complications, Julio! Okay?"

"Okay. See? I'm painting the ear. I'll be done in a couple hours."

"You better be. I'm going to finish the outside trim around the windows. Don't mess up the mural."

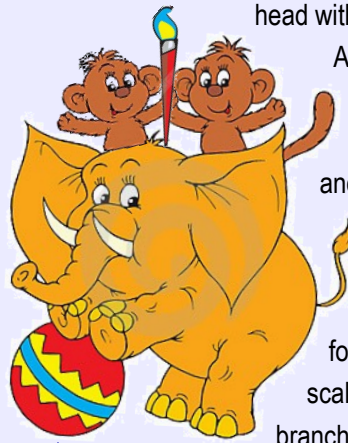
Romero left the nursery.

This paint is supposed to be gray, Julio thought, peering closely at the elephant's ear. How come it's looking kinda pink? Pink elephants in the nursery mural. Right next to the freaky pink flamingoes. The kid in this bedroom is sure gonna have psychedelic dreams. That's funny. Julio started to giggle. So he had to stop drawing because the brush was shaking in his hand.

Hmm. The room's too warm. Feels like the rain forest back home. What's next? Oh yeah, the blue circus tent. The Big Top.

He paused and looked at the figures he and his brother had painted the day before. Funny, he thought, when and how did we give it a 3-D look? And wow, the acrobat has blinking stars on her tights. Hey! Did those lions just wave their paws at me?

He turned back to the wall and wiped perspiration from his fore-



head with a paint rag.

A monkey's paw reached under his right ear and grabbed a paintbrush from the blue paint can. Julio whirled around and watched two chimps race out of the room. He chased after them, through the patio doors and out into the back yard. Then he looked around for the monkeys and spotted them as they scaled a tree. They scooted quickly along a branch toward a big monkey hut. There they

sat, waving the brush at him. Hooting and chattering. Just asking for it. Julio ran over and stood under the tree and shook his fist at the two grinning chimps.

"Bring that back, you little bastards! That's the brush for the circus tent. Oh, geez. You painted that poor flying squirrel blue. Bad monkeys!" They hooted at him again.

"I'm coming up there to get that brush," Julio shouted. He gripped the tree trunk and started to climb, but it was hard to hold on. Did those chimps put banana oil on the tree trunk? Cheaters. Got to get ... He felt a tap on his shoulder. An elephant's trunk. Of course! The elephant wanted to help him. And elephants are strong. Strong enough to boost him into the tree.

"Put your trunk around my waist," prompted Julio, "and lift me up! That's right. Here we go. Okay, I've got a grip on this lower branch ... you can let go. I said, let go. NO! Put me down!"

The elephant dropped him on the hard ground and raised its trunk. A blast of cold water hit Julio in the face. He fell back sputtering and tried to block the blast. After it finally stopped, Julio struggled to his feet and focused at the form across from him ... not an elephant, but Romero holding a hose.

"What're you doin' ?!" Julio sputtered. He heard kids giggling overhead in the tree. He squinted up and saw a tree house. A blue cat streaked out of an open window of the tree house and headed for the open patio doors.

A few seconds later a woman shrieked somewhere in the house.

"I warned you, man," Romero hissed. "You can't smoke weird stuff on break, and act crazy."

"Who's acting crazy?"

"YOU are! It's really crazy to chase Señora Wilson's twins up a tree! I don't care what Mama says about helping you learn the painting trade. Get your act together or you'll be back in your old job cleaning out cages in the zoo."

— **Kathy Highcove**

Ray Malus tells us about his latest book ...

You've FOUND IT! This is the one! The original! A literary breakthrough! 'Stories You'd Give A Shit About — If I Was Famous' is the world's FIRST Toilet Tank Book. 'Stories You'd Give A Shit About — If I Was Famous' is a hilarious collection of anecdotes from the life of the author. J. Raymond Kent takes a quirky look at life in the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s from a personal viewpoint. The result is a fascinating, outrageous, and often side-splitting chronicle. This book is available as an e-book, but you really need a printed copy to place right there on the tank. Kent promises laughs, and he delivers. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!** (And the paper is soft and gentle.)

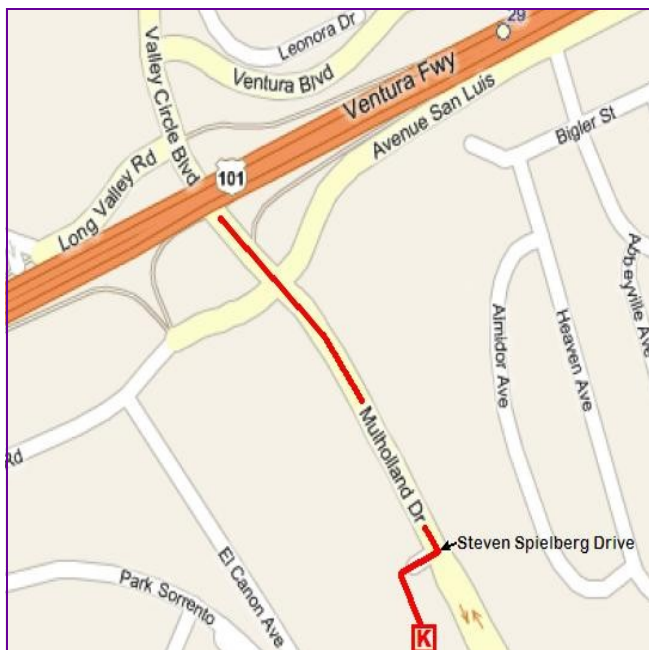
"The 'Pet Rock' of books — everybody needs one!" enthuses J. Raymond Kent.



Ray Malus who uses the alias J. Raymond Kent



http://www.amazon.com/Stories-Youd-Give-About-Famous/dp/148129511X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1363388791&sr=8-1&keywords=stories+you%27d+give+a+shit



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:

April 6th, 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.



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