



The Newsletter of The San Fernando Valley Branch

The Valley Scribe

"Our Members' Voices"



Vol. 7

June, 2014

No. 6

Next Meeting: June 7th, 1:00!

June's Speaker — Lisa Cron

Wired for Story: What Your Reader's Brain Really Craves



Imagine knowing what we're hard-wired to crave in every story we encounter, what hooks readers, and what keeps them turning pages. The answer is a game-changer, especially since the secret to writing a compelling story has very little to do with the surface plot or learning to "write well." We'll explore what your reader's brain craves, why, what a story actually is, and why writers are therefore the most powerful people on the planet. The result? You'll be able to zero in on what your story is actually about before you write word one (or if you're in the midst of your umpteenth rewrite, before you write another word). You'll not only produce a more powerful novel, chances are you'll drastically reduce your rewrite time.

Lisa Cron is the author of *Wired for Story: The Writer's Guide to Using Brain Science to Hook Readers From the Very First Sentence* (Ten Speed Press), and her video tutorial *Writing Fundamentals: The Craft of Story* can be found at Lynda.com. She's worked in publishing at W.W. Norton, as an agent at the Angela Rinaldi Literary Agency, as a producer on shows for Showtime and Court TV, and as a story consultant for Warner Brothers and the William Morris Agency. Since 2006, she's been an instructor in the UCLA Extension Writers' Program. Her passion has always been story, and she currently works as a story coach helping writers, non profits, educators and journalists wrangle the story they're telling onto the page. Find out more at: <http://wiredforstory.com/>.

Lisa Cron can be reached at: lisa@wiredforstory.com □



(Click on title to jump to item)

**Next Meeting:
OPEN MIC!
Sign up for 5 minutes
of FAME. 12:30 SHARP!**

IT'S NOT TOO EARLY

to renew your membership.

Bring your \$45 to the Welcome Table at our June meeting.

or

Mail your check to: CWC-SFV, 9625 Fullbright Ave., Chatsworth, CA 91311

or

Remember to bring your payment to our August 'MID-SUMMER MEET and MINGLE

or

Make a note to bring your check to our September meeting.

Remember, members who renew AFTER SEPT 30, will be charged a \$20 reinstatement fee.

Do **NOT** make us spank you!



President's Message Nance Crawford

“June is bustin’ out all over/
All over the meadow and the hill
. . .” The incomparable Oscar
Hammerstein II may not have said

it first, but he always seems to have said it best.

Those who know me fairly well, know that I didn’t start out as a writer of books; I started as a playwright/lyricist. My first publicly presented effort was our Sixth Grade Graduation epic, “It Happened in Rio,” memorable for the deathless speech, “I just love this sidewalk café. Oh, look! Isn’t that Sugar Loaf mountain?” Got my first big laugh. From my mother. It wasn’t intended to be funny.

I just returned from presenting at the Alliance of Los Angeles Playwrights’ (www.laplaywrights.org), “In Our Own Voices.” It happens twice a year. Six or seven of us get up in front of a group of mostly friends at Barnes & Noble and perform in ten minutes of something we’ve written – hence, the title, “In Our *Own* Voices. This year, my little group was last up and, in spite of rehearsing a whole hour, we still didn’t come in at the ten minute limit. Talking fast doesn’t help. When the ring tone goes off, even if you’ve been robbed of time by an appreciative audience’s laughter, you’re done. There were ten lines to go.

The problem with working with words is that

it’s hard to know, at first pass, what’s going to work. Playwrights have it best, because they can impose on a bunch of their friends (pizza and beer are a wonderful bribe). The thing is, even for performance, everyone’s a volunteer. Payment is in the satisfaction of stretching the muscles in service to the cause – for playwrights, and actors, the play.

It’s pretty much the same for any group of writers: we do what we do because we love it, we must do it, and we are especially dependent upon the kindness of others in order to get it done.

At CWC-SFV, the kindest of others have been my fellow Board members, and those who have helped out during the past year: Rita Brown, Doug Douglas, Yolanda Fintor, Mary Freeman, Karen Gorbach, Anne Hansell, Geri Jabara, Ray Malus, Gabriella Owens, Andrea Polk, Bill Sorrells, Linette Stone, Georgina Tagliere, and Gary Wosk.

My grateful thanks to you all.

[The Board acknowledges and thanks Nance right back. — Ed.]

June marks the end of our “Official” year – we will be taking the month of July off.

August is going to be interesting, because, just as we did last year, we’re going to have another Pot Luck Meet ‘n’ Greet. It will be Members Only, so we’ll have a chance to catch up with each other.

We had a grand time last August, so be here, or be cubed: the subject of what may turn out to be very colorful suppositional fiction. We all have active, vivid imaginations.

Thanks for a great year! □

NEW BENEFIT FOR MEMBERS!

At their January 2014 meeting, The CWC-SFV board agreed to enact a member-sponsored free guest benefit program. Effective July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015, a CWC-SFV member-in-good-standing may sponsor TWO FREE GUESTS during the above fiscal year. The limit is two and they must be sponsored by a SFV branch member. Other guests will continue to be asked to donate \$5.00. New club members will be afforded the same benefit of sponsoring two free guests regardless of the date s/he joined. This benefit is neither transferable nor may it roll over to the next fiscal year.

There will be a separate sign-in sheet at the sign-in table for club members to sign-in his/her guest(s). The current board will review the impact of this change and pass on results and any recommendations to the new board for their consideration. We hope this benefit will allow our members to encourage other writers and aspiring writers to see what we have to offer.

— *Andi Polk, Membership Chair*

May Speaker Review — Helga Schier

Don't Eat The Menu!

by Ray Malus

You have to call it something! They ask you what the title of your talk will be, and you have to give an answer. For **Helga Schier**, that answer was “**Top Ten Errors Writers Make that Editors Hate.**”

But to simply focus on those ten points would be to miss the true value of her presentation, to “Eat the menu, rather than the meal.”

For the sake of completeness, here are her ‘Ten Errors’ (along with small interpretations of her notes by me.)

1. Editors hate it when it's clear that you never ran that spell-check.

(Careless or ignorant errors: typos, misspellings, punctuation, grammar are never acceptable. Never!)

2. Editors hate it when you serve leftovers.

(Check for fragments left over from earlier drafts and errors in continuity due to reorganizing the manuscript.)

3. Editors hate it when the writing is heavier than a ten-ton-truck.

(Cut the verbal fat.)

4. Editors hate it when style isn't really style but writing in your comfort zone.

(Avoid calling attention to the *writer's* repetitive verbal ‘quirks.’)

5. Editors hate clichés except when they don't.

(Find something fresh that you *and the reader* can relate to. However, your characters can use clichés as markers of their personalities.)

6. Editors hate it when characters resemble cardboard cutouts.

(Behavior is better than exposition, and behavior must be *motivated*.)

7. Editors hate it when the narrative tells rather than shows.

(Don't comment; depict!)

8. Editors hate it when dialogues turn into speeches.

(Dialogue must be natural, and reflect an ‘exchange’ between characters.)

9. Anything goes! But: Just because you say so doesn't make it so.

(Lay foundations! Delineate motivation! Action must proceed logically and result from what came before.)

10. Editors hate hangnail writing.

(Include the essentials for telling your story, no more, no less. Avoid unnecessary sub-plots and characters.)

None of these is startling. Most of us have heard (and forgotten) them, organized in various ways, many times. (Indeed, there is a certain amount of overlap among them). After all, we have had language for millennia, and literature for centuries. *Someone* must know the rules! This is *Scripture!*

But, as with fine dining, presentation is everything, and Schier is a master. (Mistress? Stop quibbling!)

She garnishes her presentation with delicious examples — Presidents who chew gum, pandemonium in a restaurant, clothes strewn around a living room — and one comes away with the certainty that, lurking behind the Tarot card of ‘The Editor’ there beats the heart of ‘The Writer.’

Amid presentations on “‘Kindle’ Your Inner Fire,” and “The Road to ‘Tweet’ Success,” Schier's obvious devotion to the craft of story telling is inspiring. She is an entrée among canapés.

OK. Enough with the food references!

I suppose I could expand on the points in her presentation, but why? I can't do it better than she. For that, you need the person herself.

Schier's mien is assured and calming. (Even a significant technical glitch didn't faze her.) She seems to be consulting with her audience, rather than pontificating — often presenting two sides of an argument, in a ‘Socratic’ manner. She retains just the faintest trace of her native German accent, which sometimes gives her statements a Teutonic ‘snap.’ But that's usually followed by a gamine grin and the phrase, “... of course, if it works, it's fine.” You get the feeling that this is an editor who could be trusted to negotiate the inclusion of a comma.

Her preparation is impeccable. I have no idea how often she does presentations, but I have a copy of her notes. They are virtually a transcription of her program.

Helga Schier has worked in the book publishing industry for more than 20 years as an editor, writer, and translator. After many years as editor and executive editor in The Big Five publishing houses, she founded withpenandpaper.com, which provides independent editorial services, helping writers to refine their story ideas and produce the best manuscripts possible. Her work focuses on content issues such as character and plot development and the interplay of narrative and dialogue.

Let me close the way she did. She advises three iterations of proof reading:

“First, read for concept, story, character, plot... begin editing with the big picture issues, the stuff I've ended with.

“Second read looking for style, wording, sentence rhythm, superfluous scenes and sections.

“Third, read to fix grammar, punctuation, typos.”

Now that's a person I'd entrust my writing to! □



As always, please check the websites for more information before submitting. When you see "ms" or "mss" this means manuscript and manuscripts respectively. Best wishes and good luck to all!

INNISFREE POETRY JOURNAL

Cook Communication

E-mail: editor@innisfreepoetry.org. Website: www.innisfreepoetry.org.

Contact: Greg McBride, editor.

Innisfree Poetry Journal "welcomes original, previously unpublished poems year round. We accept poems only via e-mail from both established and new writers whose work is excellent. We publish well-crafted poems, poems grounded in the specific which speak in fresh language and telling images. And we admire musicality. We welcome those who, like the late Lorenzo Thomas, 'write poems because I can't sing.'"

Semiannual online journal publishing contemporary poetry.

Established: 2005. Simultaneous Submissions: Yes. Guidelines available on website. "Acquires first publication rights, including the right to publish it online and maintain it there as part of the issue in which it appears, to make it available in a printer-friendly format, to make the issue of *Innisfree* in which it appears downloadable as a PDF document and available as a printed volume. All other rights revert to the poet after online publication of the poem in *The Innisfree* Poetry Journal."

Submit up to 5 poems by e-mail, single Word attachment. "Include your name as you would like it to appear in *Innisfree* in the subject line of your submission. Format all poems flush with the left margin—no indents other than any within the poem itself. Simultaneous submissions are welcome. If a poem is accepted elsewhere, however, please be sure to notify us immediately."

Needs: free verse, traditional

THE IOWA REVIEW

308 EPB, The University of Iowa. Iowa City, IA 52242.
Phone: (319) 335-0462.

Website: www.iowareview.org.

Contact: Harilaos Stecopoulos.

The *Iowa Review*, published 3 times/year, prints fiction, poetry, essays, reviews, and, occasionally, interviews. The *Iowa Review* is 5.5x8.5, approximately 200 pages, professionally printed, flat-spined, first-grade offset paper, Carolina CS1 10-point cover stock. Receives about 5,000 submissions/year, accepts up to 100. Press run is 2,900, 1,500 distributed to stores. Subscription: \$25. Stories, essays, and poems for a general readership interested in contemporary literature.

Tri-annual magazine.

"This magazine uses the help of colleagues and graduate assistants. Its reading period for unsolicited work is September 1-December 1. From January through April, we read entries to our annual Iowa Awards competition.

Check our website for further information."

Established: 1970. Simultaneous Submissions: Yes. Guidelines available online. Buys first North American serial rights. Buys nonexclusive anthology, classroom, and online serial rights. Circulation: 3,500. Pays on publication. Queries accepted by mail. Sample copy for \$9.95 and online. Responds in 4 months to mss. Publishes ms an average of 12-18 months after acceptance.

Receives 600 unsolicited mss/month. Accepts 4-6 mss/issue, 12-18 mss/year. Does not read mss January-August. Publishes ms an average of 12-18 months after acceptance. Agented fiction less than 2%. Publishes some new writers/year. Recently published work by Jen Fawkes, Chris Offutt, Chinelo Okparanta. Send complete ms with cover letter. "Don't bother with queries." SASE for return of ms. SASE required. Responds in 4 months to mss. Accepts mss by snail mail and online submission form at <https://iowareview.submittable.com/submit>, no e-mail submissions. Simultaneous submissions accepted.

Pays \$.08 per word (\$100 minimum), plus 2 contributor's copies.

Poetry: Submit up to 8 pages at a time. Online submissions accepted, but no e-mail submissions. Cover letter (with title of work and genre) is encouraged. SASE required. Reads submissions, "only during the fall semester, September through November, and then contest entries in the spring." Time between acceptance and publication is "around a year." Occasionally comments on rejected poems or offers suggestions on accepted poems. Pays \$1.50/line of poetry, \$40 minimum. "We simply look for poems that, at the time we read and choose, we find we admire. No specifications as to form, length, style, subject matter, or purpose. Though we print work from established writers, we're always delighted when we discover new talent."

LIPS

7002 Blvd. East, #2-26G, Guttenberg, NJ 07093.

Phone: (201) 662-1303

E-mail: LBoss79270@aol.com.

Contact: Laura Boss, poetry editor.

Lips, published twice/year, takes pleasure, "in publishing previously unpublished poets as well as the most established voices in contemporary poetry. We look for quality work: the strongest work of a poet, work that moves the reader, poems that take risks that work. We prefer clarity in the work rather than the abstract. Poems longer than 6 pages present a space problem."

Covers previously unpublished poets and established ones in contemporary poetry.

Established: 1981. Guidelines available for SASE. Acquires first rights. Circulation: 1,000 (200 subscribers, 100 libraries). Sample: \$10, plus \$2.50 for postage. Responds in 1 month (but has gotten backlogged at times). Sometimes sends prepublication galleys.

Poetry

Submit 6 pages maximum at a time. Poems should be typed. Reads submissions September-March only. Receives about 16,000 submissions/year, accepts about 1%.

Pays 1 contributor's copy. □

Writing to the Right Brain

Ray Malus

Nuthin's Free!

It's been a fun year. I must admit these columns have 'meandered' a bit. That's because I interact with people who provoke interesting discussions. (Isn't that why you joined CWC?) But it's time to get back to our central thesis: "Writing to the Right Brain."

One of the excursions we took had to do with 'Ornate' (as opposed to 'Direct') writing. (See *Ornate or Not*, Feb., 2014.) I got a lot of comments on that subject, especially as it bears on 'formal' poetry.

To follow my reasoning you must first agree that we are talking about writing as 'Art.' We can have endless discussions about exactly what 'Art' is, next season. For now we only have to agree that Art stirs the emotions in a fairly direct way, and that this effect has a certain universality — indicating that it is intrinsic to our humanity, and not just some 'local' bias.

Let's take three examples of 'Art': The painting, *Der Schrei der Natu*' by Edvard Munch (often called just, *The Scream*); the sculpture/monument, *Mt. Rushmore*, by Gutzon Borglum; and the poem *Ozymandias*, by Percy Bysshe Shelley.

I think we can probably agree that each of these meets our simple criteria for 'Art.' There is an immediate internal reaction to all of them: The recoiling at the palpable agony, and the impression of sheer noise within the painting. The overwhelming majesty and awe at the size and subject of the sculpture. The taste of bitter irony and the futility of arrogance in the poem.

These are all Right Brain reactions. They are conceptual, non-verbal, holistic.

Now, in each case, the work itself involves 'technique': Munch's use of color and line to create the chaos of the scream. Borglum's use of size, texture and brute force to carve away tons of un-related rock. Shelley's use of the Sonnet form — with its rhythm and rhyme — to encase his poem.

In each case, appreciating that technique implies *sequence* and *analysis* — meaning recognition of that aspect is a Left Brain process.

In each case, the two aspects are *independent of each other*. One can conceivably recognize the technique and not have the reaction (It would be a pity, but...), and one can certainly have the reaction with no awareness of the technique. (Most people are not even aware that *Ozymandias* is a sonnet.)

The point here is that you can't deal with both simultaneously. You're either studying the brush strokes, or hearing the scream. You're either calculating the tonnage of rock, or being awed by the image. You're either counting iambs or appreciating the sentiment.

With most art, this is not a problem. The content is carried to the Right Brain by the senses, uninterrupted. But in writing, the raw material we use to reach the Right Brain is first screened by the Left Brain. Words and analysis are two of its primary tools. This is why I say Ornate writing targets the Left Brain.

In Shelley's day, the 'form' of the work was as important as the content. Poets were constrained by strict rules. Yet satisfying these rules was not the final goal; it was only a prerequisite. The ultimate test was/is artistic reaction. (English majors are conversant with extremely stringent poetic forms [sestinas, et. al.], which were once popular. Few examples survive, probably because of their emphasis on form over content.)

As poetry has evolved, the focus has shifted to content. In many cases, we retain form, but 'suppress' it. (When poets read their work aloud, it is de rigeur for them to read according to meaning, and not structure — interpreting the work as very rich prose.)

Techniques like *enjambment* (the deliberate ending of syntactical line in a different place from metrical line) are prized skills. Gradually, the importance of form gives way to the imperative of content, leaving us with the current bias toward "free verse."

I write both free and formal verse, and I find myself straddling the line.

Over-emphasis on form (meter, rhyme, organization) can lead to execrable abuses: tedium, monotony, simplistic writing — as in greeting cards, jingles, and some church music; works that have gloss, but no real meaning; works that have some linear appeal, but no conceptual content.

However, the slavish acceptance of any foolish series of random (short) lines — subject only to the whim of the 'poet' — as 'free verse', is idiotic.

Certainly, it is 'counter-artistic' for the form to become so intrusive that it detracts from the meaning. But conversely, the Twentieth

Right Brain (continued from page 5.)

Century was rife with banal ‘immortal’ free verse poets who have now been forgotten.

I believe that “Creativity is inspiration constrained by discipline.” Without inspiration, it is banality. Without discipline, it is self-indulgent dross.

Song lyrics are poetry of a type. Who is to say that Billy Joel’s *We Didn’t Start The Fire* (a masterpiece of complex rhythm and rhyme) is inferior or superior to John Blackburn’s *Moonlight In Vermont* (a non-rhyming series of Haikus)? Only time.

I am certainly not going to take sides. The subject of this series of articles is “Writing to The Right Brain.” Therefore I must give kudos to works that are moving and affecting. On the other hand, these are essays — and I write both modern and traditional poetry — so I must honor work that is well constructed and formal.

The truth is I really think that neither alone is sufficient for true greatness.

I must close by saying this:

Real care in construction and adherence to form can produce a delightful result, even with minimal content. Limericks are a great example.

On the other hand, intense, truly concentrated writing — regardless of form — can be great art.

But here’s the pitfall: You can write a formal poem with no real meaning or impact, and, at least, justify calling it “a poem.” When you write free verse with the same characteristics, you can call it whatever you like, “a poem” — even “pizza.”

But it will still be just cheese on crust.=-m=-

GOOD NEWS!

**CWC-SFV member
Douglas William Douglas’s**



The Black Lake, a contemporary Gothic novel of mystery, love and obsession is now available from Amazon.com (print only).
Congratulations, Doug!

Erica Stux announces:

“The NoHo London Music Hall has scheduled a production of my musical **ALOHA**. The action is set in Hawaii at the time of the first missionaries, and explores the conflicts between natives, missionaries, and men from a whaling ship.”
June 6 - June 29, Friday & Saturday 8 pm, Sunday 3 pm.
Ticket prices \$15

MISSION STATEMENT OF THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY BRANCH

The San Fernando Valley Branch is one of nineteen Branches throughout California, organized and operating under the auspices of The California Writers Club. We are a non-profit professional organization whose goal is to provide a friendly and inclusive environment for members to meet and network; to provide professional speakers who will aid in writing, publishing, and marketing members’ endeavors; and other writing-related opportunities that will further members’ writing enjoyment and careers.

Writers' Block — Lillian Rodich

At the beginning I had it and didn't recognize it - that deadly virus attacking my hand holding a pen and paralyzing the fingers before anything could be written.

Now ideas continue to buzz around in my head, illusive and strange thoughts never quite coming into focus. *Criticilium Nervosum Cencureous* attacks me before any words can be put down on paper and begins infecting the very flow of ideas. Why write it down? It's not significant enough to record on paper, let alone read!

Then again the malady might be called *Comparisonitis*. My fingers drop the pen and tap the table. What's the use! A high-school freshman spells better than I. And his material has more substance and clarity.

I pick up my pen and try again. Scrambled eggs! The words and sentences don't tie together - don't sound right. Flow? Oh, no. Lack of confidence causes confusion. A good night's sleep will remedy everything.

Still the worst virus of all may attack tomorrow; *Verboseuses* pouring adjectives and adverbs into my brain *ad-nauseum*. "Can't you say it simply?" my left brain admonishes and the virus retreats.

Yesterday I wrote a simple story gleaned from my past and a subdued voice within me. It was easy. No inner strength sapped, no traffic noises or barking dogs interrupting my thoughts. Just simple words arranged simply on a fresh sheet of white paper.

Still today I read the very same story and find no pleasure in its content. It doesn't look right and it doesn't sound right. What to do? Just for now I am frozen into written silence. Round file or...tomorrow I'll edit my writing. □

House in Mourning — Keyle Birnberg-Goldstein

The chauffeur is drenching the garden with a big hose undulating the water like a green snake... trapping Dad's adventures inside every drop. I look away from him and up and around and it comes again, a wild sense of sorrow and emotion I can't control. Something incredible has happened! I want to rewind my heart-clock-backwards when everything was jolly and everyone accounted for. Somehow, Dad is not in the group. Where has he gone? Is he traveling again into the Amazon jungle looking for gold dust?

But, he already came back a long while back with red-hot-sunburn face, itching mud-caked long beard, blistered cracked lips and shivering with Malaria tremors. He was lost in the big bed under piles of blankets and puffy European snow-white eiderdowns.

I join the voices in the living room, lean shadows quietly walking with no shoes, wrinkled stockings, and floppy black borrowed loose clothes... then, I find myself sitting on a low stool near the cold wooden floor. Drafty windows make me shiver inside my loose old garments... Others in the family slide like ghosts looking for a sliver of space to sit down.

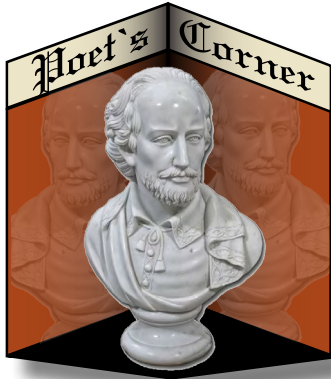
All mirrors wearing black-like shawls. People's eyes circle around a table spread with tempting foods. Nobody seems to be hungry. My lips are parched with insatiable thirst... feeling only sand, rust and ashes in my mouth.

In the kitchen I'm able to cup some water in the hollow of my hands and lift it to my face to drink, before the precious liquid escapes between my fingers again.

I open the front door to see the moribund sun scurrying away behind the trees. I had been blind with sorrow and now I see all that is around me — the landscape of my life filled with incredible memories of Dad's adventures waiting to float into my ears once more.

In the distance, my eyes see the Andean mountains, surrounding the city of Quito, like a patched-quilt in different shades of blue-green fields. Golden trees and tiny mansions like toys in the distance. Faraway church bells predict the hour with accuracy ... blue smoke coiling out of chimneys, the bark of neighbor's dogs. A man walking slowly looking down at his scuffed shoes ignores me. I wonder if he had been a neighbor, or a friend who knew Dad and could tell me all the new stories I had missed by being far away in school.

I miss you Dad, not only on Father's Day, but ALWAYS. □



Beach Morning

Lillian Rodich

mist rises from the sea
 waves crash and recede
 like brass cymbals at dawn

sands ease into relaxed ripples
 and reach the water
 in widening arcs
 disappearing in froth
 sandpipers skitter over
 sand mirrors and move in circles
 across the beach

patches of seaweed glimmer
 like jewels on the shore
 smear of clouds across the sky
 tames the sun's insistent brilliance
 pelicans skim and dive
 with relaxed arrogance

sunlight suddenly throws
 a net of sparkles across the sea
 dolphins play Hide and Seek
 as they swim up the coast
 seagulls descend in graceful arcs
 and alight on warming sands

waves crash and recede
 like brass cymbals
 greeting the day

footprints on wet sand
 mark my way to the sea
 where I seek to reclaim
 my childhood

HERE, HAVE A CIGAR!

Norman Molesko

I am a grandpa.
 How did it all begin?
 When I was young. I courted a lady. Became a lover.
 We were amorous. What resulted was a baby.
 A little bundle in the blanket I am holding.
 My God! I am a proud father. Here, Have A Cigar!

This infant smiled and then cried.
 This cute darling became smelly and wet.
 Had to be changed.
 You know, diapers and paper wipes.
 Had to be fed and kept me up at night.
 The next day I wasn't too bright.

Shh, hush, I hope my baby will be quiet.
 Here baby, suck on this pacifier.

Looking back, time passed quickly.
 Baby was active. Baby was crawling.
 Then physically strong enough to sit up.
 Time came when baby's first steps were taken.
 I shouted out to my wife,
 Our Baby, Our Baby is walking!

Remember those daily scenes, when we convened,
 The high chair, teething rings, training cups.
 Yep, our kid was growing and became a toddler.
 Those were the days, putting things up high.
 Beyond reach, hearing baby's attempts at speech.

Time moved on. My child continued to develop.
 Started school. Kept on growing bigger and taller.
 Into adolescence, teenage years and adulthood.

Can you imagine? Can you envision?
 My baby was finally an adult.
 And guess what? This adult became a lover.
 A child resulted. Yes, I'm a proud grandpa.
 I'm gently holding my new baby.

Here, Have A Cigar!

The Bulletin Board

GUEST DONATIONS

Non-members attending meetings are asked to pay a \$5 (tax deductible) donation. New membership is immediate upon application at door. For more information, contact Andrea Polk, VP-Membership, at the meeting entrance or e-mail andipolk4@gmail.com.

MEETINGS

ARE HELD AT 1:00 P.M.
ON THE 1st SATURDAY OF EVERY MONTH

Katzenberg Pavilion, Motion Picture & Television Fund
23388 Mulholland Drive, Woodland Hills, CA 91364
(Directions & Map on last page)

UPCOMING MEETINGS
June 7th, 1 p.m. — Lisa Cron
Wired For Story

Open Mic: 1:00 p.m. (Sign-ups start at 12:30)
Details on our website: CWC-SFV.ORG

Check out our writers on the
So-Cal Writers Showcase.

<http://www.socalwritersshowcase.com/>

Do YOU have a website?
Be the

'Member Website of the Month'!
Send your URL to:

cwc-sfv@roadrunner.com

This Month's BIRTHDAYS!

Marganit Lish
Nance Crawford

June 6
June 20

SUBMISSIONS

Members are encouraged to submit writing contributions to *The Valley Scribe*. This is your newsletter, and you should be part of it.

Submit your prose and poetry to cwc-sfv@roadrunner.com

Please type "SUBMISSION" in the subject line. If submitting a hard copy, please bring it to the meeting and hand it to the Editor, Ray Malus, or to the President, Nance Crawford.

- 500 words or fewer
- 800 words or fewer
- Limited to 40 lines
- 150 words or fewer

Articles/Essays
Short Stories
Poetry
Book Release Notices

Regular Features:
Submissions:

Submission deadlines:

TENTH of the previous month.
FIFTEENTH of the previous month.

The Editor (or President) has license to accept or reject any work submitted based on available space or editing problems. All submissions must include an e-mail address or a phone number. Writings will not be returned and may be included in future issues.

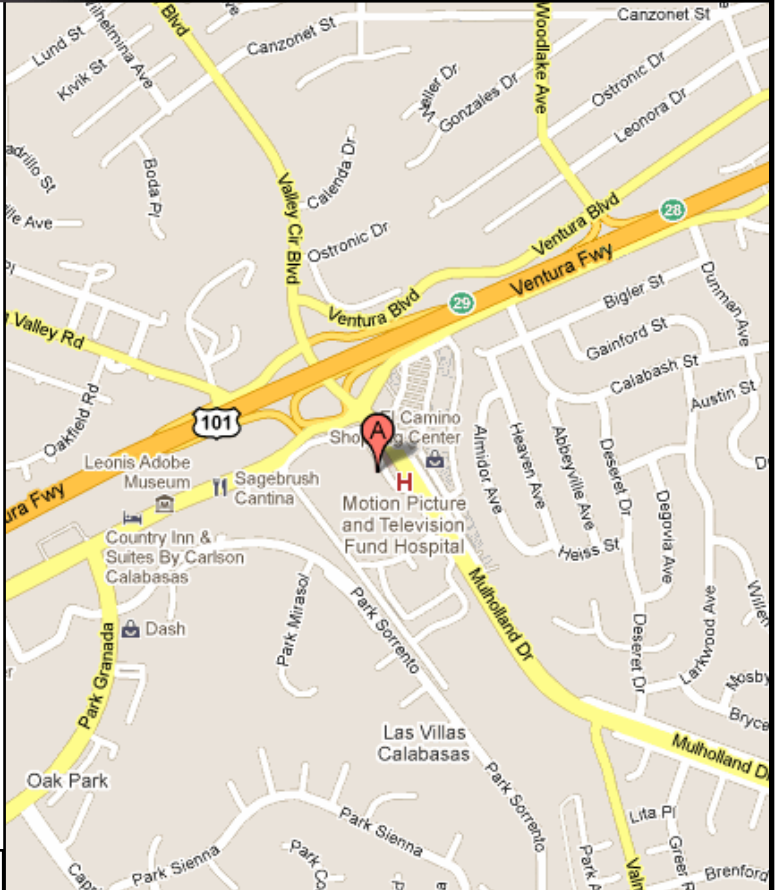
The Fine Print

San Fernando Valley Branch of California Writers Club meets at:

Motion Picture & Television Fund
Katzenberg Pavillion
23388 Mulholland Drive
Woodland Hills, CA 91364

Directions:

From the 101 Freeway exit on Mulholland Drive South. Proceed to Steven Spielberg Drive and turn right into the campus. (If questioned at the gate, tell the official that you are attending a CWC meeting.) At the 'T', turn left and follow the road to the large parking lot on the left for Villa Katzenberg. Parking is free in any of the lots. (Please do NOT park on any of the streets. You will be ticketed!) Interactive maps at: http://cwc-sfv.org/Meetings/Location.php



The Valley Scribe

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

is published monthly.

We solicit submissions from members. (See Bulletin Board: "SUBMISSIONS")

Editor Ray Malus

Staff

Proofreaders Ethel Ann Shaffer, Doug Douglas, Sharron Malus
Columnists Nance Crawford, Ray Malus

All attributed works are copyrighted by the author and are used with permission.



California Writers Club San Fernando Valley Branch

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL & BOARD MEMBERS

- President, Nance Crawford Nance@NanceCrawford.com
VP-Membership, Andrea Polk andipolk4@gmail.com
VP-Programs, Rita Brown ritakeeleybrown@yahoo.com
Treasurer, Mary Freeman mfreeman2207@yahoo.com
Secretary, Gabriella Owens spoiledgrrrapes@att.net
Member-At-Large, Doug Douglas doubledouglas@verizon.net
Central Board Rep., Ray Malus cwc-sfv@roadrunner.com
Pre-Session Leader, Bill Sorrells N/A
Webmaster, Ray Malus cwc-sfv@roadrunner.com
Newsletter Editor, Ray Malus cwc-sfv@roadrunner.com

LOTS of great information at our Website: www.cwc-sfv.org

Due to the (necessary) limit of 800 words, there are many fine writers in our branch who get ‘squeezed out’ of the Scribe. These are folks who write novels, plays, screenplays, or reference works that simply do not fit the usual 800-word limit. Once each year, we try to shine our spotlight on them, in our Major Works Supplement. Here are this year’s authors: (*Click on name to go to story.*)

FRIGID is an excerpt from Ethel Ann’s memoir, *Memories of Tiltonsville, Ohio*, in progress.

Ethel Ann Shaffer

FRIGID

“You’re frigid,” Carol hears her daddy say to her mama. She’s half-awake when she hears that word for the first time. She’s a second grader and her small bedroom adjoins her parents’ bedroom. Although her daddy whispers, the sadness in his voice creeps through the open doorway. It makes her think of how she felt when her best friend Wanda Sayer moved away.

After hearing that word again, she looks it up in the dictionary. Now she’s in the fourth grade and quite curious. Frigid has several meanings: “Extremely cold, lacking warmth of feeling, stiff and formal in manner.” It also has something to do with sexual intercourse, which she doesn’t understand. So she asks Gina, her best friend’s sister, what it means. Gina is in high school and knows more big words than Mama. But after Gina’s explanation, Carol still doesn’t know why her daddy is sad. She wishes she had an older sister, though.

When she’s eleven, Carol becomes a lady. Her mother sits next to her on the sofa and tells her that she should act like a lady now. “Watch how you sit, don’t let boys touch you up here.” She points to her boobs. “Or down there.” She points to Carol’s lady chamber.

Gosh, it’s nice talking to Mama, Carol thinks. She asks her, “Do Nuns have periods?”

“Of course. All ladies do,” her mother responds. Mama hurries through her talk before Carol can ask another question, and then Mama leaves the room.

Carol gets up and heads for Linda’s house. Mama cut her off way too soon. She has lots more questions.

Linda is sitting on the porch when Carol arrives. They hurry into Gina’s bedroom where she’s teasing her hair. “What’s up?” Gina asks, as they flop on her bed. Gina continues to tease her hair until it looks like a cat’s tail.

“We have some questions,” Carol says shyly.

Gina puts down the comb and pats her hair. Puffing up the pillows on her bed, she sits and leans against them, saying, “Well, now that you and Linda are both young ladies . . .”

Carol glares at Linda and watches as her friend’s face turns beet red. “I’m really hurt you didn’t tell me that you, you—”

“I’m sorry.” Linda hangs her head. “I only had one period, and I thought your mom would be mad if I told you—”

They both start to cry and swear they’ll never keep anything from each other again. Then Gina tells them where babies come from.

Linda starts to giggle. “I don’t believe it,” she says.

“There’s no way a kid can get out of there alive,” Carol says.

“A woman stretches when it’s time,” Gina says.

“I’m never having babies,” Carol says. “And I mean it!”

Linda’s head bobs up and down like her neck’s made of rubber. “I’m not having babies, either.”

The next few years crawl by. Why does growing up take so long? Carol wonders. She wants to get out of school, have long, painted fingernails, wear bright red lipstick, and be a secretary to a lawyer like Della Street.

Blending In is an excerpt from *Medusa's Raft Repainted*, the yet to be published sequel to Douglas's current book release, *The Black Lake*.

Douglas William Douglas

Blending In

"Where ahre zhey takingk us?" Albert asked.

"Downtown Towers. They'll process us there," his fellow prisoner Miguel "Mike" Constanza replied.

"Zhey shouldt straighten zhings out fohr me zhere, you zhink?"

"I wouldn't count on it. Maybe in a few days. By then you could be in bad shape, amigo. Lawyers mostly keep well dressed, thirty-five-year-old white guys like you out—unless for one thing: child molester. You in trouble, man."

Albert started sweating just like he had on the plane flight from Frankfurt to LA. But he gradually became distracted as the city passed by outside. It wasn't neon movie theaters, Wolfgang Puck eateries, and palm trees as he had imagined, but a parade of nondescript cloned industrial buildings and store-fronts one after another, soaring concrete freeway overpasses, and a countless clutter of street signs, white and red advertisements hand-painted on store windows, and huge billboards, some electronic like a stadium scoreboard. Stranger still, it was the middle of February but a scrolling-letter sign they passed read '90 degrees F°'. Everything looked dry, baked, caked, cracked and brittle under the cosmic oven broiler-element of perpetually blazing sunshine. Even the sky was a dull, dirty, simmering mustard haze. From the freeway he stared down upon an endless commercialism infecting every street like fungus staining the grout of a gym's shower room floor.

A few blocks after taking an off-ramp, the sheriff's van drove through an orange metal gate into the unloading area below two hulking, modernistic, beige-concrete edifices with thin vertical slits for windows.

"Home, sweet home, gentlemen," their guard said as he opened the van door and unlocked the braided steel cable that ran through the prisoners' handcuffs. Once outside, the cop straightened his aviator sunglasses, scratched his mustache, then hitch-hike signaled with his thumb for them to pile out while he repeated in monotone, "Watch your head...watch your head..."

Albert was last, and just as his foot hit the pavement, an officer carrying a rifle ran down the ramp from the building's door, piercing the air with a short, sharp whistle through his teeth.

"Hold up, Pinkus! We've got trouble in Processing—temporary lock-down inside. Can you keep these guys on ice for a few? Maybe Chen over there can watch 'em if you need to move out. That is, if there're no high-profile."

"Nah, just the usual." Bob Pinkus grabbed Albert's upper arm and pointed him toward a wall where a line of about thirty prisoners stood. After marching his six charges alongside them, Pinkus barked, "Alright, hold up."

A black and white bus with horizontal bars across the windows, like their sheriff's van on steroids, drove in through the gate and squealed to a stop at the front of the line. Pinkus pulled a key-ring off his belt, handing it to Officer Kaman Chen, a short, skinny rookie whose lack of hips threatened to let his holster belt slip down around his ankles.

"This okay with you, Kaman?" Pinkus asked.

"No problem, Bob. I'll take 'em soon as mine load-up. Hey, I heard you did great on the exam...hold on a sec." The bus door swung open and an officer stepped out, waving the line of prisoners toward him. Chen shouted, "*Vamanos, hombres!* Shoulders against the wall, eyes straight ahead, *no habla!*" then turned back to Pinkus. "You gonna transfer when you move up a grade?"

"Yeah, but I'm not sure where. I'd like to make Detective some day—any suggestions?"

Mike nudged Albert. "Move over, man," he said under his breath, signaling with his eyes toward the other line.

"Vhat do you mean?"

TOMMY'S BASEBALL CAREER is an excerpt from Polk's memoir, *Taproot* — in progress.

Andrea Polk

TOMMY'S BASEBALL CAREER

Crouching behind a makeshift home plate in our backyard, I shouted to my little brother, "Okay Tommy. I'm ready. Let 'er rip!"

Standing on the slightly raised pitcher's mound Dad built for our young baseball player, Tommy raised his left leg and twisted his body as he had seen on TV. His right arm cocked behind him, his body unwrapped, his left foot planted in front of him and he fired the ball that sailed over my head.

"Sorry!" he shouted.

"Well, you looked good. Try it again," and I threw the ball back.

The same body twisting coil, right arm back and he threw the ball as hard as he could. Dust flew as it landed in the dirt in front of me. I blocked it with my thigh. With no protective equipment I was afraid I was going to be black and blue by tonight. All I had was Dad's softball catcher's mitt.

This was about 1957, and Tommy had just joined a local playground baseball league. He was nine. I was fifteen plus. Brother Doug was a left-hander and couldn't use Dad's right hand catcher's mitt, so I agreed to be Tommy's practice catcher. Many years ago Dad taught Doug and me how to throw, catch, and pitch. Now it was Tommy's turn. In high school I was a softball catcher and I was comfortable behind the plate.

"Okay, now for the one down the middle," I continued as I pounded the mitt with my fist. "Ready? Now take your time."

Same delivery and much closer to our goal. He threw the ball to me for about a half hour that first day. After a while most of his pitches were within reach.

"Well, whadda ya think? I'm getting better, you think?"

"Sure are. Your coach thought you'd make a good pitcher. You just need to practice. You'll get the feel of it soon."

He always wanted to prove he was as equal in ability as Doug and me. His whole life he tried to do everything we did, faster, quicker, stronger. Fortunately, neither Doug nor I were very competitive. We were older and permitted to do things and go places he wasn't, which frustrated him. Now it was his turn to perform in an area neither Doug nor I had excelled.

In the evenings Dad crouched down behind the plate and caught him for several more pitches. He was impressed with Tommy's effort. "Good. Very good," Dad said, even when Tommy was wild. "Watch where your release point is for the good pitches. It will become a comfortable place. You're getting there."

"Thanks Dad." They walked to the house together talking strategy.

Tommy's baseball career lasted about three years. In the beginning his batting was spotty, but his pitching was solid. In the playground league all the kids had to play every game. Nine and ten-year-old boys could pitch to the eleven year olds, but the eleven-year-olds could not pitch to the younger players. Dad thought that was the right league for Tommy's first effort at team sports.

The team was called the Cubs; young cubs and easily frustrated. They were eager boys flailing at the pitches in the dirt or over their heads and slamming their bats to the ground when they struck out. The teammates were coached to be encouraging regardless. They clapped, cheered and hollered, "That a boy" and "Good try" to each of their batters.

As a pitcher Tommy struck out the young batters and the older boys could get on base with hits or walks. The coach said he was improving. Every evening I caught him. After every game Tommy would announce his successes and failures the moment he opened our front door.

BANG! Our front door slammed, the knocker bounced twice. "Mom, I'm home!" he'd holler. "I almost got a hit. The ball went between second and first, but I was thrown out." He never got a hit the first season and won the Sportsmanship award.

The second season it started again. BANG! The door slammed shut. The knocker bounced twice. "Mom, I'm home. You should've been there. I really almost got a hit. I hit the ball hard, clear to the center fielder. He caught it."

Darling Jennifer is an excerpt from Malus' epistolary novel (written in the form of letters) *Letters to 'J'*
— due to be released next year.

Ray Malus

Darling Jennifer

Darling Jennifer,

Time was when I could go 2 weeks without even talking to you, and now it's been 2 days and I'm a basket case. Well, tomorrow is Friday, and you said you'd call so I can hold on.

It was lovely for you to have Laurie call back last night. Talking to her is almost as sweet as talking to you, because I can hear so much of you in her.

You tell me all the time how much you like to hear my voice. I should return the compliment. There is so much softness and gentleness in it. I can remember the first time I heard that. It wasn't the first time we spoke. There was a change in it, sometime after I told you about your song and gave you that first tape. Maybe after the first time we danced together. I don't remember exactly when, because I was so unprepared for it. But I remember I was at work. It was during the day. I called and you answered, "HELLO?" I said, "HI"; and you said, "oh, hi". That was when.

That was the first of those lovely moments I once spoke of. I think the next was the night you came into the club; and I was sitting at the bar, talking to Reecie. You walked up to the bar and I put my arms around you and kissed you, just as if I was supposed to. In my joy at seeing you, I had forgotten that I wasn't supposed to do that. Well, you already know that, where you're concerned, I'm not exactly a rock. I hope a time will come when I can be strong when you need it. The amazing thing is, the rest of my people only know me like that. I know you won't believe me; but I'm generally considered pretty controlled.

You said the other night that I was a very emotional person. How can I ever convince you that's only been true since falling in love with you. No wonder so much of what I tell you never makes sense to you. You never got to know me before. The closest thing you ever saw to it was that second letter I wrote to you. That's the me Roger and all the others know. If I ever tell Roger about my reaction on Monday night, he'll give me a big lecture about stress and fatigue in American Society, as I would've him, if the situations were reversed.

But I knew it was coming.

When I first felt all the 'confusion' about you, I knew it was coming. I remember when I was growing up in New York and used to take the subway. When you wait in the station, it's so noisy that you can't hear the train until it's there. Often there's a curve in the track just before, so you can't see it either. But that huge powerful train hurtles forward toward you; and as it does, it pushes the enormous mass of air in front of it. If you stand quietly, you can feel it puffing out of the darkness, gentle at first, then stronger, then stronger still, until that behemoth comes roaring out of the darkness, right upon you.

They say that there are thunderstorms that build up so much electricity that you can feel your hair stand on end before they hit. And just before a Tsunami, the sea gets sucked 'way out, and exposes huge areas of seabed that have never been uncovered before — sometimes even long-forgotten shipwrecks. Then the wave hits with incredible crashing force. Can you imagine the turmoil and impact of it?

Sweet Jennifer, please don't see this as some sort of poetic allegory. Read it more like a newscast. I'm being pretty accurate. I felt all this about to happen. It was as if I stood at the water's edge, and watched the sea recede impossibly far out. Felt the water and sand being sucked out from beneath my feet. Saw what had been covered for so long, the broken wrecks of the past, the vast, barren, sandy expanse of what had been my feelings — and KNEW the force of the wave that was about to hit. I suppose, I could have huddled down, made myself small, and hidden. I could've run quickly and tried to escape. Instead, I made an impossible decision. I faced squarely forward, opened my arms, bared my body and welcomed the destruction. How strange. What a peculiar thing to do. But I knew the chances of meeting another event like this one were

(Shafer – from Sup: 1)

Although Carol decides she doesn't want to have kids, she starts wondering what it would be like to kiss Buddy Barker. And can you believe it? Of all the boys in their seventh grade, Linda wants to kiss Buddy Barker, too? But since Carol and Linda have always been best friends, they agree they're not going to let Buddy Barker break them up.

Finally, Carol is fourteen, and she asks her mother if she can go out on a date. Her mother explodes. "I don't care what Linda's mother says, you are not dating until you are sixteen." Her mother enunciates every word.

That's when she warns Carol to be careful around boys. "They're going to want to kiss you, and touch you, and have their way with you."

Carol wants to know more about them having their way with her, but her mother has to go to the store.

The next couple of years are painful with Carol flirting with guys who don't like her, and nerds flirting with her. Finally reaching the magical age of sixteen, Carol goes on her first date with Buddy Barker. By now Linda is going steady with Gordie and doesn't care what she and Buddy do.

They go to a drive-in movie in Buddy's Ford pickup, and she has to agree with her mother. Kissing Buddy isn't that great. He puts his tongue in her mouth and wiggles it around. Next, he pushes his lips so hard against Carol's lips that her teeth hurt. He then puts his hand on her boob. Ugh! Mama is right again. She orders Buddy to take her home NOW or she'll tell his father what he did.

A few days later Linda confesses that she and Gordie went all the way and that she didn't like it. She said she's still going to date Gordie, though.

Carol tells her about her nasty date with Buddy.

A year passes. Carol is seventeen and has a steady of her own – Dean Maris. And does he know how to kiss! He plants his lips on Carol's very gently and kind of rubs them around, causing sparks. Carol thinks it feels a little like when you rub your feet on the carpet and then touch somebody. Only lip sparks don't make you jump apart.

Carol and Dean decide they're in love and are going to spend the rest of their lives together.

One night Dean is more charged up than usual and says all the right things – that he loves Carol and that she should prove her love for him. "It isn't like we're not getting married someday," he says in his husky and most persuasive voice.

Carol's head tells her she should wait. But the air is electric, and her body is on fire. So she lets him have his way with her in his '57 Chevy truck. And what a disappointment! He never even asks if she liked it. It was like her mother said: guys just want to have their way with you.

Carol can't eat or sleep for weeks. She's truly sorry she didn't wait until her wedding night. But after she reasons it all out, she's not sorry she'd experimented because she discovers she doesn't want to spend the rest of her life with Dean. He's just too frigid. □

(Douglas — from Sup: 2)

“The other line—come on, I have an idea, muchacho.” Mike got the attention of the prisoner filing past them then motioned with a tilt of his head toward the space in front of him. The guy nodded, and Mike and Albert slid over into the other line. “This skinny-ass Chinese guard—he hasn’t given his clipboard to the bus guard. They’re not checking. If we’re lucky…”

“Vhere ahre vee goingk?” Albert whispered as they trudged forward.

“Tijuana, maybe Mexicali—somewhere south of the border.”

“How vill I retrievfe my passpohrt ahndt my bahgs?”

“Amigo, Immigration and the police think you’re a terrorist, and everyone else thinks you’re a molester. Even if you survive in jail, you’re not gonna see your stuff for a long time, if at all. This way you can disappear, man.”

“Do I vahnt to disapeahh?”

“Yeah—wear the wrong color clothes in the wrong part of this town and you catch a bullet from a passing car. It’s like those Nature Channel Africa things. The lions always eat the straggler, the zebra that can’t keep up with the rest of the stampeding herd. Try to blend in.”

“I do not believfe I vill ‘blendt in’ in Mexico.”

“I already got a plan for that, amigo. We’ll be on my turf. Trust me.”

Trust: it was a word Albert had taken for granted over the last twenty years or so. Sure, there had been art patrons whose checks bounced, and galleries that had sold his paintings but neglected to tell him for months, but there was always legal recourse. He’d forgotten what it had been like as a teen—not knowing where he’d sleep tonight, pity-begging a stranger for food or cash, or even resorting to petty theft if he hadn’t eaten for days. And the other homeless boys and runaways? They were your buddies until a good-looking john in a new Mercedes drove up, especially a repeat customer known to be kind and generous and not too kinky, as if anything you did for those guys could be called ‘normal’. You’d have to stash your pay in a bus station locker or behind a loose brick in the alley before coming back to that abandoned warehouse to crash with the other ‘boys’ or they’d gang up and demand a share of the take. But he had poker-bluffed them with a false bravado of tough-guy swagger and out-played them on almost every hand he’d been dealt. He had survived the beatings from foster parents, police, jail-mates and johns, and by some miracle dodged the viral-infected liquid bullets that got pumped into his body by the innocent carriers and the knowing sadists.

So here he was again, headed toward the unknown. Fear of flying? That was a piece of cake, a Sunday stroll in the park, a hammock snooze. One day at a time. Spy the dropped coin and snatch it up—it may be your only chance. He glanced over at Mike sitting next to him on the bus—clearly he had the street-smarts this part of the world demanded. Trust? What choice did Albert have? At least he wasn’t alone.

All the prisoners were chained-in before Officer Chen handed his clipboard to the bus guard, who tossed it onto the seat next to him without a glance as the door shut and they diesel-roared out the Towers gate. Thirty-one prisoners? Yeah, it looks like thirty-one. □

(Polk — from Sup: 3)

“Well, that’s great. You’re hitting the ball harder this year.”

“Yeah. I struck out three batters in three innings, too.”

“Fast ball?”

“Oh, Mom that’s my only pitch. Coach says I’m too young to try a curve ball.”

“Good. A smart coach. Hungry? Want a sandwich?”

And so it went.

BANG! The door slammed. The knocker always bounced twice. “Mom, I’m home. Mom, MOM! I GOT A HIT! You should’ve been there. The guys jumped all over me when I got to the bench. It was a good hit — a line drive to center field. The bat stung my hands, but I did it. My first ever hit.” His beaming smile and fast talking joy was infectious.

I heard the noise and ran to the living room. “What happened?”

Mom was almost in tears. “That’s great Tommy. Just great! Congratulations! That deserves a special dinner tonight. What would you like?”

“Spaghetti and meatballs.”

To me he beamed. “I got my first hit today,” he said through his wide smile. His deep dark brown eyes sparkled.

“Fantastic!” I said. “That’s great, fantastic. You’ll get better and better at this. Congratulations!” I reached over and pulled his cap over his eyes. He just smiled his wrinkly smile that cracks his face from the corners of his mouth to his eyes. He had the best smile ever.

I think he got a few more hits that second season and he won the Most Improved Player award.

The third season he could no longer pitch because he was eleven. He focused on hitting and fielding. He wanted fewer errors and more hits. He often ran down the street to the coach’s house to practice in the makeshift batting cage.

Finally, Dad could afford a second car and we got to attend some of his games. Mom, Doug and I cheered from the hot aluminum bleachers.

Tommy came up to bat and slowly swung his bat waiting for the pitcher to get ready. His blue baseball cap pulled over his forehead; he held his bat up waiting for the pitch.

“Ball!” the umpire called out.

The next pitch, “Strike!” Tommy didn’t complain, although his bench players moaned.

A woman next to Mom said, “Your son is a good batter. Patient too.”

“Why thank you. Huh...patience was never his virtue.”

The opposing team’s bench kept hollering the banter, “Batter, batter, batter SWING! batter, SWING!”

Tommy kept his eyes focused on the pitcher. His rhythmic slow swinging halted just before the pitcher was ready to deliver the pitch.

CRACK! The ball flew off Tommy’s oak bat into the center field. His spiked shoes dug into the dirt as he sprinted to first base.

“Go Tommy,” his team hollered.

The fielder misjudged the ball. The other team groaned.

“He missed it,” a boy hollered.

“Second! Tommy, SECOND!” his coach hollered. The Cub rooters jumped off their bench cheering.

Cupping his hands at his mouth, Doug hollered out, “That a way to go brother!”

The young boys were as intense as the big leaguers, but Tommy waved at us and smiled his accordion smile. He quickly focused on the game and watched his coach.

Our front door slammed shut every time Tommy announced he was home. BANG! BANG! BANG! The doorknocker banging twice each time. “Mom, I got two hits today. Mom, I got three hits. Mom, I hit a homerun!” That final season he won the Batting Champion award.

At the awards dinner Dad asked him, “Well Tommy, you ready for Little League now?”

“Don’t think so. I don’t want to start at the bottom again.”

And that was that. □

(Malus — from Sup: 4)

impossible. The chances of meeting even one in a lifetime were terribly slim.

I know you can't understand that what I'm telling you is so very true. How can I expect you to. But look at my reaction to it. When I tell you that you are the most important thing to happen to me since I can remember, I really mean it. Everything has changed. And I am so awe-ful-ly (there's one of those words that need to be spelled differently to mean rightly again) grateful. I am also grateful that I have the gift of writing all this down; so that, no matter what, there is proof that someone, sometime, felt this way about you. I can't imagine that no-one else ever has; but this time, you have no recourse but to recognize it. Only two choices here: Either I am the most creative liar that ever lived, and I do it just for the pleasure of it (because, Jennifer, I want nothing more from you than your love and companionship), or I really do love you in this way. There's no third alternative. And if you persist in asking "Why", perhaps the only answer is that God, in his generosity, compelled it. You see, I have to write this to you. You would never listen in person.

Anyway (and I'm almost done now), facing such a cataclysm, I made some preparations. I methodically searched my heart, to see if this was momentous enough to burden you with. I carefully sorted my feelings to be sure that there wasn't some stupid, selfish, Cavalier (Christ what a fitting word!) motivation involved. I shucked off all pretense that I could find. I confessed my love to you, and the whole world. I tried on roles. I went and became you, sitting listening to Nancy being me. I tried to understand all the strange new feelings and perceptions I was experiencing. I discovered an entire half of the universe that I had never seen — feelings and emotions that I only knew vicariously, or half remembered from a previous life so long ago. And I made commitments to myself and to you.

And that brings us to Sunday night as I drove home. And I was so FULL of joy. I was so consumed with the memory of your physical being. Me, the one who was having a spiritual and emotional love affair. And what had happened? We kissed (really) for the first time. We touched each other. We held each other. We were together in a way we had never been before. And I have no way of evaluating what that means in the outside world. But I was overpowered by it.

And I asked myself deprecatingly, "was that so important?"; and myself SHOUTED back, "YES!". And the part of me that swore to be honest whatever the cost said, "Was that all you wanted?" And my integrity, my honor, demanded that I live with that question for a while. And it was a terrible question to live with. Because if all this beauty and involvement were caused by some overactive gland, then I could never believe in beauty again.

And I had to face it. You see, all this part is easy for you. But, Jennifer, I really never have loved anyone like this before. It's all new to me. In a lot of ways, I'm having the same confusion that adolescents have. Anyway, as you well know, in a while I came to understand that all the physical stuff was just an extension of my love for you, a way of being close to something I treasure, and forgave myself for acting like an animal. I came to understand that, whether that happens again soon or not, you are still at the center of the part of me I hold precious, and there really is beauty in the world. But when I tried (in my self imposed honesty) to tell you all this, I did it wrong, and I knew you were hurt. Well, my darling, I would never hurt you knowingly. Just please understand that this is all so strange to me, and put up with my awkwardness. I promise to learn quickly.

The house is cold; and whether because of that, or too much coffee, or no food, or just thinking about how much I love you, I'm starting to shiver. I guess I'd better quit for now, and mail this. I have said so much in this letter, that there's no way to go back and see if it came out right. I'll just have to trust that your love for me can see the immensity of my love for you and smooth out the bumps. I pray (yes, really pray) that you have had a comfortable time since we last spoke and that you are happy and secure in my love for you. As for me, I will get something to eat, have a hot bath, and go to bed, where I can be as close to you as possible. Please, please take good care of all of you, the parts you like, and the parts you don't. They are all more precious to me than you could ever know.

- R -