
The Valey Scribe

## SEX WRITING 101: IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO LEARN

Writers and anyone else with inquiring minds and are not timid will want to hear internationally acclaimed editor and author Jonathan Beckman present "When Good Writers Turn Bad in Bed" at 1 p.m. on Saturday, October 6 at the San Fernando Valley chapter of the California Writers Club. We will hold this meeting in the Saban Community Room.

How to avoid crude, tasteless, often perfunctory use of redundant pages of sexual description that do nothing to develop plot or character are among the many topics that Beckman will discuss.

Beckman believes we perhaps avoid writing about sex because there are so many poorly written scenes and we don't want to add to them. "Or, perhaps we don't have a clue on how to write about the subject," he says. Beckman judged the "Bad Sex in Fiction Award" when he was senior editor at the London Literary Review. Over the years, the award has expanded to include absurd, incoherent, clichéd, unintentionally comic and pretentious descriptions of sexual activity.

Obviously, Beckman is very serious about this topic. "If a publisher pushes sex, it should at least be well written. Bad sex scenes are a major turn-off for both editors and readers." The presentation will provide tips to writers on how to write sex scenes well or how to avoid writing them badly.

During the presentation, Beckman

now deputy editor of 1843, an international lifestyle and general interest magazine published by The Economist, will share some examples of bad sexual scene writing. ( $n o$ parental guidance rating required.)
"Mediocre sex scenes can be the reason why many manuscripts never see the light of day," said CWC-SFV President Bob Okowitz. "Learning about the birds and the bees from Jonathan Beckman will definitely benefit the writers who attend this unique and fascinating meeting, but of course, as the old saying goes, practice makes perfect whether it's using the keyboard or in a more intimate setting. Who knows, maybe this will bring back some razzle-dazzle back into the lives of those attending the presentation."

None of our chapter members, many who are well past 60 years of age, were aghast when the topic for the October 6 meeting was first announced. Their attitude, in fact, was bring it on.
"We are so honored that the distinguished Jonathan Beckman will travel half-way around the world to be with us," said CWC-SFV Program Chair Lori Hamilton. "His visit demonstrates how well-known and respected our club has become."

Please join us and perhaps learn better bedside manners for your next romance story.
-Gary Wosk


## Jonathan Beckman

Born in London, Beckman earned his bacheIor's degree in English from Cambridge University and a master's degree in intellectual and cultural history from Queen Mary University in London.
His book, How to Ruin A Queen, which is based on one of the greatest scandals in pre-Revolutionary France, was published in 2014 and won the 2015 Somerset Maugham Award, the Royal Society of Literature/Jerwood Award for Non-Fiction and was short-listed for the American Library in Paris Book Award.
Beckman has also written for The Times, The London Review of Books, The Observer, The New Statesman, The Spectator, The Daily Telegraph and The Wall Street Journal.

## Message from Bob Okowitz, Our Prez



Hello friends, it's autumn in the Southland and the shorter days reminds us that winter is coming.

Local merchants are stocking shelves with gaudy costumes and bright packages of sweets. Soon kids everywhere will be trick-or-treating again.
I grew up in New York City and my October trick-or-treat outings were insane! My friends and I had had 200 apartments within easy reach. Way too much candy!

October also meant that summer vacation days were definitely over. But we still had occasional fun "Indian Summer" days when summer came back for a week or two, even as the trees changed colors.

I've lived in California since 1976 and I've found that our October weather is very different from back East. We don't have too much dramatic tree foliage color changes or cold rainstorms. In this mild weather, I often feel energized to write. I look for a quiet corner, turn on the laptop and get busy. Maybe you do too. But since I'm the Prez, I've got to come up for air sometimes antake care of SFV business.

And there's always lots to do, that's for sure. This fall our club is in a building phase as we reach out to nearby communities and try to build up our membership. To this end, we're making new social media contacts that help us make contact to all kinds of writer-friendly events and resources.

Take Meet up, for example. This website https:// www.meetup.com/ has special benefits for our club. Meetup members list their interests, and those who put down "writing" receive announcements about Saturday CWC-SFV meetings. Several Meetup members have come to visit our meetings. I hope they comb back. I also hope to see all active members at our upcoming October meeting.

Thanks for reading, Bob Okowitz

## CONTENTS



3 Sept. Speaker Rita Keeley Brown
3-4 Members' Prompt Writings
5 Poetry: October, Moonstruck
6 Critiquing in Cyberspace
6 Review and Refresh
7 Drop in on Duotrope
7 SoCal Writers Showcase
8 A Higher Calling 8
92018 CWC-SFV Scholarship Recipient

10 NaNoWriMO
10 California Writers Week
10 Evening Critique Group
11 A Few Literary Treats
12 Poetry: Autumn Trees
12 Board and Directors
13 Map and Meeting Site


OCTOBER 2018

## Got a Bad Case of Writer's Block? Rita says, "Be spontaneous!"



Our September speaker needed very little introduction. She was our club's long-time member, Rita Keeley Brown. Rita is a published author and an experienced creative writing teacher. She knows many ways to help writers recharge their batteries, so to speak. But this Saturday, she also knew that a tedious lesson plan would never work. After all, in early September, our members had just returned from their summer hiatus. Bring on the cookies and coffee!

Rita decided to introduce an exercise that's been very popular in her creative writing classes: spontaneous writing in reaction to a prompt.
"Here's how it works," Rita began, "First, sit back and relax. Close your eyes and shut out all worries of the day. I'm going to give you
one word and let's see what pops into your mind."

Other prompt sources such as
 unfinished sentences and works of art followed. A 10-minute writing time followed each prompt about the image or idea triggered for each individual.

Their stories were then read to the person next to them and if time allowed to the large group. Next, each person was given a sheet of several unfinished sentences. They were to choose one that clicked with them - an 'Aha' moment.

People intently read their sheet of prompts and then pens got busy. When ten minutes were up, several people read aloud their compositions. The room that had been hushed now filled with lively conversation and laughter.

This exercise proved so popular with our group that Rita was asked for a repeat performance at a future meeting. She promptly agreed. We broke into spontaneous applause.
--KH

The next five stories are some of the 10-minute writings at the workshop.

## Visual Prompti A sketch of a man's face ...

What am I doing here? I'm tired, sore and thirsty. If I had a mirror, l'd see a weathered face.

Black moustache, lined face and searching eyes. Don't try to guess my age or occupation.

Looks can be deceiving. Clothes, a disguise. What I want you to see is ME-a human being who has seen better days. But there's still a small twinkle in my eye. I may limp, but I do it with a jauntiness.

Who Am I? I am ...

aletelh by Rits Teoley Brown


He reminds me of the man playing a violin in the Plaka, in Greece.

He also, had kind piercing eyes. I photographed him, then painted him into my painting of houses above the Plaka, sitting on a raised brick planter, in front of a house with a blue door.

Now he looks out from the canvas with his kind smile. And now I smile at the memory.
-Sylvia Molesko
-Sheila Moss
ignoring me, as if I didn't exist, but I do. I still have some good years left in me, if he would just give me another try.

I remember the first time we met. It was physical at first. I have a feet fetish. He kept his feet clean. I didn't have to worry about athlete's foot, corns, bone spurs, claw toes, bunions. It was a match made in heaven. Sure, I'm a little kinky, but that made the relationship more exciting.

Eventually I fell madly in love with him too. I didn't mind that he flirted with others. He took me everywhere, to work, special occasions, on overseas trips. His wife couldn't care less. You name it, everywhere he went I went.

For years I was his favorite. What a great guy. I was living the high life. Sure, there were days when I wouldn't see him, but deep in my heart, I knew he was thinking of me and would call on me soon. Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

I thought our relationship was never going to end. I
less and less.
And then one day, he tossed me aside, just like the others. How foolish of me to have thought it would tum out differently. Just because I wasn't as pretty as I used to be. What's the big deal about a few stretch marks. It was then that I realized I never should have trusted him.

I am anguishing at the bottom of the dirty clothes hamper. Just another pair of stretched out blue socks with a tiny hole where his right toe goes. I can't say that l've been hung out to dry because he never puts me in the washing machine anymore. I'll be very lucky if I ever make it into his socks drawer again to take my place among the elite.

I made a pledge to myself that l'd get back at him. I will tell the new socks to droop down below his ankles after he wears them for the first time.

## Prompt: Coming directly toward me in the parking lot was . . .

$C_{1}$oming directly toward me in the parking lot was a chorus line of Scottish thanes, dressed and ready for the Stage Manager's announcement warning of the curtain. There were at least ten minutes, so they were doing the most natural thing in the world. Their arms around each others' shoulders, they were high-licking in unison, bearded, dirty, enthusiastic medieval Rockettes prancing to the joyful sound of the big band playing on the adjoining street.

Macbeth's thanes, waiting to charge into the opening battle, were obviously ready for anything, especially in West Hollywood during the street fair we had not been wamed of when the play was scheduled. Places were called and the chorus line dissolved as men scattered to grab up their shield and cutlasses.


It got better.

That night, Macbeth turned to creep up the stairs to kill the king - and was suddenly accompanied by the opening notes of the unmistakable, sneaky tiptoes of "The Pink Panther."


Coming directly towards me in the parking lot was the tallest man I had ever seen! He scared me to death! But he had a smile on his face when he said "Hello."
"Goodness" I said, in an effort to calm myself, "You're closer to heaven than anyone I've ever known!"
"Yes, I'm the tallest man in Canada! I'm in the Guinness Book of Records!" he said proudly, raising a hand the size of a large dinner-plate.

The difference in height between us made me imagine a cake baked with badly mixed ingredients, causing it to rise unevenly.

When I got home I checked the giant out on YouTube. There he was-the glorious Jerry Sokoloskithe tallest man in Canada! I had missed an opportunity to interview a beepl true giant! I still wonder which vehicle he had used to get to the parking lot.

Ester Shifren

OCTOBER
solitude motionless
and alive
with barely perceptible pulse
wind chimes
in the distance
dried leaves
leaving lonely branches
and a flutter of sound'
muted in frosted dawns
loneliness'
without regret
within a gray frame’
crystal reflections
memories
awakened within
energy
diffused from dreams
october evening
canopy of stars
cool and velvet night
embroidered with music
wind chimes
in the distance
--Lillian Rodich

## MOONSTRUCK

The moon is a shiny new penny tossed on the sky's black oilcloth, I would pluck it, twirl it and make its magic mine .... a glowing reminder safe in my pocket ... but how sad the night sky without its lucky charm!

-Lillian Rodich

## Critiquing in Cyber Space

## By Jown Zerrien

From 2009 to 2014 I happily participated in an online writing group, five women who lived along the West Coast from Port Townsend, WA to Idyllwild, CA. I'd met two of them at a writing workshop conducted aboard an Alaskan cruise, which was great fun and as much a chance to explore my desire to write as to see the Inside Passage.

After the cruise we invited two other women who had studied with the Writing It Real teacher, Sheila Bender, and adopted Sheila's three-part critique method: First, mark all the "Velcro" words and phrases that really work for you. Second, monitor your emotional responses to the material and report them accurately. Third, specify what you want to know more about, or what seems unclear or underdeveloped. It's a very focused and supportive critique model and the gold standard for me still. Anyone interested?

With this shared format we exchanged writings/ critiques on the $15^{\text {th }}$ of every month for five years. Quite often I hadn't written anything until the deadline loomed and then I had to produce something quick! I moved from Idyllwild to LA in 2010 but continued to write vignettes about life in a small mountain town, until my fellow writers said it felt like a novel in the making. But managing mountain rental properties and raising two teenagers as a single woman, I couldn't seem to find the time to focus on that ambition.

Eventually life intervened and the online group dissolved. I still wrote occasionally but only this summer was I inspired to compile the pieces I'd written about "High Pines," and able to make them into a narrative. To my surprise, I now have 70,000 words with more chapters still to be woven into the story. It's been so much fun to put this together and to discover that almost inadvertently, I did write a novel, thanks to my online writing group!

I've joined CWC-SFV to keep myself focused, to see myself as a writer among writers and to explore publication while working on a sequel. It seems the characters in my book are just not done with me yet.

## Review and Refresh

## Little Things Can

 Mean a LotLittle things mean a lot, like... making the verb agree with the subject, not with the noun closest to it. Not ... One of the children were missing. One is the subject. So it's One of the children was missing.

... pronouncing the word "mischievous" right. It's pronounced miss-cha-vuss, not miss-cheeve-ee-uss.
...not misusing the reflexive pronoun myself. Don't say That Toyota barely missed Sally and mvself instead of saying That Toyota barely missed Sally and me. Don't say Mildred, Sammy, and myself saw that movie. Say Mildred, Sammy, and / saw that movie. Myse/f is not somehow magically correct in every grammatical situation.
... remembering that combinations connected by or, or either ... or, or neither... nor are considered singular. Either Mr. Gordon or his wife Norma opens the store each morning. Not ... open the store. Neither Martin nor Bruno knows what happened Saturday night. Not ... know what happened.
... not putting the word however at the beginning of a sentence. (Okayl If you insist, go ahead. However, I think there's always a better place for it within the sentence.) Later in life, however, he thought differently about this .. has a better ring to it than However, he thought differently about this later in life.
... using the word fewer with items that can be counted, like fewer pencils, fewer students, fewer bricks. Use the word less with items that can't (or wouldn't normally) be counted, like less sand, less milk, less booze. And in spite of the beer commercials, less calories is wrong, as is the ten items or less you see at the checkout stand in the supermarket.
... using him, her, us, or them after prepositions ... and not using their counterparts he, she, we, they. The expressions between you and I... for he and Sheila ... with he and she ... are all wrong. They should be between you and me ... for Sheila and him ... and with him and her.

Duotrope is a quick, easy, convenient and inexpensive way for writers to find publications that might be interested in their poetry, short stories, flash fiction, and novels. In fact, Duotrope might be one of the best resources to come along for writers since the advent of word processing, the Internet and self-publishing.

The online service has surely worked wonders for this author. If not for Duotrope, it would have been much more time consuming to have found homes for my short stories. I give it one big thumbs up. The best part is that no agents and complicated contracts are needed.

Subscribers who sign up at Duotrope.com pay as little as $\$ 5$ and as much as $\$ 100$ to receive, via mail, dozens upon dozens of listings of publications in need of all forms of fiction and non-fiction. Just go down the line and click on the ones that seem like a good match.

For only $\$ 5$, subscribers receive the listings for one month. If you want to make someone happy, new and experienced writers will appreciate receiving a digital gift card. You can also send yourself a digital gift card. Once your subscription expires, Duoptrope will let you know. Only credit cards are accepted.

The listings are broken into such categories as Paying Markets, Non-Paying Markets, Markets No Longer Accepting Submissions, Defunct Markets and Anthologies. Some pay and some do not.

## Southern California Writers Showcase

Writers Showcase represents our California Writers Club branches in Southern California, from Long Beach and Orange County to the Inland Empire and the East Sierra. This website is a showcase of work by our member authors, including poems, essays, humor, short stories, fiction and memoir to read online. Our CWC-SFV members' submissions are accepted by this online publication.

Our member authors also have creative writing tips and writing ideas to provide insight and inspiration. You will also find news from our branches, interviews with published authors, and lists of local writing events and conferences to keep you up to date.

Check out our URL: http://www.socalwritersshowcase.com/ and contact Pat Avery if you need submission instructions.

## This spooky story was first published in the October 2011 Valley Scribe. It was composed in response to a prompt: one way ticket.

## A figher Calling

-Kathy Highcove

Big John watched the flood waters swirl underneath his attic window. Lawn chairs and trash cans bobbed on the current.

He stared down at his cell phone. No messages. What the hell happened? he wondered. Where's everybody? I want my messages! Is this thing broken?
"I figgered you'd be sittin' up here, Big John," cried a female voice. He whirled around and recognized his tenant, Angelique, an elderly Creole. She had her wiry grey hair tucked into a bright red bandanna.
"You startled me, woman! But I'm actually glad to see you. How'd I get up here? One moment I'm down there swimming in my business suit, and then I'm suddenly up here, looking out this here window. In a tomato-red jogging suit. No messages on my BlackBerry! What happened? D'you know?"
"You be daid, Big John, and so's I. See your sorry body o'er there? You had y'self a heart attack and drowned daid."
"What? You're ... right. I see myself floating face down. Hands and legs all splayed out like a dead crab. And I'm bloated all out of my clothes, suit jacket blowing up like a grey sail on a kid's raft. Lost my best shoes and silk socks, and my head's jammed into the crotch of a magnolia tree. Food wrappers plastered all over my face. Horrible. How'd I die?"
"Remember comin' over here in the mornin' to give all us renters some bad news? Yew wanted to raise our rents, you greedy old pole-cat! You and me and lotsa folks was arguin' in the rain on the front porch when the levee busted."
"Then ... are you really daid-I mean dead, too? I didn't kill you, did I? I think you riled me."
"Hah, you nevah teched me. The flood waters swept us all off the porch. I slammed into a lamppost. Drowned daid."
"What now? The moon is rising and this town is dark and spooky. Feel like I'm in limbo. Useless."
"Not 'zactly. You got a new job to do. Just like me.

I've been sent here to fetch y'all for the Parade. Look yonder. There's our krewe. Let's go. "
"Parade? It's not Mardi Gras yet, Angelique," replied Big John with a smirk. Then he peered closer in the direction where she pointed-toward the dark horizon, where night's smooth edges met the turgid dark floodwater. Something long writhed and lifted into the air like a disjointed snake...

Big John's eyes widened as he watched a line of specters slowly dance toward him, over the dark water. "Oh when the saints, go marchin' in ..." The tune drifted through the humid night air.
"What kind of parade is that?" Big John asked. "I knew some of those folks. There's Papa Rolando. He died last week of pneumonia. And isn't that drummer the guy we used to see in the La Vida Loca Club? He was shot by his girlfriend's husband. Our krewe is a bunch of ghosts? ${ }^{\text {? }}$
"C'mon, Big John. Look who's talkin'. Now we gotta join 'em or else we'll be haints in this big old moldy house. Oh, nearly forgot. I'm s'posed to give you this here saxophone. Learn to blow with soul. Yew got forevuh to learn how!" She guffawed at his baffled expression.
"Where're we going?" Big John asked as the duo wafted through the window. They sailed gracefully over to their krewe and settled next to a toddler shaking a tambourine and an old man tooting a bugle. Angelique pulled a kazoo from her skirt pocket.
"Not sure. Mebbe we're goin' to find a black hole, jump in, an' spin around with star dust ... or mebbe we'll all come back to life here-like my mama once tole me. Next time mebbe I'll be your landlord, heh, heh. Oops, there's the signal. We're leavin'."

The reveler's line rose slowly, writhing across an inky sky. Angelique pointed at Big John, "Blow your horn, brother. Let's hear your soul music."

Big John blew a low note then looked down one last time at the flooded house.
"Okay, Angelique. I'll try to keep up, but sure wish I could take my cell with me."

## 2018 CWC-SFV <br> Scholarship Recipient

This spring CWC-SFV awarded a scholarship to Daniel Glassman, a Pierce College student.
We stipulated that the awardee would be a student who had received at least a B in two English classes and had displayed writing talent. We asked the Pierce College English department professors to select the student.

Daniel Glassman was chosen by his professors to receive our award. Glassman spoke to our club members at our September meeting and praised his creative writing experiences at Pierce College.

In his talk, he told us that the Pierce College English Department fosters an invigorating environment that encourages young writers like himself. He immersed himself into improving his writing and has developed relationships with professors and other developing writers.

Recently, Glassman evidently applied what he's learned when he co-founded GlassMotion Films and became head writer for the fledgling company.

He told our September gathering, "I truly appreciate the scholarship award and hope to continue my involvement with CWC-SFV."

We in turn wish him well in his educational and vocational pursuits at UCLA.
-Pat Avery



## Daniel Glassman shares a poem.

## In The Wings

Under this light
The hope for that moment If the reality's slight
The dream still potent
Acting like those round me But my mind races
Thoughts quite hazy
The change, it races
Not sad, just happy Planned the night out Hope it ain't scrappy Alone after, pout

For these temporary woes Are beautiful on their own But the more time goes That hope, more grown

I'm not complaining This is all very slight Beauty's just draining Under this light

In 2003, the California Writers Club worked with legislators to establish a week to celebrate and recognize California Writers.

The result of this effort occurred on September 4, 2003 when the California State Assembly officially declared the third week in October of each year as California Writers Week The Resolution is endorsed by the California Library Association. Next month, during the third week of October, CWC branches and libraries all over the state will celebrate California Writers Week.

To learn more about the history of CWC, the oldest writers club in the nation, click on www.calwriters.org


Are you interested in joining a critique group but our established daytime or weekend critique groups don't jibe with your schedule? Happily, a new evening group Is forming, tentative genre long fiction, to meet on a weekday evening (time, day, and frequency to be determined).

This group would be perfect for members who cannot join one of our daytime groups or those who would like to explore writing long fiction (novels, fiction, non-fiction, life story, memoir, etc.)

If you're interested please contact Geri Jabara CWC, SFV Critique Group Coordinator, at geri.jabara@att.net


## Write a novel in a month!

National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) celebrates its 19th year of encouraging creativity, education, and the power of the imagination through the largest writing event in the world.

This November, 976 Municipal Liaisons (MLs) will coordinate hundreds of local, in-person writing events, working with local businesses, libraries, and community centers in cities and regions across the globe. NaNoWriMo expects over 400,000 people to start a 50,000-word novel in the month of November. Throughout the month, they'll be guided by this year's theme: Super powered Noveling.

For more information on Nanowrimo:
Websites: nanowrimo.org and ywp.nanowrimo.org
Facebook: NaNoWriMo Twitter: @nanowrimo Instagram: @nanowrimo

## A Few Literary Treats



## Autumn Trees



Autumn trees lining streets, tawny-haired colonnades on each side, shower shade and summer secrets leafing sidewalks yellow-brown.

Burnished arches overhead, they shed rusty coats, peeling to skin, bare themselves in winter wind; dance with abandon, stretch, twist, feeling strength deep down in roots.

When air is still in chill of winter, chagrined they surrender with uplifted subletting to silent, scrawny lions, gray sphinxes stoned in rows, standing guard till warmth of springtill bouffant shade and summer secrets touch heads above the streets again.
-Lenora Smalley

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