



The Valley Scribe



Newsletter of the San Fernando Branch of the California Writers Club

Learn How To Write Funny and Make 'em Laugh!

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Please join us for our first meeting of the New Year on Saturday, January 9 at 1:00 pm in the CWC-SFV Zoom room for a presentation that is guaranteed to make you smile—“I Write Funny, and You Can Too!” by award-winning author PJ Colando.

Writing is an encore career for Colando, whose initial profession was as a speech-language pathologist. She says, “I write while my husband watches TV sports—often. He’s glad I didn’t choose to play the French horn as my post-career hobby.” <https://www.pjcolando.com/meet-pj/>.

Colando describes her genre as a form of “commercial women’s fiction – humor and satire with a literary bent.” She has written four novels, two short story anthologies, and a book of blog posts about life in quarantine. She now calls Southern California home; but her novel series titled *Faith, Family, Frenzy* is rooted in the Midwest, where Colando was born and raised.

I Am . . . A Quarantine Survivor shares her weekly blog posts, written about her experiences during a most unusual time for us all. Blank pages in the book are reserved for readers to insert their own quarantine experiences and insights. All proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated to Second Harvest, a long-established food bank in Irvine, California.

The following is one of Colando’s “Five Fun Facts” on her website: “My first exercise was belly dancing, long before Jazzercise, Zumba, and workouts at the gym. I’ve always been a crafter, with an ever-evolving list,

including jewelry making. Writing captured my full attention in 2010 and I’ve not flirted with another hobby since.”

Baron R. Birtcher, *LA Times* best-selling author of *Hard Latitudes*, *South California Purples*, and *Fistful of Rain*, notes, “PJ Colando writes with uncommon heart, humor and pathos to artfully reveal the foibles and the dignity of the human spirit.”

Colando’s “I Write Funny And So Can You” talk will show us how to infuse comedy into our manuscripts and provide us with twenty-four tips for effective writing. So, grab a cup of coffee and start your ear wit a smile on January 9 at 1pm in the Zoom Room.

Karen Gorbach
CWC-SFV President

*All presentations are free for club members who will receive a Zoom invitation prior to the meeting. CWC members from other clubs may also attend presentations without charge but **must contact** the Zoom host at karen.gorbach@gmail.com prior to the meeting date to request an invitation. Guests are cordially invited to purchase admission to this program at www.cwc-sfv.org.*



P. J. Colando and below, her books:

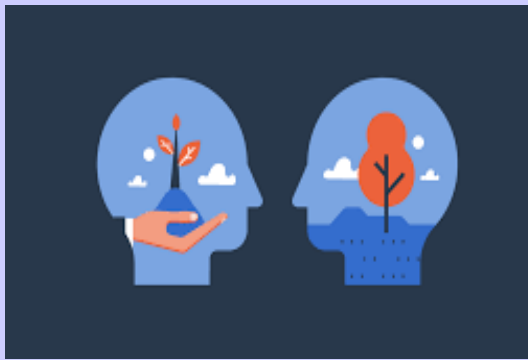


Karen's Corner

By Karen Gorback, CWC-SFV President



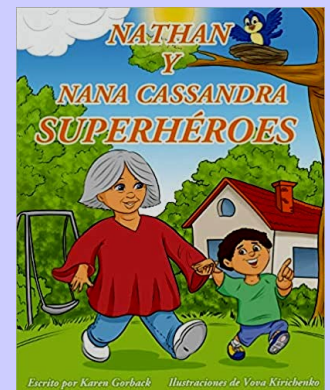
I wrote my first consumer complaint letter more than four decades ago, in response to a television commercial for office furniture. The offending advertisement featured a disheveled woman working at an old, cluttered desk who miraculously transformed into an alluring administrative assistant when her new furniture arrived. Seriously? I know that “sex sells,” but does it have to sell desks? My letter to the furniture company president was polite but firm, clearly pointing out that their commercial was insulting and out-of-touch with emerging cultural mores regarding women in the workplace. After all, it was 1975!



I never heard back from the president but the commercial disappeared.

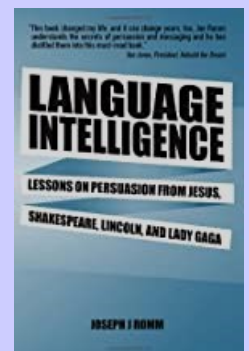
We all know words matter. Words make a difference. Both spoken and written, words can move mountains, and over the years, I’ve attempted to move a few—even if it’s only an inch or two. My mountains have included higher education for disenfranchised populations and lifelong learning for older adults. I’m currently focused on bringing greater diversity to children’s literature and expunging ageism and ableism from the workplace.

Over the years, I’ve chiseled language into op-ed articles, letters-to-the-editor and to the governor, grant applications, journal articles, social media posts, and legislative proposals. But since I believe that a good story can also move mountains, I’ve tackled tough topics through short stories, poetry, one-act plays, a novel, and children’s books. I recently had my *Nathan and Nana Cassandra* picture books translated into Spanish to reach a wider audience, with messages promoting acts of kindness, appreciating diversity, and learning leadership.



In March, I’ll be Zooming a new 90-minute mini-class titled “Prose with a Purpose” through Conejo Valley Adult School. The objective is to teach students how to utilize language in moving mountains of their own.

One of the resources I’m using is a terrific read titled *Language Intelligence – Lessons on Persuasion From Jesus, Shakespeare, Lincoln, and Lady Gaga* (CreateSpace, 2012) by Joseph Romm. Chapter headings include: “Rule One: Short Words Win,” “If You Don’t Repeat, You Can’t Compete,” and “What Evil Lurks in the Heart of Men? The Foreshadow Knows.” I love, love, love this book!



So, it’s going to be a busy year, marked with new challenges, much-anticipated medical milestones, and a tentative return to a more recognizable life. But through it all, my New Year’s resolution is to keep writing, keep learning, and most important, keep moving mountains.

The Art of the Query

By Anat Golan Wenick

Trey Dowell, our December speaker, gave his attentive audience a well-prepared presentation on query letter guidelines. In the following review, read Dowell's advice on ways to write an intriguing book "hook" that might catch the appraising eye of a busy literary agent.

Kathy Highcove, *The Valley Scribe Editor*

The road to your book being commercially published often begins when you send a query letter to a literary agent. In December, author and teacher, Trey Dowell, joined our Zoom Room to discuss what can move your query letter to the top of a literary agent's pile, and what might tank it. As Trey phrased it: "No query will sell a book, but no one will look at your book until they have a good reason to read it." A well-written query letter aims at doing just that.



Trey Dowell in his Zoom Room gear.

Writing is a very competitive field. An agent who takes on about five clients at one time and sells about eight to ten books per year, once told Dowell that he receives at least 30 query letters a day (1,500 per year). He asks only two to three percent of these applicants for their manuscripts. The agent went on to explain why over half of these letters are eventually discarded:

About 200 letters are immediately rejected because the writer used a "Dear Agent" salutation. To this agent, the use of an impersonal greeting indicated that the writer put little effort into researching this agent's professional background, his content criteria, and the books he had successfully promoted. Such a salutation also revealed that an identical query letter had been sent to many other agents. The agent's reaction: Why should I make an effort to promote this author who knows little about my professional background and capabilities?

About 200 other letters to this agent are automatically trashed for presenting a genre he doesn't represent. Several hundred more letters get thrown out because they're badly written. In all these cases, whatever sample writing the author included with the letter won't be read by this discerning literary agent.

It makes no difference if a query letter is sent to an agent

or a publisher. The goal is to get someone to read it. In most cases, an effective query letter contains four elements. The trick is to combine them in a strategic manner that will convince the agent to read your attached writing sample.

Here are the four elements:

1. A paragraph that talks about the book and includes the title, word count and genre.
2. A paragraph that personalizes why you chose to query this particular agent or publication. Always research the agent before sending a query letter. Subscribe to his Tweet feed and learn what he is actively looking for and then write something like: "As per your request on Twitter..." You might mention that you had met them once before at a pitch fest or a conference.
3. A paragraph about the author's background. Include any type of accomplishments and awards you may have received.
4. **The Hook. This is the most important part of your letter because the right hook is what sells your book.** A hook should swiftly describe characters, pressing problems and the choices that must be made by the characters. This section ranges from 150 and up to 200 to 300 words at the most—do not go into every little detail!

Having trouble figuring how to bring your hook to life? Follow Dowell's advice and check the inner jacket part of a hard copy best-seller. There you'll find hooks that showcase and intensify the story's main events, leading to a cliffhanger. A hook with those qualities will draw the agent's attention and increase his interest in your story.

Here are the elements that make hooks effective:

(Continued on page 4)

character(s): Your query letter must make the reader have a strong interest in (love or hate) your main character in the first one or two sentences. Show what factor makes the story important, compelling, sympathetic or unique. When this attachment is achieved, the reader will follow the main character on his journey until the last page.

Stakes. What's at risk? What conflicts are your characters involved with? What are they up against? What do they stand to lose: love, livelihood, life—again, show the reader. Those problems can come in any variety: intimate, personal or inter-galactic.

Intensify conflict and tension. Start wide and narrow down the challenges as the paragraph develops. Don't give too much away. When writing a hook, there's no need for an outline of the whole plot. Your hook should not be a synopsis. Rather, a hook is an intro that intrigues and makes a reader eager to buy the book and read on.

Novel's Voice. What is the novel's style? Don't just give a plot summary, but compose a hook that really resonates with the reader. An intriguing pitch shows an agent that you're a professional and book browsers are very likely to take a closer look at your book.

Dowell emphasized a few additional suggestions for composing an effective query letter:

A query is not the place to explain why you wrote the book, unless you can provide a good reason why you're the most suitable writer for this project—like this book is based on your work in a specific role for a certain industry. (The Devil Wears Prada.) Dive right into the hook—that's the best way to tempt an agent into reading further, rather than stating the

book's word count, genre, etc. and other unnecessary data.

A query should be written in present tense (is/are) that builds more tension and not the less powerful past tense (was/were).

It's okay to include a question like "Is space really the final frontier?" but don't overdo hypothetical queries. They tend to put a reading eye on "pause."

Mentioning outlandish comps like the Bible, or Harry Potter may not work in your favor. However, you can use comps strategically by mentioning successful books that were previously published by the same agent/publisher.

Be careful mentioning self-published books. Agents and publishers want either something that hasn't been seen yet, or something that sold many copies online. If your self-published work didn't generate enough interest – leave it out.

Be sure to finish the book before sending a query letter, unless you're sending a proposal for a non-fiction work. In this case, agents will usually require a pitch and three sample chapters. It's up to the agent to follow up with specifications of what and how they would like to proceed.

Before sending a query letter, research to ensure the agent has sold books before, to avoid scammers. The [Publisher Market Place](#) is a good source, but it does have a monthly \$25 fee. An agent's history of public speaking is also an indication, as well as sites like [Agent Query](#) and [Query Tracker](#).

When possible, attend writing conferences where you can meet with agents, interact with them and learn more firsthand about the book business and what agents are looking for.

Remember: Always proofread a query letter before hitting send.

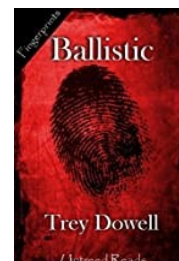
Now that you have the how, it's time to do it! Revamp your query letter and get your work published. Make it your New Year's resolution!



CWC-SFV



Four
Books
by Trey
Dowell



JANUARY 2021

Get Your Query Letter Out There

If

you followed Trey Dowell's advice on his December presentation to club members on the "Art of the Query," you must have a killer version of your query letter itching to go out. Congratulations. Perhaps it's time to test it.

Finding the right literary agency to query is not hard, but it is time consuming because it involves a lot of research. Here are a few things you should consider before sending a letter that can be the ticket to your newly found fame: Is the literary agency legitimate? Generally, a legitimate agent will not just "find" you all of a sudden because they just happened to see your Amazon self-published manuscript. More likely, you'll have to query them first. If an agent asks for any kind of money upfront, that should be a red flag.

This is not to say that an agency can't offer legitimate services for fee, but always be aware of what you are paying for. In her funny video "Scam or Legit Publisher," literary agent Arielle Eckstut suggest not just Googling the name of the agent or agency, but also adding the word "Scam" next to the name in the search box to ensure they are not associated with any fraudulent activities. Several sites track and collect this type of information and can be a good place to start, so be sure to check out *Predators & Editors* and *Writer Beware* before signing anything. (*Predators & Editors* site is currently undergoing some updates but their Facebook page is operative.)

Now that you've verified the agency is legit, make sure to query the right person. Literary agencies often have more than one agent, and they can be searching for different types of material. Only query one agent and stick to one submission at a time. Note that some agencies can have a very specific niche your story must adhere to, like an agency dealing with books containing a cave element. Yes, it can be that specific. Never query an agent who states they currently don't take new clients or submissions, even if their contact information is listed and they happen to sell the exact type of material you are writing.

It is advisable to make a list of agents you may want to check over later in the year to see if their slate has opened up. Once you find the agent you wish to query, research their name in specific. This time, try to find out if there is some common thread you can relate to in your query letter. It never hurts to add a little more person-



alization to your inquiry. Agents may have a YouTube video you can mention you found informative, or may have been interviewed for an online magazine you can tell them you read, etc.

With both agency and agent vetted out, the next important step is checking the submission guidelines. Those vary drastically from one agency to another and failing to fol-

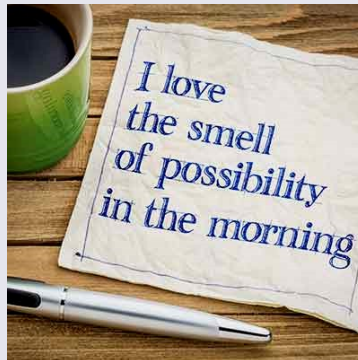
low them can result in an immediate disqualification from consideration. In some cases material can be rejected simply because the writer didn't save the file using the required name or format the agent specified. For example, Willenfield Literary Agency has different submission guidelines depending on the genre (literary, narrative, poetry and visual narrative). Agencies will also list who they do not represent and will often exclude poets, screenwriters, or children-book authors.

Most agencies will not welcome phone calls, especially when they've posted very clear instructions on how to contact them. Submission will be done via email in most cases, but agencies like The Ethan Ellenberg Literary Agency still accept mail submissions.

And, as always, before hitting the "send" button, be sure to proof-read your work once more—just to be on the safe side.

Sites that compile lists of agencies actively seeking new material is a great way to save time, but don't rely solely on their information. It is not always up-to-date. Before submitting, check out the agent's name. Are they still with the same agency? Are they still open to new submissions? Have their guidelines changed? Are they still in business?

Some examples of sites that do the work for you are *Writers Digest*, the *Directory of Literary Agents*, and *Book Fox*. Be sure to check in the agent lists for their average response time to a query. Don't send endless follow-up emails before that time.



Note that a response can take anywhere from a few days to a few months depending on how many submissions the agency receives. For more information on agents, query letters and other information about writing, be sure to check AgentQuery.com and querytrack.net.

Anat Golan Wenick

Reduced Members FEES

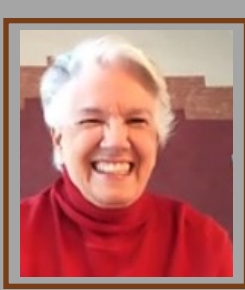
NEW MEMBERS pay \$42.50 for remainder of the 2020/21 fiscal year.

If you are a member of CWC-SFV, you don't have to rejoin, **BUT SPREAD THE WORD** about our club!

If you have a friend or family member or met someone who semi-secretly wants to write that memoir, novel, mystery or how-to book, tell them about us. For the last half of our year, membership is only \$42.50 from January 1, 2021 through June 30, 2021.

YES! Only \$42.50 for new members to the California Writers Club. Our San Fernando Valley branch offers all regular events free to our member. Even with COVID-19 reductions we have at least five active critique groups that meet virtually. Our regular monthly virtual Zoom meetings feature expert national authors and speakers in the writing industry. In addition we have adopted prompt writing opportunities for attendees who wish to experience writing within a time limit.

COVID-19 has slowed us down, but technology enhanced our outreach via Zoom. When the nation is renewed we will be ready to return to meet both virtually and in our



Andi Polk
Membership Chair

face-to-face writers' community. We hope to return to meeting at the beautiful Motion Picture Television Fund campus in Woodland Hills, CA and offer our meetings and workshops virtually as well. We are open to the world.

Members of other branches of The California Writers Club are welcome to attend our monthly meetings for FREE. We welcome you as our community of writers. Check out our line up of speakers on our website cwc-sfv.org

and register for the speaker and date you wish to hear. You will be asked for your name, email and the name of your branch of the CWC. You will be sent an invitation to log-in. We love to have you join us. IF you want to become a member of our branch the fee for CWC dual membership is just \$25.

Our membership application is available on our website cwc-sfv.org.

Membership questions should be directed to Andi Polk, CWC-SFV Membership Chair, andipolk4@gmail.com

2021 California Writers Club Literary Review Submission Guidelines

The submission window for 2021 is open from December 15, 2020 to March 15, 2021. Read and follow **all** submission information **carefully**.

Submissions are open to current CWC members and will be accepted from December 15, 2020 through March 15, 2021. Works will be reviewed and selected for possible publication by acquisition editors through a blind judging process, that is, they will not see any information about the author or the author's branch. Feedback is offered on your submissions this year, but you may opt out of receiving it. Shortly before publication in autumn of 2021, you will be notified by email if your piece will be included in the 2021 *Literary Review*.

We're looking for excellent writing. Light themes and humor are always welcome. Unacceptable are pieces that proselytize, are libelous, or contain gratuitous vulgarity. Submission categories are:

Fiction suggests an invented story which may entertain, deceive, or amuse.

Nonfiction is content that represents truth and accuracy regarding information, events, or people, and may take the form of a story. Biographies and articles are examples of non-fiction.

Memoir is autobiographical, nonfiction story based on event(s) in the author's memory. It should have an overarching theme, takeaway lesson, or message. Personal narrative, personal essay, and personal statement are subsets of memoir.

Essay: A formal essay presents an idea, supports, and/or refutes the

idea, then gives a conclusion.

Poetry: Poets choose words carefully to achieve sensory, emotional, or intellectual effects. Rhyming is not at all necessary. Clarity is. Please understand that lack of punctuation or using an unusually difficult layout may make it impossible for a reader to comprehend the content.

Humor uses asides to poke fun at one's self; states the obvious; exaggerates; makes witty remarks; adds tongue-in-cheek comments; asks a rhetorical question; uses alliteration that doesn't come at the expense of clarity; lists two straight items (the setup) and adds a third item that is a comedic twist such as the description, "writer, actor, tall person"; etc. Have fun and don't hesitate to submit in this category if you've written something humorous.

Decide carefully in what category you place your submission. Readers will have the guidelines above regarding categories.

We accept excerpts from previously published work provided that you hold the copyright, and you indicate the initial source and date when submitting—not on the submission itself.

If we accept a submission for publication, you give permission for it to appear in our print and online editions. Submitters give our editors the right to do light editing to correct occasional grammar, spelling, or typing errors, to preserve historical accuracy, and/or to maintain consistency with the *Review* style guide.

More info at Publications | California Writers Club (calwriters.org)

United in Spirit, We Salute COVID Caregivers and Wait for a Better Tomorrow

Last summer, New Yorkers were asked to applaud the doctors, nurses—all the health care workers who worked overtime, trying to deal with the sudden surge of COVID patients.

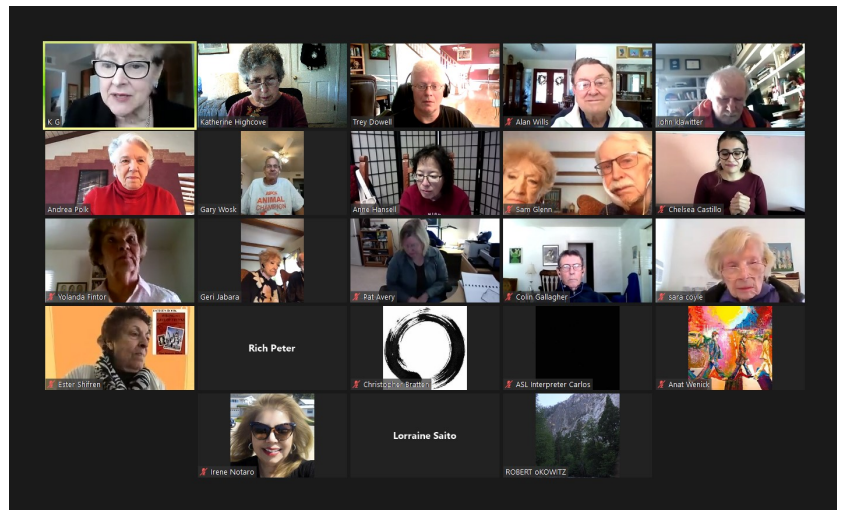
Here's how one apartment building appeared as the residents came out on their balconies to cheer and applaud medical staff, ambulance drivers, and all the people who were battling the pandemic.

Last month, when I saw my multi-colored screenshots of our December Zoom Room gallery, I was suddenly reminded of the lit-up NY apartment building photos. Our listeners were also shown in our separate frames, in separate homes, but I felt we were united in spirit.

Similar to the New Yorker applauders, we Californians feel great appreciation for our health workers, emergency personnel, vaccine researchers, suppliers—and, of course, each other during this world wide pandemic.

Write on, everybody!

Kathy Highcove

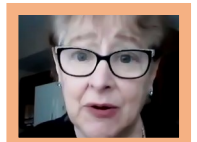


A SMILE, A HANDSHAKE AND A HUG

Waiting for the vaccine and the time afterwards when we can safely and warmly greet each other with a smile, a handshake and a hug.

Ahh, to sense the warmth of a smile.
Ahh, to feel the grip of a handshake.
Ahh, to hug and be hugged by a caring soul.
These can be so precious for you and me.

Norman Molesko
December, 2020



Thank you, Norman

To add playfulness to our pandemic ridden lives, at the December meeting, our members experimented doing our one of our favorite group activities—prompt responses— via Zoom.

After listening to Trey Dowell, our great speaker, twenty folks remained in the Zoom room to participate in the writing exercise.

I volunteered to be the prompt giver this first time and provided the group with several prompt choices.

Once eight minutes of frantic writing was concluded, several members shared their stories. A few examples are presented in January's Scribe. The successful experiment will be continued next month with new prompts.

Pat Avery



Prompt Exercise Leader Pat Avery



The Smell of His Memory – Inspired by “The Odor That Brings Back Memories” Prompt

Most of all, she remembered the stench. Somewhere between a mouthwash gone -bad and that carcass of a dead pigeon she once found under a bush in her backyard, after it was devoured by her neighbor's cat. It was so thick and poignant, that she could almost see the green twirl coming out of his mouth, like in those Sunday cartoons she used to sneak downstairs to watch before her parents woke up. Back when her world was filled with the smell of her mom's cheesecake baking in the oven and the roses she just brought from the garden. It wasn't the fact he overpowered her, right after she finished polishing the bottom half carton of her favorite chocolate ice-cream. It wasn't the pain of the penetration or the Merry-Go-Round

of feelings racing in her head. It was that smell of his breath, mixed with the sweet taste of her only daily indulgent frozen treat, when he thrust his tongue down her throat.

She wanted to remember the entire ordeal. As her military dad once barked at her when she cut her foot at the beach, trying to prove she could climb some rocks without her shoes: “Stupid is as stupid does. You forget your mistakes and you're bound to repeat them.” So she needed to march herself through every moment: That almost inaudible clicking sound she paid no attention to, and turned out to be the window lock he picked to claw his way into her home. The surprisingly uneventful fall on the floor, despite the rough tackle from behind. His soft hands violently tearing her clothes first and her delicate skin second. The almost cloudlike feeling his longhair had when it fell on her cheeks, when he cemented his lips to hers, as if trying to carve his initials in them. The smooth touch of his meticulously shaved skin when he forced himself between her legs over and over and over and over and.... And all she could remember was the smell.

Long after the smell was gone, and both her home and body were scrubbed clean and smelled like what clean would smell like if it wasn't defiled, she knew, his smell ruined ice cream for her forever.

Anat Golan Wenick

Prompt: An Odor That Brings Back Memories



From **Michael Rains** to **Everyone**:
Zorg Flumoolegrg always zorflod his nirfs when he sensed the aroma of freshly cut grglt. Ah, how the shining suns warmed his mirbic in those eons! The tiny wiffle mogers would scurry over his nirfs, bringing the harvest from their swemps. Of course once Zorg reached the Mindless Age he began sinking and bubbling below the wafty waves of Nirfland, far away from the shining suns that once warmed his mirbic in those eons. But sometimes the wiffle mogers would dig dig dig for tresseouss dymats, bringing their grglt in large piles. And he would once more be just a Flumoofle, sitting under the shining suns in those eons!

Prompt: a tattle tale

MY BROTHER, THE TATTLE

My brother was the worst tattle-teller! But he never told *my* side of the story.

He tattled on me when I tore up his homework, but I only did it because he tore up my comic book!

And I *did* pester his friends... but because they teased me, and wouldn't let me join them in playing with his Erector set!

When he tattled that I stole his money, that was because we were using our Hanukkah money to toss coins, and I won them all.

He even tattled on me after I tied him to a tree, and didn't release him till after dinner, after I ate his dessert. Yes, I *did* tie him to that tree ... but only after *he* had tied *me* to that tree and left me there for *hours and hours*!

And I *never* teased him, I just got *even* instead!

Sylvia Rubin Molesko





Last month, this notice appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* obituary section:

Edward "Big Ed" Rasky passed away peacefully on Wednesday, Dec 2, 2020. Big Ed loved to run, play tennis, travel, camp, and help kids. He was a champion for Ronald McDonald House to get kids to camp. Big Ed taught in the LA School District for over 40 years. Big Ed was preceded in death by his wife, Sunny Rasky, and survived by his children Carol, Steven and Michael, and his grandchildren Ross and Marissa.

Any longtime member of the SFV, who glanced at this obituary that morning, would have immediately recognized Ed Rasky's name. And then he or she would have felt saddened, as I felt when I was told of Ed's passing. Ed was member of our club and was especially active in SFV critique groups., as the comments below from Lillian Rodich and Leslie Kaplan will attest. For years, he wrote stories and thoughtfully critiqued the work of his fellow group members. I remember that he always gave his honest opinion in quiet low-key tones. But Ed, both before and after his teaching retirement, continued singing in his synagogue choir and began an unique form of charity work: running races, an activity that he had given up in his fifties, took up anew at the age of 81!. Every year that he raced, the money he earned in a competition paid summer camp fees for several underprivileged children.

Ed's volunteer work was renown in certain city circles and one day, someone told the *Los Angeles Daily News* columnist, Dennis McCarthy, about Big Ed Rasky's racing for summer camp fees. Intrigued, McCarthy interviewed Big Ed and Sunny, then wrote a laudatory column about Ed's feats. When contacted by this editor, McCarthy obligingly gave permissions to re-run the article in this Scribe. Please read McCarthy's Big Ed story on page 12. And, enjoy. After all, Big Ed Rasky was all about making folks smile.

Kathy Highcove

Big Ed, as he liked to be called, was our one-man-standing in our small familystyle critique group. We enjoyed his humorous tales about traveling with his wife, Sunny, and her forever klutzy tripping accidents in every country they visited. They both had a sense of humor about these happenings which they began to believe was destiny written in the stars.

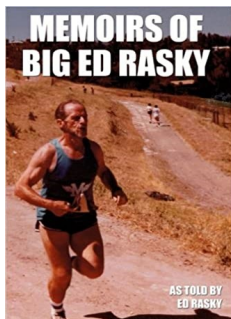
No matter how careful they were, or where they were, Sunny had to take one of her infamous falls. Ed was never surprised. That was his Sunny ... for better or for worst.

Leslie Kaplan

Big Ed was in the first critique group I joined at CWC. Our Tuesday group has since remained active for many years and Ed was an integral and cherished part of that group. We all became more than friends; we were a close family.

Ed was a man for all seasons: world traveler, high school English teacher, clown, author, runner for charity, active Temple member, comedian, loving family man and kind friend. In short, one wonderful guy! He was a dear friend and I will truly miss him.

Lil Rodich



[Memoirs of Big Ed Rasky: Ed Rasky's life stories, told by Ed Rasky](#)

Ed Rasky has stories to tell and he's done it here for his family, friends and those who have known and loved him throughout his life.

Amazon URL for this book: [Memoirs of Big Ed Rasky: Ed Rasky's life stories, told by Ed Rasky.: Dolan, Joe: 9781507890844: Amazon.com: Books](#)

A clown often has a dramatic effect on the audience. For example, entertaining retirement people in a retirement home can be very rewarding. A clown can put a smile on someone's face even though they recently had a stroke. It's a magical experience. Deep down in my soul I've always wanted to be a clown.



lowed me to enter. I had no experience but I knew it was something I wanted to do. About ten years ago I had heard of a course in Orange County. It seemed too far away for me to travel that distance.

Age was another factor I was thinking about. I was 72 and wondered if taking a course in clowning was going to be worth the effort.

Clowns wear queer costumes with so many bright colors. Polka dots, diamond shape, squares, circles, of red, yellow, green, and brown. If it's a loud color, a clown will show it off. The outfit is loose fitting and the shoes are too big. Clowns love attention and will do anything to get your eyes focused on the outfit he or she is wearing.

The real break for me was an article in the *Daily News* on July 20th, 2008. It was written by Dennis McCarthy and was a human interest story about the Carousel of Clowns. These clowns were mostly women and had been in business for over 20 years. They entertain children in hospitals or lonely seniors in Convalescent Homes.

When else would I ever get a chance to wear make up? Every clown uses a base of white and gets a ghostly effect from the start. The eyebrows are usually stashed with brown and then red takes over the mouth and lips. It is so much fun to lift the eyebrows up and down.

Here's a quote from the article, "The Carousel of Clowns is looking for new members to train as clowns, and for new places to visit around the valley where people might need a smile or a laugh." So, I called up the head clown, "Strawberry," and told her I was interested. This project added a whole new chapter to my life.

Soon, the clown brings on the best theatrical he or she can muster. The cornier the joke the better the audience likes it. Here's an example of a knock, knock joke.

Making up a clown name was intriguing. Our senior clown is named Strawberry and another is called Melodius. Clown names are usually unusual. I'm a tennis player and one of my partners, Bing, always used the expression, "Peachy Keen" whenever he made a good shot.

Clown 1: "knock, knock."

Clown 2: "Who's there?"

Clown 1: "Aldo."

Clown 2: "Aldo who?"

Clown 1: "I'll do anything for you, Babe."



So that became my new clown name, Peachy Keen. Isn't that a clever little story? Another search came when I had to choose a new outfit. It had to be baggy and have loud colors. I didn't want to spend a lot of money. My wife and I tried The Salvation Army

The clown world opened up its doors and al-

(Continued on page 12)

and I tried on anything that was colorful. We weren't too happy with what we saw. We finally went to a costume store that had a lot of clown outfits. The outfit makes me look very big and had a lot of yellow and red. It was perfect and I was almost ready to make my debut.

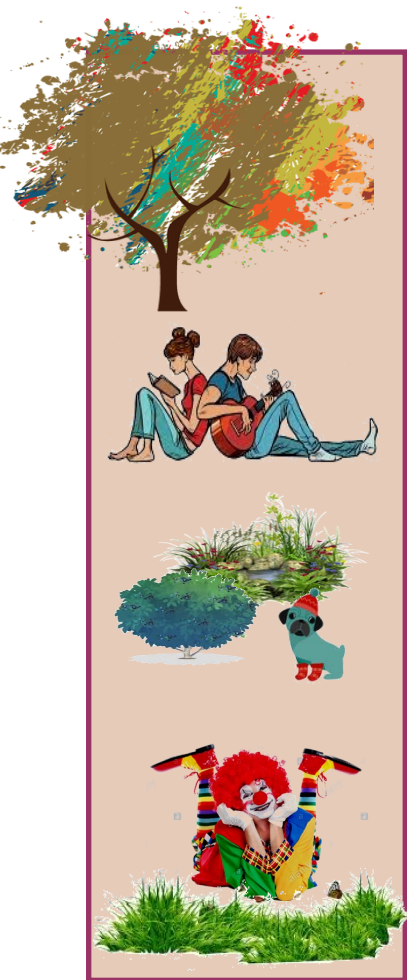
I soon learned that there were two types of entertainment in clowning. One is a group show that lasts almost an hour. The other is an individual effort where clowns do one on one activities. It might be a magic trick or making animal balloons for children. I prefer the show where we all sit around and make up skits. I like the attention I get when I perform solo. For example, I do a creative dance to the music of YMCA.

Another clown called Melodius sings one or two songs. Then we usually do knock, knock jokes. The cornier the joke, the better they seem to like it.

Our leader Strawberry performs a corny doctor's skit with two other clowns. Then we do a skit with "Take me out to the Ball Game" themes. Towards the end we do a few magic tricks and then do the "Chicken Dance" or the "Hokey Pok-e-y Dance." We do a lot of hand movements and get the audience involved.

The audience appreciates everything we do. I still have a lot to learn, but clowning is something I'll never give up. I love being a clown even though people see me all dressed up and have a nice laugh when they see me with all the make-up on.

Another Rasky story from the archives:



CWC-SFV

POETRY CAN BE EXCITING!



Every fall I think about the excitement that comes with a new semester of teaching at the senior high school level. Thirty-nine creative years with fifteen - eighteen year olds brings back many memories.

Teaching poetry was always a challenge. How can I make this subject interesting? Choral reading, a little acting, and a few sound effects can make a difference. Everyone must participate is the goal.

I chose Edgar Allen Poe and "The Raven" in my first experiment. First, I closed all the lights in the room. I took out a flashlight so I could read the words. Then I chose two students to be in charge of sound effects. All 39 students in the class practiced rapping on the desk. It was very noisy in the classroom but we were having fun.

Then the sound effects experts played with the window blinds. They soon had achieved the right sound for the curtains shuffling in the wind. Then we went back to the rapping, tapping noise.

I always recruited a football or weight lifting expert to be the raven. We perched the raven on a small table. Then we had someone knock on the door and our football player jumped to the floor with a loud thump. After he recovered his senses he ran around the room lifting his arms as if he was going to fly. Our raven departed the room and we were still in darkness.

Mrs. Carson, the teacher below us, heard the loud noise and came running to our room. The lights were still out and the kids were all laughing.

I apologized to the teacher for the commotion and noise. I assured Mrs. Carson that no one had a heart attack and that I was a sane person.

This was only the beginning of odd things that took place in Mr. R's classes. One time I was teaching about all the different beats and rhythms in poetry. I had three students bring their guitars to class the next day. We explored the beats in poems like "Chicago" by Sandburg and "Leaves of Grass" by Walt Whitman.

I am now retired for 19 years. Every September I think back to those days when English was the most exciting thing in my life.

-Ed Rasky

Runner Big Ed Rasky Has Big Shoulders. Big Heart

Written by Columnist Dennis McCarthy for *The Los Angeles Daily News*. April 2, 2015 and reprinted with the author's permission.

The retired English teacher was approaching the finish line of another 10K charity race last Saturday morning when he heard his name being called over the loud speaker.

"Here comes Big Ed Rasky, 89 years old," the announcer was saying.

"How'd he know that?" Big Ed wondered. His wife was the only one who knew he was here, and she was out getting her hair done.

Sunny Rasky had stopped doing finish lines decades ago. She loved the guy, but, c'mon, how many times do you have to watch him cross the finish line with his hands in the air, before you're granted amnesty?

Or maybe they were singling him out just because of his age, but that was no big deal, Big Ed thought. It's easy to win trophies in your age category when you have no competition.

No, this was something else. That announcer had done his homework. He was talking about the 25 years Big Ed spent running the LA Marathon with a dozen terminally ill cancer children sitting, in spirit, on his strong shoulders.

That's why they called him Big Ed. Big shoulders. Bigger heart.

He would take the money his poker buddies, tennis partners, old teaching colleagues, family and friends pledged to him every year to run the marathon, and use it to send kids who would never see adulthood to summer camp.

All in all, he raised \$260,000 running marathons, enough to send 500 kids to a week at Camp Ronald McDonald in Idyllwild. Big Ed would tag along just to make sure they had fun.

"There are not enough good role models in this world, and we've been fortunate enough to have one of the best," said Brian Crator, director of the camp, lauding Big Ed's commitment.

That's the guy the announcer was talking about as Big Ed walked across the finish line and people gathered around to shake his hand.

His knees may be shot and he can't run marathons anymore, but as long as he can walk a 10K they'll be another dozen terminally-ill kids going to summer camp this year on his broad shoulders.

"Ed's at temple," Sunny said Tuesday when I called to see how her husband was doing.

He's been a busy guy lately since a book of his memoirs became available on Amazon. It took Big Ed five years of writing to cram 89 years of life into 176 pages. He got a big assist from his colleagues in the California Writers Club.

It's a great social and professional outlet for people with a knack for words and something to say. Locally, there are branches in the Inland Empire, Long Beach, Kern and Orange counties, and the San Fernando Valley – Big Ed's chapter. Look one up.

"It's Passover this Saturday and we're going over to see the grandkids," Sunny continued.



Ed Rasky and wife Sunny celebrate another trophy.

The grandkids. Another one of Big Ed's role model projects. Sunny and Ed have been married 60 years and have three children. What they don't have are grandkids.

As they were closing in on 70 back in the mid-1990s, they realized time wasn't on their side anymore so they decided to adopt a couple of grandkids.

"People adopt children all the time, why not grandchildren?" is the way Big Ed posed the question.

He put an ad in the Jewish Journal, but that got no response. He wrote letters to rabbis, still no response. Finally, he talked to the preschool principal at his synagogue — Shomrei Torah in West Hills.

"She said she would send out a letter to see if anyone was interested," Ed said. "Five weeks later, one family said they were. I bent down and kissed the floor. My prayers had finally been answered."

Jill and Ken Meyer both grew up in homes where grandparents were an important part of their lives. But their two, young children weren't having that same opportunity because their grandparents lived far away and only visited once or twice a year.

The Meyers and the Raskys met in the park with the kids, Ross and Marissa, then 6 and 3 — starting out slow to see if the children would take to the older couple. "They did, in a big way," Jill said.

Pretty soon, the Raskys were baby-sitting on weekends to give Jill and Ken a night out, and whenever Sunny and Ed went away on vacation, they always brought home gifts for their adopted grandkids.

"They were giving our children their unconditional love, even calling them sometimes at bedtime to say goodnight before they went to sleep," Jill said.

Today, the adopted grandkids the Rasky's pushed on park swings when they were little and helped nurse through turbulent teenage years, are young adults with bright futures. Ross, 24, is a nuclear engineer, and Marissa, 21, is a student at UCLA with plans to go to medical school and become a surgeon.

"We're just so proud of them," Sunny says, as Big Ed gets home from temple and heads for the bedroom to put on his baggy pants, big red nose, and transform himself into Peachy Keen, the clown. It's show time again.

A few years back I wrote a column about a group called the Carousel Clowns who go to rest homes and hospitals — anywhere people can use a little cheering up.

Big Ed joined them, figuring if he could carry 500 terminally-ill kids on his shoulders for 26.2 miles, and adopt two, wonderful grandchildren who turned out great, well, making some sad people happy for an hour or so would be a nice thing to do.

See. That's just the way great role models think.

[Dennis McCarthy – Daily News](#)

My Words Begin and End In My Body

It is by my body I read the world and speak back to it.

My language was first formed in my body's five senses...hearing, touch, vision, smell and taste. Within my in utero development I began this private biology of language—forming and speaking it without prompt, without reason.

Therefore, I wonder if it can be said, that all the words I write, begin and end in my body?

The alignment of my creative effort, this cause and effect, this manic awareness and compulsion to respond is primal. Native verbs and adverbs, adjectives and nouns are created instantaneously in the blur of millions of neural responses. My senses do wordplay and conjugate. Present and past tense wrestle as each unique moment comes, then passes. First person is always pushing to the front of the line.

It brings to a fine point the adage, *I can only speak for myself!*

Short stories appear when I absorb the intricacies of life. Essays form in my body's ache, energy or exhaustion. Novella's arrive in hormonal surges, the cycles of reproduction, birthing and menopause. A chain of sexual experiences creates mystery novels. Haikus tell of the tender caress of soft sheets or the feel of cleansing a baby with water and soap.

My body writes an op-ed when I stub my toe, feel ice cream's chill lodge in my brain or hear another's screech of pain. The string of words that come to life in the synergy of all my organs, complete themselves in prose poetry. A sigh, a gag, a chuckle punctuates these narratives.

When my body senses love's touch or hears its whisper, it drowns in inner conversations. When I return love, it feasts on parables.

My body's language flips and gyrates and flushes my cheeks. It travels back and forth within artery and vein. I will absorb and calculate, cataloging its words with extreme precision, identifying if they are safe and understood. Or, do they tell of unsafe themes that will cause "dis-ease?" Feeling phrases may become locked down for incessant review or worse, buried— toxic in the bowels and stomach lining. Others may hide anxiously in the crawlspaces between lung and ribs.

Always waiting and watching are my metaphors. Some quickly distilled to be recklessly drunk by noon. Some wait, aging their wisdom in the barrel of my body.

Perhaps those five senses wrapped in my skin, peacefully sleepwalk—stepping out in moonlight, awake only to themselves.

I have no choice but to care for my body's health so it will not be silenced. Its indigenous language never forgotten. And when I gasp my last breath, what patient word waiting in the queue, will finally have its moment?



By Anne W. Lee

**Happy New Year To All
From the CWC-SFV
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2021

In the coming New Year, we hope you will be healthy, happy and joyfully connected with your family, friends and the CWC-SFV. In 2121, please continue to join us in our Zoom gallery.



Our first Zoom meet of 2021 is on Jan. 9th.