



The Art of Writing Life

by Alexander Leon

The art of storytelling blooms into narratives that entertain, hold the attention of young and old, are long remembered, and even teach a thing or two. South Bay Writers' June guest speaker would call this the art of "writing life," and finds its importance illustrated in the following lines of poetry:

I listened as she read each tale
and made each tale my own,
And...I still hear her magic voice,
...though I'm old and grown.

—Brad Begert

Undoubtedly, mastering the art of storytelling and writing life are vital for the author. But what is at the core of this art that eludes so many? How can an author spin a tale that will hold the interest of all? What things lead readers to make tales their own and remember them?

We have the good fortune to have as our June guest speaker Tim Myers, who is one of the best sources of answers to these questions. Tim has decades of experience as a writer and storyteller, and is a renowned and celebrated author of books for children and adults. He is also an award-winning poet and song writer.

All nine of his children's books have received strong reviews and mentions and are included in selection lists from *Kirkus Reviews*, *Booklist*, the *Times*, *Nick Jr. Magazine*, and is a Bank Street Library Irma Black Honor Book. These include *Dark-Sparkle Tea*, *Good Babies*, and *Tanuki's Gift*. Two of his most renowned books were inspired by Basho, the most celebrated 17th Century Japanese haiku poet. *Basho and the River Stones* was a Junior Library Guild starred selection, received an excellent review in *The New York Times*, is a California Young Readers Medal nominee, and is a Scholastic Book Clubs selection. *Basho and the Fox* was read on National Public Radio, became an *NYT* children's books bestseller, and is a Smithsonian Notable Children's Book.

Tim has placed numerous pieces in children's magazines, including *Cricket*, *Spider*, *Odyssey*, *Storyworks*, *Appleseed*, and *Highlights*. He won a national poetry contest judged by John Updike, has published over a hundred poems (*South Carolina Review*, *Northeast Book Reviews*, *Rattle*), and has a poetry chapbook due out from Pecan Grove Press. He has also won a science fiction and fantasy prize in the Writers of the Future Contest.



Tim Myers

May Recap Persevering as a Truth-Telling Author

by Jackie Mutz

May's guest speaker was a writer on a crusade to "tell it like it is"—not an easy thing to do if you want to become a published author trying to sell a controversial idea for a book. Think not? Ask Michele Simon, author of *Appetite for Profit: How the Food Industry Undermines Our Health and How to Fight Back*.

Our guest speaker's talk was not so much a push to sell her book (although a good idea) as an account of her own experience in becoming a first-time author. How did she become a writer of such a controversial topic and succeed in getting her book published? After all, it is a literary jungle out there.

Because she is a public health lawyer and legal specialist in the strategies and tactics of the food industry as well as a practiced writer, writing became the vehicle for her to expand the awareness of the consumer. From a public health perspective, it was apparent to her that issues such as obesity in our children and dietary guidelines were being undermined. For example, food conglomerates lobbied against legislation introduced by local politicians that attempted to limit the amount of junk food in schools. Although food conglomerates painted a picture of a team eager to address the issues of obesity and nutrition, in reality, sabotage was the motive in continuing even today to market "crap food" to the consumer; in particular, our children.

Once Michele had the topic, she wrote an article about how when local politicians tried to pass healthy food/drink laws in the schools, big food companies lobbied successfully to kill these bills.

Continued on page 9

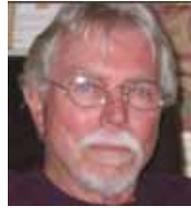
Continued on page 12

President's Prowling

by *Dave LaRoche*
President, South Bay Writers

Squirrels, Delays, and Pickerel Fishing

I hadn't, and couldn't get my "Prowl" out on time because: there was a squirrel in my office. A frantic, life-frightened, wild-eyed squirrel barreling around and knocking things over—wall to desk to chair to window to file cabinet, thrashing itself into escalating panic. I exited quickly, a bit frightened myself; closed the door and listened. It had stopped, though in my mind's eye, I could see the little guy, petrified and waiting for his calamity to return—not a single twitch to his tail.



Reflecting on these things is a waste of time for me; it was simply a problem that needed action to solve. (Dick's *WritersTalk* deadline had passed and I could feel the prod coming.) So I called Karen. She said call Animal Rescue; they said call the Humane Society, and a weekender there said call the Wild Life Preserve, who said the obvious: open a window, close the door, and wait. There you go, problem solved—not quite, of course.

Once, up north long ago, Blackie and I moseyed over to Leach Lake to catch a bucket of fresh pickerel for breakfast. We were crossing Knight's Meadow—turf as smooth as the felt on a billiard table and not a tree in sight—when Blackie spotted a squirrel, or it might have been, the squirrel who spotted Blackie. Instantly they recognized their instinctive modality; and I, tranquil in the clear morning's grace, stood unaware and slightly taller than a fence post. In less time than it took to think on it, the squirrel scampered right up the front of me, Blackie growling and desperate to follow. I could not get the squirrel off, though I swatted about like a boy amidst a swarm of mosquitoes. The squirrel dodged around my shoulders, up the back of my neck, scurried across the top and turned about—messing my pompador. He straddled my forehead facing aft, his rear feet working a good hold in my tightly pursed lips. He did his chirping—a-clickin' and a-clackin'—while Blackie jumped and howled.

Then it hit me: if I dropped to the ground, I'd experience less damage and, as soon as I did, the squirrel shot off across Knight's Meadow, fully accelerated, with Blackie in pursuit like a magnum charge from my Stevens twenty-two. The squirrel was chasing life itself but for Blackie, properly fed, it was only a sport and soon he tired. Head hung and panting, he ambled his way back and we returned to our moseying.

I remembered clearly the taste of those feet and the scratches; the frenzied manner of a hyped-up squirrel as I stood outside my office—listening and stumped. I let hours pass while mentally pacing through all of lunch and a broadcast of

Continued on page 16

Inside

South Bay Writers Elections

Tuesday, July 10 4

New Members 5

Time to Renew

Your Membership 5

Accolades 6

Club Mentoring 6

Publish Your Book In California! 7

The Journey of a Thousand Miles:

Staged Readings, Spoken Word,

Performance Poetry 8

Henry 9

Kathy and Me 10

Doctor, Hide 11

Flood 11

Dawn 5/22 12

Nipper's Nits 13

What I Learned from Judging the

Basil Stevens Contest 13

View from the Board 15

CWC, SBW, and Our Basis of Governance

15

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— 0 —

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We have a membership category that fits you.

Dues are \$45 per year plus a one-time \$20

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WRITERSTALK

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Submissions

Members of the South Bay Writers Club are encouraged to submit their creative works for publication in *WritersTalk*. Suggested word limits are not absolute; query the editor. Electronic submissions should be text or attached MS Word file sent to newsletter@southbaywriters.com; or mail double-spaced, typewritten copy to

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Guest Columns

Almost Anything Goes (400 words)

News Items

 (400 words)

Letters to the Editor

 (300 words)

to Andrea Galvacs
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Creative Works

Short Fiction (1800 words)
Memoir (1200 words)
Poetry (300 words)
Essay (900 words)

Announcements and Advertisements

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Editor's Perspective

by Dick Amyx
Editor

Galley Your Copy



The French have an institution called *L'Académie française*. According to Wikipedia, "The Académie consists of forty members, known as *immortels* (immortals). New members are elected by the members of the Académie itself. Académicians hold office for life, but they may be removed for misconduct. The body has the task of acting as an official authority on the language; it is charged with publishing an official dictionary of the language. Its rulings, however, are only advisory; not binding on either the public or the government."

Language, however, has a life of its own that is unlikely to be directed by an academic body. When microcomputers made the scene, *L'Académie française* took issue with common parlance referring to a floppy disk as "le floppy" and proclaimed that a floppy disk should be *un disque souple*. Les geeques wouldn't buy it, though, and floppy disks continued to be called *les floppies*. Whether the result of this conflict between academic determination and dynamic language is a good thing or a bad thing is a subject for separate debate.

English has no institution comparable to *L'Académie française*. It is up to its practitioners and bodies such as usage panels to maintain the purity of the language.

Our older son Damon (who has no small writing talent himself) has been named senior managing editor of Vermont Law School's law review. He's out of school for the summer, and during dinner last night he was lamenting about the work he has to do for the law review despite its being vacation time. "I have to galley all the copy for the next issue," he said.

Meredy's eyebrows elevated, and she said, "You can't 'galley copy.' Galley is a noun." There ensued some discussion about the difference between galleys and galley proofs, and how galley proofs were prepared in the olden days when men were men and type was hot.

Damon argued from a point of concision. It was shorter and *easier* to say, "I have to galley my copy" than to say, "I have to prepare galleys from the selected manuscripts." "Are you saying that you oppose changes to the language?" he challenged. "If not, then why use more words than you have to?"

Meredy launched a protracted two-pronged argument (I'll spare you the details), saying, on the one hand, that the verbalization of nouns has become a blight on the language, contributing to ambiguity and loss of precision; and on the other, that a notion of easiness as a value in itself, unquestioned, is corrosive in half a dozen different ways.

"But it's already a trend," she added ruefully. "When I was at the doctor's office the other day, the medical assistant said to me, 'I can room you now.' Yuck."

My position on the matter is that if a change in language reduces its information-carrying capacity, then the change is not good. One of the reasons that English works as well as it does is its redundancy, and it's the redundancy of English that permits someone who doesn't speak the language well to mangle it to a pulp and still be understood by a native speaker. Oversimplification would reduce redundancy and thus the amount of information that could be included in some statement when compared with the same statement rendered in more traditional grammar.

Most of the change in language, I think, but can't document easily, is in word meaning (anyone who's been involved with English for a while knows the story of

Continued on page 13

South Bay Writers Elections

Tuesday, July 10

by *Suzu Paluzzi, Nominating Chairperson*

Let us make this a good race! Your voice can be heard! Now is the time to step up to the plate, run for office, and have a say. If you are a paying member, join the slate for a South Bay Writers office. The job descriptions are in the May issue of *WritersTalk*, either on the SBW website at "newsletter" or in your mailbox.

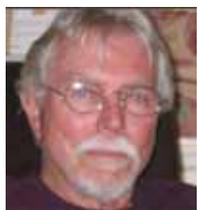
The 2008 election is June 10, the second Tuesday of the month. Nominations are accepted from attendees at this general meeting until the time of voting. If you would like to see your choice's name on the ballot before then, please contact me at jomarch06@yahoo.com. The nominee must be willing to run for office.

Please attend on election night. Your ballot will not count unless you are present.

Thank you. You have the opportunity to improve South Bay Writers even more this coming year!

President

Dave LaRoche

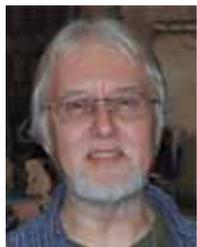


As President I will bring the following:

- Membership growth leading to more affordable workshops and more break-thru monthly programs, thus increasing opportunities to learn more of our craft, and the selling of work.
- Associations and experiences that encourage our muse.
- Outreach that fosters our mission and builds branch prestige in the community.
- Improved connections between the state board, our local board, and our membership providing more available means for members to influence their Club.
- New routes for members' involvement in the operations of our Branch including a member-at-large slot on the Board.
- Effort toward reducing our dues obligation to the State Central Board.
- Continued brisk meetings that allow time for networking and social connections.

Vice-President

Bill Baldwin



I am running for Vice-President of South Bay Writers because I think I can provide a good series of events for our branch.

I have always wanted us to have a variety of program speakers—a good mix of writers, editors, agents, and so on. I have also wanted to widen our demographics—perhaps more Latino and Black speakers, perhaps people with diverse gender-and-sexuality backgrounds, some younger writers.

I'd like a mix of genres represented: film, plays, short fiction, novels, non-fiction, poetry. Perhaps a few more recent genres like slam poetry.

It would also be nice to get a few more "big name" guests, whether as a dinner speaker, workshop leader—or for some kind of "special event." I'd like to heighten our profile here in the San Jose area.

I think I can do this because I'm very good at networking and very sociable; hard-working and likeable. I have a lot of experience coordinating events.

I'm sure the coming year will be an exciting one!

Phyllis Mattson



The running of CWC is a mystery to me, but I am impressed that events have been so well organized, and speakers have been great. Since I have benefited from the club, I am willing to contribute to its work. My qualifications: I've served many other organizations as program chair. I'd like to have more of our own members speak to the group, as well as members of other CWC in the area. I'd like to see some round-table discussions among writers of the different genres. As a writer who has self-published, I would like to bring speakers to help us with that job, particularly the new electronic publishing. Also, I'd like to bring experts who can help us with the business of writing.

Secretary

Cathy Bauer



I served as secretary before and understand the importance of keeping accurate minutes and tracking motions. In addition to recording the activities of the board meetings, I will archive all documents so they may be accessed by the board and members. An additional duty placed on the secretary is keeping the calendar updated. I will not have any problem doing this. I feel the most challenging part of the secretary's duties will be enforcing Robert's Rules. I pledge to carry a big stick and make sure they are followed.

Rita St. Claire



I've volunteered to serve as secretary to give something back to the club in return for the benefits I've received. I'll work hard to do a good job. I do have some applicable experience, having served on a few non-profit boards and in several community organizations.

I've been a member of CWC South Bay for two years, and have been writing for almost four. My interests are women's fiction, short stories, and literary fiction. I've written two novels.

I'm interested in combating the health effects of the sedentary nature of writing, and have set up a mutual support blog for writers and others at <http://OffTheCouchAndAtTheTable.blogspot.com>. If you'd like to know more about me, please see the blog and/or www.ritastclaire.com.

Treasurer

Richard Burns



If elected, I will do my best to carry out the treasurer's traditional financial-reporting duties, including flagging variances from the annual plan. I will work with the board to put our funds to the best possible use.

SBW Anthology Team Shifts into Gear

Now that the June 1 deadline for new content has passed, the anthology editing team is busy evaluating hundreds of entries to find the best possible representatives for the SBW collection. They're not talking, though! Team members have agreed to keep all discussion of selections just among themselves. The process of carefully and thoughtfully considering all candidates will take several months.

The project team is working toward a release date early in 2009, in time for the CWC centennial. Advance orders will be taken starting in September.



SBW Anthology editorial lead Meredy Amyx gathers the editing team for a kick-off meeting: Andrea Galvac, Meredy Amyx, Suzy Paluzzi, Lisa Eckstein, Phyllis Mattson, David Breithaupt, Suzette Gamero. Not pictured: Kathryn Madison, Juliana Richmond.

New Members

by Lita Kurth

Toni K. Pacini, who moved to Sanger which offers no Borders, B&N or Writers Club, has rejoined our club and reports that her memoir, *Alabama Blue*, is attracting publishers' interest while her Open Mic at the Sanger Library is attracting much local interest. When not helping to run Valley Biodiesel, her and her partner's new company, she writes short mystery fiction and Southern Goth and is managing a City Council campaign. She'd love to hear from members. Toni.pacini@comcast.net

New member and *Mercury News* editor Colin Seymour found us via the *Writer's Yearbook*, which lists the East of Eden conference. The author of an unpublished memoir and an unpublished novel, he found at the Willamette Writers Conference that in person, it was a lot easier to elicit a positive response than through any less direct method. He would like to find a critique group for multi-genre, memoirs, and magazine articles, and has already volunteered to contribute to a presentation on getting the most out of a writers conference.

Colin_Seymour@sbcglobal.net. WT

Time to Renew Your Membership

Dear South Bay Writers,

It's that time of year again.

Renewal Reminder: The 2007-2008 CWC South Bay membership year ends June 30. Renewal dues of \$45 keep you a member in good standing through June 30, 2009. Save \$20 by not letting your membership lapse.

Benefits of membership:

- Savings on dinner at regular meetings
- Savings on conferences/seminars
- Networking and fellowship with other writers
- Getting your creative work published in *Writers Talk*
- Getting a free web page on the SBW website
- Free advertising for your book or your writing-related services/classes on the SBW website

Please send your basic information with your check:

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Email _____

Mail your check for \$45 to
CWC South Bay
Attn: Marjorie
P. O. Box 3254
Santa Clara, CA 95055

New this year: To pay by credit card, use the Membership Renewal Online Payment form found at: http://southbaywriters.com/forms/mem_renew_form.html

(Note: The renewal link is *not* found from the SBW home page.)

Write on!

Marjorie Johnson,
Membership Chairman

June Bug

The flaw in the program
For a self-employed writer:
No paid vacations,
So budgets get tighter.

—Pat Bustamante

Accolades

by Jackie Mutz

Family matters, in this case the Los Gatos High School Varsity and JV Softball Awards ceremony, interrupted my attendance at the May CWC meeting. Transcribing from the audio of the meeting is just not the same as being there, so bear with me.



Jackie Mutz
Contributing Editor

- **Marsha Brandsdorfer**, whose book *The Accidental Secretary* was published last fall, received publicity in a newsletter recently. She shared that networking is one sure way to keep interest in one's work.
- **Bill Baldwin** finished the revision of his novel and is set to begin the next in time for the East of Eden Writers Conference in September, three months away.
- **Rita St. Claire**, a seasoned writer, participated in a diet study at Stanford University and lost 25 pounds. In December 2007, after the results were published, she was contacted by the press and picked up by the AP wires. The realization that writing is sedentary led her to start a blog for writers called *offthecouchandatthetable*.blogspot.com, a support network for writers.
- **Steve Wetlesen** received such rave reviews for his poetic art commission that he was rewarded with an extra bonus payment over and above the original commission fee for this work.
- **Mary Tomasi-Dubois** held a book signing for *Days in the Jeweled City* at the Border's in Los Gatos on May 26, 2008. Congratulations!
- **Rick Brost** reports: "After 20 or so conferences I finally met the agent I like well enough to represent my work. His office is in Hollywood, and he in turn contacted his personal editor to take a look at my ms. I'm happy to report that my completed ms is currently with her in Beverly Hills and I am expecting to be published later this summer."

- **Jack Hasling** donated a copy of his book *Footprints on my Tongue* for the raffle. His book is a 2007 winner of the New York Festival Award. Check out Jack's website at www.jacksverse.com
- **Robert Balmanno**, author of *September Snow* will be participating in live radio interviews around the country via phone to promote his book. An article on Robert appeared in the online *One Planet Magazine* at the end of May.
- **Colin Seymour**, a former longtime San Jose *Mercury News* copy editor and reporter who still writes theater and classical music reviews for the paper, has launched a new business ghost-writing and editing obituaries. Colin is editing part time for Stanford's alumni magazine, and (since our May meeting) has become the obituaries writer for the magazine.
- The new Fremont area CWC group hosted **Betty Auchard** as guest speaker at its May 17 meeting and is offering a July 26 workshop "Building Creative Skills," a kind of The Alphabet Soup of Writing Strategies. Email Jeanine Vegh at ladyjatbay@sbcglobal.net for more information
- On May 27, **Audry Lynch**, author of *With Steinbeck in the Sea of Cortez* and *Steinbeck Remembered: Interviews with Friends and Acquaintances of John Steinbeck*, will appear on the Gary Shara show "Minding Your Business" on Comcast's community-access channel 15 to speak about John Steinbeck's associations, personal and professional, in the Santa Clara Valley area.
- **Andrea Galvacs**, our own WT copy editor, found so many mistakes on a professor's website that he has asked her to edit the entire website. Add website content editor to her skill set. Congrats, Andrea!

Each month a handful of our members stand up to share their accomplishments. Their good news makes it into *Accolades*, a place to see writer success stories no matter how big or small, in print. So go ahead, crow a little and send me your good news at j_mutz@yahoo.com. You deserve it! WT

Club Mentoring

by Dave LaRoche

Within the Networking Chair's portfolio is the item Club Mentoring, perhaps better called Orientation. However, it doesn't stop with a meeting because the new members attending are invited to ask questions and make suggestions throughout the duration of their membership. Sounds like mentoring to me (talk to Sara Aurich, our Networking Chair). In any case our last meeting was held at the Stevens Creek B&N on April 26 with those in the photo attending.



Mentoring Group meeting attendees:
Dave LaRoche, Marilyn Fahey, Sara Aurich, Eric Heilman, and Tim Null.
Photo: Dave LaRoche

We discussed it all: from history through purpose, governance, meetings, workshops and the conference, outreach, networking opportunities and right up to how they might get involved. We had fun, exchanged ideas, and ascertained that no mistake had been made in their joining.

That's the whole point, by the way—avoiding that mistake. Last year we lost 35 members at renewal time. Some moved away, some became otherwise challenged, but most left because they were not, in any way, integrated into our club. We took their money, said have a seat, and fully expected they would find their way alone to all of those things that keep us renewing in July—it ain't the food, folks. (I just had to say that—ask Betty. She'll tell you I'm a brat.)

Anyway, whether we'll stem attrition or not, the orientation of new members makes sense. Not only do they get to know us, we get to know them and believe me, wonderful new ideas come with new members if we reach for them. WT

Publish Your Book in California!

Part 1

by Victoria M. Johnson

Many of us scour the market directories in search of a publisher for our books. Often we already know the name of a potential publisher and we only need to find their address. We pack up our proposal and ship it off—often to New York. But we live in California. Why not look first at the publishers in our own backyard?

After a little research and a few phone calls, I found several successful publishers with impressive track records right here in the Bay Area. Here's a close up look at six of them. Hopefully you'll find at least one that's a perfect match for your book.

New World Library

www.NewWorldLibrary.com

Georgia Hughes has been editorial director at New World Library since 1999. She acquires and edits nonfiction books in the areas of spirituality, personal growth, sustainable business, nature and animals, and women's issues. Before joining New World Library, Georgia worked in bookstores and at Harper San Francisco and Prima Publishing.

"New World Library aims to publish books that inspire readers to improve their lives and the world. We are the 'little publisher that could,' publishing huge bestsellers such as *The Power of Now*, by Eckhart Tolle, but treating each of our books and authors as 'A-list,' lead titles that deserve and receive editorial and marketing approach. We don't publish a book we don't love. We're also 'green': our offices are partially powered by solar panels; 90% of our books are printed on 100% post-consumer waste recycled paper; we have compost bins, including worm-composting for food scraps; we use 'virtual' communication as often as possible, avoiding printing documents unnecessarily," Hughes says.

New World Library publishes between 35-40 new titles annually. In 2007, for example, they published 28 completely new books with 39 total projects, which included paperbacks of hardcovers, audios of published books, and reprints/repackages of books. New World accepts and receives many unsolicited and unagented proposals, and about 30% of their books are unagented.

Just how many proposals did Hughes read last year and of these how many did she buy? "How many did I read? Oh my. We receive nearly 3,000 proposals or queries a year. We look at them, but only about a tenth of that are read carefully and discussed. I personally bought about 15 projects last year, but some were from authors we'd already published." Over the years New World bought quite a few books from the slush pile. "This becomes less because our authors write new books and we have limited space on the list. Last year, we bought one book from the slush pile," Hughes said. Also last year, New World Library acquired about eight books from first-time authors.

When asked what types of projects she was currently seeking, Hughes said, "Books that take a fresh look and offer great advice for readers! We want books that have unique ideas and are well written. Our publishing areas include: animals, personal growth, Buddhism, spirituality, women's issues, relationships, and progressive business."

Is New World Library interested in series proposals? "We are open to series proposals, but it is best if a writer focuses on one really good idea well executed. We publish series books, but they start with one book that is successful."

What are the most common reasons Hughes rejects a manuscript? "It seems generic or derivative. Many authors think that pitching their idea is much like a major best-seller is a good idea, but we're looking for something that hasn't been written before, not something that is a wannabe or an imitation. Our favorite reaction to a submission is: 'What a great idea! Hasn't anyone done that already?'"

Hughes has advice for authors submitting to New World Library. "Please be

patient. It takes a great deal of time not only to write a good book but for us to review the proposals we receive. Put your best foot forward by doing your homework *ahead* of time. That includes developing a platform, teaching your topic, making sure you have a good title and solid approach, finding out about the competition. Write well, and be prepared to take direction and be flexible. Know the type of books we publish."

Submission guidelines:

www.newworldlibrary.com/client/client_pages/submissions.cfm

Weiser Books and Conari Press

www.conari.com

Caroline Pincus, Executive Editor, has worked in book publishing for more than 20 years, as an editor, ghost writer, and book doctor. In addition to acquiring books at Weiser and Conari, she maintains an independent consulting business working with select authors. She has published several *NY Times* best-selling authors and was previously Senior Editor at HarperOne.

Jan Johnson, Publisher, has worked in publishing for more than 35 years. She and her business partner, Michael Kerber, own Red Wheel/Weiser, LLC, which publishes Weiser Books and Conari Press. Previously she worked at Tuttle Press, HarperOne as editorial director, and Winston/Seabury Press, which was a division of CBS Publishing. She has edited hundreds of books, including several *NY Times* best-selling self-help books.

Conari Press was founded 21 years ago and has remained an independent press, publishing mostly nonfiction books that inspire people to better themselves and the world. They publish wellness and recovery books; alternative health books; inspiring gift books; books on, by, and for women. Some of their bestselling authors have had books in print for many years including Daphne Rose Kingma, MJ Ryan, Jean Bolen, Phil Cousineau, Hugh Prather, and Karen Casey to mention a few. Some of these authors have published (and indeed continue to publish) with larger houses, and they find Conari's personal attention to detail a refreshing experience.

Continued on page 14

The Journey of a Thousand Miles: Staged Readings, Spoken Word, Performance Poetry

by Lita Kurth

Hearing our writing spoken is quite a different experience from reading our words silently on the page; hearing them performed by an actor takes the experience one step further. I love events that mingle several arts (well, if they do it successfully): music and writing, drawing and writing, dance and writing. I got interested in staged readings when I put together a piece about California pioneer women that had “parts” for several different characters. A professional actor read them at the Writers on Writing conference at West Valley College, and when I saw the DVD, I thought, *Wow, this is great*. I was astonished, frankly, because I had worried that the piece was boring, bogged down in lengthy, unbroken description, but the professional performer enhanced it immensely.



Lita Kurth
Contributing Editor

We’ve all been to poorly attended readings in which writers mumble, and time drags. Staged readings or performance poetry hold potential for making readings more exciting for the audience and a more significant experience for everyone.

“Staged reading” originally was the word for a dry run of a play in which actors without costumes or a set, tried out a play. But since the early 1990’s, fiction and poetry have been staged too. Known as Spoken Word or Performance Poetry, they are fine arts in themselves, though like so many good things, a little under the radar. Of course, Spoken Word could also be seen as a revival of radio readings, like *A Prairie Home Companion* is, and a companion of Poetry Slams.

Perhaps the most professional group doing spoken word performances, i.e., performing every single word of a story (and making money at it!) is Word for Word, a San Francisco group based at the Z Space Center. Their latest project is the James Baldwin story, “Sonny’s Blues.”

In researching this column, I got in touch with cutting-edge spoken word performers Stephen Future and Miracle Jones (fictional names, I’m thinking) who perform the hazardous duty of reading their own fiction to musical accompaniment in Brooklyn bars. They allowed me to pick their transplanted-from-Austin brains about what to do and what to avoid when launching a spoken word event in a bar. (fictioncircus.com is their website, which accepts profanity-laden stories [but not poetry!]. Caution: this is a very fun, youth-oriented site utilizing all the seven deadly words. You are warned.)

Lita: *Any work especially suitable or unsuitable for this type of presentation?*

Stephen Future: Anything long or hard to follow. 3,500 words or so is the extreme upper limit of dense prose that people can pay attention to. It’d probably be very hard to read a super-subtle character study . . . Proust wouldn’t necessarily play well at a Fiction Circus—maybe the opening page, certainly not the long descriptions of flowers along the Guermantes Way.

Miracle Jones: You should never read a story longer than about 2500 words, and that’s even pushing it. That is definitely the upper limit of the average a-----’s attention span. Stories should be clear, lucid, and move forward quickly, without being especially well written. People perk up at the five following themes: their own names, the name of the bar they are in, p----, c---, and d----. If you can write a story and put all five of those themes in, you are gonna get some applause.

Lita: *What are hazards to watch out for?*

Stephen Future: Make sure you’ve read your story aloud at some point before the show. Otherwise you might have a really, really bad time realizing that you hate the story you’ve chosen to read. Remember to make your physical presentation interesting, but not to overpower the story with it. If you make flyers advertising your show, you should hand them out. Make sure to clear your free drinks with the bar-

tender well in advance of the show.

Miracle Jones: Coffee shops do not serve alcohol, and you need alcohol to make a fiction reading work. Stay away from coffee shops. We’ve done shows on the rooftops of drug co-ops, in semi-abandoned buildings in the East Village, and to hostile business owners who did not remember that they had booked us. Often, the thing you have to watch out for most is guns, unless you are playing to a crowd of very attentive and earnest young people and then you have to watch out for chicken pox.

Lita: *Miscellaneous post-performance insights?*

Stephen Future: . . . We’ve been doing this for a long time in Austin, Texas, and for a few months now in New York. It’s a little better in New York, but we can still clear a room like nobody’s business. So it’s better to be the closing act than the opening act if you can swing it . . . Everyone who stays for the show or who just happens to show up for it really likes it, but no one sees one of our flyers or ads and thinks “Boy, that’s what I want to do Saturday night. Sit calmly and listen to short fiction being read aloud for an hour.” We try to spice it up with music and art and jokes. . .

Miracle Jones: Every writer in the world should crawl out of their holes, put on their best suit, get some damn musical accompaniment, and go put on Fiction Circuses wherever they can, however they can. . .

So there you have it, fresh from the other coast. WT

AUTHOR’S NOTE: A wonderful website, spokenwordart.com, allows you to listen to poetry performances, rank them, and even add yourself as a link. Now who wants to do a poetry-and-fiction performance in the South Bay? Email me: lakurth@yahoo.com

**The WritersTalk
deadline is *always* the
16th of the month.**

Henry

by Dave LaRoche

I had seen him pull his old brown pick-up into Angie's driveway a hundred times before. He'd get out her mower and do the lawn, a little trimming and pruning, then pack up and be gone in no more than half an hour. When he saw me, he'd wave. This day he came across the street instead, sauntering stiffly as if his knees didn't work, and with only a nod he began.

She sent me out to fix the fence. Well, the fence was down 'cause they were building a pool and 'course they had to haul buildin' crap through it and back from the hole there ... and I told her that they'd just have to take it down again. She said no, no, it wouldn't make any difference, she wanted it fixed. She has lots of money, so it's just spread a little here and a little there ... and damned little at that, you understand. Well, doin' fences was OK when I was younger, even then I had help, but now ... I'm 70 years old and, especially when it's hot like today, I get tired ... and I tried to 'splain it to her but you see, I've been working for her mother for 50 years and she thinks it's just like it was. Her mother's a good boss. Ya know, I was with Ford for 29 years, then retired. I told her I would do it, the fence, but it would cost her again when they were finished with the pool. I don't mind doin' a few lawns like the old woman's and Angie's here, but fences!? If I had help ... maybe. I could go down to Story and King and pick up some Mexicans and take 'em out there but they don't know nothing and they don't want to work so I'd jus owe 'em and I'd get nothin' from 'em, ya understand.

He was tall and a bit slumped with long arms that had worked hard and hands that were scarred and carried dirt that had been there for decades. His dark eyes glistened from deep under heavy brows on a face brown and wrinkled by years in the sun. It hung on his skull like an old coat on a peg but arranged well when he talked. His mouth was big and when he spoke you could see his teeth were flattened out from use but straight and white—though not likely to have seen many dentists.

I could quit'n move to the valley. I own

two pieces of property out there—bought 'em in '62 for \$7000. Nobody believes me now—\$7000. I married a woman and we moved in to one and had some kids and I was fixin' it up. I was building, what you call it ... a rumpus room out back. Had poured the slab and was getting ready to start framing and one morning I got up to go to work and a man come to the door and gave me this paper—a “supeeni,” he said. She was goin' with the kids and wanted a divorce.

I got this lawyer. Humph ... and he and her lawyer got together and they talked. Shit, they talked ... and they talked, and it was costing me money. Every couple weeks he'd send me a bill and I'd pay it. And then they said it was time to appear in front of the judge and you know where they took us? Palo Alto. They said I was an alcoholic and would have to give her \$1000 a month. An alcoholic is someone who drinks all the time and misses work, and I never missed a day of work—least while I was married to her. Well, my lawyer, he was sitting there behind this big-ass desk—'bout this big—and telling me why things were going the way they were going, why I wasn't to get my kids back and I said to him, “Do I owe you any money ... any money at all?” He said, “Nooo ...you're paid up.” So I told him to wrap up all the fuckn' paperwork and that I'd give him two days to do that and get it to me and after that, he was finished.

Well ... What's yer name anyway, mine's Henry ... nice to make your acquaintance. I see ya over here all the time putzin' around.

As I was sayin', to my surprise, the paperwork did show up on the third day and I took it to this little short man of a lawyer down on First Street at Taylor—he was there for awhile then moved up on El Camino—and he said bullshit. Give me three days, that's all I need, three days.

He paused to look across the street to Angie's lawn. His eyes had a distant air as if they were checking out the next life, and I thought he might welcome it.

Angie's mower ain't working. See that yellow-like shrub over there on the left? Humph, the last time I was here using her mower, I pushed it under that shrub and it crapped out ... sort of went puft

and then stopped and I couldn't get it a-goin' again. This time I brought my own. She's a nice lady, Angie. Do you know she's been working at that same store for thirty-five years? She doesn't have to, just likes to, I guess.

When I finish here, I got an appointment at two and then got to go over and water her vegetables. The squash needs watering every three days but the tomatoes can go a whole week. Beans are like squash. I got to slow down—I'm 70 years old—I'm just going to tell her I'm through with it and not do the fence. I used to do the whole thing... landscaping, including the fences, but now I'm just going to tell her that she should get a landscaper or a fence man to do it.

This little short lawyer—he's probably dead now, yeah probably—he said the judge was crooked and my lawyer was crooked. He made a few phone calls and wrote a letter and in three days my kids were back and I had to pay her a thousand dollars. That was all ... a thousand dollars and she was gone.

Yep, I'm gonna tell her to get a landscaper to do that fence. WT

Writing Life, continued from page 1

Tim was a classroom teacher for 14 years in the United States and overseas, and has been a university lecturer in education for 16 years. He currently teaches at Santa Clara University and visits many schools and other venues as a guest author and storyteller. He has taught numerous courses and workshops and gives regular talks on a variety of topics.

Whether to hear Tim hum and sing at the same time, which he can, get tips of how to do “can-opener” splash-dives from one of the world's greatest, or to learn from a master storyteller, teacher, and lecturer about the art of writing life, this is a meeting to not pass up. See you all at the Lookout Inn in Sunnyvale, Tuesday, June 10, 6 pm sharp, to enjoy great food, networking, socializing, and fun, and to meet and hear author and poet Tim Myers. WT

Kathy and Me

by Betty Auchard

Kathy, stunted and sturdy, is my personal gardening munchkin. I'm not lonesome when she's helping. She trims, grooms, plants, and prunes, and wears no gloves, no hat, nor one bit of UV protection. Her tanned skin is leather, hardened from weather, and sun eats her face as she digs, rakes, cultivates, and bakes in the heat all day with no break until sucking a few puffs from a cigarette. Even then, she stops only briefly — a moment or three — in the inviting shade of the mulberry tree in the North East corner of my garden. I can see munchkin sweat dribbling down her forehead.

I don't mind that she uses my time for a drag on a fag. She deserves whatever time needed to shed her addiction, but she may as well pull weeds while she's doing it.

I have my own problems which don't include smoking, so Kathy and I talk about more than what's growing in my yard. We sip iced tea and we chit-chat on the porch in the cool, dry shade of my patio. We were two lonely girls, looking for love when I discovered she *thought* she had found it again. I called her to say, "You didn't come here today. Where were you?"

"I've been with my old boyfriend from college," she said, "but I'll work in your garden next Thursday."

Kathy had a boyfriend and I had none? I felt more alone than ever. Unwilling to be beat and feeling miserably abandoned, I invented a story of my own. With a face so straight it would fool a plate, I lied real well and said, "Thursday is out, 'cuz MY lover is arriving to ... I mean *from* Fremont, I *think*, or Gilroy, I believe. I'm so muddled with love I can't remember spit, so Munchkin, please tell me, can you fertilize my faded lawn by this Friday?"

She calmly replied, "No can do, Boo-Boo. Friday's no good. My *real* job is actually at the market, you know."

Yeah, I knew. Her real job was actually at the market.

Kathy's gardening became casual and my lawn grew pale, while the daisies

seemed dead and the weeds grew as high as an elephant's eye; as high as our two hearts that reached for the sky while we looked for love in the clouds, oh, yeah ... we were looking for love in the clouds.

The point of my tale is that when my garden is drab, it's probably because of an interlude in my gardener's love life. Whenever *she's* occupied with affairs of the heart, I'm at the keyboard *inventing* my own. And when the flora of my homestead looks neglected, you know that two women are distracted with the longings of two ladies lookin' for love. But her love-life is authentic and mine is concocted. And even though Munchkin and I both love plants, who needs real petals when our hearts are blooming with lust?

Sadly, though, right when her breast was bursting with desire ... my gardener friend got recycled. Kathy was in very sad condition and my foliage was even worse when it joined her in weeks of grieving. Her misery might have made me envious but, instead, I rushed to the keyboard to get as much mileage from it as possible. I am quite literate when trouble is brewing.

So here's what happened to my gardener. Quite out of the blue, her old beau announced, "I'm getting married this week. Are you happy for me?"

Pretending to be happy, Kathy's mouth made a tiny curve that her ex-beau mistook for a smile. He left and she stayed in bed for many moons, it seemed. And that's when my Shasta daisies bit the dust and the snails ate everything they could slime their way through. Though my heart ached for her, I was torn with envy that she had actually loved and lost. Not to be out done, *again*, I oiled my creative gears and made up a quick scenario that matched her sad story with my own. My voice oozed with phony compassion when I lied, "I know *exactly* how you feel, for I've been deserted as well; my lover dumped me up for his *wife*."

Kathy was shocked but she bought it, hook, line, and whatever. She really felt bad so I tried to look sad while she whimpered and sighed. I could almost imagine how she was feeling, not quite, but I could *almost* imagine how she felt. I hoped she'd find a new guy real soon

so my garden could get back in bloom because after two weeks, I could have won an Ugly Yard Contest. But Kathy finally pulled herself together, smoked a few cigars and renounced love for a year, but, what a dear. She returned to my plot and made my garden look so good that it made strangers inquire, "Who do you *hire* to do this yard work?"

My answer was plain: "Kathy's her name and gardening is her game. She trims, grooms, and prunes when there's no guy in her rooms, like an old boyfriend around to really get her down. That's when she's *especially* efficient, oh yeah; that's when she really digs in."

And wanting to be supportive, I offer sound advice. "Kathy," I say, "Guys get in our way. With no fella who's game, I feel just the same. Now that they're gone, we can finally move on. There's no lover in my heart — or my head, or my bed. No boyfriend is sharing my space (*how sad*). No lover to ravage my time (*how sublime*), nobody to love me and hug me and kiss me, nobody to nibble, and nuzzle, and cuddle in the morning and nighttime, at noontime, and spoon time ... no one to love in any way." But we'll meet a good guy someday! Oh, yeah. We'll meet a good guy someday. **WT**

Texas Gold

Poem and painting Carolyn Donnell



A golden haze spreads
from my eyes to my heart
coating my universe in
a glaze of glory.

Dark forests behind
warn of hidden dangers,
but only if I abandon fields
of flowers to venture in.

Doctor, Hide

by Pat Bustamante

Sue Lin was interested in schizophrenia because of her mother but she became a general practitioner as the swiftest way to move from scholar to resident to doctor at the local county clinic.

Her mother who had been born in Hong Kong but emigrated before Sue was born delighted in screaming: "You give up too soon! More money if you study specialism!" ("Specialty," Sue muttered.) She lived at home to save money but it was increasingly clear she needed to get out. Almost thirty. Marriage no option because "she married her work" (another favorite rant of her mother's). The clinic whose range of patients tended to bulge at the poverty level overscheduled to the point of abuse.

"You work all night again!" After the yelling her mother produced a hot meal and soothing tea. Sue while catching up on the computer sipped tea absently, ignoring her mother's sighs.

She gave her email address when

patients asked. Since she was paid a fixed income it mattered little to her what hours she donated. The crowded waiting rooms tended to replace honesty with anxiety; a hurried patient might well forget to report the most important thing.

Do you drink or use drugs? Do you have a clean place to live? Will you tell me about the lump that is bothering you or will you try to think it magically away ...

One correspondent intrigued her because she could not recall the name on the header or any visit that pinned down who he was. He used English in a foreign but creative way, specializing in calling her attention to various medical reports and news. "... did you read this? What do you think?" Intelligent but very elusive; when she admitted she did not recall who this was she got a happy face by return mail.

It could be a colleague having fun or any member of the clinic staff. Sue looked forward to the insightful tips. Her tired fingers flew over keys as she shut out her mother's new tirade. Sue sighed. Her mother insisted on working

at the fast-food noodle palace; no need for it, just another provocation.

Finally Sue leaned back. "What?" Her screen had flipped due to slipping fingers.

"You think my advice is nothing, you think I wear dirty aprons, burn my hands for you, that is all I am?"

"... of course not ..."

"I was a somebody once! You never listen to me you make that face, no respect!"

"No ..." Something had happened, she was in some unknown file, something "she" had written? Wait! These were original messages from her "tipster" but clearly had been created on *her* computer! For a wild moment Sue thought: I've flipped, I have been unknowingly writing emails to myself! Her mother's stare was drenched in guilt ...

"You!" Sue whispered. The intelligent, amusing stranger on the Internet ... No Not possible ...

Her mother twisted her hands, squeezed her eyes shut. "Only way to talk to you," she whispered back. WT

We Have a Winner In the Worth 500 Words Contest

She is **Pat Bustamante**, and her winning entry is featured at the top of this page.

The rules were simple: just write something to suit the illustration provided by Betty Auchard. Genre didn't matter; the only qualification was a maximum length of 500 words.



For her effort, Pat will receive a winner's certificate and a cash award of \$35.

Thank you to all the entrants in this first Worth 500 Words contest. The quality of the entries—both poems and short stories—was so high that the winner could not be determined until the last vote was counted.

Congratulations, Pat!

EXCERPT FROM *DANCING MAMA*

Flood

by Juliana Richmond

A strange sound, like the hooting of an owl, woke me in the middle of that July night in 1932. I lay in bed, listening to the pounding of raindrops on the roof, frightened, yet not knowing why. The sound came again, this time louder, closer to my room, and suddenly I knew it was Mother uttering those whimpering, frightened cries.

"Dedie, get up!" she said urgently. "There's water—lots of water. We have to go!"

Go where I wondered. Why? We'd had rain before, cloudbursts even, in Sioux City, Iowa and never had to go anywhere. What was Mother talking about? And why was I suddenly afraid? I wished Daddy were home, but he was a traveling man and away during the week.

Mother was shaking Sonny's bed now, pulling the covers off him. "Get up. Get dressed!" she commanded both of us. "We have to get out of the house! I

looked out the kitchen window and there was just a *wall* of water, like a wave, coming at me. The basement's full of water and it's starting to come in the living room! "

I got out of bed, wide-awake now, and pulled on my underpants under my nightgown. Mother grabbed three-year-old Bobby from his small bed, slinging his sleepy body over her shoulder like a sack of potatoes, and disappeared, her nightgown billowing behind her as she ran into her bedroom.

"Hurry, Sonny," I said. "We've got to get dressed fast!"

Off came my nightgown; on went an undershirt and pair of coveralls. Shoes and socks—we'd need those, I thought, clumsily tying the shoelaces. I ran into Mother's room and stood, puzzled at the sight of her smoothing silk stockings onto her legs; sliding feet into her good shoes. Bobby, dressed, sat on the bed watching.

"Come, children, it's time," Mother said again in that urgent tone, edged with panic. Still in her nightgown she

Continued on page 12

Dawn 5/22

It's time for my walk. I step outside and read the early sky. To westward, a white moon pauses, waiting its exit cue. Away in the east, the glow in the sky pledges us a new day, and the whisper of breeze on my cheek brings news, news of today's fresh mixture of earth and sea and sky. And what faint scent hangs in the air? Remnant, perhaps, of neighbor's fireplace warmth, of glow on a lover's cheek. No, it brings a more distant memory, memory of a campfire, of warmth and light on an evening by a lake, of fragrance of broken boughs of pine carrying my dreams to the sky. And, is it true, the aroma of my father's fresh-cooked trout? No, something not long gone, a hike down a manzanita trail, with the California sun blazing hot upon the land. The sun blazes, pines and manzanita answer, and sun-driven flames slash through a forest like that one of my near-forgotten youth. Now images came unbidden to my home, of hills aflame, of trees compressed onto a glowing screen, like small replicas of those kitchen matches once held lightly in a boy's fingertips as the flames burn downward, daring him to hold one second more, one second more, one second more, til the pain begins. Now Earth holds up the trees for us, for one year more, one decade more, one oilfield more, one coal mine more, daring the pain to grow more intense, too intense, til we fling that match away. Then shall we fling away our Earth when it, too, is burnt down? Or hold it in blistering hands as the sun blazes, oceans rise, And glaciers melt? And now I wonder as I stroll, will my father's trout still jump in that mountain lake? Will those pines still stand in the twilight as the fragrance of broken boughs carries the dreams of tomorrow's boy to the sky?

—Jamie Miller

Flood, continued from page 11

scooped Bobby from the bed and shooed Sonny and me ahead of her toward the front door.

"See, the water's starting to come through the register," she said and I saw a thin trickle edging the square register that vented heat from the coal furnace in winter. Mother grabbed my hand. I tugged at Sonny's and we stepped out onto the front porch.

I stood stock still at the sight that met my eyes. Water, dirty muddy water, fast moving water, covered the front lawn, rolled swiftly down the street. Mother pulled my hand with a sharp yank.

"We've got to get across! It's higher on the other side. We'll go toward the Eckmond's house. Come on!" She stepped boldly out onto where the sidewalk usually was. She'll ruin her silk stockings, I thought. Pulling at my younger brother Sonny's hand and holding onto Mother's tightly, I walked into the swirling water. It sloshed

against my eleven year old thighs. The water was warm, like the rainstorms we always had in summer when we kids could go outside and run around in our bare feet squishing mud between our toes. I could have gone barefoot, I thought.

We splashed thru the torrent. People, neighbors on the other side were cheering us on. "You'll make it," they cried and held out hands as we got closer. When I felt the first stub of curb on my foot, I turned to look at the expanse we'd crossed and saw an uprooted tree ricocheting down the street. What if we'd been caught in its branches! I could see myself struggling against the tree, being pushed down into the water. I shivered and turned away from the sight. Strong arms pulled me upward to dry ground. We were safe!

I turned to look at the house I'd always lived in. I would never live there again, but I didn't know it then. WT

May Recap, continued from page 1

About that time, a friend recommended Susan Page's *The Shortest Distance Between You and a Published Book*, which Michele came to use as her guide. A book proposal and New York agent later, *Appetite for Profit* made the rounds to all the major publishers and was rejected for such reasons as depressing, dislike of topic, didn't bother to read, and can't sell as in "this book's already been done." (Think *Fast Food Nation*.)



Michele Simon

About a year later, Nation Books offered her a publishing contract with a fall publication date—the hitch was a four month timeline in order to finish the manuscript. She met the timeline; *Appetite for Profit* went to publication and became successful—for a time. As it turned out, Nation Books did not do a sterling job with publicity and marketing, so Michele hired her own publicist. About the time sales were doing well, the distributor for Nation Books went into bankruptcy, essentially holding her book hostage. No availability can mean literary death of a book. Frustration at how the marketing and distribution worked made for one cranky author—who once again was forced to take matters into her own hands and fight a lengthy battle to get her book out of warehouses and back on sale.

In the end, Michele succeeded in the task she set out for herself: she got her story told and established herself as a credible speaker on her topic. But the path so success was far from a smooth one—it seemed that practically everything that could go wrong did—and the message to first-time authors is be prepared to persevere. WT

"nice" and how its meaning has changed 180 degrees over time) or the incorporation of neologisms from many sources; for example, industry (floppy disk), business (outsource), literature (grok), and street slang (bling). Changes in structure, it seems to me, come much more slowly. The grammar and syntax of today are not very different from the grammar and syntax of three hundred years ago.

So, I suppose, the jury has yet to go out on the matters of galleying one's copy or rooming one's patient. All the arguments haven't yet been mounted.

Meanwhile, you can do your bit to help preserve the purity of the language by renewing your CWC membership today. WT

Writing is creating or spinning dreams for other people so they won't have to bother doing it themselves."

Beth Henley

Nipper's Nits Here No More



As this column goes into its fourth year, I have decided to stop writing it for *Writer'sTalk*. I have enjoyed entertaining and enlightening all my readers for these many lessons—some

designed to teach, some to test, and some to amuse. I have had a lot of good feedback from you and will continue to put the nits on my web site. When you want to read a monthly update, go to www.patdeckernipper.com. I'd love to hear from you after you make the switch.

Sincerely,
Pat Decker Nipper

What I Learned from Judging the Basil Stevens Contest

by *Meredy Amyx*

How does a panel of judges select the winners of a writing contest? I had no idea until I agreed to serve as one of five volunteer judges of the 2006 Basil Stevens Memorial Writing Contest. What I learned from that experience went well beyond matters of process and matters of achieving consensus. I had an opportunity to glimpse how my own writing might be viewed objectively in a judging situation, an awareness that could help my work succeed.



Meredy Amyx

The contest held in memory of Basil Stevens, a sportswriter late of SBW, is open to any previously unpublished essay, article, story, or poem, 750 words maximum, with a sports theme. When organizer Bob Garfinkle asked me to serve as a judge of the 2006 contest, I almost said no because I have not the least interest in sports. But I figured that my indifference would favor objectivity. I wouldn't find the subject matter of one entry more attractive than another, and my ignorance of all of them would make it easy to focus on the writing. So I agreed, both for the experience and to help the club.

Even though I'd heard two speakers at South Bay Writers Club meetings recommend contest judging as a great learning experience, I didn't realize how much this educational opportunity was going to teach me as a writer. Not speaking for any other judges in this or any other setting, I want to share with you the lessons I took away with me. This is the low-cal version, better for your diet: fat-free and with no sugar added.

- It may not be easy to spot a winner really fast, but it is easy to spot a loser.
- It is difficult but necessary to separate a sense of what is well done from a preference for what you like.
- The pieces that met my highest criterion turned out to be those that delivered what they promised,

regardless of genre; few actually achieved that.

- There is a greater diversity of opinion than I ever thought possible with respect to what constitutes a poem.
- Strong creative expression paired with technical proficiency would be a real attention-getter.
- Endings are really important.
- Tallying preferential rankings in advance of meeting face to face can greatly speed the process.
- A group of judges of extremely different tastes can converge fairly rapidly and relatively painlessly even when no two had the same first choice and no one piece was even on everyone's semifinalist list.
- Being the objectively best entry may be outweighed by being a good representative of the judging body; that is, the winning entry speaks for the group as well as for the author and must, like a beauty queen, be a good ambassador.
- A piece that is nobody's first choice can still come out on top.

This exercise was oddly stimulating, despite the fact that most of the entries had left their authors' hands far too soon. So many good ideas were lost in disappointing delivery. Among the 55 entries, there were few real standouts, few complete and polished pieces. The actual task of reading them all several times was not a great pleasure.

In advance of meeting, the panel of judges did some preliminary rankings so that when we met in person we could concentrate on the semifinalists. The in-person deliberations were the best part. I liked hearing what moved other people and what they considered meritorious. I enjoyed the process of championing selections, discussing pros and cons of pieces, and justifying vetoes. And I found that the work of converging with a group was in itself a worthy challenge.

Even though the time it took felt burdensome, the rewards of the activity exceeded the cost. And that makes it a winner. WT

Weiser Books was founded 51 years ago. Under the Weiser Books imprint they publish books across the entire spectrum of occult and esoteric subjects. Weiser's mission is to publish quality books that will make a difference in people's lives, without, as a house, advocating any one path or field of study. They publish books on astrology, tarot, Western mystery tradition, Wicca and other pagan traditions, and new age and new consciousness. Weiser's authors range from Aleister Crowley to Drunvalo Melchizedek.

Conari Press and Weiser Books accepts unsolicited or unagented material. "We respond to query letters and entertain proposals and finished manuscripts. For the latter, please query first. And include an SASE and/or email contact for a response," says Pincus. Under the two different imprints, approximately 60 books are published per year in two seasons.

"We're acquiring for 2009 and beyond, looking for, on the Conari list, books that have a strong take-away message to help readers improve their lives. We're publishing lifestyle books, including some that offer alternative health and wellness guidelines. We're particularly interested in 12-step and other addiction/recovery books. And, we're looking for quirky, wonderful, sometimes funny, always inspiring gift books," says Johnson. "For the Weiser list, we're looking for what people interested in new consciousness and alternative ways of looking at the world want to read."

When asked how many books have you bought from the slush pile? Pincus says, "This year? Maybe about five so far." What about the number of proposals you read last year and of these how many did you buy? "Who can count. We get at least 100 submissions a week. And we do open and read at least the cover letter of each and every one of them."

Last year Conari Press and Weiser Books bought about ten first-time authors. They are not open to series proposals. They prefer to buy a book at a time. The most common reasons they reject a manuscript are that the book is out of their subject areas or is something

they don't think they can successfully publish and sell through their channels.

Johnson and Pincus offer this advice to authors submitting to them. "Write a clear and focused query letter. Do your homework about the competition, about the house you're submitting too—we don't, for example, publish fiction. And, yet, we get a lot of submissions for novels. Do some research or get some professional advice, and do a knock-your-socks-off proposal. There are several good books on writing a book proposal. We like Susan Page's *The Shortest Distance Between You and a Published Book*."

Submission guidelines:
www.conari.com/company/submissions.jsp

Ten Speed Press

www.tenspeed.com

Brie Mazurek is a Senior Editor at Ten Speed Press, a Berkeley-based independent publisher of lifestyle nonfiction books. Ten Speed Press is a backlist, author-friendly publisher specializing in practical how-to guides, cookbooks, and self-help books. Brie has been in publishing for more than nine years.

"Across our adult imprints (Ten Speed Press, Celestial Arts, and Crossing Press), we publish about 80-90 titles per year, including some revised and paperback editions. Our children's imprint (Tricycle Press) publishes about 30 titles per year," says Mazurek. "We're independently owned, and we seek out books that take a distinct or quirky approach to their given subject. We put a lot of care into packaging each book, and we involve the author in all stages of the process, from editing to the look of the book to publicity. Also, we pride ourselves in maintaining an active backlist and keeping our books in print long after they first hit the shelves."

In general, Ten Speed Press publishes lifestyle nonfiction. Mazurek describes what they are currently seeking, "Ten Speed Press publishes mostly how-to books, such as cookbooks or books about changing careers or getting into college. We also publish gift and pop culture, and we're branching out more with our craft books. Celestial Arts and Crossing Press are our body-mind-spirit imprints, with Celestial focusing more on self-help, inspirational, health, and

parenting, and Crossing more on alternative healing modalities and spirituality. My areas of special interest include self-help, spirituality, health, healthy cooking, sustainable living, and pop culture."

Ten Speed Press has bought very few books from the slush pile, but they do look at them. Mazurek explains, "I'm relatively new to acquisitions, but in general, we probably acquire about one proposal for every fifty we receive."

As for the number of first-time authors, "I don't have exact figures, but we're very receptive to first-time authors," Mazurek said.

Does Ten Speed Press consider series proposals? "Yes, though we generally like to start with a single book and see how it performs before committing to a series. While we don't usually do multibook deals, we do appreciate authors thinking ahead about their next project."

Mazurek cites the most common reason she rejects a manuscript, "It doesn't fit into our publishing categories. For example, we don't publish memoirs, fiction, or poetry."

Mazurek recommends authors interested in Ten Speed Press familiarize themselves with their list. "Make sure we're the right publisher for your work before submitting. And do your market research, so that you can target your audience and distinguish your book from the competition. It also helps to have a platform for your work. If you aren't already established as an authority in your field, then attend conferences, form connections; write articles or a blog, get your name out there. Authors who show a history of dedication by building a strong platform are attractive to us, since that will make their book more marketable. Show passion and be enthusiastic about promoting your work. Good luck!"

Victoria M. Johnson is published in non-fiction. She's an award-winning author and screenwriter, and writes medical romances. Visit her website www.VictoriaMJohnson.com

View from the Board

by *Dave LaRoche*

Our monthly board meeting was held at Dave LaRoche's on May 5, Jeannine Vegh, Edie Matthews and Cathy Bauer absent.

The Prez announced:

- 40 CWC-emblazoned tote bags (purchase, net \$3.18 per, authorized in April) are now inventory.
- Sara Aurich has replaced G Dow (taking new job) as Networking Chair.
- New-member mentoring continues with four attending in April.
- Marilyn Fahey, a "mentoring graduate," has indicated an interest in the Youth Group and will make contact with Mt. Pleasant HS, where related activity is functioning.

Alex Leon, VP, reported: His program line up through the end of the year and that 70 had attended our April meeting—applause for everyone.

- May—Michele Simon
- June—Tim Myers
- July—Workshop and Summer BBQ
- Aug—Dahr Jamail
- Sep—East of Eden
- Oct—Steve Bhaerman (tentative)
- Nov—Norman Solomon
- Dec—Holiday Bash

Jeremy Osborne, treasurer, reported: Healthy balances have not moved noticeably during this fiscal year and budgets and cash flows are now complete.

Dave LaRoche, as Central Board Rep, reported:

- The quarterly meeting was held in SJ at the Courtyard Marriot on May 4, Prez Anthony Focarelli presiding. As yet, no reduction in popular face-to-face meetings and concomitant costs in spite of a bylaws vote last year.
- Rewrite of Policies and Procedures continues with each section approved by a unanimous vote.
- State organization now with \$52K in assets and 1182 members.
- IRS now affirmed that CWC and subordinates are 501(c)3.
- State anthology "Exploratory Group"

transitioned into "Editorial Group" and is ready for submittals. Book to be published in 2009 commemorating the CWC centennial.

- Slate for 2008-09 year presented: Casey Wilson; Prez, David George; VP, Carol Celeste; Secretary, and Kathy Urban; Treasurer.
- State organization will celebrate its centennial with an extraordinary event—Donna McCrohan Rosenthal, East Sierra Branch, is chairing the effort, and seeking suggestions.
- SBW part of the "CWC History," written by Bob Garfinkle, has been submitted.

Marjorie Johnson, Membership, reported: SBW now has 194 members.

Bill Baldwin reported: The Open Mics are going well and getting stronger. See Events Calendar on the website or *WritersTalk* for schedule.

Dick Amyx reported that May *Writers-Talk* (231 copies of 24pp each) mailed May 1 at a cost of \$247.

Edie Matthews, EoE Chair, reported (via email): East of Eden conference progresses with announcement mailings to 1200 people, publicity visits to three other branches, notices to all branch editors, postcards at the printer's, eight agents booked to date, keynoters well filled out, and 25 registrants to date.

Sara Aurich, Networking Chair, reported: "Writers Eye" reading group to start soon at B&N, Stevens Creek, meeting on the third Tuesday; poetry critique group to start—those interested contact her; and a new drive for "experts" willing to share their experiences to shore up wanting scenes in our writing—please talk to Sara.

Nominating Chair, Suzy Paluzzi reports: One candidate for prez, two for VP, one each for offices of secretary and treasurer and that several she contacted were interested in running for office in the next year.

Dick Amyx's anthology plan was accepted unanimously.

Jeremy Osborne's motion to authorize \$250 for the purchase of a video camera was tabled until next meeting.

Next meeting will be held on June 2. Members are welcome to attend with advanced notice to the President or Secretary. WT

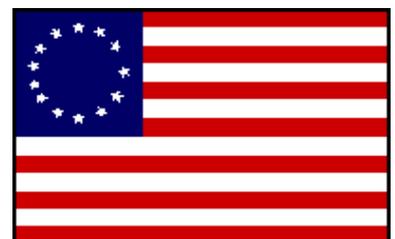
CWC, SBW, and Our Basis of Governance

by *Dave LaRoche*

It may be enlightening, surprising, expected, depending upon your insight into organizations like ours, the CWC and the South Bay Writers, but whatever you suspect or assume, we operate with formal guidance in hand. Here is how it stacks up. At the highest level, we have a State Charter (granted by the Secretary of State), a constitution, set of bylaws, a collection of policies and procedures, and the "law"—formally approved, subordinate and complementary Motions that provide day-to-day operational guidelines. At our branch level, consistent with the foregoing, are bylaws, policies and protocols, and our own board legislation. Baked through all, judiciously and with love of our craft, is tradition.

What is this about, Dave, you may ask. We come to the meetings, pay our dues, participate as we have time—why do we need to know this? Well, the truth is we don't *need* to know the gritty substance because we have elected officers who do, and as they plan and execute our activities and events, they do so with this "governance" in mind. The purpose here is simply to remind and inform us that such is the case and these documents exist. They are the foundation of our board's thought and guidance for its direction and should you be interested in knowing more, they are publicly available.

On our meeting reception table you can find a copy of our SBW Bylaws, our local Policies and Protocols, and a synopsis of the other related documents. Help yourself to copies. Additionally, if anyone has need for the synopsis material, please make a request of our president or secretary and they will see that you receive the copies. WT



Prowl, continued from page 2

“Hardball”—Obama deflecting scurrilous innuendos from Hillary—and still the problem, unresolved.

Quietly I re-entered my office and closed the door and again the frenetic jumping and dashing. The squirrel scampered up the blinds, lost footing and fell backward onto my plot board, up and banged his head hard against the sill, exploded back to the desk and zipped around again to the window—which now, armed with professional advice, I wanted to open and did. Of course behind it was the screen, in place for a decade—molecules exchanged. As I wrestled with the damn screen, the squirrel shot wildly across a book shelf to bounce off a watercolor I had picked up last year, tripped over a pocket knife of my father’s and slipped down into a two-inch crack between a file cabinet and the wall. There was a horrible screech, some sorrowful death-sounding chirps—then silence.

With a mighty tug, I pulled the cabinet over an inch where it was blocked by a credenza that weighed in at just under a

ton. Beaming in a flashlight, I could see the little guy squirreled tightly into the boxed corner, no movement. I prodded gently with a yardstick, still no movement, or sound. Shit, he’s dead and of course I was responsible.

Hours passed as I fashioned a hoe-like device intended to scoop out the little corpse, but when finished and I approached, he jolted then lurched deeper into his corner. He’s alive! I brought fresh water, diced pecans, borrowed some kibble from our Shih Tzu, and closed the door softly behind me.

Occasionally over the next three days, the “Prowl” still slipping, I dared to enter quietly and peek—no movement. About the third day, seeing the squirrel in the same orientation, I prodded with my yardstick—ever so gently of course. This caused a tremor followed by a lurch more snugly into the corner. Relieved, I again experienced hope—considered flowers and a card.

On the morning of the fourth day, I approached tentatively, expectations lowered and hoe-device in hand. A breeze from the bay, it seemed, had

blown papers around and the earlier scurrying, that I only noticed now, had certainly left a mess. I pointed my beam down into the corner where I expected the brown shadow of curled squirrel to reflect, but only Berber beige shone back. I got to my knees for a closer look—no squirrel! I crawled around; poking my light into corners not viewed for years, every dusty cubby, and maze of wires; in the closet, under the credenza, behind the books. Except for me, and a few cloistered spiders, it was most certainly an unoccupied room. I have to say I rejoiced, even as I knelt in some squirrel droppings.

Out back I see a clear sky. A northerly breeze moves lazily through shimmering leaves and the morning is alive with tree chatter; furry guys with twitching tails hop from limb to limb playing tag. Satisfied and relieved, I replace the window screen and sit down at my computer. But, if I had a pole handy and a hound, you can bet I’d be up north, moseying through Knight’s Meadow and on to some pickerel fishin’. **WT**

Good ideas!

Bad Ideas

CREATIVE

IDEAS

The SBW anthology needs a title. Please send your suggestions to

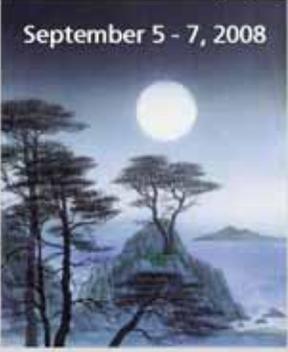
anthology@
southbaywriters.com



A work crew of SBW members gets together in East of Eden Co-chair Edie Matthews’s back yard to label and stamp postcards to be mailed to prospective EoE attendees: Kelly Harrison (EoE Co-chair), Valerie Whong, Clysta McLemore, Edie Matthews, and Jim Matthews (hiding behind Edie).

EAST OF EDEN
Writers Conference

September 5 - 7, 2008 Salinas, CA Steinbeck Country



- Agents
- Editors
- Publishers
- Keynote speakers
- Writing workshops



EARLY BIRD SPECIAL!
REGISTER & SAVE NOW!
www.southbaywriters.com

Sell Your Book at East of Eden Writers Conference

If you are a published member of CWC and attending this year's East of Eden Writers Conference, you are invited to sell your book there. If Barnes & Noble can order it, they will sell it through their bookstore, or if you are self-published, we will allow you to bring books and sell them. There will be a special table for authors to sell and sign their books.

At the last conference we had about 300 people attend, and we all know that writers are readers. Come sell your book, enjoy the conference, and be inspired to write the next one.

Contact Edie Matthews in advance if you are interested in taking advantage of this opportunity.
edie333@sbcglobal.net.

Third Basil Stevens* Memorial Writing Contest

What: Previously unpublished essay, article, story, or poem, 750 words maximum. Topic: sports theme.

Prize: First prize is a scholarship to the East of Eden Writers Conference, September 5-7, 2008, Salinas, CA, \$500 value (includes extras). Second prize is \$100 credit for the Conference. Third prize is \$50 credit for the Conference.

Entry: Fee is \$10 per entry, one entry per person. Open to all, except that previous first place winners are not eligible to enter. Make your check payable to "East of Eden Writers Conference." Do not send cash.

Deadline: July 1, 2008 (postmarked). Winners announced August 1. All entrants will be notified via e-mail.

Submittal Format: Text on one side of numbered pages, double-spaced in 12-point type. Title in the header on all pages. No personal identification of any kind on any of the pages. Name and contact information, including e-mail address, on a separate page or index card attached to your entry with a paper clip.

For more information: www.southbaywriters.com (California Writers Club, South Bay Branch), or Robert Garfinkle (510) 489-4779 (after noon).

Send your entry to:

Basil Stevens Memorial Writing Contest
California Writers Club
c/o Robert Garfinkle
32924 Monrovia Street
Union City, CA 94587

* Basil Stevens was a sports writer and long-time member of South Bay Writers. He passed away in 2004 and is sorely missed. This contest is being run primarily with funds donated in his memory.

WANTED

Contributing Editor for *WritersTalk*

Lend your journalistic hand to the creation and production of *WritersTalk*.

As a contributing editor, you'll have the opportunity to write articles on topics of interest to you, report on activities within the writing community, take on occasional writing assignments, proofread or edit copy, hone your writing skills, AND enjoy a monthly powwow with the *WritersTalk* staff.

If you're interested, drop a note to

newsletter@
southbaywriters.com

Library Presents “Book Publishing 1-2-3”

Join us as we follow a manuscript's journey from the writer's fingers to the reader's hands. Get a behind-the-scenes peek at the publishing process—and see who has influence along the way. Readers and writers alike will enjoy this informative discussion (which will include a Q&A session to address writers' specific concerns). Presented by CWC member Laurie Gibson, a book editor and U.C. Ext. Instructor.

Sunday, June 8, 2–3:30 p.m. Free. Los Altos Library (13 S. San Antonio Road, Los Altos). For more information, call 650-948-7683 or visit www.santaclaracountylib.org/losaltos/

Late Blooms Postcard Series

by Lita Kurth

One of Artsmith's members, and a fine poet, Lana Ayers, is the contest editor for a gorgeous postcard series called Late Blooms. The postcards showcase the writing of women over forty who haven't yet published a full-length book. The poems are paired with artwork, then printed on full-color 5x7 postcards. I received a set of last year's postcards, and loved them. If you or someone you know is a female poet over forty years old, check out the contest guidelines:

lanaayers.com/LateBlooms2008.aspx

SBW Writers' Forum

Events

Conferences

Contests

Networking

Resources

SBW Author Events
and News

Check it out:

southbaywriters.com

Directory of Experts

Do you have specialized knowledge that might help a writer bring authentic detail to a scene? If you are willing to share your expertise, send a message to networking@southbaywriters.com or to the club post office box. We will add your listing to our directory of experts.

Character Development

ArLyne Diamond, Ph.D.
ALyne@DiamondAssociates.net

Character Traits

Jeannine Vegh, M.A. M.F.T.I.
ladyjatbay@sbcglobal.net

Computer Dingus and Full-Time Nerd

Jeremy Osborne
jeremy_w_osborne@yahoo.com

Doctors' Office Environment, OB-GYN

Dottie Sieve
pdrsieve@yahoo.com

Hospital and Nursing Environment

Maureen Griswold
maureengriswold@sbcglobal.net

Internal Medicine/Addiction Disorder/Psychology

Dave Breithaupt
dldbmlb@comcast.net

Police Procedures

John Howsden
jwhowsden961@yahoo.com

Profile Writing

Susan Mueller
susan_mueller@yahoo.com

Teaching and the Arts

Betty Auchard
Btauchard@aol.com

Television Production

Woody Horn
408-266-7040

Lake Tahoe Writers Conference

June 12-14, 2009

www.laketahoewritersconference.com

CWC

Around the Bay

These are the published meeting times and locations for the CWC branches in the greater San Francisco Bay Area. If you're thinking about attending one of their meetings, be sure to check the website first for details.

Berkeley: Meetings are held from 10 a.m. to noon on the third Saturday of each month, except for July and August.

Unless otherwise noted, our meetings are held at Barnes & Noble bookstore, in Jack London Square, Event Loft, Oakland.

berkeleywritersclub.org

San Francisco/Peninsula: Meets on the third Saturday of each month from 10 a.m. to noon at the Belmont Library, 1110 Alameda De Las Pulgas, Belmont.
sfpeninsulawriters.com

Central Coast: Meets on the third Tuesday of each month except December at Buzzard's Backyard BBQ, adjacent to the Travelodge, 2030 N. Fremont, Monterey. The dinner hour begins at 5:30 p.m. and the program begins at 7 p.m.

centralcoastwriters.org

Mount Diablo: Meets the second Saturday of each month, except July and August, at 11:30 a.m. at the Hungry Hunter Restaurant, 3201 Mount Diablo Boulevard, Lafayette (corner of Pleasant Hill Road and Highway 24).
mtdiablowlriters.org

Tri-Valley: Meets the third Saturday of each month, except July and August, at 11:30 a.m. at the Oasis Grille, 780 Main Street, Pleasanton.
trivalleywriters.com

Sacramento: Meets at 11:00 a.m. the third Saturday of every month, except July and August, at Luau Garden Chinese Buffet, 1890 Arden Way, Sacramento 95815.

acramento-writers.org

Marin: Meets on the fourth Sunday of every month at 2 p.m. at Book Passage in Corte Madera.

cwcmarinwriters.com

Redwood: Meets the first Sunday of the month, from 3 to 5 p.m. at Marvin's Restaurant, 7991 Old Redwood Highway, corner of William St., in Cotati.
redwoodwriters.org

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2 7P Board of Directors Meeting	3	4	5	6 7:30P Open Mic Barnes & Noble Almaden Plaza, San Jose	7
8	9	10 6P Monthly Dinner Meeting Lookout Inn, Sunnyvale Tim Myers	11	12	13 7:30P Open Mic Borders Books Santana Row, San Jose	14 11A Editors' Powwow
15	16 -WritersTalk deadline	17	18	19 7:00P Open Mic Barnes & Noble 3900 Mowry, Fremont	20 7:30P Open Mic Barnes & Noble Pruneyard, Campbell	21
22	23	24	25	26	27 7:30P Open Mic Borders Books Sunnyvale	28
29	30	JUNE 2008				
July 13 Preconference Workshop	Future Flashes					
July 20 SBW Barbecue						

Stay Informed!

Sign up for the SBW Email List to receive meeting and event announcements.

www.southbaywriters.com

Writer's Workshop

SF/Peninsula Branch presents
Kevin Smokler

The Rest of 2008,
the Rest of your Writing Projects

June 21, 2008 at 10:00 AM
Belmont Library
1110 Alameda De Las Pulgas,
Belmont

Members, \$15:00; nonmembers, \$18.00
Reservations suggested. Call (650) 615-8331 or email: Chris Wachlin
Reservations@sfpensinulawriters.com

Kevin Smokler takes you through a mid-year literary assessment. How are your writing projects going and what will you need to make 2008 your most productive literary year yet? Local author Kevin Smokler will take us through laying out a "plan for productivity" for the rest of the year.

Full info at sfpensinulawriters.com

San Jose Poetry Slam (Est. 1998)

8:00 p.m., \$6.00

First Tuesday: Open Mic with music by Rebelskamp

Second and Fourth Tuesdays: Poetry Slam with music by Jay Rush

Third Tuesday: Head-to-Head Poetry Bouts with special guests.

At The Britannia Arms
173 W Santa Clara
Downtown San Jose
www.sanjosepoetryslam.com

Poetry Center San Jose Readings

First Gallery downtown
Willow Glen Books

Cosponsored by the Creative Writing Department at San José State University

Free admission.

See www.pcsj.org for featured guests and details.

South Bay Writers Open Mic

Read from your own work, from your favorite authors, or just come to listen. See calendar for schedule.

Contact Bill Baldwin
(408) 730-9622 or email
wabaldwin@aol.com

For Fremont Open Mic contact
Jeannine Vegh
ladyjatbay@sbcglobal.net

or

Bob Garfinkle
ragarf@earthlink.net



California Writers Club
South Bay Branch
P.O. Box 3254
Santa Clara, CA 95055
www.southbaywriters.com

MAIL TO

Address Correction Requested

Next Monthly Meeting
TUESDAY, June 10, 6:00 p.m.

Lookout Inn

605 Macara Avenue, Sunnyvale
At the Sunnyvale Golf Course

Tim Myers,

Author of *Basho and the River Stones*
and eight other children's books

"The Art of Writing Life"

East of Eden
Writers Conference

September 5, 6, and 7, 2008
in Salinas, California

Mark your calendar now!

WANTED!
Contributing Editor
See page 17

