

WRITERSTALK

Volume 18 Number 2 February 2010

Monthly Newsletter of the South Bay Writers Club

February Speaker Michelle Gagnon, Mystery Writer

by Bill Balwin

Over the years, Michelle Gagnon has been a modern dancer, dog walker, bartender, freelance journalist, personal trainer, model, and Russian supper club performer. To the delight of her parents, she gave up all these occupations for an infinitely more stable and lucrative career as a crime fiction writer. Are you wondering how she did this? Are you picturing how *your* parents would react?

Her novels have been published in North America, Europe, and Australia and have become Top Ten bestsellers as ranked by the Independent Mystery Booksellers Association (IMBA).

The Tunnels deals with ritualized murders in the abandoned tunnel system beneath a university. Boneyard depicts a cat-and-mouse game between dueling serial killers in the Berkshires. The Gatekeeper involves a domestic terror plot by antimmigration hate groups.

Would you like to trade in your day job for a lucrative writing career? Come hear how Michelle has achieved her success! How does she get the ideas for her novels? How does she research them? How has she gotten published not only in the U.S. but internationally?

As part of her writing life, Michelle participates in several writing groups: Sisters in Crime, Mystery Writers of America, Romance Writers of America, and International Thriller Writers.



Michelle Gagnon

Learn how Michelle uses her membership in these groups to advance her writing career.

In addition to her novel writing, she blogs weekly about life, writing, and petty annoyances. Find out how she uses her blog to further her writing.

I first met Michelle at the San Jose Book Expo, where she participated in several panels. Clearly, she has created a synergy among her various activities: novel writing, blogging, writing groups, and public appearances. You will want to hear more about how she did this—how she wrote her books, got them published, and publicized them (establishing her "platform" in the process).

We all have much to learn from this talented writer! Join us on February 9 for her talk, questions . . . and answers! \mbox{wt}

Come to the general dinner meeting on February 9.

January Recap 25 Lessons I Learned from Gerard Jones

by Bill Belew

I counted fifty-five who gathered at January's meeting to hear Gerard Jones give an oral mini-memoir version of his writing career. I was all ears as I listened for nuggets of insight. I heard some: here are 25 lessons I gleaned:

- 1. Writers don't always become the kind of writer they'd hoped they would. Gerard said that when he was teenagerish, he was convinced he would become a novelist. He never has written a novel.
- 2. The paths our lives take are often determined by dumb luck. In Gerard's words, he and a friend wrote *The Beaver Papers* just to amuse themselves. But that book opened the door for him to agents, publishers, and the network he would depend on for his entire writing career. It got him his job with *National Lampoon*.
- 3. The odds of getting an agent and editor are about one in 130 when doing a mass mailing. But even with those odds, an agent and editor can be found if one persists.
- 4. Sometimes we have to let go of the past to move on. When Gerard split from his collaborator on *The Beaver Papers* he wrote a book by himself.
- Doing multiple kinds of work is energizing. Collaboration is not fun. Having a willingness to do new things keeps one fresh.
- 6. Just because one works for a large studio, it doesn't mean the writing will sell (Gerard wrote a screenplay for Warner Bros. that didn't go anywhere). Perhaps the end result we should expect is just being able

President's Prowling

by Dave LaRoche President, South Bay Writers

My Muse Is Awake in a Parking Garage

Lould tell she didn't always sleep in her own bed, and wherever she slept, not regularly—eyes shut after Leno. "Wrinkled and hurried" swirled languidly around her, I imagined like smoke in still air if you could see it. She felt worn somehow, a traveler, I thought.

You can tell about people without really knowing—a feeling you

get that they just don't fit with a latte at Starbucks, their Mercedes parked at the detailer's. Her long hair, a little tangled, needed washing by some standards, and her shoes were too worn. She might have been fifty, although she was probably younger.

And then she spoke up with a gravelly voice that seemed missing a few cords, "Registered voter?"

I looked closer. She looked right back, her ruddy face furrowed in her question, eyes solicitous and twinkling. Though the parking garage was dim, I could see her dress was heavy, ordinary and dark and not Californian. It wasn't very cold. She held several clipboards with a couple cheap ballpoints dangling on strings from each one.

"Nope, not . . ." It was my reflexive response, always in a hurry and nothing apparently attractive here, but for some reason I stopped mid-reply. "Yeah. Yeah, I am registered. What've you got there, petitions?" She half-nodded affirmative. "Ya know," I said, "I don't like these public 'initiatives'. We use them too much. Let's elect some legislators that will do the work we intend for them. I mean, it's they who know what needs to be done or why it shouldn't."

Her eyes dimmed and her response was automatic. "Okay," she said, and turned away.

"Hey wait! What are these about? I mean . . . we have what we have and the other is purely theoretical." I wasn't in a particular hurry and signed all four. She said what they were, but to me it didn't matter. I'd probably see them again in November.

"Well, where're you from," I asked, "live around here, and how did you get into this?" I was idly curious.

She was Marion from Cincinnati—a "professional petitioner" and single mom with a son. And she did travel. In January through March it would be here in San Jose. Her eyes lit up as I showed some interest, and she told me her story. Signatures were her career and each one was important, and although there were many more

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Almost Anything Goes (400 words)

News Items (400 words)

Letters to the Editor (300 words)

to Andrea Galvacs newsletter@southbaywriters.com

Creative Works

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

Accolades

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Announcements and Advertisements

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Editor's Perspective

by Dick Amyx Editor

Cheap hotel rooms and critique groups



This editorial was suggested by fellow SBW and critique group member Sara Aurich. Its title derives from the subject line of an email discussion that started with the ways in which the environment in a story or novel can inform the characters. For example, you might expect different behavior from one couple getting together for a tryst in a cheap motel room and another couple who rendezvous in a suite in the Mark Hopkins. From there, the thread moved into ways of making critiques more valuable for authors

while at the same time improving the reviewer's critiquing skills.

The nub of it is that one size doesn't fit all: effective critiques have to consider the author's intent, experience with writing, and writing skills.

In critique groups, we're exposed to many different kinds of writing—short stories of all sorts; adventure novels, romance novels, and literary novels; creative nonfiction; and memoirs. Underlying all of this writing is *us*—you, me, the lady to my right, and the gentleman across the table—and our individual sets of knowledge and skills. The easy way to offer criticism is just to tell the author how we'd write a particular section of his work; more difficult is to put ourselves in the author's shoes and offer suggestions consistent with what he's trying to accomplish. This could be as simple as language (*I'd* never say anything like that in *my* novel) or as complex as the pacing of a scene, the mixture of scene and setting, or the kind and amount of description offered in any setting.

All authors have their own styles. Some are as sparse as Ernest Hemingway's; some are as lush as F. Scott Fitzgerald's. You have your own style, too, of course. If you tend toward spare writing, you might find it difficult to help someone whogoes in for rich detail, or might just suggest that she pare her description down. That's the easy way, and not so good. To help that author effectively, you're going to have to examine her writing on its own terms and offer your criticisms in a way that will make her lusher-than-you-would-prefer description do the job it's supposed to be doing.

An author may be dealing with subject matter—political, moral, or religious viewpoints, say—that are absolutely antithetical to your own. If you're going to criticize that kind of material objectively, you have to remember that it's not about you. Matter of fact, it's not about the author, either. It's about his writing.

Writing a fairly presentable first (or even second) draft requires another set of skills than rewriting an early draft to transform it into a finished one, and someone who has the innate ability to write well may not know how to rewrite. Rewriting is more than just touching up jots and tittles and smoothing out clunky sentences: it may require wholesale slaughter of thousands of an author's pearly words, discarding the gem that was the seed of the work, and writing new material that will succeed where the original writing failed. For most writers, rewriting is a learned art. Part of the trick is being able to see where heavy repair work is needed; part of it is developing the discipline necessary to do it. But simply telling an author that he's going to have to have to do major rewriting on some section of his work may not be enough. In order for your criticism to be effective, you also have to be prepared to offer suggestions how to make the changes step by step.

Putting yourself in the author's shoes when you critique his work seems to me to be a win-win-win approach. The author gets more meaningful criticism, the reviewer develops a keener sense of how to comment on another's work constructively—and the reviewer is likely to develop techniques of self-criticism and improvement of his own writing. WT

Accolades

by Jackie Mutz

In yesterday's San Jose Mercury News there was a full-page spread about the concept of practicing the art of compassion 365 days a year, to do something good for someone—buy the guy behind you a cup of



Jackie Mutz Contributing Editor

coffee at Starbucks, smile at a stranger, be there if someone falls, don't be afraid to make a difference in another's life. That is the act of compassion in action, the idea that we receive the most when we give of ourselves.

Writing is like that. We sit at the computer or typewriter as my CW student Rafael does (he's eighty-six and doesn't do computers). And when we sit and write the music of our lives, the highs and lows of our life experiences roll

across the page with passion, pain, vulnerability, and often humor at what we have shared. This is what our South Bay writers do every month in "Accolades" as noted below:

- Betty Auchard read her book *Dancing* in My Nightgown during a three-day recording session January 25–28 in Las Vegas. Many people with macular degeneration requested an audio version of her book, and Betty responded.
- Bill Brisko is working through what he terms the "first dirty edit" of his novel.
- Carolyn Donnell may have as many as three poems and a short nonfiction story published in the first quarter journal from Story Circle Network. When published, Volume 14 will be available at storycircle.org/ journal.html. Stay tuned for further information.
- Maureen Griswold had her satirical short story "Dead Man's Mail"

published in the Winter 2009/2010 issue of *ken*again* literary magazine. It is a story about an other-worldly adventure starring her long-departed dad and General Electric (GE). To read Maureen's story, go to kenagain.freeservers.com/PROSE.HTML#griswold.

- Woody Horn solved the mystery of the Christmas spoon's owner—Betty was reunited with her long-lost favorite spoon.
- Phyllis Mattson's article "Sixty Years in Yosemite" was recently published in the Yosemite Association newsletter.

As you write, consider all the ways our lives intersect. That is a story in itself. And don't forget to email your good news about any writing accomplishments—big or small—to accolades@southbaywriters.com. We're "all ears," as they say, waiting to hear what you have to say. WT

Spotlight

by Dave LaRoche

Betty Auchard

She's sweet, she's tough, she's pixie. Betty Auchard was a schoolmarm in earlier days, an art teacher—and I'll bet she carried one of those wooden rulers, but not for the craft. She has shown her skills with a number of illustrations right here in this newsletter—and done it kindly, whenever asked, with accom-

plished aplomb.

Of course we know Betty most from her book: Dancing in My Nightgown—a collection of vignettes, both poignant and funny, about her and her



Betty Auchard

late husband. Stories rendered with great sensitivity and respect, not just for her love of the man, but her reverence for their life together.

She is a speaker extraordinaire. Expand-

ing on *Dancing* with more observations of life, she weaves spells of magic for all to engage in and enjoy. Betty's view seems unencumbered with "shoulds" and "oughts" and the ordinary measure of "don'ts," which allows her a freedom that most of us envy, once brought to face it. She is a lauded and laudable package of podium dynamite that we adore—don't light a match, I suspect it's not wise.

Betty has hosted our Annual Christmas Bash since pachyderms roamed on the continent—well, maybe not that long, but so long that no one can rightly remember, and once again we thank her. Where would we find a more affable, charming benefactor, one who has silently supported, in magnanimous style, our conference contests, providing no small portion of prize to the genre winners—this, several times over.

There is one thing about Betty that none of us knew, prior to Barry Eisler's SBW speaking engagement the night of our annual Literary Costume Contest in 2007, that is. After an agreeable Eisler judged her "dancing nightgown" a winner, Betty awarded him with a hug and then a hug-ug-ug. Well, Betty was taken by the tall, dark, and handsome, clever, comfortable, and whimsical

author who had any number of books selling wildly. Who wouldn't rush up to the podium amid the ovation and give out a triple-whammy hug? And Barry too was taken—and in his talk, blush finally waning, he thanked our Betty several times over for her undulating embrace—his very best undulating ever. Now, I've heard that she is a conservative gal and parses out that tricky hug with the utmost discretion, so don't expect too much more than a smile from her, unless you are tall, dark, and . . .

I am glad that Betty is ours, that she is a member of our club; a rare and lovable friend, completely serious about enjoying her life and trying her damnedest to see that we all follow suit. She entered my spotlight in January.

In Memoriam

Victoria Ballard January 17, 2010

Writecraft: You'd Better Believe It

by Lisa Eckstein

I can't believe I'm writing a column with tips for making time to write. My so-called process for this column was to do everything but work on it for more than a week, and then start



Lisa Eckstein Contributing Editor

two days after the due date. It would appear that what you can learn from me is a variety of avoidance techniques to ensure that you never get any writing done.

But let me explain why I'm actually very well qualified to offer advice on how to stop procrastination and buckle down. I was born late and haven't done anything on time since. I'm easily distracted, disposed to napping, and oddly fixated on washing dishes instead of accomplishing more important tasks. I write at home, in close proximity to my television, bed, and kitchen sink, without the incentive of pay or (aside from WritersTalk) deadlines. Yet despite these serious obstacles (and if you don't believe they're serious, you're clearly not a procrastinator), I've managed to pound out a couple thousand pages of fiction in the last few years.

For me, becoming a diligent writer required overcoming every natural inclination except the urge to write. And most days, that urge isn't stronger than the urge to go back to bed or read blogs about writing (it's research, see?), so that's not what keeps me going. In order to sit down and write new words every day (okay, most days), I've had to make myself believe that nothing is more important than finishing the current novel draft.

Of course, my novels are important only to me, and maybe to the friends and critique partners who want to read what I've been working on. Perhaps in the future my words will gain importance for publishing professionals who hope to make a profit, and eventually for the hordes of readers who will proclaim that my books changed their lives. Even then, a novel isn't necessarily that significant in comparison with

everything else in the world, but neither is most of what we spend time on. If you're going to dedicate yourself to writing, you have to believe it really matters.

Believe that your priorities are valid.

You should feel no shame in giving writing priority over everything except work you get paid for and the care and feeding of yourself and other living creatures you're responsible for. But a lot of to-do items that don't fall into those categories tend to sneak in and push writing down the list, and we let this happen because writing doesn't seem urgent. If you don't write today, you can do it tomorrow. It turns out that the same can be said for the laundry. I bet if you really do run out of clean underwear, you'll do a load of wash despite that hour you spent writing, but I'm not convinced you'll make time to write if you focus on the laundry first. Prioritize writing, because unlike so many other tasks in life, it doesn't prioritize itself.

Believe that habit is more relevant than inspiration. The danger in repeatedly putting off writing is that it prevents you from establishing a habit. Everything you've read about the importance of setting aside a consistent time to write is true. I show up at my desk to work on my novels because it's on the schedule. If I had to decide every day whether I felt like writing, I'd never make an appearance. Require yourself to write on a regular basis, and you'll write much more, and eventually better, than if you wait for a visit from the muse.

Believe in what you're writing. You're going to have doubts about the quality and content of your work that will make you want to give up. Don't give up. Identify why you're writing this piece to begin with, and keep that in mind whenever insecurity creeps in. I'm sure every page of the second draft I'm working on has something wrong with it, but I am obsessed with these characters, and I'm going to continue producing drafts until I get the story right. Wanting to tell your story is what makes it so important.

Get help in believing. Share your commitment to writing with the important people in your life, and ask them to remind you when you'd rather just

forget. Accountability to others is a powerful motivator, but if you're writing without a boss or external deadlines, you'll need to create a system of people to answer to. It usually fills me with dread when a friend inquires how my novel is going, but honestly, if nobody ever asked, I might not still be writing. Add transparency and companionship to your isolated writing life by recruiting loved ones to check that you're making time to write.

These strategies aren't easy, but they really do work. Believe me.

Or believe some other writers who have ideas about finding time and motivation:

- Margie Lawson's "DUH Plan" is so obvious, it works: margielawson.com/index.php/ margies-pov/40-qduhq-your-way-tosuccess
- Leo Babauta offers tricks to keep you moving toward your goals: zenhabits.net/2007/02/top-20motivation-hacks-overview/
- Author and blogger Cory Doctorow shares his advice for writing in the age of distraction: locusmag.com/ Features/2009/01/cory-doctorowwriting-in-age-of.html wt

Prowl

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like her, they each traveled alone as contractors, and all over the country. They worked for politicians and as often for others with fat cigars, big money, and influence. And sometimes she was "stiffed," losing cash out of pocket, but, as she smiled, "... it's a life, and it's the nature of the job." Her Jake, "a fine boy," would be graduating from college in June.

Marion and I talked for more than half an hour, and while her signatures and a part of her paycheck passed by us, I juiced up on material—most of which is not reflected here. And I thought, as I thanked her for the conversation and wished her good luck, how easy it was to find a story. My muse was awake and hanging out in a parking garage.

South Bay Writers Critique Groups— Part 2

by Carolyn Donnell

Last month I talked about Valley Writers, a critique group that meets at Valley Village Retirement Center in Santa Clara. From there I moved down the road—Homestead Road, that is—to the Northpoint Critique Group. The name of the group is derived from the street where moderator Valerie Whong's condo is located, Northpoint Street in Cupertino.

This group started about a year and a half ago and currently has two other active members, Marjorie Johnson and Bob Whitten. (Bob is not a SBW member, at least not yet.)

Valerie is currently working on a short article about the new Chinese year, "The Year of the Tiger." Marge brought printouts and read a suspenseful chapter from her new novel, *Jaguar Princess*. Bob read his story directly off his laptop and kept everyone wondering about the fate of military personnel accused of shootings in Iraq.

Northpoint is a small group by design

to allow its members to concentrate more heavily on the works at hand. The members decided they did not want sessions that lasted longer than a couple of hours and also did not like the idea of making lots of copies to pass out each



Northpoint Critique Group: Valerie Whong, Marjorie Johnson, Bob Whitten. *Photo: Carolyn Donnell*

week. This group, unlike Valley Writers, is therefore closed to new members at this time.

Valerie has belonged to writing groups since the 1970s. Along with Bob, Dale Aycock, Gisela Zebroski, and Pat Bustamante, Val has journeyed from Cupertino Writers in the 70s, through Writers Connection in the 80s, to Los Gatos Writers in the 90s. South Bay Writers is the latest in this long list.

Cupertino Writers was considerably

different from SBW. They started at 10 a.m. and ran until about 2:30 with a half hour lunch. Sometimes more than fifty people attended, but only the first ten writers who signed up could read. Writers gave critiques, and, according to Valerie, the club also had some great mentors—ex-members still follow their advice and rules. Val says, "We still get together to talk about our writing, so it's a continuous thing. Writer friends stick together, so that's another way to look at it."

Marge has been a member of other groups as well (see the article in January's *WritersTalk*) and is also the current moderator for Valley Writers.

So we can already see that each critique group is different, not only in size, but in format, content, rules and other features. If you can't find one that meets your needs, then start one. Or two.

South Bay Writers has help available for those interested in finding or starting a critique group. Begin by emailing Networking Chair Cathy Bauer at networking@southbaywriters.com. If you are a member of the Yahoo group (groups.yahoo.com/group/SouthBay_Writers_Exchange/), you can also ask about critique groups there. wt

Workshop Recap Blogging for Publishing and Promoting Your Writing

by Victoria M. Johnson

On Saturday, January 23, SBW member, professional blogger, and author Bill Belew offered a wealth of information in a lively and fast-paced workshop



Bill Belew delivers his blogging workshop to a full house at the Lookout Inn.

held at the Lookout Inn.

He pointed out the benefits of blogging: it's a way to bring several thousand

people to your website each day, and when people are interested in what you have to say you can sell them your books. Blogging helps you gain visibility in your industry, and blogging is a way to build your platform.

Belew has much experience as a successful blogger and estimates that he's written 12,000+ blog articles during the four years since he started. In the early goings, for about a year and a half Belew wrote at least 15 blog articles a day for three different blog sites. His blogs now have a combined daily total of page views in the 40-50,000 range. He also has some 3,000 subscribers to his blogs. With that kind of exposure, he has a built-in audience for any future books he may write. And that's the point of blogging. Well, that and having a burning desire to write about what interests you. "You must have a passion to write," says Belew. "You must have something new to contribute to the

discussion of your topic."

Belew treated the full house of attendees to the 10 things to consider to get a blog started, 5 reasons why blogging is a good idea for writers, 21 elements of a good blog, and much more. I found that the most motivating elements to a good blog are the length of 100–200 words per post, and how to create pillar content. Pillar content is a short article of about 500 words that keeps bringing new people to a site. One such blog that Belew wrote two years ago still gets about 400 hits per day. He briefly talked about how a blog makes revenue and the advantages of joining a network.

Belew also gave invaluable tips for starting a blog where he discussed taglines, categories, and creating titles for each blog post. He even provided ideas for what to write about and how to make your blog more findable by

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Donald Maass Workshop

by Lisa Eckstein

On January 23, writers filled the ball-room of the Sunnyvale Sheraton for an all-day workshop with literary agent Donald Maass. The event, sponsored by local chapters of the Romance Writers of America, covered techniques from Maass's latest writing guide, *The Fire in Fiction: Passion, Purpose, and Techniques to Make Your Novel Great.*



Donald Maass signs SBW member Diana Richomme's copy of his book *Writing the Breakout Novel. Photo: Lisa Eckstein*

For eight intense hours, Maass talked about what makes readers continue turning pages and led the audience through exercises for adding this quality to works in progress. As head of the successful Donald Maass Literary Agency in New York for 30 years, Maass has read enough manuscripts to speak authoritatively on the difference between a story that burns brightly and one that never catches fire.

To kindle a flame in your own fiction, try these exercises from the workshop:

Protagonists: If your main character is an ordinary person, think of an admirable quality he possesses, perhaps one exhibited by a real person who inspires you. If your hero is extraordinary, come up with a way in which she's fallible or flawed. Now show at least a glimmer of this quality in the first five pages of your novel. The result will be that readers are more likely to care right away about your protagonist, who is no longer quite so average or such a goody-goody.

Secondary Characters: Make the other characters in your novel seem more real by considering them through the eyes of the protagonist. What are three ways

that your hero and another character are exactly alike? A way in which they are exact opposites? What fascinates or bewilders the protagonist about the other character? What was the defining moment in their relationship? How does their relationship change the protagonist by the end of the novel? Find places to show the answers within the story and bring secondary characters to life.

Settings: To create a setting that readers don't want to leave, enrich the portrayal of place and time by seeing the world as your characters do. Think of three details that tourists wouldn't notice right away but that natives recognize. How does your protagonist feel about his environment at the beginning of the novel? How has this changed by the end? What are the best and worst things that ever happened to him in a particular location? What places are his favorite, and which does he avoid? Write descriptions that explore the protagonist's evolving sentiments about the setting to reveal details about both the world and the character.

Scenes: Pick a scene from the middle of your novel that isn't memorable but that needs to be there. If it truly can't be cut, something happens that causes a change in the course of the scene. Identify the exact moment of change. Imagine rewinding the clock ten minutes and asking the protagonist how she views herself and where she is on her journey. Then jump ahead to ten minutes after the turning point and consider the same questions. Use the protagonist's changed perception of herself to illuminate the purpose of the scene.

Dialogue: Choose a scene of dialogue between two characters. Rewrite it so that with every line they speak, the characters savagely insult each other. Then rewrite the same passage using no more than five words for every utterance. Finally, recast the scene as an exchange of a single line of dialogue and a single nonverbal response. Now, apply what you liked best from these rewrites to the actual dialogue to add conflict, make it snappier, and leave more unsaid. WT



Spring Writers' Retreat April 5–9

by Dave LaRoche

Hurry! Talk to Dale King, there may yet be space to spend several days in the most idyllic spot imaginable for nailing down verse or hatching scenes that activate your characters.

Breeze rustling through redwood, caressing meadow, touching cheek, waxing muse. On a visit to Pema Osel Ling Spiritual Retreat, weeks back in pouring rain, I wanted to write—stash my umbrella, sit down in the mud, and write. Compelling doesn't cover it. My original thinking was that the reason they call this a spiritual retreat is its association with Tibet. No more! My new reason is because it is inspiring, whatever your beliefs or lack of them. I mean, spiritual whacked me in the kisser the moment I turned off the wipers. Proverbial pin-drop quiet, lush colors, soft earth, fresh air-okay, most mightn't be whacked, I'll give you that.

Mostly shared facilities, some individual cabins, but for all, the toilet is "at the end of the hall"—not the Ritz, but nicely arrayed, well-constructed lodging in a rustic redwood setting. You can enjoy these surrounds from noon of the 5th through the afternoon of the 7th for \$206; extend through the afternoon of the 9th for another \$188. Meals are included. You will find this exceptional venue a few miles northeast of Corralitos between Aptos and Watsonville.

Alice Wilson-Fried will be there, as will Luisah Teish, both exceptional at guiding our efforts. There will be time to write, to commune, to network, to workshop—a wonderful opportunity to leave your distractions behind; take your muse, your appetite, and, for the eccentric, a change of underwear.

If you are not yet signed up for this April 5 event, please talk to Dale King (deking8@msn.com) or go to southbaywriters.com/journal/ (or click "SBW Journal-blog" on the front page). Once at the Journal, scroll down to "Writers Retreat in the Redwoods" or click "cwc-norcal association events."

A Cyber Chat Featuring Harlequin Romance Editor Kimberley Young

by Victoria M. Johnson



Victoria M. Johnson Contributing Editor

Kimberley Young is Senior Editor of Harlequin Romance. She currently acquires across all the Harlequin Mills & Boon series, including Harlequin Presents, Harlequin Historical Romance,

Medical Romance, and Mills & Boon Modern Extra.

Kimberley has been at Harlequin Mills & Boon, London, for eight years. She has always been an avid romance reader and was introduced to the delights of Harlequin under her grandmother's kitchen table. Kim now thinks it's a dream come true to work with romance authors who give hopes and dreams to other women the world over

VMJ: So many of us began reading our romances under the table. I can remember waiting impatiently for the next month's new releases. How many books per month is Mills & Boon currently publishing?

KY: Over 50 titles per month—wow, that makes my head spin just thinking of it! This year marks Mills & Boon's 100th birthday—and it's amazing that after 100 years we're still going from strength to strength, trying new things, and launching new products. It's a very exciting time. And of course, in 2009 Harlequin celebrated its diamond anniversary, so there will be more celebrations your side of the pond next year.

VMJ: Did you say 100 years? Congratulations! What are you particularly seeking at this time?

KY: We are always looking for fresh talent for all of our series. We look to our authors—from those who have written over 100 books to those we haven't yet discovered—to keep our readers engaged and to evolve with the times. But in practical terms, we have recently expanded our M&B Modern Romance/Harlequin Presents series and are looking for new writers. So if you

are a reader of Presents or feel you can write high-octane, passionate, and emotionally intense stories—then give it a go. Visit iheartpresents.com for lots of tips and a chance to see what our published authors are up to.

VMJ: That's exciting to hear. Can you tell us what attributes you want to see in your authors?

KY: That's a difficult one as it's different for each author—but a passion for storytelling is so, so important. I think the advice I would always give is to remember that as editors, publishers, and writers we all have the same goal: to get the best book we can into as many readers' hands as possible.

VMJ: How many books per year does a Harlequin author need to write?

KY: For the series which are short in length, a minimum of two per year—the number really will depend on the series you are published in.

VMJ: What are the most common reasons you reject a manuscript?

KY: It's trying to tell all of the backstory in the first chapters instead of jumping in at the emotional heart of the story. At the heart of any romance there needs to a believable reason that the hero and heroine can't be together . . . the famous emotional conflict. Never doubt its importance in your story.

My other piece of advice would be to read as many current books as you can in the series you are aiming at. This always gives the best guide as to what our readers like, and therefore what editors want to buy.

VMJ: What are the perks to being a Harlequin author? (What little-known perks does one earn?)

KY: Think you'd have to ask my authors that. From an editor's perspective, I love the fact that Harlequin is an international company—it's wonderful to see my authors' books published around the world. I think our annual author parties are pretty cool, too.

VMJ: The author's platform is a term that authors are hearing a lot about these days and refers to having an

online presence; i.e., a web site, blogging, a mailing list, and general promotion of oneself, even the unpublished. Is having a platform something Harlequin desires in their writers or encourages their writers to do?

KY: They say, all publicity is good publicity—so I would say having a platform certainly does you no harm. But is it going to make me buy a book? No. Only fabulous writing does that. And if you spend more time blogging than writing . . . well, get writing!

VMJ: How should an author query you?

KY: We ask to see a short synopsis (two pages maximum) and the first three chapters. This is different for our offices in New York and Toronto, but eharlequin.com has all of the submission advice and lots of fab tips too.

VMJ: Is there anything else you want to say to romance authors?

KY: Thank you! Thank you for providing women around the world with a chance to escape, indulge, and have a little me-time. Life is about feeling good, and romance authors manage to bring that magic into their storytelling. Romance authors have brought me many happy hours reading, as well as a dream job.

VMJ: And thank you, Kimberley. wt

My Share

Life serves us a banquet of fate. We take our place at the table and celebrate.

For me Life is more Than an IN and OUT door. It must be something I ate!

—Emma Hooker

Workshop Recap Continued from page 6

search engines. He talked about the effort necessary to build and maintain a successful blog. He recommends three to five posts a day. With his secrets to success revealed, it is doable. His workshop was so popular that nearly three in four of those who submitted feedback forms requested him to return for a Part II to cover from the very basics to how to make money at it. Stay tuned. WT

SHORT-SHORT STORY

A Long Way to Go

by Karen Sweet

What was I thinking? I should have just surrendered to the police when I had the chance. Instead, trapped in this metal cylinder, Earth gone in an eye blink, I'm somewhere in the Butterfly Nebula.

Ok, so I should never have put up that anti-government poster, but I couldn't stand it anymore. Not one more "hate others" neighborhood campaign nor one more unwanted baby incinerated. But what good will come of this? I should have let them electrocute me on national vid prime time. I would have been an object lesson about fighting back. Instead, I'm a speck of dust hurtling who knows where.

The research lab claims that the personal rescue pod, the very one I'm in right now, is designed to automatically take the occupant to a livable planet. Oh, yeah, they said that—and the first chimpanzee-tested pod landed on the frozen plains of Zenon. The vid screens

showed that poor monkey stepping out and becoming an instant ice statue. The government ceased live streaming of space adventures after that snafu. And a lot of people who'd signed up as test subjects suddenly canceled. Don't blame them.

Yet here I am. It was the only way I knew to go off-world without detection. Really, snatching that cute puppy from inside this pod was an act of kindness. Hitting the test technician over the head with the police baton I pilfered wasn't, but how else could I catch a ride?

My sins multiply. Will God forgive me? I mean, at least by getting me to a planet with water, air and something to eat. That last granola bar tasted good, but it was hours ago. I'm kinda disorganized. What can you expect from a writer? We're creative and easily frazzled, not like the bean counters. Planning just isn't my thing, which explains why I'm still in my robe and fuzzy slippers watching stars and planets flash by like lightning streaks.

I meant to get dressed but got caught up in watching my mock trial on the vid

screen. When they couldn't find me, they picked a pseudo-defendant to run through their kangaroo court. She didn't look a bit like me. I'm short, light brown hair and green/brown eyes. She was tall, a real vampy redhead in high heels. Maybe that's how I slipped past the policeman I then bonked on the head. They were looking for her. Serves the government right—quick to trial, quick to injustice is their motto. No one was looking for the real me, wandering around like someone's dementiariddled mother in pajamas. I slipped through the lab's back door like the garbage bag lady. And here I am, stuck in a tin can that would be screaming through space except there's no air to create the friction for sound. Oops, I guess that's actually me screaming. It's been a tough day.

The pod just landed with a thud. Where am I? Will I freeze like that monkey when the door opens? I think I'll smile. I may be meeting my Maker, or some planet's immigration authority. In either case, I have some explaining to do. I hope whoever greets me smiles back.

SBW Learning Center

Building Great Sentences, Presented by Professor Brooks Landon

The Learning Center is a benefit of membership in South Bay Writers and is available to all members at no cost. No reservations are required; just walk in. Discussion follows the lessons.

2nd and 4th Thursdays, 7:30 to 8:45 PM

Westmont Retirement Community 1675 Scott Blvd.

Santa Clara, CA 95050

Feb 11, Lesson 9: Coordinate Cumulative Sentences. Also Lesson 10: Subordinate and Mixed Cumulatives.

Feb 25, Lesson 11: Prompts of Comparison followed by Lesson 12: Prompts of Explanation.

March 11, Lesson 13: The Riddle of Prose Rhythm. Also Lesson 14: And Cumulative Syntax to Create Suspense.

March 25, Lesson 15: Degrees of Suspensiveness. Lesson 16: The Me-

San Francisco Writers Preconference

by Suzy Paluzzi

On February 11, at the Mark Hopkins Hotel, there will be six sessions that do not require registration for the San Francisco Writers Conference to attend.

Donald Maass, James Patterson's literary agent, will provide a course

chanics of Delay.

Apr 8, Lesson 17: Prefab Patterns for Suspense. Lesson 18: Balanced Sentences and Balanced Forms.

Apr 22, Lesson 19: The Rhythm of Twos. Lesson 20: The Rhythm of Threes.

May 13, Lesson 21: Balance Series and Serial Balances. Lesson 22: Master Sentences.

May 27, Lesson 23: Sentences in Sequence. Lesson 24: Sentences and Prose Style.

Questions? Contact Richard at richard5599@att.net wt

from 9 to 5 leading a small group of attendees though the steps of becoming a "breakout novelist." The cost is \$300. Michael Larsen, presenter at the 2008 East of Eden Conference, will speak about "How to Write a Book Proposal" for half the day in the morning for \$149. Robert Dugoni and Sheldon Siegel, New York Times best-selling authors, will teach writers about "Putting the Thrill in Thriller Writing" in the afternoon for half the day for \$149. A three-hour afternoon workshop is to be given by New York literary agent Katharine Sands entitled "Pitchcraft." Stephanie Chandler gives advice about "Online Marketing for Authors," also for \$149 during that afternoon. Editor Lisa Rector Maass will discuss "Writing That Last 'Third' Draft of Your Novel" for the morning half day for \$149. Finally, Julie Salisbury will conduct a workshop about learning the purpose of your book, for whom you are writing, and what the reader will get out of reading your work. This takes place in the morning for half day for \$149.

Go to SFWriters.org for complete information and registration. wt

Critique Groups— Third Grade Style

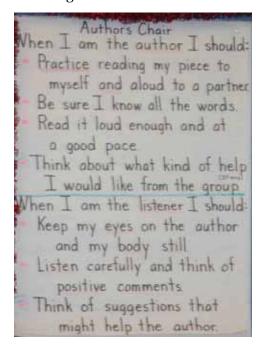
by Carolyn Donnell

I attended my granddaughter's Christmas presentation on December 18. She's in the third grade. As the class performed Christmas songs and stories, I noticed charts tacked up on the boards behind the group. The teacher, Peggy Verhougstraete (or Mrs. V. as they call her), had posted several writing and reading checklists. In addition to the two below, there were notes on drafting a story, revising, and proofreading, as well as a page on what kinds of events would work well in a personal story (memoir). I felt like I was reading handouts from a professional writers' workshop.

Story Elements

- Characters—Who is in the story? People, Animals, etc.
- Setting—Where does the story take place?
- Plot (or Problem)—What happens in the story? What was the problem? (Main idea)
- Events—What important things

- happened in the story? (Smaller than main idea)
- Solution—How was the problem solved?
- Theme—What was the author's message?



Author's Chair

When I am the author I should:

• Practice reading my piece to myself

- and aloud to a partner.
- Be sure I know all the words.
- Read it loud enough and at a good pace.
- Think about what kind of help I would like from the group.

When I am the listener I should:

- Keep my eyes on the author and my body still.
- Listen carefully and think of positive comments.
- Think of suggestions that might help the author.

There is nothing fancy here, just plain basic guidelines. I wish I had had something like this when I was in the third grade. I might have sold a book by now. As it is, I am learning all these principles today, a late start for me.

My granddaughter tells me she has already "published" stories. (They print them out at school.) Kind of a cute thing to say, you might think, but she already is beginning to think of herself as a writer. Isn't that the first step? So watch out, publishing world! These third graders are armed and writing. Thank you, Mrs. V. wt

View from the Board

by Victoria M. Johnson

Present: Dick Amyx, Bill Baldwin, Bill Belew, Richard Burns, Loureen Giordano, and Dave LaRoche.

Vice President's Report

Baldwin reported the following upcoming events: March 9 speaker—journalist, author, and editor Nina Amir; April 13 speaker—Jordan Rosenfeld, columnist for *Writers' Digest* and author of *Make a Scene: Crafting a Powerful Story One Scene at a Time.*

The Board agreed we can suggest topics to the speakers. The suggestion came in for another night for club members to sell their books.

Treasurer's Report

Burns reported that the club finances are level.

Central Board Report

 Dave reported that the new editor of *The Bulletin*, Carolyn Wood, is looking for content and is open to suggestions on the direction of the newsletter.

- Kelly Harrison has taken over the editorship of the state anthology and is making progress reviewing all the submissions.
- The next meeting of the Central Board will be on (or around) March 14. location TBA.

NorCal Report

The group has launched a midweek writing retreat, starting April 6. Writers may choose a 3-day or 5-day option. The Corralitos area retreat center is operated by a Buddhist group.

Committee Reports

Membership: absent

Publicity/PR: Edie Matthews (absent) submitted a photo from our Christmas party to the *Mercury*'s "On the Town," but hasn't heard whether or not they'll use it.

Bill Belew reported that the new online

SBW meetup group he set up (meetup.com/South-Bay-Writers) now has 43 members. He worked to get announcements of the monthly meeting on Craigslist, local newspapers, and all the North Bay CWC clubs.

Open Mic: Bill Baldwin reported one open mic with five readings in December. He is looking to recruit someone to assist with open mics.

Newsletter: Dick Amyx reported the January issue was 20 pages, printed and mailed on December 31. Press run was 223 and included eleven novel excerpts.

Anthology: Dick reported that sale price will be reduced to \$10 in some instances.

Young Writers: Marilyn Fahey (absent) reported that they have a room at a church reserved for April 17.

East of Eden: Luis Valdez and Selden Edwards have both signed contracts to speak.

Continued on page 13

Memoir

Naked Escape

by Anna E. Thumann

(A resident on Alcatraz Island 1934–1944)



Anna E. Thumann

There was a thick, cold, wet fog that completely enveloped the island on a June afternoon in the late 1930s. As the foghorns bellowed out their haunting wail, the ships on the bay could

be heard in a muffled way signaling one another as to their whereabouts. It always frightened me to ride on the bay when the fog was so thick because I imagined that is what it would be like trying to drive a car in total darkness.

Dinner was cooking in the oven while my mother and dad were sitting in the living room reading the newspaper and discussing the day's events. My sister and I were sprawled on the floor with books and papers scattered everywhere, trying to get our homework done as soon as possible so we could go to the social hall after dinner and play pingpong. There was always a chance, too, that one of the guards would need a pinsetter in the bowling alley and we could earn some extra money.

The serenity of the setting was suddenly jolted by the terrifying sound of the alarm from the prison—very loud blasts that sent a chilling message to all the personnel on the island that a prison break was in progress. The guards immediately reported to their stations, and all the women and children were confined to their living quarters with instructions to lock the doors and windows and not open them to anyone.

Since our house was in an isolated location by a prison work area, it was more essential than ever that we use extraordinary precautions. Our closest neighbors were the Cotterals, and my dad and mother had told us that in the event of a breakout, we were to go immediately to their house, since we would feel safer being with friends. Since none of us had eaten dinner, my mother and Mrs. Cotteral thought a good way to keep the kids occupied was to fix hot dogs, potato chips, and chocolate milk, gather on a blanket on

the floor, and pretend we were having a picnic.

We talked, and giggled, and talked some more, but as time slowly passed, we could no longer pretend this was just a picnic. The prisoners were still on the loose, the guards were still very much in danger, and a nervous tension permeated the room. Lorraine Cotteral said she would wash the dishes, and as she entered the kitchen, we heard dishes crash to the floor and she screamed hysterically, "There's a man outside our house—I saw him looking in the window!" She ran into the living room. We huddled together, and our mothers put their fingers to their lips and motioned us to be very quiet. Someone started pounding on the kitchen door, and a concerned but familiar voice asked, "Is everyone all right in there?" It was one of the guards, and you never saw a more relieved group of people. We unlocked the door, and he told us he was sent down to guard our house until the all-clear sounded. Since he had not had any dinner, we handed him a plate of food and locked the door again, and in the darkness we just waited.

We children were getting tired and restless, and in order to help us feel more secure, my mom put all three of us together in the big bed upstairs. Needless to say, we never went to sleep and passed the time making up all kinds of spooky horror stories.

Very early in the morning the all-clear sounded, and with a collective sigh of relief, everyone was reassured the prisoners had been captured in a cave in the rocks down by the water, and none of the island personnel had been harmed in any way. As we all watched, the shackled prisoners were marched from the rocky shore up onto the parade ground. It was then, to the shock of all the onlookers, we saw that the prisoners were stark naked. It was too late to get the women and children back behind closed doors in order to protect the kids from viewing such a spectacle. The inmates were then loaded into the island's only vehicle, "The Black Mariah," and driven up to the prison.

When my dad returned home, my sister and I were "on him" in an instant to ask about the naked men. Most of us girls lived very protected lives and had

never seen a naked man, and you can imagine the conversations that took place among us for the next week or so. My dad gave us a very simplified explanation of what happened, and it satisfied our curiosity at the time. He said that when prisoners attempted an escape, their focus was to wait for the fog to close in, get down to the edge of the water as fast as possible without being seen, and then collect driftwood from the rocks, take off their clothes and use them to tie the wood together to make a flotation device. They would then rub their bodies with machine oil they had collected from their work areas and get into the bay and try to float undetected to the nearest shore. He explained that the prisoners were so out of condition because of their inactivity during their incarceration, they needed the oil to protect their bodies from the extremely cold temperature of the bay. This time their plans had failed and they never even made it into the

The next day, it was back to school and life as usual. You can guess the questions the island kids had at school from the teachers and classmates about the escape. But the most fun of all for me was the whispered conversations I had with my closest girlfriends at school, giving them the sordid details about what naked grown men really looked like. And believe me, I included all the details that were left out of the physiology books we had looked at in the school library.

All of us had successfully weathered another escape attempt, and the prisoners and island families returned to the task of daily living. The only loss suffered during that turbulent experience was the innocence of some of the young children caught up in the harsh realities of prison life. wt

Feb. Is for Foibles

"Habits" can be worn or broken: Your tale changes with point of view. A mystery-character's "gun is smokin',"

Quirks remind readers who is who.

—Pat Bustamante

EXCERPT FROM THE NOVEL

The Fictional Writer

By K.O. Llewellyn

I parked in the drive near the front door and dragged the sack of groceries off the truck seat. The sun and mild humidity blossomed the day into a bouquet of scents—the flowers along the walk, smell of baking from upwind at Yvonne's house, and the rain-damp fall soil. I took a deep breath as I shut the truck door, straightened my shoulders, and tried to focus my thoughts.

Sun shone on the porch roof and warmed away the dampness on the shingles, causing light steam to rise like restless phantoms. The deep, shady porch welcomed. The hanging swing swayed gently as Paws, my immense black cat, jumped down and strolled to greet me, a welcoming committee of one. I gave him a distracted stroke with the toe of my shoe, balancing on one foot, squeezing the grocery bag and jingling keys as I jimmied them into the lock.

What would Yvonne suggest now? Killing off Claire seemed a better idea than ever.

As I unlocked the lovely old oak door, I peered into my parlor through the oval glass. How peaceful it looked. I entered the foyer and crossed through to the kitchen, where I dumped my groceries on the island. While putting the food away, I searched my brain for a damage-control plan, should the leak come. I shoved the bags of frozen veggies into a heap. It was best to make a decision now, before I needed to take action. I shut the freezer door, compacting the contents further. Good to have a strategy so that when something hit, I could do what was required as calmly as possible.

I yanked open the sticking pantry door and put the peanut butter next to the jam Yvonne made from her overly fruitful and nomadic strawberries. Clanking jars together, I made room on the shelf. Maybe I should shut the door and stay in here for a couple of years, I thought with some irritation.

A knock on the back door scattered my thoughts. Pivoting out of the pantry, I bumped my head on the doorframe. Rubbing my forehead as if I could wipe

off the bruise-to-be, I went to see what new development was coming into my disordered life. When I opened the door, I stopped massaging my forehead and started straightening my hair.

The first time Cody Caulfield met Ryder Scanlon he took her breath away. Literally. As she strode down the hall at the police station toward the Chief's office, a teenaged boy in jeans rounded the corner toward her at full speed and narrowly missed knocking into her. He was followed by a well-muscled guy in a black leather jacket, t-shirt and jeans, legs pumping, green eyes flashing. He dove to catch the kid, bringing him down in the middle of the hall. Unfortunately, one of his broad shoulders brought down Cody, too, ramming her into the wall. As she slid down, gasping for the air that had been knocked out of her, she could see his backside as he straddled the kid and cuffed him. Pretty good butt, she thought dizzily, and her gaze moved upward to check out the width of his shoulders and the thick, wavy brown hair as he turned to look back at her.

The guy at my door in jeans and t-shirt smiled at me. His eyes crinkled at the corners. Ryder Scanlon! But Ryder was a fictional character and this guy, fitting my mental picture of Ryder to a T, was definitely flesh and blood.

"I'm Tip McCoy. Your sister sent me over to talk to you about your yard." He reached out to shake my hand. His grip was firm, his calloused hand was warm, and the handshake made me tingle all over. I have this thing for strong hands.

Not a fictional tender/tough policeman, here was the curious landscaper from Ferguson's. As I slowly withdrew my hand, I probably squinted at him as I looked for some sign that read, "Beware: snoopy press spy guy who wants to destroy your life." Or maybe, "Ryder Scanlon lives!" I was pretty confused at the moment.

He didn't look dangerous, but you never know, I thought. He seemed pretty darn clean for a guy who spent his time digging up people's yards. I'd keep an eye on him, and for more reasons than that he was a potential yellow journalist. He had Ryder's beautiful curly dark hair and green eyes. His face looked like someone lived there—not a plastic model face. Keeping an eye on him might be pleasant work.

Maybe I was a bit paranoid because Barbara had shown an uncharacteristic interest in something other than a society affair. Or maybe I thought two people asking about Claire in Baxter were two too many.

"Oh, uh, Mr. McCoy. I'm a bit fragmented at the moment," I glanced around at the remaining groceries dumped on the kitchen island. "Won't you relax in one of the lawn chairs while I finish here, then I'll join you

Continued on page 13

A New Year, This Year, 2010

Two thousand nine was once a New Year, remember? It was here twelve months and got old, after December We always enjoy the first month; everything is very new We began making plans, now; so what should we do? There are names for this. The most popular is resolution The New Year's resolution, January first, for new action So, do not make a resolution that is really out of sight Make one that is a possibility, and you will be so right You will have to begin with your resolution now, January However, you must now, listen, don't wait until February Begin on a positive note and you will always be positive Remember, to act, to think, positive; never be negative

So this is two thousand ten, or just say twenty ten A New Year. Months later, another New Year will begin

-Clarence Hammonds

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is Clarence's 1,180th poem.

Recap—Gerard Jones

Continued from page 1

to do the work.

- 7. You can sometimes get somewhere even if you are not a "relentless pursuer of anything." Gerard turned down the opportunity to work in LA because it just wasn't what he wanted to do and the timing wasn't right.
- 8. If what you are doing isn't working, try something else. At 40, Gerard tried nonfiction for the first time. It worked. He landed radio interviews, then another book.
- Maybe blogging is a better choice for getting the word out about yourself than depending on NY publishers. (Gerard said that. I was the "amen" heard in the back of the room.)
- Writing is therapeutic; it serves as a discussion started. Blogs are good for this type of writing.
- 11. Those who can't sell books, teach. When Gerard wasn't selling books, he began teaching.

During the Q&A I picked up a few more.

1. In one response, Gerard said in passing, "...lots of research and

- interviews with psychologists."
 Preparation is necessary for writing!
- 2. Writing does not always need to result in book form. Video game



Gerard Jones: a man of many genres.

makers need writers, too!

- 3. Freedom lies in letting go of the thought that the book business is dying. Think podcasts, blogs, audiobooks.
- 4. The key elements in a comic book story are individual challenge just for that person to overcome, self-discovery, and transformation.

- Gerard didn't choose his audience, his audience found him.
- 6. As a writer, he is not good at marketing himself or carving out his own niche. (Does anyone know a writer who is good at this?)
- 7. Gerard writes with one person in mind.
- 8. The publishing world is a small world.
- 9. Just having something published opens up new doors.
- 10. Fiction writers are comic fans.
- 11. Writers need to have a willingness to try the hokey, pursue the implausible, trust the old cornball stories. There's a reason why those stories have been around so long.
- 12. Sometimes we need to make promises to ourselves and *keep* them.
- 13. Indeed, sometimes things happen out there that don't fit our plan. When we can accept that, we feel liberated.
- 14. Even the soft-spoken have something to say.

That last one reminds me of the movie *Sweet Home Alabama*. At one point Matt says to Reese something like, "I may talk slow, but that don't mean I'm stupid." wt

The Fictional Writer Continued from page 12

with some lemonade."

He smiled, nodded, and turned back down the steps to the lawn. The view from this side was . . . Ryder Scanlon.

I headed back to the pantry to close the door, wondering how to handle the situation. Maybe he was after Claire, or maybe he was just a yard guy with curiosity about some rumors. But the fact that he looked just like Ryder Scanlon was scrambling my brain cells more than Mac's warning.

I left the nonperishable stuff lying on the counter, snatched a couple of glasses from the beadboard cabinet and got the lemonade out of the refrigerator. Juggling the glasses and pitcher, I bumped open the back door with my hip and balanced my way across the porch and down the steps. He sat gazing around the feeble yard, seemingly content in the Adirondack chair under the huge oak in the middle of dead grass. I wonder if he can get

anything to grow in the shade here, I thought as I walked over and set my burden on the small table between the chairs. He smiled up at me as I poured the lemonade, causing me to dribble some onto the table.

"Lovely area you have, Ms. Branson. Your sister said you'd like a little more greenery?" His eyes twinkled as he glanced around at the dead stalks of former resident plants.

"Greenery. That is definitely what I need back here, Mr. McCoy, and please call me Anna." I tried not to look into those pine-colored eyes.

"Just call me Tip. Everybody does. What sort of plants do you like? I just planted a few geraniums over at the Winslows' this morning, or Ceanothus might go nicely here. They'd survive the battle with the tree for nutrients."

Seeing the blank look on my face, he added, "I'll get you some photos I have in the truck." I'd have liked to ask for an 8-by-10 portrait, but I quelled the urge. WT

View from the Board Continued from page 10

Learning Center: Richard Burns reported that four club members and one retirement center resident attended the session on December 10, with Lessons 3 and 4.

New Business

- Bill Belew moved that we offer the member's price of \$15 to first-time guests at general meetings. Bill Baldwin seconded the motion. The Board passed the motion.
- Bill Baldwin moved that the Board pay \$225 to The Lookout, splitting the costs with them for their preparation for a December meeting. The Lookout had food prepared. Bill Belew seconded and the Board agreed.

Adjourned at 9 p.m. WT



Directory of Experts

Do you have specialized knowledge that might help a writer bring authentic detail to a scene? Send a message to networking@southbaywriters.com or to the club post office box and we will add your listing to our directory of experts.

Asia, Japan, China, Russia

Bill Belew

belew@panasianbiz.com

Astrology, Singing

Sara Aurich

saraaurich@comcast.net

Astronomy, History of Astronomy

Bob Garfinkle

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Character Development

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Counseling

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Engineering: Mechanical,

Aero, Aerospace

Jerry Mulenburg

geraldmulenburg@sbcglobal.net

Growing Great Characters from the Ground Up

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WRITERSTALK Challenge

What Is It?

Twice a year, in February and August, awards are given to contributors to *WritersTalk*. You need take no special steps to enter this competition; if your piece in one of the designated genres is published in *WritersTalk*, you are a contestant in the Challenge.*

Genres

Fiction

Memoir

Essay

Poetry

Judging Periods

January 16 through July 15 July 16 through January 15

Prizes

One winner will be selected from each of the eligible genres. Each winner will be awarded a cash prize of \$40.

Judging

Judging will be done by *WritersTalk* contributing editors and other Club members whom the contributing editors may ask to assist.

* Eligibility for the *WritersTalk* Challenge is limited to members of the South Bay Branch of the California Writers Club; judges may not judge in any category in which they have an entry.

CWC Around the Bay

These are the published meeting times and locations for the other 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 on the third Sunday of each month, except for July and August, at 1:30 at the Oakland Public Library Main Branch. cwc-berkeley.com

Central Coast: Meets on the third Tuesday of each month except December at the Casa Munras Hotel, 700 Munras Avenue, Monterey. The dinner hour begins at 5:30 p.m. and the program begins at 7 p.m. centralcoastwriters.org

Fremont: Meets (except in July, December, and on holiday weekends) from 2-4 p.m. on the fourth Saturday of the month at Mountain Mikes Pizza, 35760 Fremont Blvd., in the Brookvale Shopping Center, one block south of Decoto Road in Fremont. Contact: Bob Garfinkle ragarf@earthlink.net or (510) 489-4779

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

cwcmarinwriters.com

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). mtdiablowriters.org

Redwood: Meetings are held on the first Sunday of the month (except for holiday weekends), from 3-5 p.m. at Copperfield's Books, 2316 Montgomery Dr., Santa Rosa. redwoodwriters.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. sacramento-writers.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

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	7p Board Meeting LaRoche residence	4	7:30P Open Mic Barnes & Noble Almaden Plaza, San Jose	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
		бр Regular Dinner Meeting Lookout Inn Michelle Gagnon		7:30p Learning Center Westmont 1675 Scott Blvd. Santa Clara	7:30p Open Mic Borders Books Santana Row, San Jose	11A Editors' Powwow
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
		WritersTalk deadline			7:30p Open Mic Barnes & Noble Pruneyard, Campbell	
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
				7:30P Learning Center Westmont 1675 Scott Blvd. Santa Clara	7:30r Open Mic Borders Books Sunnyvale	
28		F	ebrua	ry 20 1	10	
Future Flashes		March 9 6r Regular Dinner Meeting Nina Amir				

Stay Informed!

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

southbaywriters.com

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

Check out the new South Bay Writers

Blog

southbaywriters.com Click SBW Journal—Blog

SBW Poets

Poetry Center San Jose is turning its eyes toward SBW with an interest in showcasing our poets at its monthly readings. PCSJ's host and member of South Bay Writers Linda Lappin is making a personal request. Are you a poet? Would you like to read your work? If your answer is yes, contact Linda by email at captainlappin@netzero.net and have a look at PCSJ's website, www.pcsj.org

South Bay Writers Anthology



\$12.50 + 9.25% sales tax At the meeting. On the website. southbaywriters.com

Other Open Mics

Thursday Gig

Third Thursday, 6:30–9:30 p.m. 411 E. Campbell Ave., Campbell Stone Griffin Gallery

10Ten Gallery

Last Friday, 6:30–10:00 p.m. 1010 E. Taylor St., San Jose Al Preciado's home

Poets@Play

Second Sunday 1 p.m.-4 p.m. 1650 Senter Rd., San Jose Markham House History Park

Poetry Center San Jose Readings

Art Object Gallery 1st Tuesdays, 7:30 p.m. (September–May) 592 North Fifth St., San Jose

Willow Glen Library 2nd Mondays, 7:00 p.m. 1157 Minnesota Ave., San Jose

Free admission.

See pcsj.org for details.



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, February 9, 6:00 p.m.

Lookout Inn 605 Macara Avenue, Sunnyvale At the Sunnyvale Golf Course

Michelle Gagnon author of Tunnels, Boneyard, and The Gatekeeper

WritersTalk deadline is always the 16th of the month preceding the month of issue, and is always listed on the calendar inside the back cover.

