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President's Letter

by Janice Konstantinidis

Dear Fellow NightWriters,

Judging by my many communications with members, we are busier than ever. The pandemic causes reflection, and reflection causes writing! I hope that many of you are finding writing a comfort - and a rewarding challenge - in a stressful time.

Last week our board held a fruitful meeting using Zoom. We are planning activities that we can conduct online. I invite you to sign up now for our online webinar, hosted by Anne Janzer, on Tuesday, May 12, 2020 at 6:30 pm. All members should have received an invitation in an email with instructions, which are repeated on [page 4](#).

Our Programs Director, Steve Mintz, invites members to share their quarantine experiences on the SLO NightWriters' Facebook page (see [page 3](#) and [page 8](#)).

Our Golden Quill Writing Contest is now underway, and is accepting entries through August 1, 2020 (see [page 3](#)). I hope you will join this annual writing effort. We always



have fun recognizing the best writing by our members!

Finally, I understand that some of our critique groups are reaching out to each other for virtual meetings. Our Critique Group Coordinator, Tina Clark, is managing that effort.

It is heartening to know that in a time of physical separation, our members are reaching out to each other in productive ways.

Janice Konstantinidis, President

She sat in a blackberry bush,
no thorn did prick her tush.
As quiet as bird could be,
was Miss Wren as she looked straight at me!

Janice Konstantinidis



Photo by Lorraine Flakemore

Keeping Up With Our Members

Since we're all self-quarantined right now, we would like to know how you are doing and what you've been working on at home. Let us know about your work in progress, any books or articles published, how you are dealing with the added stress and anything else you would like to share. We ask that you post it on our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/SLONightWriters/>.

NOTE: See Judith Amber's article *Space and Time* on [page 16](#) of this newsletter. In it, six of our members discuss how their lives and writing habits have been changed by this period of quarantine.

Steve Mintz

Now Open: The Golden Quill Writing Contest 2020

The SLO NightWriters' Golden Quill Writing Contest is NOW OPEN for entry submission. Our theme for this year is: THE UNEXPECTED. We will be accepting entries until August 1, 2020 in the categories of Fiction, Memoir, Creative Nonfiction and Poetry. Winners will be announced and prizes awarded at our September 8, 2020 meeting. The entry fee will remain \$10, and proceeds will be used as cash prizes for the winners. For more information please see the Golden Quill Contest 2020 page

on our website: www.slouightwriters.org.

We hope you will participate!

Note: As yet, we do not have enough judges to share the judging workload. If you are interested in judging, please notify the Contest Director at: slonwgoldenquill@gmail.com

Judges remain anonymous to members and other judges.

Steve Derks



May 12 General Meeting Cancelled - Instead, Meet Anne Janzer for a Webinar

We will not hold our General Meeting on May 12 due to the coronavirus pandemic. Instead, Anne Janzer will be doing a webinar on that day from 6:30-7:30 pm. The title of the presentation is: **Building and Growing an Author Platform.**

To attend this meeting, register here: <https://bit.ly/2z238GV>.

About the Zoom meeting

We'll conduct this webinar over Zoom. Once you register with the link above, you'll get an email about how to connect to the meeting, either by computer or phone.

If you have access to a computer, click the link that Zoom sends you in the email and select "Join with computer audio." You'll be able to see the slides, hear the talk, and submit questions. Anne will turn off everyone's microphones and cameras by default, so you don't have to worry about how you look or sound if you don't want to. She'll give people the option of turning on cameras during Q&A.

No computer? Once you register, your email will include a phone number and dial-in instructions. You can listen to the meeting.

We'll be there online earlier, probably around 6:20, so if you want to "drop in" early, do so. If you have specific questions about building an author platform, you can send them to Anne (anne@annejanzer.com) ahead of time or include them in the chat screen during the meeting.

Don't forget to register: <https://bit.ly/2z238GV>
You can register any time up to the time of the meeting.

About Anne Janzer

We are very lucky to have an expert in conducting online writing webinars as a member of our group. Anne Janzer develops programs about writing, publishing, and book



marketing. Anne is also doing free weekly webinars for people during the "shelter in place" time. You can access past webinars and replay them at: <https://annejanzer.com/portfolio/webinar-self-publishing-myths-and-realities/>. Anne is an award-winning author, business writing consultant, armchair cognitive science geek, marketing practitioner, and blogger. She's on a mission to help people spread important ideas through writing.

She is author of the books [Writing to Be Understood](#), [The Writer's Process](#), [The Workplace Writer's Process](#), and [Subscription Marketing](#). Find her blog posts, online courses, and more at her website, AnneJanzer.com.

WORD PLAY

by Morgann Tayllor

WHAT HAPPENED?

What happened to our language? Time happened. Writing styles and vernacular change from generation to generation. Technology changes but human behavior remains the same. And stories are mostly about human interaction, whatever the place, culture or generation. A few random examples of evolutionary ideas and breakthroughs in writing styles and story plots:

Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898): The title, an idiom with a long history, is an action that makes a bad situation worse. In his Victorian novella, the more the screw is turned, the deeper and more convoluted the plot. This screw represents a new twist in ghost stories--psychological terror and ambiguity between characters. There is the familiar brooding Gothic mansion, but without the rattling chains, demonic noises, or melodrama of yore.

The author exponentially builds suspense and tension toward the story climax. A sample passage: *It was the dead silence of our long gaze at such close quarters, the whole horror, huge as it was, its only note of the unnatural. If I had met a murderer in such a place and at such an hour, we still at least would have spoken....The moment was so prolonged that it would have taken but little more to make me doubt if even I were in life...the silence itself...became the element into which I saw the figure disappear; in which I definitely saw it turn as I might have seen the low wretch to which it had once belonged turn on a receipt of an order, and pass, with my eyes on the villanous back that no hunch could have more disfigured, straight down the staircase and into the darkness in which the next bend was lost.* This last sentence, in its entirety, has 92 words.

In spite of tangled thickets of words, sentences and paragraphs, James engages readers to the end, ensuring the survival of his Victorian classic that is still read today.



Leave it to the likes of **Ernest Hemingway** to help bulldoze the underbrush in the Gothic forest of embroidered narrative, then unravel the embroidery itself.

Hemingway's ***The Garden of Eden***, set on the Côte d'Azur (French Riviera) in the 1920s, ensnares newlyweds in an exotic, erotic triangle when they both fall in love with the same woman. Hemingway worked on the novel from 1946 until his death in 1961. With limited editing, it was published posthumously in 1986.

His descriptive passages are colorfully cryptic. Pages of bare dialogue cut to the bone. Excerpts: *Catherine lay propped on her elbows with her chin on her hands. "Do you think it would be fun if I went back to being a boy again? It wouldn't be any trouble."* (husband David:) *"I like you the way you are now."* (Catherine:) *"Shall I make love this time as a girl and then do it?"* Later the couple meets the other woman, shifting the dynamics in all three relationships.

Expatriate arts salon maven **Gertrude Stein** could show depth without destination. A writer of many genres, an art collector and a contemporary of Hemingway and Picasso, she went further than Hemingway with her stream-of-consciousness writing that painted in words what Cubist art painted in pigment.

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Or as Winston Churchill would later say of Russia, Stein could write *a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma*. Excerpts from her experimental **Tender Buttons (1914)**: *Sugar is not a vegetable...A bag which was left and not only taken but turned away was not found...A little called anything shows shudders...Abstraction aside, Stein had wit and foresight still relevant today: Everybody gets so much information all day long that they lose their common sense.*



Some of Stein's writing foreshadowed and leap-frogged even that of **Jack Kerouac**, habitué of the 1950s Beat Generation. Based on Kerouac's travels across America, **On the Road (1957)** is also "spontaneous prose", originally written in three weeks on a 120-foot-long scroll of continuous paper taped together and fed into a manual typewriter.

Excerpts: *...the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones that never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn...Whither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night?...What's your road, man?--holyboy road, madman road, rainbow road, guppy road, any road. It's an anywhere road for anybody anyhow...Holy flowers floating in the air, were all these tired faces in the dawn of Jazz America...* While Stein could eschew conventional punctuation in the spirit of abstract paintings, Kerouac wrote in the rhythm of the road and the voice of jazz.



Jeanine Cummins **American Dirt** (as in *Soil*) **2020**: It's a contemporary novel of a Latin American mother and her child fleeing the

Mexican drug cartel that murders sixteen members of her family, including her journalist husband. Lydia is forced to run after she briefly views the bodies of her loved ones splayed around the family barbecue pit and backyard patio, after having escaped the carnage herself by hiding in the bathroom with her eight-year-old son Luca. Their lives are instantly transformed from that of a comfortable middle-class existence to one of migrants joining countless others in their quest to reach the hope and safety of *el norte*, the USA.

Excerpts from Lydia's last look at her dead husband Sebastian: *Lydia crouches at her husband's feet, but she doesn't want to feel the cooling of his pallid skin... She...(stares) at his one outstretched hand, the ridges and lines of his knuckles, the perfect half-moons of his nail beds. The fingers do not move. The wedding band is inert. His eyes are closed, and Lydia wonders, absurdly, if he closed them on purpose, for her, a final act of tenderness, so that when she found him, she wouldn't have to observe the vacancy there. She claps a hand over her mouth, because she has a feeling the essential part of herself might fall out. She shoves the feeling down, tucks her fingers into the fold of that unresponsive hand, and allows herself to lean gently across his chest. He is cold already...Sebastian is gone, and what's left is only the beloved, familiar shape of him, empty of breath.*

Visceral and poignant, **American Dirt** has been hailed as one of the most important books for our times.



Maya Angelou (1928-2014) was a Renaissance woman. Not only was she six feet

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tall, she was imposing as a cultural and literary icon and an activist for humanity. Rising from a marginal and unforgiving childhood in Alabama, she not only became a celebrity favorite and mentor, but through her actions and words, a voice of wisdom and hope for all. Her memoir *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* (1969) received critical acclaim. Angelou's indomitable spirit soared in *Still I Rise* (1978).

An excerpt: *...You may shoot me with your words,/You may cut me with your eyes,/You may kill me with your hatefulness,/but still, like air, I'll rise.*

And rise, she did. Her poem *On the Pulse of the Morning* was read at President Bill Clinton's inauguration in 1993. In 2010 she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the most prestigious U.S. civilian decoration for meritorious contributions to society at large. Readers will also remember one of her best quotes: *People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.*

It's a call to action for all writers. People won't forget what you write if it resonates.

So writers, don't forget to write during these long and tedious days. Words matter.

We Need Your Help

The success of non-profit organizations like SLO NightWriters depends on its members. We all have talents other than writing that any organization could make use of. NightWriters has many special opportunities for members to get involved, working "behind the scenes." If you'd like to assist in any capacity, email: jkon50@gmail.com



Bulletin: Just released is a prophetic new novel about a global pandemic by **Lawrence Wright** (*The End of October*): Completed last year before Covid-19 struck, the story is a fictional account of the spread of a virus that closely resembles the panic now happening worldwide, including stay-at-home isolation, economic turmoil, supply shortages, and lack of preparation and medical testing.

Interviewed on CBS This Morning, Wright, who is neither a doctor nor a scientist, said he thoroughly researched elements of this worst-case scenario with top professionals in the fields (What would happen if...). "You always discover things by talking to people who really know the answers," he acknowledged. Wright is the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Looming Tower*.

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SLO NightWriter Officers

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THE ETHICS SAGE

by Steven Mintz, PhD

WRITING COOPERATIVE



One of the sacrifices for SLONW members during the COVID-19 shutdown is the inability to take advantage of our pre-meeting critique groups. We hope to have it up and running by the summer. Of course, that will depend on the social distancing guidance provided at that time.

I've been in critique groups before and have found them quite valuable, in part because of the ability to socialize with others of a like mind. Moreover, getting an objective view on one's work is critical before completing the writing process and submitting your work for publication.

Generally, people have different skills, passions, and knowledge. In a small collaborative group, when a question is raised, different participants can have different answers and we can learn new things from one another, but also understand different perspectives.

I have been scouring the internet during the COVID-19 pandemic to find resources for writers. I came across "The Writing

Cooperative." It is a community of people who help each other write better. It publishes unique, high-quality articles that focus on creativity, writing, editing, publishing, and everything in between. They look for original content that helps writers improve their craft. To find out more about the group, click on this link to their website:

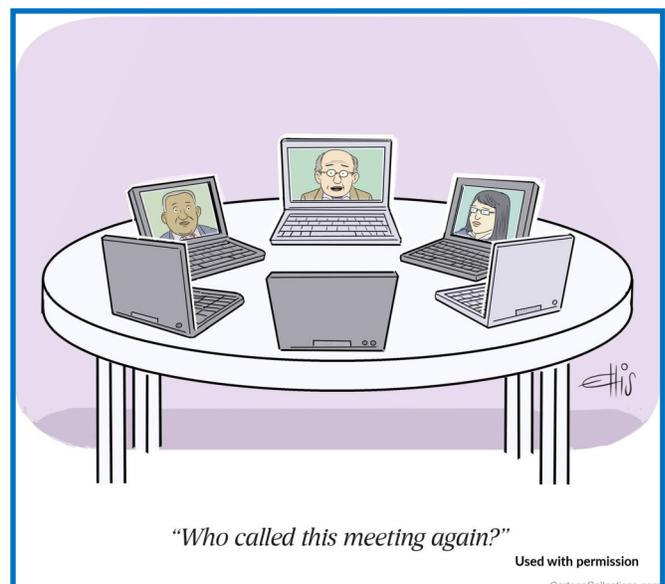
<https://writingcooperative.com/what-is-the-writing-cooperative-do-not-publish-54901adf5325>

Good luck and please let us know about your work in progress, any books or articles published, how you are dealing with the added stress and anything else you would like to share. We Ask that you post it on our Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/SLONightWriters/>

Sometimes people ask me what it takes to be a writer. The only things you have to do, I tell them, are read constantly; write for thousands of hours; and have the masochistic ability to absorb a great deal of rejection and isolation. As it turns out, these qualities have prepared me well to deal with life in the time of the coronavirus.

Viet Thanh Nguyen
The New York Times
April 10, 2020



TIPS AND TIDBITS

by Judythe Guarnera

HOW TO WRITE A WINNING SHORT STORY



Thinking about a topic for my column TIPS AND TIDBITS, I remembered that the SLO NightWriter Golden Quill Writing Contest has opened. When I decided to write about how to write a short story, one of the categories in the contest, I googled the topic. I was hoping to look beyond the elements of a story to try to find something unique that might help you to craft a winning short story.

For safety sake, let's begin, though, by listing the seven elements of a story:

- Character: The beings who inhabit our stories.
- Plot: What happens in the story, the series of events.
- Setting: Where your story takes place.
- Point-of-view.
- Style.
- Theme.
- Literary Devices.

If you need more information about these elements, please follow my lead and google them.

In my search, I came across a blog/publishing site called [Reedsy](#). I found the site informative and signed up for free subscriptions which address writing topics that interest me. What follows comes from that same site.

The following words are from Reedsy. When I kibitz, my words will be in *italics*.

From Reedsy:

How to Write a Short Story in 7 Steps

From Rudyard Kipling's "The Jungle Book" to the bone-chilling works of Shirley Jackson and Edgar Allan Poe, short stories have always had the power to captivate and profoundly move us. But how to write a short story that makes such an impact?

What makes a short story a short story?

Short stories are a highly respected form in the literary world. Many writers, like Sylvia Plath, began their careers by writing short stories.

In the words of writer Stephen Vincent Benét, this kind of story is "something that can be read in an hour and remembered for a lifetime."

A note on short story structure

You will want to limit plot points to one or two in a short story depending on its length.

A short story should be comprised of exposition, conflict, rising action, climax, and denouement (climax).

For instance, **maybe your story will start *In Media Res*** — Latin for "in the middle of things." In other words, your story begins in the middle of the narrative, usually with some sort of crisis occurring. From there, the rising action toward the climax occurs (and the background information typically delivered in the exposition is presented to readers).

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After the climax comes the traditional falling action and denouement. This structure works particularly well for short stories, as it brings readers immediately into the main conflict of the story — which is important when time is of the essence.

In general, short stories don't have the same privilege of time when it comes to exposition (narrative). It's better to deliver this information within the action. Typically, this part of the story will see the main character meet and overcome several smaller obstacles (with exposition snuck in), crescendoing with the climax — and then, again, the falling action and denouement.

Don't forget a short story needs a beginning, middle, and end. The protagonist must have a goal, someone or something must get in the way of reaching that goal, and the end of the story should show how the character changed over time.

This is where it gets good—that special element which, when well developed will hold your reader.

What are the steps to write a short story?

Writing in this form isn't about complex, masterful plotting — it's about feeling. On the subject of writing short stories, F. Scott Fitzgerald once said, **"Find the key emotion; this may be all you need."**

With that as our jumping-off point, the first concrete step in the process should be clear...

Step 1. Find your key emotion

When your reader finishes the story, do you want him to feel happy, sad, disgusted, annoyed, inspired. Once you decide what that feeling is, everything you write should add to that emotion.

The revelation, the heart of the matter, the core meaning — it's all the same thing when

it comes to short story writing. To pay homage to Fitzgerald, we'll call this component the "key emotion." The key emotion in your story is the feeling or impression you want to give your readers that will stick with them, possibly for the rest of their lives.

Despite the name, devising a key emotion is more complicated than simply picking an adjective out of thin air ("happy," "sad," "angry," etc.). You need to focus on more than just the feeling — think about the context you will use to articulate it. What kind of story do you want to tell, and how will you tell it?

For example, you might know you want to write a sad story because despair is a powerful human emotion. But a sad story about a man losing his wedding ring is very different than a sad story about a family losing a child. The first might be a story of disillusionment with monogamy; the second deals with unimaginable loss and grief. Each of these falls under the umbrella of "sad stories," but the nature of that sadness is distinct to each.

The most engaging key emotions come from real life, so you may already have one in mind. However, if you're struggling to think of a key emotion for your short story, consider looking through some [short story ideas](#) or [writing prompts](#) for inspiration. You can also talk to friends, family, or a writers' group to help you out. But no matter how you get there, get there you must if you want to write stories that are compelling and meaningful.

For the NightWriter contest, you will be writing to a theme. But you're going to write it differently than anyone else addressing the same theme. You'll have your one story idea and you'll have the special emotion you've

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chosen to fit your story.

Step 2. Start with a hook

Having ruminated on your key emotion, you probably already have a good idea of how you want your story to unfold. Drafting is where you figure out how to communicate it: start to finish.

Writing a short story and its opening lines isn't easy. You'll want to strike the right tone, introduce the characters, and capture the reader's attention all at once — and you need to do it quickly, because you don't have much space!

One highly effective method for starting a short story is to write an opening hook: a sentence that immediately intrigues the reader. For example, in *Mrs. Dalloway* (originally a short story), Virginia Woolf opens with the line, "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself." The reader then wonders: who is Mrs. Dalloway, why is she buying flowers, and is it unusual that she would do so herself? Such questions prompt the reader to continue with interest, looking for answers.

Another means of hooking your reader is beginning your short story *in medias res*: in the middle of the action. According to Kurt Vonnegut, this form should "**start as close to the end as possible,**" and this strategy achieves exactly that.

Starting as close to the end helps the writer to evaluate every sentence, every word and to eliminate any unneeded words that will keep the reader from reaching the ending and experiencing that special feeling.

Beginning *in medias res* also loosens the shackles of traditional story structure and allows you to write more freely. If this means your exposition ends up a little messy, that's okay — you can always rework it later. The objective of drafting is just to get words down on the page.

Step 3. Write the story

As you start to build your short fiction, remember our cardinal rule of care. You have a finite amount of words, which means each sentence is proportionately more important than in a longer piece. **Re-read every sentence to make sure it either directly advances the plot or gives significant backstory — otherwise you're just wasting precious space.**

I've previously addressed the importance that every character in a story must be there to advance the goal of the protagonist or to prevent him from reaching his goal. This is true of stories of any length, but you can imagine how important this guideline is in a short story, especially one with a low word limit like the Golden Quill Contest.

Remember all that time and effort you poured into developing your key emotion? Now's the time to put it to work. "A short story must have a single mood and every sentence must build toward it," Edgar Allan Poe once said. Ensure that each sentence not only progresses the story, but also contributes to the "mood," or key emotion.

Step 4. Write a strong ending

Nothing is more disappointing to a reader than a beautifully written narrative with a weak ending.

If you have no idea how to end your short fiction, go back and review it up to the penultimate scene, right before everything resolves.

Then ask yourself: how would a reader want this story to end? **The answer to this involves a combination of what would realistically happen to the characters and what is most impactful.** Ernest Hemingway succinctly achieves this sort of ending in *Hills Like White Elephants*, about a couple at an emotional crossroads:

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"Coming back, he walked through the barroom, where people waiting for the train were drinking. He drank an Anis at the bar and looked at the people. They were all waiting reasonably for the train. He went out through the bead curtain. She was sitting at the table and smiled at him. "Do you feel better?" he asked. "I feel fine," she said. "There's nothing wrong with me. I feel fine."

Even if you've known your ending since day one, you still need to execute it for maximum emotional effect — the final push for your key emotion. Try using dialogue to end your story, or reveal a twist in the very last sentence, leaving the reader reeling.

Finally, after you write your ending, ask yourself again: Does it make sense based on the preceding scenes? If there's a twist, does the story hint at it without being too obvious? Most importantly, does it make a strong emotional impact? Once you can answer yes to all these questions, you're ready to start editing.

Step 5. Reread your story

Since you've been writing your short story so carefully, you might think you can use your "Get out of jail free" card for the editing phase. Nope! Because the form is so compact, you have no room for error — so make sure to edit diligently, starting with a reread.

Read through your whole story at least three times. Think about the flow of the words, the strength of your key emotion, and the consistency of your plot and characters. Make a note of any inconsistencies you find, even if you don't think they matter — something extremely minor can throw the whole narrative out of whack.

Step 6. Edit yourself

Editing for inconsistencies is always a hassle, especially in short stories, where even small plot holes are glaringly obvious. Revise to eliminate these. If you end up rewriting

substantial portions of your story, remember to keep it consistent with your tone and key emotion.

You may also have to cut back on your text if you're entering a writing contest with a word limit, or if you simply realize your story is dragging. Taking advice from Poe again, **if a sentence doesn't add to the mood, get rid of it!** Don't be scared to press delete; you'll be amazed at how little you miss those words.

When a client complained about how much his editor wanted him to cut, the editor said, "There are only two people who will ever miss those words—you and me." Author Elmore Leonard was famous for this quote: "I try to leave out the parts that people skip."

Step 7. Ask others for editing help

Send your story to someone else for editing, even if you feel self-conscious — it could save you from making major mistakes. There's nothing like a fresh pair of eyes to point out something you missed. More than one pair of eyes is even better! You might ask one friend to look for plot holes, another to edit for spelling and grammar, another for sentence structure, and so on.

But remember, writing short stories is not merely a path to greatness. A truly heart-wrenching short story is greatness in and of itself.

If you'd like to read more on writing from Reedsy, follow this link:

<https://www.reedsy.com>

Now, get to work and write that winning story.

Entries accepted beginning May 1, 2020.

All entries and payment must be received by 11:59 p.m., August 1, 2020.

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Theme: The theme of the 2020 Contest is **THE UNEXPECTED**. All entries must depict this theme, originally interpreted. It is not necessary to include the word.

*In the Rhythm of Writing,
Judythe Guarnera*

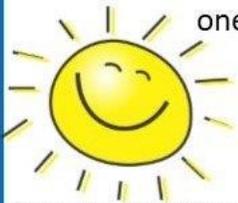
Sunshine Corner

Need a Little Sunshine?

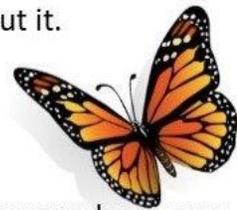


Into every life a little rain might fall, times when we long for sunshine, but no one notices.

NightWriters would like to send a card to any of its members who are ill, have lost a loved one, had surgery or an accident, but we don't always hear about it.



So, Fellow Writers, we need you!



Please email me, Judythe Guarnera: judy.guarnera@gmail.com and let me know when someone you know needs a little sunshine.

Moved or Changed Email?

Please notify NightWriters of any change in address or email: jkon50@gmail.com. Join NightWriters and send dues or renewal checks (payable to SLO NightWriters) to: SLO NightWriters, PO Box 2986, Paso Robles, CA 93447. Or join/renew online through our website: www.slouightwriters.org and pay with a credit card.

Monthly Meetings

NightWriters' Evening Meetings: the second Tuesday of every month, year round. We encourage interested visitors to join us. Admission is free; refreshments served. Next Meeting: TBD, at United Church of Christ, 11245 Los Osos Valley Road, San Luis Obispo 93405.

General meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. Round Table presentations start at 5:15 p.m. Writers' Critique Groups: Free for members, \$5 for non-members. These groups read and critique each other's work and discuss the business of writing. Visitors are always welcome. For details, visit our website: www.slouightwriters.org.

Kudos, Kudos, Kudos...

Terry Sanville

Diet Margarita, a flash fiction story by Terry Sanville, will be included in a handmade chapbook titled *Shelter in Place* published by [Staring Problem Press](#).

Terry's flash fiction story **Ledges** will appear in the upcoming online edition of *Delphinium*, a new online and print journal put out by [REaD Lips Press](#).

Terry's short story **Math Homework** will appear in an upcoming edition of [The Ignatian](#), an annual print journal published by the [University of San Francisco](#).

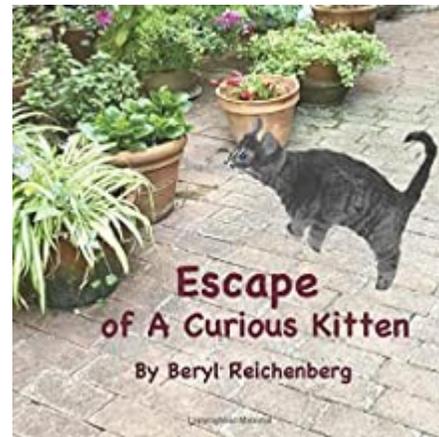
Terry's magical realism short story **Night Train to Albany** will appear in an upcoming issue of [The MacGuffin](#), a print journal published by Schoolcraft College in Livonia, Michigan.

Terry's short memoir **Fifty Years With Cats** will appear in upcoming issue No. 35 of [Adelaide Literary Magazine](#), a print journal published in New York City and in Lisbon.

Terry's short story **Can't Have Too Many Flamingos** will appear in the upcoming edition of [Penumbra Literary and Art Journal](#), a print publication put out by Cal State University Stanislaus.

Beryl Reichenberg

Beryl Reichenberg's twenty-third children's picture book, **Escape of a Curious Kitten**, has been published, and is available on [Amazon](#), on her website, www.berylreichenberg.com, and at local bookstores. This story is about a kitten, Luna, who ventures outside into an exciting but scary world. Beryl is both author and illustrator of her children's books.



Have Kudos to Crow About?

Do you have a recent article or story published in a local, national or even international print or online magazine? Or a book published?

How about a review, or an award, honor or recognition of your writing?

If so, we'd like to know about it. To have your literary kudos included in *WordSmiths*, send an email to slownnewsletter@gmail.com by the 20th of the month.

Google Calendar

A Pandemic Poem by Patricia Gimer

March, 2020

You have no events scheduled today.

No need to even go out for groceries—
no one's coming to dinner.

Your boyfriend says he misses you,
will come on Wednesday, work in the garden
if the rain stops and if you, a cougar
over sixty-five, will keep your distance.

You can smile at each other from opposite
corners of the garden while you
prune the roses, plant seedlings,
exchange heart hand-signs, body-language hugs
and blow kisses—
as though you're FaceTiming
from distant ends of the earth—

an earth that aches
with longing
for those we lost—
for touch,
for normal
and the simple things we took for granted

before Covid-19 was born—
before we learned the term, *social distancing*,
before TV journalists Skyped from home,
started styling their own locks,
and home hair color began flying off the racks—
before the shelves at Costco were bare,
before our investment accounts were drained
and we were told it could be this way for months,
before schools, churches, gyms, and book clubs
downloaded Zoom,
before we knew the definition of PPE,
and were prevented from visiting our dear ones in nursing homes—

We used to hunker together in the face of danger.
Now, *we are* the danger. Behind our masks, we hunker alone.

Space and Time

by Judith Amber

"I'd been struggling to find time and space to write. If I had time, I didn't have space and if I had space, I didn't have time...There's nothing scarier than time and space and the blank page." (from "Murder Me Nicely," a short story by Lucie Britsch in the May issue of *The Sun Magazine*)

For the past few months of self-isolation the choice between space and time is not one I had to make as I have both - with the exception of Zoom meetings and the lure of yet another Netflix series. This hasn't always translated into hours of writing. So I assigned myself a writing project, asking other NightWriters the following questions:

- 1) Have you started any new writing projects that you otherwise might not have or might have delayed for not enough time?
- 2) Are you writing about the same amount of time as usual, more, or less?
- 3) Have you used the "extra" time (and do you feel you actually have extra time) to go back to older writing to edit or submit?
- 4) Are you reading more or less? Changed your reading habits?
- 5) Anything else that would be interesting to know about how you are coping?

Judith Amber

I had been re-editing a long memoir piece in the months before COVID-19 but hadn't gotten around to researching where I might send it. So I have used the time to submit my memoir (in three different versions!) to literary magazines, including *Bellevue Literary Review* and *The Sun*.

With free time and extra money (no concerts, movies, trips, etc), I have been buying books. In one instance, Nan's Book Store in Pismo Beach ordered a book I needed for my Jewish

Book Club; when it came, Nan and I met for a minute outside the store, both of us in masks and gloves. I also bought *The Best of Bellevue Literary Review*, renewed several magazine subscriptions, and tackled the pile of *New Yorkers*, *Harpers*, and *Sierra Club* magazines that were sitting unread on my coffee table. I've also gone back to reading books that hopefully will improve my writing: *The Art of the Personal Essay*, edited by Phillip Lopate, and *Turning Life into Fiction* by Robin Hemley.

Susan Tuttle

I am not writing more than I was before the shutdown, but am increasing my marketing activities. I'm promoting Volume 1 of my new series, *Tough Blood*, via Mail Chimp. I was able to go from an email list of 50 people, the most I can do as a group, to an email blast to 700 people who are on my full mailing list

I also teach a class online for former students. I email them a daily writing prompt and then send back my comments. I plan to teach "Write It Right" classes via Zoom. As my fellow Night Writers probably know, this class is helpful to all genres, as we cover the 12 skills writers need to master. I could use a few more students for the class which will be held weekly on Wednesdays for 12 months, at either 10:30-12:30 or 2-4 p.m. People should contact me if they want to join. The cost is \$30 per month.

Finally, I find it hard to write without the stimulation that comes from seeing people! Under usual circumstances, I would see people at Starbucks and chat and also bump into neighbors. Now I find that sometimes depression sets in and it's harder to write something new. I am also still recovering from the flu (not COVID-19) so it's taking time to get back to a regular schedule.

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Janice Kostantinidis

I haven't started any new writing projects, but I have resurrected a memoir I want to finish. It's about life growing up in an abusive situation and how I've overcome the damage done.

I have used extra time and I think I am doing more writing.

I am also reading more. For instance, a couple of books from Elizabeth Strout's *Olive Kitteridge* series, Michelle Obama's autobiography, *Becoming*, and some poetry by Mary Oliver.

I am enjoying my garden a lot and growing more herbs and vegetables. We bought a green house. I am, by nature, a reclusive person, so not a lot has changed for me. I love silence.

Dennis Eamon Young

My writing seems to manifest itself differently than before. I am still working at both research for and actual work on my novel to the same degree, but more sporadically. My protagonist, Corbyn Cochran attacks me in the AM shower. Then in the evening, he and the rest of the characters keep at me. Bits and bites of ideas float in at various times, while I'm involved in other things.

I write much longer emails to friends, going on and on, as if I'm utilizing them to relax into being more expressive and they keep me a bit more focused. We are awaiting the printed copies of KIND magazine, so I'm not working on any new articles at the moment. I have pulled up a short children's story from 2005 and re-worked it, but not submitted it anywhere yet. I'm probably writing about the same amount of time or a bit less.

Sometimes I believe I have been transported into a poorly written episode of *The Twilight Zone* or *The Outer Limits*. Photographic work is now non-existent, with assignments cancelled or moved into 2021.

My reading is either research for my novel or general political reading, trying to make sense of the possible collapse of our economy and/or

country, starting with the Tribune news and then spending hours at the computer. My release is a daily 4 pm walk by the ocean with my wife, Carol, talking, taking photos, breathing deeply of the clean ocean air, talking with neighbors and strangers from six feet away.

I'm getting back to drawing and even bought a nice big canvas, to start painting, but now I need to buy an easel. So, I have plenty of things to distract me and no matter what I am doing, the novel is always being worked on in my head. There's no getting away from that.

Sarah Green (new member and coordinator of the South County Poetry Group)

I haven't begun any new projects, except new poems, which don't really count. (author's comment: as a fellow poet, that certainly counts!) I've started poems and not finished them, but not revised older works.

I'm writing about the same amount of time, but I don't seem to have 'extra' time since I take care of my handicapped husband and I am often interrupted from what I'm doing to get him something to eat or drink, or to do his eye drops, or just tend to him. We did play Scrabble one afternoon - a shortened version as he tires easily.

I seem to spend more time online than reading lately, and what I read might be an article in the *New Yorker* or *Smithsonian* rather than a whole book. Before COVID-19 I used to read books more than reading magazine articles. But a book I'd requested from the library and managed to grab from the library before it closed was *City of Girls* by Elizabeth Gilbert, which I could hardly put down. Excellent!

Overall, I think I'm coping pretty well. I'm lucky to have a neighbor who buys me groceries once a week and she even called me last night to make sure we were okay with the weather being so hot, and did we need a

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(Continued from page 17)

fan? No. We're fine. I've even made more overseas phone calls to family and friends!

Terry Sanville

I continue to write about two short stories a month. Each story is a new project where I address a new subject in a new way. My latest effort is a short story titled *Midnight Tornado*, a surrealistic view of mental illness (no need for research on my part, heh, heh).

I write about two hours in the morning after breakfast, an hour or two in the late afternoon, then from 11:30 pm until 1:30 am. I may write a little less in the afternoon because weeding my garden has usurped some of my writing time. (My gardener quit and I've yet to hire a replacement. Besides, there's something meditative about pulling weeds.)

Any extra time is spent editing a dystopian trilogy (three novel-length works) that I wrote several years back. The first book, "Face-to-Face" has been acquired by a small mid-west

publisher and should be released this fall – or whenever the printers come back to work.

My reading habits have remained the same. And I spend much more time writing than reading. I'm reading a friend's novel just released on Amazon, *White Poison* by Michael Harris and it's a historical western about the massacre of Native Americans in Northern California. It's not a short novel.

I'm finding that watching too much CNN News stifles my ability to explore new short story ideas. At first I went with the flow, wrote a flash fiction story titled *Diet Margarita* that has the GLA (Geezer Liberation Army) terrorizing the Flatbush neighborhood of NYC during a Covid-42 pandemic (it has been picked up by online and print publications). But I'm past the pandemic writing stage (gardening and long walks helped) and I think I'm back on track (check out the Kudos section of this newsletter for my recent activities).

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Post your bio, picture, book covers and ordering links. Contribute a writing blog post-free publicity!

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List your website(s) and blog(s) with live links — makes it easier for the public to find you and helps build your platform.

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Get your book reviewed. Write a review—it's a valid publishing credit.

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Proofreading: spelling, punctuation, and grammar only. The last step before publication.

Cost: \$5/3 pages

What you get: a corrected document. Turnaround time @ 1 week for a 250-300 page manuscript.

Line Editing: spelling, punctuation, grammar, word usage, sentence construction, consistency of voice/style.

Cost: \$5/page

What you get: two documents, one corrected (spelling, punctuation, grammar only), one with suggestions in track changes. Turnaround time @ 1-1/2 weeks for a 250-300-page manuscript.

Developmental Editing: full evaluation of the story and plot, including character development and growth, story arc, use of language, point of view, tense, consistency/believability of story line, subplots, beginning and ending, setting, author's voice/style, etc. Includes spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

Cost: @ \$850-\$1,200 for 250-300-page manuscript, depending on amount of work the manuscript needs. Flat rates also available.

What you get: a document with track changes for spelling, punctuation and grammar, and comments, suggestions, and examples on ways to improve the work. Turnaround time: 2-3 weeks, depending on amount of work needed.

I will never rewrite your work, I will only suggest ways you can make it better, with examples for clarification. My goal is to help strengthen your unique author's voice while making sure you tell the best story you can write.

Beta Reading Services also available, \$50/book.

Contact me at: editme1@yahoo.com

Submit Stories, Photos and Ads to the Newsletter

We will publish advertisements for NightWriters' books and book writing related events. This advertising is Free For Members. Please provide the graphic (book cover or other graphic) for the announcement.

We will also accept original photographs, and unpublished Flash Fiction between 400-800 words from current members. Excerpts from published works, if they stand alone as their own mini-story, are also acceptable. We are also interested in articles, kudos and event notices. And if you have any other ideas for content, please let us know.

Send all submissions as attachments to: slonwnewsletter@gmail.com, and put NEWSLETTER SUBMISSION in the subject line. We're all writers... so, take advantage of this opportunity to be published in your newsletter.

NightWriters REVIEW BOARD

As writers, we need to read in order to see what others are doing. We also find out what works and what doesn't, what we need to avoid and what we want to incorporate into our own bag of skills.

So, as long as we're reading, why not read other members' books and write reviews for them? It's a win-win for everyone: we learn by reading, and authors garner those all-important reviews for their work.

NightWriters has set up a Review Board, where we connect member readers with member writers' new works. Below you will

find a listing of members who are willing to read and review (on Amazon, Goodreads, or their other favorite review site) specific works by other members. You must be a NightWriter member in good standing to take advantage of this board. If you have a new book for review, just contact the reader(s) listed here, and arrange to have a book sent to them. Please check carefully to make sure your genre fits the genres each person reads. Have fun!

Review Board Members*

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Judith Bernstein	ryewit@live.com	memoir, creative nonfiction
Steve Bowder	sbowder@live.com	historical novel
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Ruth Cowne	abuela10@att.net	memoir, flash fiction
Steven McCall	steven.mccall7@gmail.com	literary fiction
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Brian Schwartz	brian@selfpublish.org	nonfiction
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****To be added to our Review Board listing, write to: slonwnnewsletter@gmail.com and put Review Board in the subject line.***