



April 2021

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# President's Letter

by Janice Konstantinidis

Dear Fellow NightWriters,

Recently I watched the PBS biography of Flannery O'Connor, and I was intrigued by one of the first tasks assigned to graduate students of the MFA program at the Iowa Writers' Workshop she attended: read, or re-read, the great writers!

Who has time for that? We are so dominated by the business of our daily lives that we can't imagine taking time to study the writings of masters of the written word. And yet we know, deep down, that reading well-written sentences is a true path to better writing.

But where to start? I am interested in hearing from members who are conscious of the influence of great writing in their own work. Perhaps we could share the suggestions with our members.

Personally, I would start with William Shakespeare, who is known to have turned a memorable phrase or two. Then I would consider Mark Twain, Jane Austen or F. Scott Fitzgerald. Pick your genre, and there are innumerable examples to choose from.

Meanwhile, I hope you are all well and

## **Blue Wren**

Semiquaver cotton ball,  
fantail high above it all.  
Blackened breast meets eye and beak,  
bright blue feathers gently peek,  
at one with nature's soft decal.

*Janice Konstantinidis*



productively writing in these unusual times. There is light ahead, but further patience will be required to get through the pandemic safely.

*Janice Konstantinidis*



Photo by Lorraine Flakemore

## General Meeting Previews

Tuesday, April 13

Sue McGinty

**5:15 pm: Join the Critique Table**

**6:30 pm: Sue McGinty**

### ***Creating Catchy Characters***

Join author Sue McGinty to discuss the elements of character development in writing. The discussion will include:

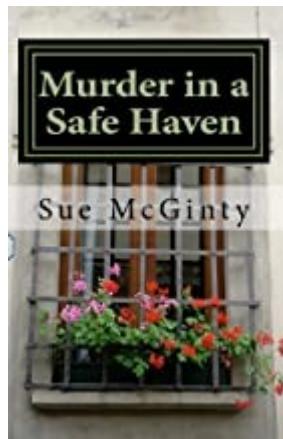
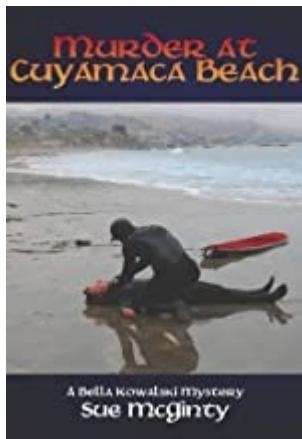
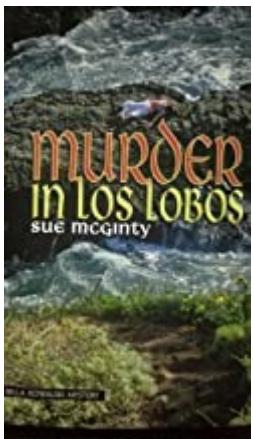
- Which comes first, the character or the story?
- Introducing your main character: appearance, voice, strengths, weaknesses.
- Understanding how the story's arc relates to the goals of your characters.
- Secondary characters: how many and when should they be introduced?
- Secondary characters that help the main character achieve his or her goals.
- Secondary characters that hinder the main character.



Sue McGinty escaped Los Angeles June 17, 1994, the same day OJ Simpson took his infamous ride. Unlike OJ, Sue had a destination in mind: the Central Coast hamlet of Los Osos. Her goal: writing fiction, a whole different mindset than writing technical courses for McGraw-Hill.

She made the most of her newly-found time, publishing five Central Coast mysteries: *Murder in Los Lobos*, *Murder at Cuyamaca Beach*, *Murder in Mariposa Bay*, *Murder in a Safe Haven*, and *Murder at Smuggler's Cove*. Her current release, an historical fiction coming-of-age story, *The Sojourner Chronicles*, takes place in Detroit during WWII.

Contact Sue at [SueMcGinty@aol.com](mailto:SueMcGinty@aol.com) or on Facebook: Sue McGinty.



# General Meeting Previews

## Tuesday, May 11

### Mara Purl

**5:15 pm: Join the Critique Table**

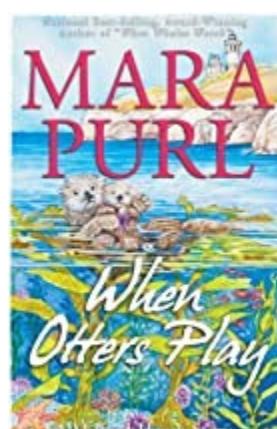
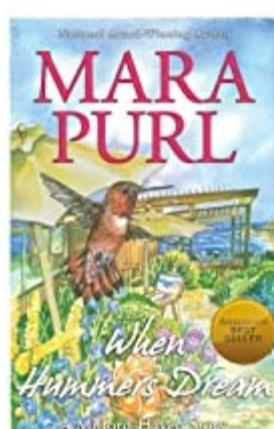
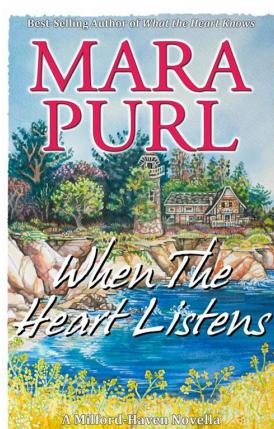
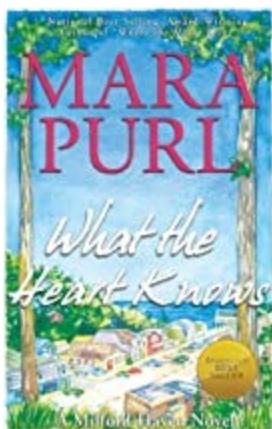
**6:30 pm: Mara Purl**

### ***A Journey to Milford-Haven and Beyond***

Join Mara on a journey through her varied and fascinating career as she reveals who were some of her major influencers, teachers and mentors. Enjoy stories about Louis L'Amour, James Michener, Margaret Coel, Joseph Campbell and several others. Hear how she went from television star to her own radio drama creator and from script writer to best-selling novelist.

Q&A follows the presentation!

Mara Purl is the author of the best-selling Milford-Haven Novels, which have earned fifty book awards. The saga is based on her BBC radio drama which had 4.5 million U.K. listeners. Her radio and book series is set on the Central Coast, where she is a long-time performer, speaker, and author. A dynamic voice in Women's Fiction, Mara speaks nationally on heart-matters and personal transformation, and is an accomplished audio book performer. She was an actress on Days Of Our Lives, and a journalist for the Associated Press, Rolling Stone and the Financial Times of London.



# General Meeting Previews

## Tuesday, June 8

### LeAnne Krusemark

**5:15 pm: Join the Critique Table**

**6:30 pm: LeeAnne Krusemark**

#### ***Manuscript Formatting and Submission Do's and Don'ts (Avoiding Simple Mistakes That Cause Rejection)***

If your manuscript is formatted or submitted incorrectly, chances are you will be rejected. Learn the ABCs of formatting articles, poetry, short stories, and different types of books. You will also learn how to submit digital and/or hard copies of your manuscript properly, as well as find the right publisher or agent who will take a serious look at the manuscript once received.



#### Bio:

LeeAnne Krusemark is the founder and managing partner of Krusemark, Grinnell and Associates. She is a nationwide speaker on the topics of entrepreneurship and publishing. Her in-person lectures have been offered at more than 200 facilities nationwide, including Purdue University, and she has been asked to speak at Senate-sponsored business conferences as well as for the Department of the Army. She is also a former journalist, editor, and managing editor of newspapers, as well as an author of countless magazine articles and several books, some of which can be found on Amazon. LeeAnne also assists authors with editing to make sure their writing is marketable, and then represents them as an agent. The inspiration she gives to others has even been compared in writing to Oprah!

Website: [KrusemarkGrinnell.com](http://KrusemarkGrinnell.com)

#### **Getting Published: A - Z**

FROM AGENTS, COPYRIGHTS, FORMATS,  
PUBLISHERS, AND QUERIES TO WRITER'S BLOCK  
WITH A BONUS CHAPTER ON  
SELF-PUBLISHING OPTIONS

LEEEANNE KRUSEMARK

## General Meeting Previews

Tuesday, July 13

Ava Homa

**5:15 pm: Join the Critique Table**

**6:30 pm: Ava Homa**

### ***A Best Book of 2020: Daughters of Smoke and Fire***

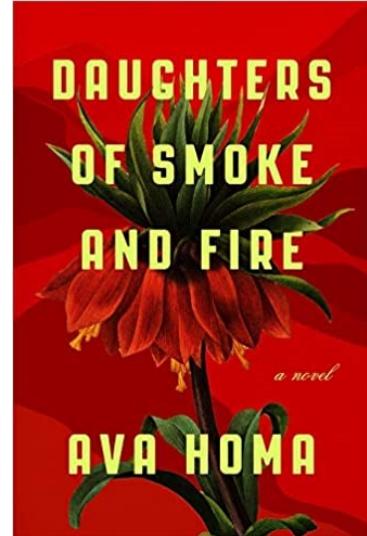
Mark your calendars for July 13 when we will have a special guest presenter, [Ava Homa](#). Ava's *Daughters of Smoke and Fire* was named "A Best book of 2020." She was nominated for the Frank O'Connor International Prize. Her book has been described as an unforgettable, haunting story of a young woman's perilous fight for freedom and justice for her brother.



Set primarily in Iran, this extraordinary debut novel takes readers into the everyday lives of the Kurds. Leila dreams of making films to bring the suppressed stories of her people onto the global stage, but obstacles keep piling up.

Leila's younger brother Chia, influenced by their father's past torture, imprisonment, and his deep-seated desire for justice, begins to engage with social and political affairs. But his activism grows increasingly risky and one day he disappears in Tehran. Seeking answers about her brother's whereabouts, Leila fears the worst and begins a campaign to save him. But when she publishes Chia's writings online, she finds herself in grave danger as well.

*Daughters of Smoke and Fire* is an evocative portrait of the lives and stakes faced by 40 million stateless Kurds and a powerful story that brilliantly illuminates the meaning of identity and the complex bonds of family, perfect for fans of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*.



*Daughters of Smoke and Fire* "unfurls the history of an oppressed people fighting for their right to live, love, thrive, and create. Homa peels back layers of sorrow and injustice to reveal the resilience and hope of so many Kurds living in the stateless nation."—Chicago Review of Books

# Notices

## Scholarship Opportunities for Writers of Children's Books

Need a kick in your writerly posterior? The good folks at the [Highlights Foundation](#) may be just the ones to administer that kick. They're all about "amplifying the voices of storytellers," in particular, storytellers who write for kids.

Their fabulous retreat center is evocative of Asilomar, though it's in the Pennsylvania Poconos. That's a long way for us SLO people, but due to COVID, Highlights has developed online and on-demand courses featuring astoundingly dedicated and inspired writers and teachers of writing. And by fall, they'll also be offering their traditional in-the-flesh instruction at the Highlights Foundation retreat center (which involves nifty cabins, serious coddling, and mind-boggling food from the amazing Chef Amanda and her crew).

Highlights has a true commitment to serving those who can't afford to attend to treat themselves to this level of learning, so they've put a lot of energy and money into their scholarship programs. Some scholarships serve poets, others serve novelists. Some are for illustrators, or writers trying to revise their work. Some focus on people of color, or LGBTQ+ folks. There's even a scholarship for writers over fifty.

If you've been working hard to get your craft to the next level, but you're feeling you need an extra kick, or you just can't wrap your head around that next revision, or you're looking for an inspired and inspiring mentor, try poking around on the [Highlights Foundation](#) website. Chances are good you'll find something right up your alley.

Questions about all this? SLO Nightwriter and Highlights Foundation devotee, Charlie Perryess is happy to field questions. Contact him at [csperryess@kcbx.net](mailto:csperryess@kcbx.net).

## Writing novels for kids?

Apply for the Patricia Lee Gauch



<https://www.highlightsfoundation.org/scholarships/>

## Notices (Continued)

### SLO County Publication Seeks Submissions

The San Luis Obispo County legal magazine, the *Bar Bulletin*, is expanding its range of articles and is seeking submissions from the community. Tara Jacobi, editor of the *Bar Bulletin*, states that "I am looking for articles about anything from the history of SLO, the latest book mystery you read, work-life balance, a lifestyle choice that made the difference and more. Generally, I am open to almost anything that writers wish to write about who may wish to obtain the experience of being published."

To submit an article or to ask any question, contact Tara Jacobi at [slosafire@icloud.com](mailto:slosafire@icloud.com).

### Monthly Online Zoom Meetings

During the pandemic isolation, we are offering online meetings and presentations via Zoom (see page 3 for details of our April 13 General Meeting). We encourage interested visitors to join us. The meetings will be held on the second Tuesday of the month. The Critique Table will begin at 5:15 pm and the General Meeting will begin at 6:30 pm.

If you have any ideas or comments about our online presentations, please contact our Program Director, Steven Mintz, at [smintz@calpoly.edu](mailto:smintz@calpoly.edu)

Visitors are always welcome. For details, visit our website: [www.slonightwriters.org](http://www.slonightwriters.org).

### How to Join the Monthly Zoom Critique Table

1. If you desire to have your work critiqued, send your chosen two pages to Susan Tuttle ([aim2write@yahoo.com](mailto:aim2write@yahoo.com)) and Terry Sanville ([tsanville@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tsanville@sbcglobal.net)) by the Saturday before the meeting.
2. Login to the monthly Zoom meeting a few minutes before 5:15 pm on the day of the meeting using the link below or the link provided in the email that is sent to members. You are welcome to join us even if you just want to listen and hear the critiques.
3. If you have any specific issues or questions you'd like covered at the Critique Table, just let Susan ([aim2write@yahoo.com](mailto:aim2write@yahoo.com)) or Terry ([tsanville@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tsanville@sbcglobal.net)) know before the meeting.

### The Zoom Meeting Link

[Click Here to Join the Zoom Meeting](#)

## Notices (Continued)

### A Friendly Reminder from the Sunshine Chair

I haven't mailed out a card for a very long time. Why, you might ask?

Because I rely on the NightWriter members to tell me when a member they know is ill, or had an accident, or surgery, or is just alone and depressed during the pandemic.

Cards can bring cheer, raise spirits. A card might just make the difference between a horribly depressing day and a tolerable day.

So, please think for a moment about members of your critique group, or people you know in NightWriters, who need a little cheer, and let me know.

Email me at [judy.guarnera@gmail.com](mailto:judy.guarnera@gmail.com) and let me know who needs a little cheer.

*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](mailto:judy.guarnera@gmail.com) and let me know when someone you know needs a little sunshine.

### North County Critique Group Currently Open to New Members

The **North County Critique Group** is looking for a few new members. Are you a fiction or creative non-fiction writer of intermediate to advanced ability who is looking for a group with which to share your work, listen to others, and grow your craft? We are currently meeting via Zoom on the second and fourth Thursday of the month at 1:30 p.m. If interested in joining this amenable group, please send a writing sample to coordinator Lillian Brown at [lilliofslo@aol.com](mailto:lilliofslo@aol.com).

# WORD PLAY

by Morgann Tayllor

## SILENCE IN WORDS

Silence is rare in a chatterbox world. Yet words in many languages have silent letters, including English. They may seem bogus or exasperating, but without them, some words would not exist. Others can become different words altogether. This **column**n features a few examples:

\* \* \* \* \*

What good are silent letters? Aside from carrying forward the legacy of root languages, they have personality. Consider the whimsical **knickknack**. It would have the same meaning by kicking the first **k** to the curb, but without the bridge**e** of silent letters, **niknak** appears naked.

*Silents* have energy. They're found anywhere within a word, from beginning to end. But without their *silents*, some words can morph into different words. **Lamb** goes on the **lam**, surfing is **fine** until a shark **fin** appears and **whole** is something you don't want to fall into. How about **coup**, a borrowed word from the French phrase *coup d'etat*? **Coup** is pronounced as **coo**, a homophone.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Pneumonia** and **psoriasis** are bacterial/auto immune conditions bent on making mischief, but where would they be without their piggyback **p**? **Ptomaine** poisoning might go unnoticed until a diner doubles over in distress after eating bites of tainted fish. *Ptomaine*, with or without the **p**, is now in disuse and is simply referred to as food poisoning caused by bacteria...The **pterodactyl**, an extinct flying reptile, was once thought to be an ancestor of birds. Without a **p**, the remaining collection of letters might fade into oblivion.

\* \* \* \* \*

Many alphabet letters serve silently, including the **M**, often left out in the pantheon of its

peers. **Mnemonic** is a word begging to be remembered. It means related to memory or devices used to jump-start memory. HOMES is a sample mnemonic device to recall the names of the Great Lakes: **Huron**, **Ontario**, **Michigan**, **Erie** and **Superior**.

Like many of the combinations of silent or phonetically deviant letters in words, **mnemonic** is a borrowed word from the ancient Greek, courtesy of their goddess of memory *Mnemosyne*. Greek root words were often filtered through Latin and then dispersed throughout other languages.

\* \* \* \* \*

But Greek and Latin are not the only languages responsible for our silent letters.

A borrowed word from the Japanese—the **tsunami**—can have everyone running for the hills...From the Vikings, those Scandinavian mariners of legend who **knuckled** down on their oars and **gnawed** at the **sovereignty** of other lands, come word usage with such *silents* as **g** and **k**, often followed by **n**...Recently British royalty considered hiring "a diversity **csar**" to help mitigate the fallout from the Meghan and Harry "bombshell" interview with Oprah Winfrey. **Csar**, **tsar**, **tzar** are variant spellings meaning a Russian emperor, adapted in American English within the last century to denote a person of power or authority in a particular field or situation.

\* \* \* \* \*

So writers who "listen" to the **rhythm** of their writing are in for a treat. They might just hear the perfect **silence**.

## TIPS AND TIDBITS

by Judythe Guarnera

### PERSONIFICATION Jazz Up Your Writing



Are you settling for boring, cliché-ish writing or do you want to make your writing scintillating?

After designing a presentation on ways to take writing to a higher dimensional plane by using descriptive writing tools, I'm continuing to explore what else is available out there and to share it with NW members in this column.

The craft of writing is a fluid process. Think back to how different much of today's writing is since the time of the early masters—Hemingway, Jane Austen, and Virginia Woolf compared to today's artists such as James Patterson, Agatha Christie, Anne Tyler, and J.K. Rowling.

Styles of writing are in flux, as are rules. Because of these ever-changing "rules," for my own personal thinking, I'm labeling them guidelines, techniques, and/or tools. I read many articles on writing, and notice that if I compare their advice, they often contradict each other. Rather than feeling confused, I consider this indicative of the fluidity of the art of writing.

The more varied your reading on the topic of writing, the more likely you'll begin to recognize tips and tools that work better for your style of writing and will discard the rest. When you see a tip being repeated in many columns, the broad consensus can add more weight to that one than others—at least for now. Next year might be different.

Have you ever been told that something you've written is okay, but a little flat? Since people we know are usually kind, let's

imagine they say what we've written is great, but *you* know something's missing—no pizazz.

One way to spice up our writing is to use *figurative language*. This includes the familiar similes and metaphors, but today we're going to focus on personification. When you use personification, you assign the qualities of a person to something that isn't human, or, in some cases, not even alive.

*The thunder clapped angrily in the distance.*

*My dog was angry when I left him alone all day.*

Why use personification? Sometimes by comparing one thing to a more familiar thing, the reader will better understand what you're trying to convey. Using personification may bring home a certain point to the reader that might be lost, otherwise.

*The pain of this toothache reminds me of the pain of childbirth.*

*My computer must hate me; my writing is always disappearing.*

Personification also gives the writer an opportunity to create interesting imagery, which can enliven a story.

Here are some general examples:

- The wind moaned through the trees.
- The screen door protested as it slowly opened.

(Continued on page 12)

(Continued from page 11)

- My computer throws a fit every time I use it.

So, there you go. You may have been using personification without even knowing it.

You don't want to confuse personification with anthropomorphism (not to be dwelled on today). The former as I described above gives human traits to non-human, or abstract things; it can also represent a quality or concept in a human form. Anthropomorphism refers to something non-human behaving as a human.

Examples of anthropomorphic personification are *Father Time*, *Chaos*, the *Grim Reaper*. These are all natural processes which are endowed with human form and personality.

If you either anthropomorphize an animal or personify an inanimate object as a literary device in your writing, you probably won't upset any of your readers, and you might find your writing more in demand.

Now, more examples of personification:

- She had an exciting way of reading. (Okay)

The words seemed to leap off the paper as she read the story. (Better)

- He threw a fast ball to home plate. (Okay)

The baseball screamed all the way into the catcher's glove. (Better)

- I'm going to bed; I'm tired. (Okay)
- I could hear my bed calling me. (Better)
- When the long-awaited DVD came out, sales were high. (Okay)

When the long-awaited DVD came out, they flew off the shelf. (Better)

Using personification is another easy tool that can add dimension to your writing, taking it from the ordinary to the spectacular. Focusing on more exciting description can enliven an ordinary story to one that readers won't want to put down.

*In the Rhythm of Writing,  
Judythe Guarnera*

**President:** Janice Konstantinidis  
**Vice-President:** Vacant  
**Secretary:** Leonard Carpenter  
**Treasurer:** Steve Derks  
**Program Director:** Steven Mintz  
**Membership Coordinator:** Jim Aarons  
**Critique Group Coordinator:** Tina Clark  
**Social Media/Publicity Coordinator:**  
Meagan Friberg  
**Contest Director:** Vacant  
**Welcome Committee:** Vacant  
**Sunshine Chair:** Judythe Guarnera  
**Website Master:** Janice Konstantinidis  
**Web Assistant:** Steve Derks  
**Newsletter Editor:** Steve Derks  
**Photographer:** Vacant  
**Member at Large:** Susan Tuttle

### 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](mailto:jkon50@gmail.com).

## Kudos, Kudos, Kudos...

### Terry Sanville

Terry's short story, *Secrets Best Kept*, will appear in the [Round Table Literary Journal](#), published annually by the Hopkinsville Community College, Kentucky since 1956.

Terry's short story, *After First Contact*, will be included in a print anthology published by [StoryMoja](#), a Kenyan publishing house. The anthology will be published in English, Kiswahili and Kinyarwanda, and is intended as instructional material for high school students in East Africa. Terry is happy his story has made it to Africa.

Terry's short story, *Sand*, will appear in the upcoming edition of [The Deadly Writers Patrol](#), a biannual print journal that presents writings by military veterans that expose the reality of war.

Terry's 350-word flash fiction story, *Blue*, will appear in the June 2021 issue of [Down in the Dirt](#) magazine, a journal published by [Scars Publications](#).

Terry's short story, *Tioga Pass*, will be included in the [2021 Annual](#), an anthology published by [Elizabeth River Press](#).

### 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 [sloannewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:sloannewsletter@gmail.com) by the 20th of the month.**

### Have You Checked Out Our Website Lately?

#### Control Your Own Information

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

#### MEMBER SITE LINKS

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

#### BOOK REVIEWS

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

#### WRITERS SERVICES

Do you have a writing or professional skill? Get listed on our new Services Page.

#### FACEBOOK

Become a "Fan" of NightWriters! Visit NW's Facebook page and sign up today! Also, link your Facebook page and your websites and blogs to NW sites.

#### LINKEDIN

Connect with NW on LinkedIn. Help build your author platform with writing professional connections.

## Blackbird

### by Shari Hollander

When I was 16, I fell in love with a boy in my hometown. Our on-again, off-again romance would last five years, through high school and college, until I moved cross-country to Southern California, literally on the eve of the nation's bicentennial. I sobbed as I flew out of JFK over the Statue of Liberty, knowing our historic date would never be consummated.

Our worlds could not have been more different. Alex, the middle child of six, lived in the basement of his parents too-small Cape Cod-style house, the dirty dishes under his bed symbolic of his triumphant subterranean hermitage, as he was either ignored or the object of their disappointment and exasperation.

I occupied the prized corner bedroom with two windows, walls painted a *nouveau* shade of sage green. My stylish mother had outfitted my princess bed with a fringed peacock-and-olive tapestry spread in our new bi-level in the nicer part of town.

My fascination for Alex might have begun at his green eyes, strayed right through his golden-brown curls and lost its mind around the belt buckle of his worn-out Levi's. He was clever and creative and musical. Self-taught in most things, school just couldn't corral him back in those rambunctious days of long hair, rebellion and falling asleep in class, especially after working janitorial late nights or playing gigs in bars. I was an honor student. He was always late for school.

How we came together in spite of our divergence is the stuff romance is made of and what subsequently defined my life in that Age of Aquarius (he was) and beyond. I didn't know it at the time, but decades later, I was rapturously remembered as the coolest girl in school; my fan, even 40 years later, recalling my racy MG. I'm sure my

cachet was enhanced—and envied—by my close association with this unapologetic nonconformist, whom, though coveted by female classmates and rock band groupies, I was lucky to call *my* boyfriend and who had chosen *me*, Poopla, as his partner in crime.

In those days, he was content being the soft-spoken bass man in the band, explaining soul to me once as not *what* you play but *what you don't* play. However, the confident prankster became disarmingly shy when called upon to sing falsetto harmony in covers like Neil Young's *Down by the River*. Irresistible in his vulnerability, I was flattered by his solo serenades to me, his *Cinnamon Girl*, accompanied on acoustic guitar at post-coital rehearsals in my bedroom, his basement or with a six-pack of Rolling Rock amidst the privacy of Parkway pines.

As those last innocent days of summer spilled into the crisp cusp of my first semester away at college, Cat Stevens' wistful *Wild World* was his poignant farewell. Crooned cliffside, sitting on a boulder in our lovers' lane on the Palisades, overlooking the Hudson River, his back to the New York City skyline, every word resonated, creating a powerful sonic memory that still spills tears whenever I hear the gentle regret of "*I'll always remember you like a child, girl....*"

In my mind's eye, Alex remains in suspended animation, the archetypal *Peter Pan*, a child-man reluctantly growing up, haphazardly, not believing in his own longevity nor legacy, stuck in the ambered dream-light of the past.

Above all, though, filtering through, one melody haunts me, echoing through time like a distant gramophone. The Beatles *Blackbird* was a simple solo he played acoustically, purely for pleasure, never on stage. While

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*Wild World* seemed perfectly penned for me, *Blackbird* might have been scripted for Alex: "Take these broken wings and learn to fly...."

I flew but he didn't. If you'd had a bird's-eye view of Lincoln, England, during Rag Night in 1974—the fall semester after Nixon's resignation—you would have seen 19-year-old me costumed as a drunken "dolly," alternately dancing to BTO's *You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet* and making out with another musically inclined bloke, my English student-boyfriend John.

Though several significant years my senior, we were conjoined by a strong physical attraction and our mutual love of Van Morrison. Shivering, we snuggled cozily against the damp on a frayed Persian rug in front of the crackling blaze of his vintage fireplace, while *Moondance* made it's debut as my lifelong theme song. I was clad in John's too-tight jeans as mine dried out by the fire, drenched by a downpour enroute to his digs, while Alex, the boy back home, was being arrested for drug possession during a routine traffic stop, dressed as a clown on Halloween.

*Tempus fugit.* Fast-forward five years. Even as I was planning my wedding in Los Angeles, I still irrationally held the torch for Alex. Inevitably, increasingly infrequent long-distance calls became awkward as we reluctantly disengaged, leaving my brain buzzing like a hive of frenzied bees sucked into the slipstream of separation.

Our next contact came three years later. Pregnant, I reached out, excited to share my good news, coyly mentioning that he would partly be the namesake who'd inspired a son's middle name...a detail I "neglected" to share with my husband.

By now, these meager calls were anything but romantic. However, his new wife was jealous in spite of me being happily married,

a mother and a decade plus 3,000 miles away. He told me sadly that she had forbidden contact with me ever again; and, resignedly, with the proverbial whimper, that was that.

Until one morning in 2002, when my sister called me--uncharacteristically early for her--with a puzzling message from the East Coast. All she could say was that a woman named Brenda had called asking if Jodi was my sister, apparently identifying us from our Cutters high school yearbooks. Jodi hoped it was all right that she'd given her my home phone number.

I was in suspense and grabbed the telephone as soon as it rang, strangling the last chime in my haste. I was unprepared for the shocking news that followed, as much as by who was delivering it. The woman on the other end of this transcontinental transmission was none other than Alex's wife, Brenda, informing me, incredulously, that Alex had glioblastoma, a fast-progressing, always fatal brain tumor. She was on a mission of mercy to grant his dying wish, which was to speak with me once again; and graciously, as often as was comforting for him until he could speak no more....

It was late fall, and my son would soon turn 18; coincidentally, like Dorian Gray, the eternal age at which I'd frozen my portrait of Alex. Justin was self-taught on the guitar the same as Alex. One day, I froze outside his room as, through the closed door, I clearly heard him picking out a few notes, a refrain from *Blackbird*. Choked with emotion, I asked Justin: Could he learn the entire song? He wasn't sure; but I implored him to do it please, please for me...and for Alex.

Justin practiced until he had a rendition that he felt could do it justice. I worried that Alex would slip away before I could offer this gift

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to him. At first, he was able to chat and joke in that familiar way; but subsequent calls would trail off to just the sound of his breathing until Brenda hung up the receiver.

Some things never change, I chuckled softly to myself, reminiscing how, at 16, we'd spend hours chatting on my blue princess phone about everything and nothing, my feet on the bed and my head on the floor...until I realized he'd fallen asleep with the phone off the hook! There was no other way to disconnect and clear my line other than driving cross-town to his house, whatever the hour. Sometimes, I'd wake up his friend, Lou, to holler outside and bang on his basement window or else I'd have to rouse his angry parents. But I'd feel lucky if I was the one to wake him for sleepy hugs and stolen kisses.

Justin softly sang: "Take these sunken eyes and learn to see...." Alex's vision was fading, and he was increasingly comatose. On the cusp of his 49<sup>th</sup> birthday, Alex flew "*Into the light of a dark black night. You were only*

*waiting for this moment to be free...."*



"Blackbird" by Venessa Kay

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## Moved or Changed Email?

Please notify NightWriters of any change in address or email: [jkon50@gmail.com](mailto: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.slonightwriters.org](http://www.slonightwriters.org) and pay with a credit card.

## 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](mailto: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.

## Letters to the Editor

**NOTE:** A new column is making its debut in this issue. It's entitled, "Letters to the Editor."

The purpose of the column is to offer members and readers an opportunity to:

- Comment on the content of the monthly newsletter.
- Make a request for a speaker or activity on a certain topic.
- Ask if a member has the answer to a writing question.
- Provide information that is useful to other members.

Please identify yourself in your letter and be sure to add contact info if you're looking for a reply. Send your letters to [slonwnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:slonwnewsletter@gmail.com).

### **To the Editor:**

Thank you, Steve Derks, for the nicely laid out newsletter you design and edit for SLO NightWriters. Many of our readers have no idea how much intensive labor it takes to pull this off each month.

I'd also like to salute NW member Ruth Starr for her memoir piece, *Nazis in Skokie, Illinois*. There is a message here for all of us.

We are living in tumultuous times, politically and pandemically. Fear, which can destroy reasoning and compassion, is all too frequent a companion these days. Ruth described a town in the seventies, which was home to a population of about 69,000 people, nearly 40,000 of whom were Jews and many were Holocaust survivors.

The inhabitants reacted passionately when they heard a Nazi group would march in their town. Fear sprang from the many horrific memories and stories the Jewish people had heard or experienced.

For a while, normally peaceful, helpful, caring people were threatening violence if the march occurred. Fortunately, it never took place and the relieved towns people returned to normal life and temperaments.

In current days normally peaceful folks have

turned into angry individuals attacking people of other ethnicities, religions, colors, and sexualities. Some have revolted against a process Americans have held dear for years—voting and the peaceful transference of power. Some have rained animosity, destruction, and murder on those who cherish our democracy and contribute to its work.

Ruth's story was a timely reminder that we must set apart destructive behaviors and embrace our at times tattered democracy which has led us for almost 250 years. Fear of the unknown, fear of known threats, fear of those who comprise "the others" can turn us from peaceful citizens to angry, rioting mobs.

Recently, I read an article where the author said that we must never make the assessment that someone we meet is not as good as us nor better than us. We retain our dignity when we avoid that assumption. Another piece of advice was to assume others have good intentions. Of course, for our own protection, we must be cautious, but when we are talking with co-workers, neighbors, family, acquaintances, give them the benefit of the doubt while you hear them out.

Judythe Guarnera

# 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 NightWriters 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\****

| <b><u>Name</u></b>    | <b><u>Email</u></b>  | <b><u>Genres</u></b>                   |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Jim Aarons            | <a href="mailto:jim@jeadvm.com">jim@jeadvm.com</a>                             | historical fiction                     |
| Mark Arnold           | <a href="mailto:markarnoldphd@gmail.com">markarnoldphd@gmail.com</a>           | historical, sci-fi                     |
| Judith Bernstein      | <a href="mailto:ryewit@live.com">ryewit@live.com</a>                           | memoir, creative nonfiction            |
| Steve Bowder          | <a href="mailto:sbowder@live.com">sbowder@live.com</a>                         | historical novel                       |
| David Brandin         | <a href="mailto:dbrandin@earthlink.net">dbrandin@earthlink.net</a>             | political, historical, general, sci-fi |
| Tina Clark            | <a href="mailto:outsidetheglasstjc@gmail.com">outsidetheglasstjc@gmail.com</a> | sci-fi, creative nonfiction            |
| Ruth Cowne            | <a href="mailto:abuela10@att.net">abuela10@att.net</a>                         | memoir, flash fiction                  |
| Steven McCall         | <a href="mailto:steven.mccall7@gmail.com">steven.mccall7@gmail.com</a>         | literary fiction                       |
| Jody Julkowski Nelson | <a href="mailto:jjnteacher@gmail.com">jjnteacher@gmail.com</a>                 | fiction, creative nonfiction           |
| Jennifer Rescola      | <a href="mailto:jkrescola@charter.net">jkrescola@charter.net</a>               | autobiography, novels                  |
| Brian Schwartz        | <a href="mailto:brian@selfpublish.org">brian@selfpublish.org</a>               | nonfiction                             |
| Mary Silberstein      | <a href="mailto:luvlamas@gmail.com">luvlamas@gmail.com</a>                     | poetry, fiction                        |
| Susan Tuttle          | <a href="mailto:aim2write@yahoo.com">aim2write@yahoo.com</a>                   | mystery, suspense, paranormal suspense |

**\*To be added to our Review Board listing, write to: [slonwnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:slonwnewsletter@gmail.com) and put Review Board in the subject line.**

# Services Offered

## Writer Within Publications

WriterWithin Publications announces that for a limited time it will have cover design services available for indie writers. To check out the covers done so far, see the front page of the website: [www.writerwithinpubs.com](http://www.writerwithinpubs.com).

To contact the cover designer directly, email [aaron@aaronkondziela.com](mailto:aaron@aaronkondziela.com). He is a great graphic designer with a good handle on the pulse of today's book cover needs. If you are ready, or almost ready, for your book cover, contact Aaron and see what he can do for you and your book.



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Let me help you Write It Right*  
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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.

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Contact me at: [editme1@yahoo.com](mailto:editme1@yahoo.com)