



President's Message

By Janice Konstantinidis



Fellow NightWriters,
It's hard to believe that it's December – how time flies by! I hope everyone had a wonderful Thanksgiving Holiday!

I am still settling into my role as president. Going forward, I have many ideas and plans for the organization. I am looking

forward to the new year's activities.

Some of these include some exciting speakers, activities for our general meetings, and growing our membership.

A huge thank you to Tia Araminta, our Golden Quill Contest Director and to all our wonderful judges, for making our contest such a great success. We were thrilled with the entries. We are still receiving notes of appreciation and praise for our contest from entrants who were happy to be able to enter our contest. They made it all worthwhile.

Congratulations to all of you who participated. You can see the winning entrants, judges and some of the entries on our [Golden Quill website](#).

I will be creating a new page on our SLO NightWriters website in the next week. There will be more entries and a photo gallery of the winners published there.

We were delighted with our awards ceremony last general meeting. Thank you to Baxter Trautman for the donation of the beautiful cake.

Please look for the new contest page [on our website](#).

Thank you to Meagan Friberg and Andrea Chmelik for their efforts and time in organizing our NaNoWriMo event this year. Their efficient and timely ability to get this event up and running in such a short time was amazing. This event is a keeper for SLO NightWriters.

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Thanks to all who spent the day at the event, or some of the day, helping. Thank you to the speakers who gave their time on the day to provide insights and motivation.

Thank you to Meagan Friberg and her committee for Simply Clear Marketing & Media. Many of our members have had the pleasure of seeing their work in print due to your hard work.

Thank you to Mark Arnold, Terry Sanville, Rosie McKinney and Susan Tuttle for the time given to run our Round Table critique sessions before each general meeting. These sessions are very popular, and your contributions are most appreciated. Kudos to you all.

Thank you to our very generous newsletter editor, Elizabeth Roderick, who takes time to do our newsletter all the way from Washington.

Thank you to Baxter Trautman and Brain Schwartz for the work you do to provide us with refreshments at each general meeting.

Thank you to Jean Moelter, for doing the job of Greeter. Your presence is a lovely introduction to members and non-members as they arrive at our meeting.

Thank you to Torry Dickinson, our Sunshine Chair.

Last but not least, a big thank you to our board members. I encourage our active members to renew their membership when due. Also, any non-members who would like to be join our organization, please come to a meeting, and or visit our website to read about SLO NightWriters.

A warm welcome to our new members. I hope you will enjoy the upcoming year. I am hard at work on some stimulating and informative programs for 2018.

We will be conducting a survey early in the year. I hope you will all take part in this.

Keep in mind, you are what make up SLO NightWriters, and I would like to know what you want from your organization. Come to a board meeting, be part of your organization in a way that enables you to help determine how we go forward as an organization. Write to me with your suggestions.

I am still seeking members who have time to fill various board positions. Please contact

me if you are interested so we can discuss what's involved. jkon50@gmail.com
Happy holidays and a healthy and safe start to the new year.

Janice Konstantindis
President SLO NightWriters.
BA. LittB. Grad Dip Ed.



Our December 12th Meeting

Our meeting will consist of presentation by Susan Tuttle on the 'Art of Self Editing'

Making sure your work is the best it can be entails knowing how to self-edit, so your story/book/article is ready to be seen by a professional editor, agent or publisher. This session will touch on preparing the manuscript, then delve into the three essential steps of self-editing: 1) Gaining Perspective; 2) the 9 elements of English Class; and 3) the 26 Writing Techniques; all of which will enable you to edit your own work like a professional, and increase your chances of securing an agent/editor/publisher, or a larger reading audience.

Join us for our Holiday Celebrations after Susan's Presentation.



We look forward to having you join us!



Submit Your Stories, Photos, and Ads for the Newsletter!

We're publishing **advertisements** for NightWriters' books and book or writing-related events. The advertising is **free for members**! Please provide the graphic you want me to use (the book cover or other graphic).

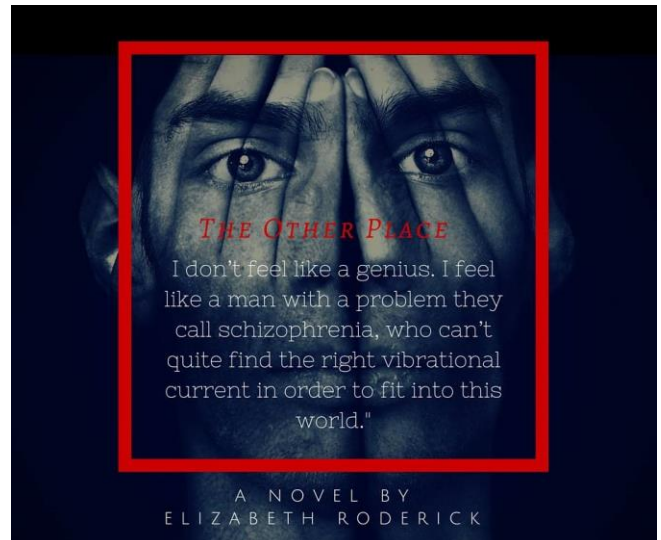
We're also accepting **original photographs**, and unpublished **flash fiction** between 500-800 words from current members.

As always, I will accept **articles, kudos, and event notices**. And, if you have any other ideas for content, let me know!

Please send all submissions as attachments to elizabethroderick@att.net with **NEWSLETTER SUBMISSION** in the subject line.

I'm looking forward to seeing your submissions!

Elizabeth Roderick
Editor



[Available on Amazon](#)

NightWriters Roundtables

We now have two separate critique tables at our general meetings. At Rosie MaKinney's table, participants will critique each other's work in a safe and supportive environment. This is an opportunity to get feedback on your work in progress and practice your constructive critiquing skills. It is also a great way to get to know other writers in our group. You do not have to bring along work to participate. Please keep submissions to double spaced, 12-point font, two pages.

Terry Sanville and Mark Arnold will be giving feedback as always on pieces brought to their table. If you do bring a piece for critique, please bring three copies: one for Terry, one for Mark, and one for yourself. Please keep your submission to 2 pages, typed, 12-point font, double spaced, 1" minimum margins all around. Note at the top what the genre is, and the age of your audience. Proper formatting is good practice for when you are ready to submit to agents/editors/publishers. If you don't format your submissions correctly, you'll probably be rejected. This is a great—and safe—way to see what the critiquing process is all about, get valuable feedback from two fantastic writers, and practice reading your work to a small audience.

More and more writers are coming to the Critique Tables. If you want to make sure your piece is read, arrive before the start time to get your name on the list. The Critique Round Table starts at 5:15 pm sharp. **It is free to NW members, \$5.00 for visitors.**

December Instruction Round Table will focus on Tension/Conflict

See you at UCC at 5:15, or at the general meeting that follows at 6:30 pm.

Fellow Writers!

Is a writing partner sick? Need encouragement? Getting married or having a baby? Suffering from the loss of a loved one?

Email me at torrydickinson@gmail.com and I'll send them a card from their SLO NightWriters family.

Torry Dickinson

BIOGRAPHER FOR HIRE

I write personal biographies to memorialize the lives of loved ones for their families. The average length is fifty pages, with pictures, and may take a matter of several months and many visits. The normal cost varies from \$3000 to \$5000, but can be more depending on the complexity of the project. I am just completing a recent project and may be available in June for a new start.

Contact: Darryl Armstrong

darryl1219@gmail.com 805-234-4348



The Family Who Reads Together
Photo by Dennis Eamon Young



Rainbow
Photo by Elizabeth Roderick

WORDS ARE IMPORTANT

By Judythe Guarnera

The older I get, the more convinced I become of the importance of words. You, my fellow writers have heard this repeatedly. But, have you stopped to think about why this might be true?

To answer that question, I'd like to offer some non-writing examples and then bring the discussion back to writing.

For more than fifteen years, I've been a volunteer mediator with Creative Mediation. I cut my teeth in Small Claims Court, where every day people seek resolution, often in the form of financial retribution. For instance, a landlord and tenant, who disagree about whether the deposit should be returned.

The tenant argues she left the apartment spotless. The landlord cites the amount of money he had to pay to clean the apartment to make it presentable. Often the solution lies in the recognition that individuals have different standards for cleanliness. When both parties agree to that definition, they find it easier to find a solution that works for everyone.

Another mediation word which is used frequently is "compromise." I choose to avoid the word. People who have different perspectives on an occurrence, while sure their perspective is the correct one, don't like the idea of compromising or giving up. Instead I suggest finding a solution that works for both parties.

Think about parents meeting with a divorce mediator who reminds them they are there for a custody battle. Sounds ominous, doesn't it? What if the mediator suggested the purpose of the meeting was to help the parents work out a schedule that works best for their children and each of them. Ah the power of words!

From a writing perspective, most of us have read the importance of using strong verbs, which stand alone and don't require an adverb to prop them up.

Example: Her fingers moved clumsily as she unbuttoned her sweater.

-or-

She fumbled with the buttons on her sweater.



Using the right, or more expressive, words can help us tighten our writing. We know editors look for tight writing.

For six months or so, I've been occupied with a quest to find the type of writing group that will best support my creativity and my need to improve my writing and increase publication possibilities.

Members of NightWriters have discovered the value and support to be gained by joining one of their critique groups. Certainly, during my years as a member, I have benefitted greatly from them.

Yet, personally, I reject the word "critique," just like I've rejected "compromise," and "custody dispute." Please understand I don't object to those words or their use, but I choose to employ words that imply a different concept.

In my experience, the word critique seems to imply there is something wrong, something which must be revealed and rooted out.

Most authorities on critique groups will stress the importance of starting the "critique" with something "good," before offering something "bad." Often, I've heard a critiquer begin her comments, with "I couldn't find anything wrong with what you wrote." Which leads me to believe that might be the perceived goal.

Instead, what if we approached the task of supporting a fellow writer by beginning with a summary of what worked and how it worked?

Example: "When you described your character's feelings about his mother, I really could see what kind of person he is, what his values are, and I find it easy to connect with him."

If we continue in that vein, we're giving the author invaluable information about what he is doing right. Don't we want to encourage a writer to recognize good, effective writing, so he can do more of the same?

Of course, we, also want to let the writer know where the sticky places are, where the story drags, where he hasn't been clear, when something doesn't tie in with the plot. And, if we can explain why something didn't work and perhaps offer some suggestions that might fix the problem, even better.

The group I'm working with right now, call ourselves, "Creative Lab." We do what I've described above. Sometimes it sounds too much like a critique, but we're working on that. The best part is when the writer identifies a problem area: "I can't figure out how to transition from this scene to the one where . . ." and we brainstorm. We discuss the pros and cons of our ideas, always recognizing that the author will go home fortified, to solve his dilemma.

So, my writer friends, I'm not suggesting the banishment of the word "critique," but I hope I've given you a little different perspective, a different approach.

Try it; you might like it.



Remembering Paul Fahey
Photos by Dennis Eamon Young



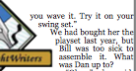
Congratulations to SLO NightWriters

Denis Perry, Mike Price, and Andrew Ross!

Christmas Magic NightWriters

By Mike Price

Sheila, my four-year-old daughter, climbed onto my bed and said, "Don't cry, Mommy. It's Christmas." "I know," I said, "but my eyes and thought of Bill. He died just before Easter. I dabbed my tears and said, 'Let's see what Santa brought you.' " "Okay," she said. She dashed to the Christmas tree and found her present. "Can I open it now, Mommy?" After I nodded, she tore the paper and found a box. "It's a little box," she said, as she tried to open it. "You'll grow into it." "Mommy, I don't see one for you. Mommy, please don't cry. Maybe Dad will bring you a present. He's nice." "Dad was my late-husband's good friend who had recently moved back to town. Bill's parents had introduced us at their Thanksgiving dinner. We had a wonderful time getting reacquainted. We fell in love." "Dad may not be back," I said. "He proposed last night. My brain told me that it was too much and too fast. I was scared. I told him, 'No.' " "The doorbell rang and Sheila flung open the door. 'Mommy, he's here. He's here.' " "Dad?" I asked, my eyes wide with surprise. "Merry Christmas, Julia," he said, trying to hide his hurt with a smile. "I came bearing gifts. May I come in?" "Yes, yes, get in and close the door." "He handed me a small blue package. 'For you.' " "I sat on the couch and carefully removed the wrapping from an exquisite set of ceramic figurines of Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus lying in a manger." "It's beautiful, thank you." "Bill told me you collected figurines." "Did you know my Daddy?" "Yes, I did. He was my best friend. He handed her a silver present. 'I have a gift for you too.' " "Sheila's gift was a pink magic wand with red lights. When she waved it, the lights blinked and it chimed. 'La, la, ling.' " "Cynthia," I said, "it's real. But you have to say 'Ho, ho, ho,' after



you wave it. Try it on your 'wing set.' " "We had bought her the silver last year, but Bill was too sick to assemble it. What was then up to?" "I know," she said, and ran into the garage. She waved her toy over a big long dusty box and said, "Ho, ho, ho, he put it in." "Look in your backyard," Dan said, with a smile. "No way," I said, as my daughter ran to the back. "Mommy, Mommy, look! It's up." She sat on her swing and said, "Push me, push me." "Admittedly, I asked, 'How did you do that?'" "Magic," Sheila said. "And a secret!" "Dan whispered. He ran to push my happy girl back and forth. After swinging and sliding, she said to Dan, 'You can't catch me.' When he almost did, she waved her wand and, quickly said, 'Ho, ho, ho, he put it in.' He froze in place. 'Infringe.' He chased her again, but never caught her. 'It's starting to rain,' I said. 'Let's go inside.' " Sheila sat next to Dan. "I like you, Mommy doesn't cry when you're here." "She said because your daddy went to Heaven. But someday, she'll find someone else who will love her, and you, just like Joseph loved Mary and Jesus." "Sheila glanced at the figure of Joseph and then looked at Dan. Suddenly, she flashed a big smile, waved her enchanted wand, and said, 'Ho, ho, ho, you're my new Daddy.' " "As if by magic, my heart said, 'Yes,' and I threw my arms around my fiancé."

Mike Price is a retired nuclear plant operator, part-time writer, and a time traveler. He lives in Santa Barbara and hopes everyone can have a magical and merry Christmas. He is a member of SLO NightWriters, for writers at all levels in all genres. Find them online at slonightwriters.org.



Submit your stories for inclusion in Simply Clear Marketing & Media

Full submission guidelines

at www.slonightwriters.org

Submit your 500-600 word short fiction to

Meagan at meaganfriberg@gmail.com

A Taste of the Wild

NightWriters
By Andrew Ross

The call came in about a wild animal, type unknown, killing and eating people's pets in the neighborhood. I glance at my partner, Theo, and say, "Okay, it sounds like we have a carnivorous predator to deal with." He nods and gets the truck in gear. "After driving around through the suburban area for a while without seeing anything out of the ordinary, we spot a cat fleeing a dark creature and observe it desperately crawling over a fence into a backyard. The odd predator follows in a smooth flowing, almost fluid, movement. "What on Earth was that?" I exclaim. It seems to run and then to slither. It makes no sense; I have never seen anything like it. "I might know, Mary," Theo says, "but I need to see it up close before I'm sure what we are dealing with here."

We clamber out of the truck, go to the rear, and collect our gear. I'm not sure what we need, but Theo seems to know. What is it about this man that draws me towards him? What is the attraction? He makes me feel light headed whenever he looks at me. We hear the cat screaming, which makes the hairs on my arm rise, and Theo calmly gets ready. He hands me the tranquilizer gun while he pulls together a collection of net, hook, and prod stick. He leaves one of the containment boxes with the driver open. "Okay, Mary, let's see what we've got."

We go through the gate and find a large, strange slug-like beast. It is fighting and changing shape, seeming at once to have limbs and then looking like a python, all while trying to control and ingest, the yowling, struggling cat. While I cowered him with the tranquilizer gun, Theo steps up to the pair and, using the prod, pins down the vile looking beast. I immediately release the cat, which flees away instantly. Without a word, Theo scoops up the creature dripping with fluid in the net. As Theo glances at me, seeming startled, and I feel a chill I feel like I

back as he smiles broadly and gently holds my hand. I can't look away. His eyes are too much. Why is he looking at me that way? "Theo... what... what... what... I struggle to say, as everything fades to grey. "Theo was born in Santa Barbara. He has three published works, several novels in process, and about 30 short stories and articles. Andrew is a member of SLO NightWriters, for writers at all levels in all genres. Meetings are held monthly and are open to all. Find information at slonightwriters.org."

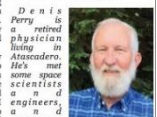


Who Knew?

NightWriters
By Denis Perry

I did not desire an adventurous retirement. After 40 years at JPL, managing interplanetary probes, I determined to retire myself to a natural and simple lifestyle. For my retreat, I located a half-acre property near the river in Atascadero with apple trees, pomegranates, and nectarines; there was a large but neglected garden plot near the back episodes in my mind, then charted the characteristics of each visit. The fountain was a focal point of the invader, and clothes were involved in several of the pranks. That night I arranged two socks on a patio chair and chose a seat in the living room with a view of the area of concern. I checked that my phone was at hand, then turned out the lights and sat gazing at the patio in the light of the quarter-moon. Sometime after midnight I started awake to a faint sound. I heard someone getting spanked, but heard no squeals or complaining. Slap - pause - slap - pause. The moon was long set. I crept to the light switch and stood close to the window as I flipped on the flood light. A masked figure stared back at me for a moment, then resumed timing socks and slipping them on the fountain's edge. I eased back from the window and turned off the light. It appeared that I must now study the fauna of Atascadero. Who knew a raccoon could cause so much chaos?

the porch. Then someone uprooted a pea plant, and the next night a pair of socks were pinned to the line and deposited in the fountain. I reviewed Nite-Cam records several times, finding nothing indicative of the nature of the prowler. The idea of such a secretive intruder bothered me, and the peace I felt in Atascadero was gone. I reviewed the fence. At first things were excellent. I harvested Granny Smith apples in September and pomegranates the following month, installed a fountain adjacent to the patio and enjoyed watching bats in the dusk. I filled in the riverbed and up Pine Mountain, went to bed early, and rose at dawn to work in the garden. Peace filled my soul, replacing the noise and confusion of Pasadena. One morning I woke to find my trousers pulled from the clothesline and left floating at the edge of the fountain. Perplexed, I searched the property for signs of intruders, finding nothing. Mischievous teenagers, I concluded. The episode was soon forgotten and I returned to my study of Sumner's Western Garden Handbook, planning an extensive garden. By March I'd forgotten the paint-the-fountain episode in the excitement of spring planting amidst blossoming nectarines and new leaves on the apples. Then someone got into the trash. It seemed a bizarre stunt, garbage strewn across the yard and floating in the fountain, a banana skin arranged neatly on the fountain edge. I searched the property, carefully inspecting all the fences, gates and locks but found no other clues. The next morning I put my electronics and computer skills to work. I ordered three Nite-Cam security modules, then devoted the remainder of the day to wiring and programming. The following day I completed the installation, with two Nite-Cams set to continuously record the gates from dusk to dawn. The third camera was oriented toward a neighbor's tree that overhung the fence. I settled down to wait for the pranksters to reveal themselves. For three nights nothing occurred, though I did note muddy smudges on



Denis Perry is a retired physician living in Atascadero. He has met some space scientists and engineers, a raccoon often sits his back yard - occasionally washing his socks. Denis is a member of SLO NightWriters, for writers at every level in every genre; find them online at slonightwriters.org.



Meagan Friberg

Pick up copies of SLO City News, Bay News and Coast News at local stores and kiosks. Visit the SCMM on-line archives to read other NW stories published in the CC Life section of

SCMM at www.tolosapressnews.com

Volunteers Needed

With our goals of extending member involvement and continuing to fulfill SLO NightWriters mission of supporting and advancing fellow writers, we are seeking further volunteers for the following Teams:

Sound/AV: (Setting up sound system for meetings)

Newsletter: (Writing columns, proofreading)

Secretary: (Taking minutes as required)

Meeting room organization: (Organize the meeting room before the meeting and assist with packing up)

Board Members at Large: (Members who attend board meetings and who can be on call to help as required)

We need people who are motivated to learn how to be backups to all our key board positions. (Members who are experienced in all the areas of administration, treasury, website, programs, editing)

I am reaching out to you all to step up and help make us strong as an organization and responsive and effective as a board.

Our board meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month at the same venue where our meetings are held. We begin at 6:30 pm. I welcome you all to attend a meeting to see where your skills can meet our needs.

Please respond to President jkon50@gmail.com if you are willing and available to join these important teams. And, if you think of other ways you can help out, we would love to hear from you.

Working toward a rich and productive writing community.

Kind regards,

Janice Konstantinidis

President SLO NightWriters

Sell Your Books!

Sell your books at our general monthly meetings! If you are a member of the SLO NightWriters, we encourage you to take part. We will have a table set up for you to display, discuss and sell your books.

Please note—SLO NightWriters holds no liability in this process. All authors participating are responsible for their own money exchanges and for the security of their own funds and books. Your dues with the SLO NightWriters must be current.

KUDOS... KUDOS... KUDOS...

Susan Tuttle's novel *Proof of Identity* has been chosen as one of the best novels to read on [Novel Writing Festival's website!](#)

In mid-December 2017, **Terry Sanville's** short story, "Desert Walk," will appear online in the [New Mexico Review](#). This literary journal is published by New Mexico Highlands University, located in Las Vegas, New Mexico, where the Sangre de Cristo Mountains meet the Great Plains.

Judythe Guarnera's articles: "The Queen of Magic Moments" and "Paul Fahey, Mentor, Mensch, and All-Round Kind Man," appeared in *Kind Magazine*.

Judythe Guarnera's profile, "The Eclectic Volunteer," and her articles, "Senior Volunteer Services," and "Central Coast Classique" were published in *The Journal Plus Magazine*.

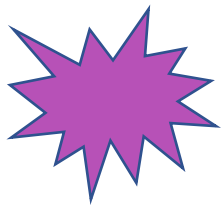
Terry Sanville's short story "Over-Town" will appear in the autumn 2018 edition of The [Evening Street Review](#), a print journal published twice a year in Sacramento, California.

Patricia Gimer's poem "No Promotions Please" was published in *Central Coast Kind* magazine, issue #3

Dennis Eamon Young is now officially the new Vice President of Sisters in Crime of the Central Coast

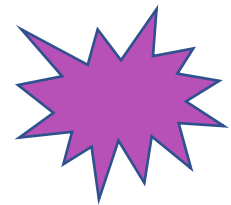
Dennis Eamon Young is now the official Executive Producer of CENTRAL COAST KIND magazine

ANNOUNCEMENTS



Susan Tuttle announces the release of "Mirror Eyes", an eclectic collection of poetry that dips in and out of the events that shaped the author as a writer. The first

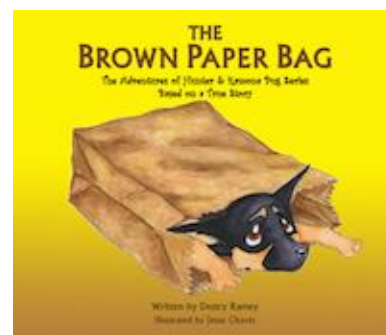
two sections present the serious, the sad, the heartfelt, and the humorous. There are poems that poet Shirley Radcliff Bruton says are "pure magic," and others that are both deeply personal and universal. The third section presents the lyrics to songs Susan has written, both secular and spiritual. "Susan uses strong visuals, nice textures, and a distinctly feminine voice to share her hopes and dreams with us... these are timeless poems that can be read over and over again." (Shirley Radcliff Bruton)



Destry Ramey's *The Brown Paper Bag* received top marks from the judges of the Writer's Digest's 25th Annual Self-Published Book Awards!

Structure, Organization, and Pacing: 5
 Spelling, Punctuation, and Grammar: 5
 Production Quality and Cover Design: 5
 Plot and Story Appeal: 5
 Character Appeal and Development: 5
 Voice and Writing Style: 5

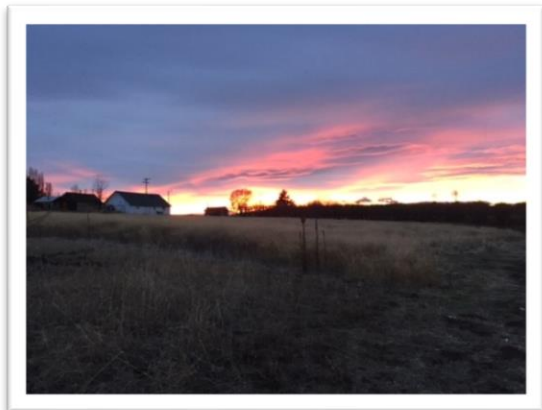
Judge's Commentary*:



The Brown Paper Bag: The Adventures of Hunter & Ramona Pug Series Destry Ramey illustrated by Jesus Chavez The Brown Paper Bag is a chapter book with pictures designed to appeal to transitional readers ready to leave the simplest book of few words and big illustrations. While this little volume has the visuals well intact, the text is stepped up for those beginning to be ready to take on the challenge of many more words on a page. The story is one of four pugs happily living with Daddy Chris in a condo. When a paper bag is thrown into their yard, the pugs must investigate only to find a puppy that has been thrown away. Despite the pugs' love for new pup Feather, they cannot keep her because of the condo limit of four dogs. So off to the shelter for Feather. From there the story unfolds to a happy conclusion for Feather, the pugs and new found friend Lucy. The story includes diversity, acceptance of limitations, taking on challenges and positive problem solving. It offers parents and teachers ample opportunity for discussion about all these. The last page includes photos of the real life inspirations for the story. Young readers will surely enjoy this little volume to read and reread. This little volume is a worthy addition to the shelves of personal and school libraries.

TALES FROM A ROCKY COAST **A not-to-be-missed inaugural edition**

Four members of the Friday Night Writers' Group of San Luis Obispo (B. Carter Pittman, Debra Davis Hinkle, Shirley Radcliff Bruton, and Susan Tuttle) are proud to announce the upcoming release of their anthology ***TALES FROM A ROCKY COAST***. Watch for its launch in early 2018.



Sunset

Photo by Elizabeth Roderick

A Word from SLO NW's Critique Group Coordinator

Hello fellow NightWriters. As the holiday season and the end of the year approaches, I am reminded of the goals I had at the beginning of the year, mainly helping our members get connected with groups that meet their needs. I soon learned that many groups state they are "full" and do not facilitate or welcome new members in any broad way. I can understand wanting to have a small, supportive group of like-minded writers to hang out with, but I was not ready for the exclusivity I found.



By now I have come to believe that your best way to find yourself a group is by posting your needs in the newsletter and by coming to meetings the 2nd Tuesday of the month to introduce yourself.

I am always happy to spread the word personally if you would like to contact me. If I should hear of someone who might be a good fit for you, I will try to link you with that person.

In the future, however, I envision a sort of Match.com website whereby writers can find each other by selecting their specific needs on a profile. Wouldn't that be nice? Unfortunately, I don't have the technical skills or resources to facilitate such a site. So for now, I remain here ready to help. If you're having trouble linking up with an appropriate critique group, please call me. Short of developing a new writer's match.com, I will do all I can to assist.

~ Patricia Gimer – 805-235-8313

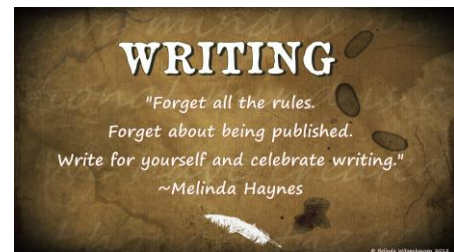
Review of November Meeting

Jan Alarcon is currently on hiatus. Her meeting review will return soon!





QUOTE OF THE MONTH:



Remembering Anna Unkovich
Photos by Dennis Eamon Young

Let's Get Social

Be sure to give us a “like” on Facebook at SloNightWriters and take it a step further by “liking” and “sharing” our posts.

On Twitter, our moniker is @slonightwriters—tweet us a hello sometime soon!

And, we have recently launched our Instagram account—follow us at slo_nightwriters and we'll follow you back!

Looking forward to connecting with all of you online, on your smart phone, tablet, or however you like to enjoy your social media!

"Critique Group Connections"

NW Members—Please, email critique requests to: Pat Gimer (patgimer@gmail.com) We'll print your specific request in this [Critique Group Connections](#) section of the newsletter for all NW members to view, increasing opportunities for NW critiquing. Use this information to find a match for your needs, make contacts, or to start a new group or critique partnership. Contact Janice for assistance if needed and she'll get you to the right people. And, if you form a group, please let Janice know so she can list it on the website. She can also forward your group's information to the newsletter. Critique Group Guidelines are available on the website at www.slonightwriters.org.

***SLO NW cannot guarantee critique group formation or availability but do we strive to facilitate connections between writers so they can initiate and develop their own writing affiliations. While we cannot be, and are not, responsible for any outcomes from these associations, we hope they lead to great creative magic and magnificent literary works!

Critique Group Requests

Holly Thibodeaux works in fiction, non-fiction, screenwriting, memoir and experimental fiction. She is seeking a critique group or peer edit exchange with writers in a more structured environment with accountability to boost productivity. Intermediate level preferred; no location restrictions. She would also like to find others interested in exploring the philosophy of writing

and the psychology of storytelling. Contact her at:

Katie is seeking a critique group for YA and FICTION. She is interested in either a critique group, or 1:1 electronic peer exchange. She has some writing experience and prefers SLO City location. Contact Katie at: dreamsofcitylights@gmail.com.

Tony Taylor is seeking a critique group for FICTION, YA, CHILDREN'S MIDDLE GRADE or VARIED GENRES, preferred skill level is advanced/experienced writers. Preferred location is SLO City area.

Contact Tony at 805-704-3528 or by email: tony@anthonyjtaylor.com

Rolynn Anderson wishes to organize a NEW PLOTTING GROUP for LITERARY FICTION with elements of suspense and mystery. Preferred skill level is advanced. Preferred location is Arroyo Grande/Los Osos/SLO area.

Contact Rolynn at 805-473-5847 or by email rolynna@earthlink.net

Griselda Rivera is seeking multiple critique groups: MEMOIRS, TEEN & CHILDREN'S, ACADEMIC/EDUCATION/LINGUISTICS.

Contact Griselda at grissilvarivera58@yahoo.com

Colin McKay is seeking a critique group or peer edit exchange for COMMERCIAL FICTION – CRIME, YA, or SCREENWRITING. Preferred skill level is advanced. No location restrictions for meetings but would prefer Los Osos, Morro Bay, Cambria. Contact Colin by email: mckay01@gmail.com

David Flamm is seeking a critique group or peer edit exchange or 1:1 writing mentor/partner or editing fee for service, for COMMERCIAL FICTION. Preferred Skill Level is Intermediate to Advanced. Preferred locations for meetings are SLO City, South County/Santa Maria, Orcutt.

Contact David at 805-868-3779 or by email: david.flamm@yahoo.com

Christina Grimm is seeking a critique group or peer edit exchange for VARIED NO GENRE RESTRICTIONS. No skill restrictions. Preferred location for meetings is SLO City, Los Osos, Morro Bay, Cambria, but can travel to other locations.

Contact Christina at 805-459-4923 or by email: grimmpsych@gmail.com

Jill Stegman is seeking a critique group or peer edit exchange for LITERARY FICTION or LITERARY HYBRIDS WITH THRILLER, SUSPENSE, MYSTERY. Preferred skill level is

advanced. Preferred location for meetings is SLO City, Los Osos, Morro Bay, Cambria or North County.

Contact Jill at 805-466-1956 or by email: jastegman@gmail.com

Deborah Brasket is seeking a critique group, online peer edit exchange, or 1:1 writing partner for ADULT LITERARY FICTION, NOVELS AND SHORT STORIES, AND FOR CHILDREN'S MIDDLE GRADE NOVEL. Preferred experience level is intermediate to advanced. North County is preferred.

Contact Deborah at 221-5405 or by email: dbrasket51@gmail.com

Alycia Kiley is seeking a critique group for VARIED GENRES but primarily POETRY, NON FICTION and ARTICLES; skill level is intermediate. SLO City location is preferred.

Contact Alycia at 602-7075 or by email, alyciakiley@gmail.com

George Klein is seeking a critique group or 1:1 writing mentor/partner for COMMERCIAL FICTION; No particular skill level or meeting location restrictions.

Contact George at 712-3378 or by email, fangio@charter.net

Steve Bowder is seeking a critique group that concentrates on true stories embellished to make them interesting, but that stay true to the facts that are known.

Contact Steve at: sbowder@live.com



Mom, where is
the bath
towel??

Critique Groups with Openings

WRITE NOW

These bi-weekly Wednesday critique meetings are for more experienced and tech-savvy writers. Submit up to 3,500 words of your current project to Dropbox by Sunday night, and then, using track-changes in Word, upload your reviews of each other member's work to Dropbox by 6:00 pm Wednesday. Meeting time is used to cover discussion-worthy items: logic issues, theme problems, etc. Commas, punctuation, and spelling are left on the written page. We follow these [Rules of Conduct](#). Recommended reading is [Story](#) by Robert McKee.

Meetings are every other Wednesday at

6:00 pm. Email moderator for location and dates.

CURRENTLY OPEN TO NEW MEMBERS

Moderator: Cynthia Replogle

cynthia.replogle@gmail.com

805-904-6365



PISMO SATURDAY GROUP

New group starts Saturday May 10. All levels and genres, short stories, poetry, novels and memoirs. Work is exchanged one week prior to group meetings. 1500 word limit on submissions. Meets the 2nd and 4th Saturdays from 9:00-11:00 am. Contact moderator for location.

CURRENTLY OPEN TO NEW MEMBERS

Moderator:

Tom Snow

coinerbop@gmail.com

MEMOIR AND NON-FICTION

Disbanded until there is more interest. If you would like to explore re-starting this group, please contact Judith directly.

CURRENTLY OPEN TO NEW MEMBERS

Contact: Judith Bernstein

ryewit@live.com

FICTION/NONFICTION

Meets on 1st and 3rd Mondays from 9:00 am to noon in San Luis. Members bring original work to each session and read aloud to the group. The group provides constructive suggestions for improving the writing and the structure of the stories. Prose forms of literature—short stories, novels, memoirs, essays, newspaper and magazine articles, travel—are this group's forte. It welcomes writers who are serious about producing work

for publication. Those interested in attending or who need more information should telephone. **OPEN TO NEW MEMBERS**

Contact Terry Sanville 541-0492 or Gloria Pautz 543-2049

HI HOPES

This group was invented to fill a need for a Los Osos/San Luis Obispo group that incorporates writers who generate stories, essays, novels, poetry—you get the picture—writers of any description. Whether or not you wish to publish, we'll help you with ideas to improve your writing. Led by Sharon Sutliff, we meet on the 2nd and 4th Mondays at 9 AM and usually wrap up in time for lunch. We meet in various locations. Call one of the moderators to arrange a visit, or get more information. **CURRENTLY OPEN TO NEW MEMBERS**

Moderators: Sharon Sutliff, 544-4034
Audrey Yanes, 748-8600

NORTH COUNTY RACONTEURS

This group has disbanded for various reasons until further notice.



Shell Beach at Evening
Photo by Dennis Eamon Young

WRITE IT RIGHT WRITING GROUP I (Wed. a.m. Group)

Meets every Wednesday morning in 5 Cities area from 10:30 am to 12:30 pm. Not a traditional NightWriter critique group. Work is produced in each session, then analyzed according to the objective of the day's goal. Based on writing exercises designed to jump-start the creative process (based on the lessons and exercises in the Write It Right Series), these sessions take writers through the process of writing fiction from inception of idea to the final resolution. This group is for all writers who want to learn the process of crafting a well-told story while developing their own voice and style. We explore such topics as ideas, character, story arc, tone, voice, POV, tension, dialogue, resolution, writing mechanics, etc. There is a small monthly fee involved for this class to cover materials.

CURRENTLY OPEN TO NEW MEMBERS.

Contact: Susan Tuttle: 458-5234
aim2write@yahoo.com

WRITE IT RIGHT WRITING GROUP II (Wed. p.m. Group)

For all writers of fiction and creative non-fiction, a writing instruction class that meets weekly and takes about a year to complete. See full description under Wed. a.m. Group. Meets from 3:00-5:00 pm in Los Osos. Current members are presently getting their work published after only six months or so.

CURRENTLY OPEN TO NEW MEMBERS

Contact: Susan Tuttle, 458-5234
aim2write@yahoo.com

THE THURSDAY GROUP

This group meets at 9:00 am every other Thursday at The Coffee Bean in Pismo Beach. Anyone interested in joining them can email the moderator for full details.

CURRENTLY OPEN TO NEW MEMBERS, and visitors are always welcome. Contact the moderator for details.

Moderator: Mark Ruszczysky
zsur@aol.com

KICK START

Looking for three to four writers who could meet on Monday or Tuesday evenings in SLO, near Marigold Center (Tank Farm/Broad area). For fiction, action adventure, memoir type pieces. Start May 1 or 2. Moderator has a Fine Arts degree and an MBA.

CURRENTLY LOOKING FOR MEMBERS. Contact moderator for details.

Moderator: David Schwab
 805-459-3200

Critique Groups Currently Closed to New Members

PISMO WEDNESDAY GROUP

New group began Meeting on May 1. All levels and genres: short stories, novels, poetry, memoir. Work is exchanged one week prior to each meeting; 1,500 word limit on submissions. Meets the 1st and 3rd Wednesday from 9:00-11:00 am in Pismo Beach.

CURRENTLY FULL—NOT OPEN TO NEW MEMBERS. Visitors welcome. Contact moderator for location.

Moderator Tom Snow
coinerbop@gmail.com

LONG STORY SHORT

This group is currently inactive.

Moderator: Diane Smith 858-414-0070

LO PROSE

Meets in Los Osos on the first and third Wednesdays at 7pm till usually 10pm. Charlie Perryess and Anne Allen share hosting responsibilities, running a tight ship so that everyone can read. No cross talk permitted. At the beginning and at our break we socialize. We're all serious but fun-loving. Presently the writing covers several genres: YA novels; short stories; short stories woven into a novel; fantasy; humorous mystery novel; political satire novel; and personal essays. We write just

about everything except poetry.
CURRENTLY FULL – NOT OPEN TO NEW MEMBERS but guests are welcome. It may happen that space could be made for a compatible writer.

Moderators: Charlie Perryess, 528-4090
 Anne Allen, 528-1006

FICTION/NONFICTION

Meets on 1st and 3rd Mondays from 9:00 am to noon in San Luis. Members bring original work to each session and read aloud to the group. The group provides constructive suggestions for improving the writing and the structure of the stories. Prose forms of literature—short stories, novels, memoirs, essays, newspaper and magazine articles, travel—are this group's forte. It welcomes writers who are serious about producing work for publication. Those interested in attending or who need more information should telephone. **CURRENTLY FULL — NOT OPEN TO NEW MEMBERS**

Moderators: Terry Sanville, 541-0492
Gloria Pautz, 543-2049

SOUTH COUNTY WRITERS

This group focuses on serious writing in a friendly, supportive environment. Members who write at an advanced or intermediate level. We meet on the second and fourth Saturdays from 9:30 to noon in Grover Beach. The members thrive on variety: writing short stories, articles, and novels: all genres from fiction to biography and memoirs. Members exchange work by email one week prior to the meeting in order to receive in-depth critiques. The critiques are aimed at eliminating weaknesses and increasing strengths in everything from plot and character development to grammar and proper manuscript preparation. We are serious about fully developing each member's writing talent, whether for publication or for personal satisfaction.

CURRENTLY DEFUNCT

NORTH COUNTY CRITIQUE GROUP

Meets twice a month on Thursday from 1:30-4:00 pm at the Atascadero Library. the group includes intermediate and advanced level writers of fiction and non-fiction, both published and unpublished. Our critique process is upbeat and constructive. We send around pieces in advance, and read aloud at sessions. Potential new members are encouraged to visit to see if we are a mutual fit.

CURRENTLY FULL — NOT OPEN NEW MEMBERS

Moderators: Lillian Brown, 215-6107
lilliofslo@aol.com
Mike Perry, 466-8311
dmperry1012@att.net

POETRY CRITIQUE GROUP

This group is currently inactive.

Contact: Irene Chadwick, 481-3824
irenekooi@gmail.com

WORD OF THE MONTH:

gleek

gleek

verb (used without object) *archaic*

1: To make a joke; jest.

E: Nay, I can gleek upon occasion.

Writer by the Sea-November 2017

Everyday Miracles

By Dennis Eamon Young

It might happen in the morning, or perhaps in the middle of the night. Could be on the subway to work, or maybe in the shower, just as you get soaped up. Whenever it happens to you, it usually is the most inopportune time. It just seems that the human mind works in very mysterious ways. You can develop a strict regimen, set specific times, try creating a certain mood. Good luck.



Hemingway started early and worked until noon, but felt lucky if he managed to create one good sentence. Mozart ran amok, like an unrestrained child, leaving pieces of brilliance effortlessly in his wake. Whatever it takes and however it strikes, the creative mind is ever in a state of stasis awaiting one of those everyday miracles. We've all heard stories of the writer staring at a blank piece of paper in the typewriter for hours, certain that the muse has left and may never return.

The question we ponder, be it Edison creating electricity after countless attempts, or Orson Welles filming the same scene over and over, is how to get the result we need to come to us on demand. When we take a step back to examine the situation, oft times the answer will just appear in front of us, as if it were right there waiting the whole time. The truth of course, is that there is no silver bullet or single golden answer to be had.

For some it is a matter of consistent action, staying on the move, plugging away, until something breaks loose and the answer appears. Erma Bombeck was asked in an interview if she had a certain time and place which allowed her to develop her material. Her simple answer was "The ironing board!" She added that she would be ironing clothes in the kitchen, cooking dinner and applying band-aids to her children's scrapes while writing. For others it becomes a waiting game, slowing down to a meditative state in order to lure the answer they seek.

Thank the heavens for publishers, editors and their ilk. Without someone to set a deadline and be a taskmaster, writers might simply keep working on that masterpiece until they expire beneath the weight of the ongoing tome. Without the constant pressure of a production company and cost analysts the next James Cameron might simply keep right on filming until the brilliance of the next Avatar becomes dull.

In truth, everyday miracles are few and far between for most of us toiling away as a creative artist, inventor, engineer or astrophysicist. When a flash of brilliance finally

does strike, it is because the groundwork for it has been laid over many years of study and preparation. That wild hunch which allows a breakthrough? It comes from a long track record of trial and error. Many times, we do not even consciously realize how much research we may have done, on an informal basis. Every step we take, every move we make, all prepare some thread which may later become part of a strand which allows us to create that breakthrough, because of an “everyday miracle”.

Excelsior, Dennis

Who Knew?

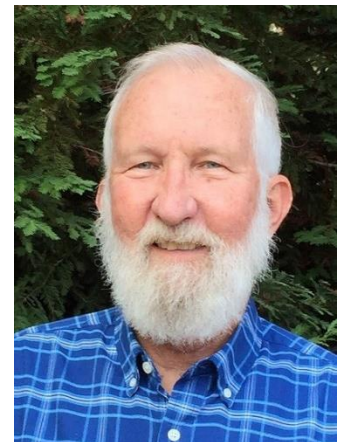
By Denis Perry

I did not desire an adventurous retirement. After 40 years at JPL managing interplanetary probes I determined to reorient myself to a natural and simple lifestyle. For my retreat, I located a half-acre property near the river in Atascadero with apple trees, pomegranates, and nectarines; there was a large but neglected garden plot near the back fence.

At first things were excellent. I harvested Granny Smith apples in September and pomegranates the following month, installed a fountain adjacent to the patio and enjoyed watching bats in the dusk. I hiked in the riverbed and up Pine Mountain, went to bed early, and rose at dawn to work in the garden. Peace filled my soul, replacing the noise and confusion of Pasadena.

One morning I woke to find my trousers pulled from the clothes line and left floating at the edge of the fountain. Perplexed, I searched the property for signs of intruders, finding nothing. Mischievous teenagers, I concluded. The episode was soon forgotten and I returned to my study of Sunset’s Western Garden Handbook, planning an extensive garden. By March I’d forgotten the pants-in-the-fountain episode in the excitement of spring planting amidst blossoming nectarines and new leaves on the apples.

Then someone got into the trash. It seemed a bizarre stunt, garbage strewn across the yard and floating in the fountain, a banana skin arranged neatly on the fountain edge. I searched the property, carefully inspecting all the fences, gates and locks but found no other clues.



The next morning I put my electronics and computer skills to work. I ordered three Nite-Cam security modules, then devoted the remainder of the day to wiring and programming. The following day I completed the installation, with two Nite-Cams set to continuously record the gates from dusk to dawn. The third camera was oriented toward a neighbor's tree that overhung the fence. I settled down to wait for the pranksters to reveal themselves.

For three nights nothing occurred, though I did note muddy smudges on the porch. Then someone uprooted a pea plant, and the next night a pair of socks were pulled from the line and deposited in the fountain.

I reviewed the Nite-Cam records several times, finding nothing indicative of the nature of the prowler. The idea of such a secretive intruder bothered me, and the peace I felt in Atascadero was gone. I reviewed the episodes in my mind, then charted the characteristics of each visit.

The fountain was a focal point of the invader, and clothes were involved in several of the pranks. That night I arranged two socks on a patio chair and chose a seat in the living room with a view of the area of concern. I checked that my phone was at hand, then turned out the lights and sat gazing at the patio in the light of the quarter-moon.

Sometime after midnight I startled awake to a rhythmic sound like someone getting spanked, but heard no squeals or complaining. Slap – pause – slap – pause...

The moon was long set. I crept to the light switch and stood close to the window as I flipped on the flood light. A masked figure stared back at me for a moment, then resumed rinsing socks and slapping them on the fountain's edge.

I eased back from the window and turned off the light. It appeared that I must now study the fauna of Atascadero. Who knew a raccoon could cause so much chaos?



Christmas Magic

By Mike Price

Sheila, my four-year-old daughter, climbed onto my bed and said, "Don't cry, Mommy. It's Christmas."

"I know, sweetheart." I closed my eyes and thought of Bill. He died just before Easter. I dabbed my tears and said, "Let's see what Santa brought you."

"Okay," she said. She dashed to the Christmas tree and found her present. "Can I open it now, Mommy?" After I nodded, crimson foil paper fluttered to the floor as she tore open her gift. "Oh, pretty," she said, as she tried on her new blue jacket. "It's a little big."

"You'll grow into it."

"Mommy, I don't see one for you. Mommy, please don't cry. Maybe Dan will bring you a present. He's nice."

Dan was my late-husband's good friend who had recently moved back to town. Bill's parents had introduced us at their Thanksgiving dinner. We had a wonderful time getting reacquainted. We fell in love.

"Dan may not be back," I said.

He proposed last night. My brain told me that it was too much and too fast. I was scared. I told him, "No."

The doorbell rang and Sheila flung open the door. "Mommy, he's here. He's here."

"Dan?" I asked, my eyes wide with surprise.

"Merry Christmas, Julia," he said, trying to hide his hurt with a smile. "I come bearing gifts. May I come in?"

"Um, yes, get in and close the door."

He handed me a small blue package. "For you."

I sat on the couch and carefully removed the wrapping from an exquisite set of ceramic figurines of Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus lying in a manger.

"It's beautiful, thank you."

"Bill told me you collected nativities."

"Did you know my Daddy?"

"Yes, I did. He was my best friend." He handed her a silver present. "I have a gift for you too."

Sheila's gift was a pink magic wand with red lights. When she waved it, the lights blinked and it chimed, "La, la, ling!"

"Careful," Dan said. "It's real. But you have to say 'Ho, ho, ho,' after you wave it. Try it on your swing set."

We had bought her the playset last year, but Bill was too sick to assemble it. What was Dan up to?

"Okay," she said, and ran into the garage. She waved her toy over a big long dusty box and said "Ho, ho, ho, be put up."



"Look in your backyard," Dan said, with a sly smile.

"No way," I said, as my daughter ran to the back.

"Mommy, Mommy, look! It's up." She sat on her swing and said, "Push me, push me."

Astounded, I asked, "How did you do that?"

"Magic," Sheila said.

"And a screwdriver," Dan whispered. He ran to push my happy girl back and forth.

After swinging and sliding, she said to Dan, "You can't catch me." When he almost did, she waved her wand and quickly said, "Ho, ho, ho, freeze!" He froze in place. "Unfreeze." He chased her again, but never caught her.

"It's starting to rain," I said. "Let's go inside."

Sheila sat next to Dan. "I like you. Mommy doesn't cry when you're here."

"She's sad because your daddy went to Heaven. But someday, she'll find someone else who will love her, and you, just like Joseph loved Mary and Jesus."

Sheila glanced at the figure of Joseph and then looked at Dan. Suddenly, she flashed a big smile, waved her enchanted wand, and said, "Ho, ho, ho, you're my new Daddy!"

As if by magic, my heart said, "Yes," and I threw my arms around my fiancé.

A Taste of the Wild

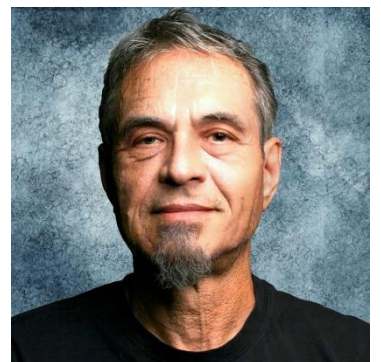
By Andrew Ross

The call came in about a wild animal, type unknown, killing and eating people's pets in the neighborhood. I glance at my partner, Theo, and say, "Okay, it sounds like we have a carnivorous predator to deal with." He nods and puts the truck in gear.

After driving around through the suburban area for a while without seeing anything out of the ordinary, we spot a cat fleeing a dark creature and observe as it desperately scrabbles over a fence into a backyard. The odd predator follows in a smooth flowing, almost fluid, movement.

"What on Earth was that!" I exclaim. It seems to run and then to slither. It makes no sense; I have never seen anything like it.

"I might know, Mary," Theo says, "but I need to see it up close before I'm sure what we are dealing with here."



We clamber out of the truck, go to the rear, and collect our gear. I'm not sure what we need, but Theo seems to know. What is it about this man that draws me towards him? What is the attraction? He makes me feel light headed whenever he looks at me.

We hear the cat screaming, which makes the hairs on my arms rise, and Theo calmly gets ready. He hands me the tranquilizer gun while he pulls together a collection of net, hook, and prod stick. He leaves one of the containment boxes with the door open.

"Okay, Mary, let's see what we've got."

We go through the gate and find a large, strange slug-like beast. It is fighting and changing shape, seeming at once to have limbs and then looking like a python, all while trying to control and ingest, the yowling, struggling cat.

While I covered him with the tranquilizer gun, Theo steps up to the pair and, using the prod, pins down the vile looking beast. It immediately releases the cat, which flees away instantly.

Without a word, Theo scoops up the creature dripping with fluid in the net and we walk it back to the truck.

I gasp, "What is that thing?"

He says nothing, just gives me a little smile.

Theo stuffs the slug-creature into the holding box. While he removes the net, the thing envelopes his hand and rapidly slides itself up Theo's arm, engulfing it completely.

I watch, frozen in horror, not sure what to do. If I shoot a tranquilizer into it, it could go through the beast and hit Theo's arm. What was it doing to his arm? Was it eating it? Poor Theo.

Oddly, my co-worker remains calm and, as the thing reaches his shoulder, Theo bends his arm so his hand is lined up with his mouth.

I watch in a sort of fascination mixed with revulsion as Theo opens his mouth wide and slurps the tail end of the creature in. His mouth continues to open wider as he in turn envelopes the creature and...and...what was going on? I feel like I am watching a kid with a popsicle as he strips the beast off his arm and finishes swallowing it.

As Theo glances at me, seeming satisfied, and I feel a chill. I feel like I am falling. The look in his eyes makes me shiver in horror and yet I feel that strange attraction. I take a dizzy step back as he smiles broadly and gently holds my hand. I can't look away. His eyes...are too much. Why is he looking at me that way?

"Theo...what...a...what...are...you?" I struggle to say, as everything fades to grey.

WRITING WORKSHOP

by Jeanie Hundertmark

New!

Welcome to SLO Nightwriter's new Writing Workshop newsletter column. Each month I will give you a prompt and a time limit. It's up to you to open your imagination and write non-stop for the assigned time period. If you've managed to write a complete story, or at least an entertaining partial one, email it to me by the 20th of the month, and you might see it published in the next newsletter.

This exercise can be completed alone or with a small group. If you're looking to be social, gather a few fellow writers, read the prompt, set the timer, and write. After the timer goes off, read your work aloud. You'll be surprised at what happens. You might even find inspiration for your next short story or a scene in a novel.

Writing Prompt

PROMPT: Pick a character from your own writing, or if you don't have one in mind, make one up for this exercise. Imagine your character has been invited to a holiday party where a white elephant gift exchange will take place. (If you don't know the rules, go to www.whiteelephantrules.com). Your character must bring a wrapped gift to the party and must also open a gift at the party.

TIME: 30 minutes

TWIST (optional): an uninvited guest arrives at the party

GROUP OPTION: If you're doing this exercise with a group, have each participant write one gift on a slip of paper, fold it up, and pass it to the person on their left. When you have reached the point in your story where your character is about to open a gift, open your mystery slip of paper. You must incorporate the mystery gift into your writing. This will give both you and your character a genuine element of surprise.

Email your workshop stories to Jeanie at clementyne@gmail.com. Write "SLONW Workshop" in your email header. Stories must be received by the 20th of the month.

Happy writing!

Because the workshop is new this month, I've included a story written from this month's holiday-themed prompt.

The Bowl

by Rod Pound

First, it wasn't his idea. Second, he sure didn't want to be there. Third, if he heard one more Christmas carol, someone was going to pay.

"It'll be fun. You never want to go to things like this, but afterwards you are always glad you did."

To respond would surely open up a conversation he wasn't interested in having.

"Well?"

"I said I'd go."

"Did you get a gift for the gift exchange? she asks, heading into the other room. "You should see what...." her voice fades.

"Sure," he says to himself. "Now, I've got to find a gift."

He looks around the living room.

"There must be something here I don't want."

Nothing.

Kitchen cabinets.

"Here you go."

He pulls down a couple of pitchers, reaches in the back and retrieves a large bowl.

"No sweat."

Now, a paper bag.

More drawers are opened.

"Well, well, well," he says proudly. "A pretty red ribbon."

Now, scotch tape.

Quickly.

"Did you hear me?" she asks as she steps into the kitchen.

"Sure. I've got something right here."

"It isn't wrapped very well."

"It's not the wrapping, or the gift. It's the spirit of giving."

"What is it?"

"A surprise. Isn't that what they call it? A surprise gift exchange?"

He was silent on the ride over. Not her. She'd waited all year for this...they were friends she hadn't seen forever...it was going to be such fun...she couldn't wait to pick out a gift and open it. He couldn't wait for her to shut up.

"Charlotte." Air kisses. He forces a smile.

Instantly, she's gone – person to person, working her way into the living room. He wanders into the kitchen looking for anything that might blunt the happiness that's seeping through the walls.

"Hey, dude. You wanna a beer?"

"Oh, hell yes."

"Charlotte make you come?"

"What do you think?"

"Same here. Not Charlotte...Nancy."

The pair lean the counter and exchange silent glances. It's sufficient conversation.

"Out. Both of you."

The voice is Nancy's – hands on hips.

"Should've known. We're about to start the gift exchange and it's all hands on deck.

Grumbles, but compliance.

Every chair, couch, and some of the floor is occupied by smiling faces.

"Shit," he whispers to his partner in crime.

"On a stick," is the quiet response.

He returns to the kitchen and grabs two of the chairs from the kitchen table and carries them into the living room.

"Everyone has placed their gift under the tree...except for you two," Nancy says.

He half smiles and places his red ribbon wrapped paper bag as far under the tree as possible.

"Everybody ready?" Nancy inquires.

All responses are positive. She holds out her hands – a neatly folded piece of paper in each.

"Pick a number. Everyone else already has theirs."

He takes one and slowly unfolds it. Number two.

"I've got number one," Nancy squeals. "I'm going to start."

She sifts through the gifts, occasionally shaking one – gently. No, not that one. This one? No.

"Jesus, how long is this going to take?" he whispers.

"This one!" Nancy exclaims, pulling the red ribbon wrapped paper bag from the pile.

She doesn't notice the look on his face. He knew someone had to pick it but had not come to grips with how to explain the contents.

"It's a bowl. A lovely bowl. Oh, my. It's really old. Well, someone seems to have ignored the \$10.00 limit.

Please, no one take it from me. I still need to have it appraised."

There's the look. Charlotte had given him looks before,

but never like this one. He began to envision driving north in their travel trailer, working for gas money and food along the way, parking overnight at a Walgreen's somewhere outside of Redding.

"Yes," Charlotte says, looking directly at him. "I imagine that bowl is quite valuable – to say nothing of its possible sentimental value. Don't you agree, honey?"

"Uh...yeah...probably. I've got number two."

He heads for the bowl. Smiling. Nancy is reluctant but gives it up. He hands it to Charlotte.

"Why don't you hold this for me?"

"Not for long," says a voice from across the room. And the bowl is gone.

"You need pick another gift," Nancy tells him.

Doesn't matter. The bowl is gone.

"Can I take back the bowl?"

"Don't be silly. Open another gift."

The trip to the tree took just over an hour, or so it seemed.

He pulls a small, flat gift from under the tree. It is beautifully wrapped. Maybe its valuable - he could give it to Charlotte and all will be forgiven. He unwraps it slowly – while praying.

A plaque: "This is the first day of the rest of your life."

Charlotte silently slips the plaque from his hands, reaches into her purse, and pulls out a Sharpie pen.

Without hesitation, she crosses out the word "first" and writes, "last." ☀

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