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# President's Letter

by Janice Konstantinidis

Dear Fellow NightWriters,

I heard a wild rumor that we are on the verge of putting the pandemic in our rear view mirrors. It is hard to get my head around that thought.

California's pandemic statistics are especially good. That wouldn't happen without responsible behavior by millions, a robust government public health effort and serious dedication by thousands upon thousands of health care professionals. And I don't want to forget the scientific community that made the vaccines possible. I hope that many books are written to document the stories of those whose work made a difference in the Pandemic of 2020-2021.

This progress dangles the hope that we may be able to meet again in person later in the year. We on the board are discussing how to resurrect our meetings, and we'd like to hear your opinions on what SLO NightWriters should look like in the future. We will be looking for a new venue, as the United Church of Christ meeting hall is being renovated, and we will be



exploring the idea of bringing livestreaming to our meetings with the hope of continuing to attract out-of-area speakers and of allowing members who cannot travel to a meeting to attend remotely. The pandemic has certainly changed the world, and we'll see if we can keep up with the times.

I hope your writing efforts continue to be fruitful.

*Janice Konstantinidis*

## **Fantail**

So very alert the Fantail,  
he'll not miss a trick, rain or hail.  
His shiny black eyes,  
searching the skies  
or any a hill or a dale.

*Janice Konstantinidis*



Photo by Lorraine Flakemore

## General Meeting Previews

Tuesday, June 8

LeeAnne Krusemark

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

**6:30 pm: LeeAnne Krusemark**

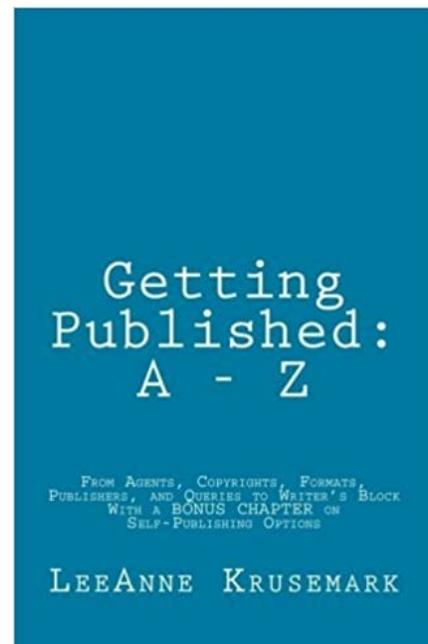
### ***Manuscript Formatting and Submission Do's and Don'ts (Avoiding Simple Mistakes That Cause Rejection)***

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)



## General Meeting Previews

Tuesday, July 13

Ava Homa

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

**6:30 pm: Ava Homa**

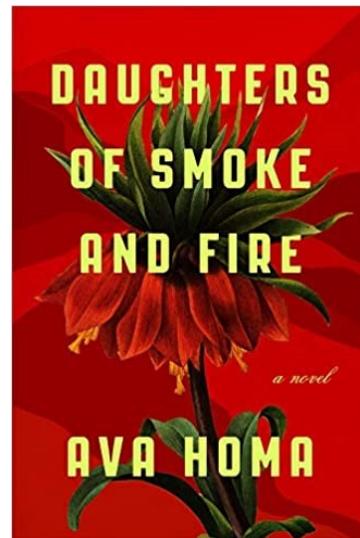
### ***A Best Book of 2020: Daughters of Smoke and Fire***

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

## General Meeting Previews

Tuesday, August 10, 2021

Wendelin Van Draanen and Mark Parsons

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

**6:30 pm: Wendelin Van Draanen and Mark Parsons**

### ***The Realities of the Writing Life***

**Wendelin Van Draanen** and **Mark Parsons** will discuss various aspects of being an author (with regards to both writing and publishing) as well as what it means to “live the writing life.”

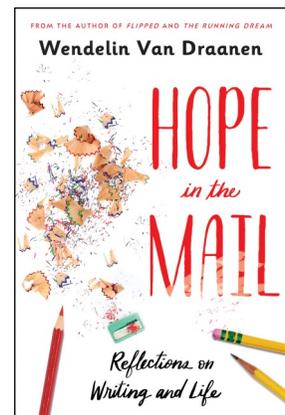
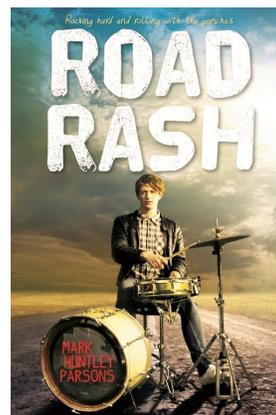
This presentation is for writers who may think the journey ends at finishing a manuscript... or publishing it... or landing a literary agent... or getting a book deal with a Big-5 imprint... or a follow-up deal, with options for more... or winning awards... or having films made from your books...

All these things are nice, but they’re the sauce on the ribs. The real meat is simply being a writer... living the writing life. Which includes that big chunk of your work life which is spent in support of your career as an author—but not on actually writing—as well as making sure you *do* allot the butt-in-chair time to actually do your real work: putting words on the page.

Presentation followed by Q&A. Come with questions!

**Wendelin Van Draanen** is the bestselling author of more than thirty books, including the long-running Edgar-winning Sammy Keyes mystery series. Her novel *Flipped*, named a *Top 100 Children’s Novel for the 21st Century* by SLJ, became a Warner Brothers feature film, and *Shredderman* became a Nickelodeon made-for-TV movie. Her first non-fiction book, *Hope in the Mail, Reflections on Writing and Life*, was published by Random House in 2020. Her latest novel, *Millions of Peaches*, is coming from Knopf/Random House in 2022.

**Mark Parsons** has written primarily non-fiction for several years, penning over two hundred articles for national publications as well as a pair of non-fiction books before turning to book length fiction. His YA novel *Road Rash* (Random House) was named to the ALA’s *Best Fiction for Young Adults* list, as well as Bank Street College’s *Best Children’s Books of the Year* list. His latest YA novel, *The 9:09 Project*, is coming from Delacorte/Random House in 2022.



## Notices

### Monthly Online Zoom Meetings

During the pandemic isolation, we are offering online meetings and presentations via Zoom (see [page 3](#) for details of our June 8 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.sloulightwriters.org](http://www.sloulightwriters.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](#)

## New Books By Members

### The Search for Blue Sky

by Mary Silberstein

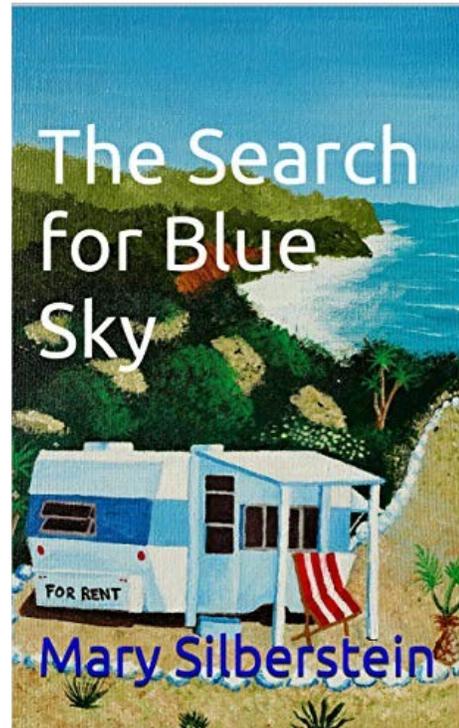
William Gregory's formerly privileged life is shattered. Accused by the FBI and IRS of absconding with company funds and running from a psychopathic enemy obsessed with destroying him, he seeks refuge on the quiet shores of the Pacific Ocean in Baja, Mexico. Kidnapped by a confused young woman, Lacey Hudson, and her loser boyfriend, his plans to prove his innocence and thwart his enemy are interrupted. Lacey somehow embeds herself in his life, drawing him further into danger. When he discovers that his young adult daughter back home is missing, he must face his past and leave his hideaway. He joins forces with Lacey, an unreliable ally struggling with drug addiction, trying to outrun her own dark past. Together this unlikely pair attempt to rescue his daughter, putting him back into the crosshairs of the man who wants him dead.

It is a story of loss and recovery filled with romance and adventure, and the lesson that sometimes you must risk accepting help from the most unlikely sources.

This book is available at this link: [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

**Mary Silberstein** was born in Saudi Arabia when her father worked for Aramco Oil Company. She traveled the world with her family right out of the cradle - travel and adventure are in her blood. She first began writing as a young child, journaling her travels during trips to the States and across Europe. Next to travel, she finds writing and reading, movies, music and theatre, wonderful escapes into life's grand adventures.

The author began writing poetry 30 years ago as catharsis over the tragic death of her teenage son. Over the years, her poetry subjects have changed from those of grief to revelations in the beauty of nature and the celebration of the human spirit. A nurse by profession, mother, and grandmother, she understands human frailty, its joys and losses.



## Kudos, Kudos, Kudos...

### Terry Sanville

Terry Sanville's short story, *The Rescued*, will appear in the upcoming edition of [The Schuylkill Valley Journal](#), a bi-annual print journal out of eastern Pennsylvania.

Terry's personal essay, *Dancing Along Fence Lines*, will appear in an upcoming issue of [Breath & Shadow](#), a quarterly online magazine of disability culture and literature.

Terry's flash fiction story, *Cinnamon Girl*, will appear in the summer 2021 print anthology *Draw Down the Moon*, published by [Propertius Press](#), a nonprofit indie publisher out of Martinsville, Virginia.

### Judith Amber (Bernstein)

Judith Amber's opinion essay, *The Nearly Normal*, was published in the May 20, 2021 issue of [The New Times](#), a weekly online and print newspaper from San Luis Obispo.

### Mary Silberstein

Mary Silberstein published her novella, [The Search for Blue Sky](#), on Amazon in December, 2020. (See [page 7](#).)

Two of Mary's poems, *Shanti* and *Metta*, were published in the March 11, 2020 edition of the [Central Coast Kind](#), a quarterly online and print magazine. Note: *Central Coast Kind* has been on hiatus during the pandemic.

### Jim Aarons

Jim Aarons reports that the podcasts based on his book series have surpassed 3200 listens. (<https://www.jeadvm.com/audio-books>)

## Have Kudos to Crow About?

**Do you have an article or story published, or soon to be published, in a local, national or 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 [slownewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:slownewsletter@gmail.com) by the 20th of the month.**

# TIPS AND TIDBITS

by Judythe Guarnera

## WHO SHOULD BE INCLUDED ON A WRITER'S EDITING TEAM?

Today's Focus: Beta Readers



When my budget is flush, I'd like to hire the following to be part of my writing team:

- A critique group
- A developmental editor
- A Beta reader
- A copy editor
- A proofreader
- Ears (chuckle, chuckle)

Unfortunately, having a flush budget can be elusive. What I'm offering here is information that might help you decide which of those on the list you might choose for your team.

The focus today will be on Beta Readers, as I've heard a lot of questions about the process lately: whom one should seek to be beta readers, and how best to utilize their help.

I'll offer a few nuggets on editors but would be happy to go into more detail on them in a later column. Or email me at [judy.guarnera@gmail.com](mailto:judy.guarnera@gmail.com) to ask a question.

**TIP:** A Good Critique Group is worth its weight in gold. One which isn't helpful should be abandoned and replaced.

Ideally, create your story first and bring it to the group once it's completed. Of course, if you have specific problems or questions, don't wait until the end to request help.

I've seen writers shut down their creative process when they get stuck trying to fix mistakes pointed out by their critique groups.

One person kept re-submitting the same chapter and was unable to move on to the next.

If you don't have the luxury of waiting until your book is done to have it critiqued, ask your group to read your work as a reader, not as a writer or an editor. If they can, they'll help you find the things which may throw off your future readers and you can fix them. I think it would be ideal to have some members read your work as though they were your editors, while others read it as readers.

If possible, keep the creative process going until the entire draft is finished. Self-edit it or use an editing program (many available for free or for a free trial period) and then bring it chapter by chapter to your critique group. That way you can combine their suggestions with your own as you rewrite and edit.

**TIP:** As part of the editing process, read your story out loud. For shorter pieces it helps to have someone else read it aloud to you, also.

It's incredibly easy to read something you've created, especially if you've done your due diligence and spent time editing. The eyes read what the brain knows it's supposed to say. Your ears are an incredible part of your author process. (I might even add it to the list at the beginning.)

**TIP:** When I've completed a chapter or an essay, I run it through the editing program on my computer before I shut my

*(Continued on page 10)*

(Continued from page 9)

computer down. It only takes a few minutes and it's sort of like making my bed every morning. I like to begin working again and not be distracted by mistakes, nor do I like climbing into a messy bed.

**TIP:** Editing program, use it now and whenever you make major changes during the later stages.

**TIP:** When your draft is done and you've self-edited and/or run it through a software editing program, it's a good idea to hire a developmental editor. (Most books need one.) This person will read for continuity—no blue eyes in Chapter 1 and brown eyes in Chapter 4. They'll show you where your plot goes astray, and what's missing in the story line. They'll often copy edit, while they're giving you structural advice.

You've completed your short story, essay, novel, or whatever you are writing, and edited it. You've used a writing program to give it another run-through. You've read it out loud to pick up anything wrong your eyes might have missed.

\*\*\*

Now it's time to enlist Beta Readers. Inventors, software developers, and individuals with a product that they want to sell or promote, use beta testing to get rid of the kinks and hang-ups, and sometimes much more. As I mentioned, at this stage we can become blind to things that our readers will get hung up on. If they get hung up too many times, they'll look for a different book. As do those in business mentioned above, writers want to locate the weak places in their writing, so they can fix them.

*I'll just have my spouse, or my best friend or my maiden aunt who was a former teacher test drive my book for me.*

*Let me mention my experience as an example. My husband is smart, a good reader, decent with grammar and spelling—but he loves me a lot and hates*

*to say things that he thinks might hurt my feelings. He, also is proud of me, as is my maiden aunt, so he tends to overlook my faults, whether it be as a cook, a housecleaner, or a writer.*

After I did some reading about beta readers, I looked elsewhere for mine. I wanted to have the difficult conversation with people who were willing to help me improve my book.

Look for 3-5:

- People who are part of your target audience and appreciate the genre.
- People who'll give you honest, constructive feedback.
- People you can depend on and who have the time to finish the book within a designated time frame.

I followed one recommendation that made sense to me and sent my manuscript to three people. When I got their feedback, incorporated what made sense and deleted the rest, I sent the revised version to my last two beta readers. You might have to repeat this process depending on how much work the manuscript needs.

If you're writing a short piece, the process is simpler, but there will be nuggets in this series that can apply to your work.

What do you want from your Beta readers? Whether you're sharing with your critique group or Beta readers, the clearer you are about what you want, the more help they'll be able to give you.

In one of my critique groups, one of the members would always ask the same questions at the top of his page. But they were too generic—the kinds of things a reviewer/critiquer would normally look for. Such as: Do you like the characters? Are they and the dialogue realistic? Do you want to read more? It seemed so pointless that I would just write a

(Continued on page 11)

*(Continued from page 10)*

yes or no in answer to each question.

If you want to elicit helpful answers, ask open-ended questions, rather than closed questions.

Above I gave you closed questions that elicited yes or no answers. If you want more useful help, ask questions such as:

- “When I introduced a new character on page 25, he didn’t seem real to me. Do you agree? What might I do to fix that?”
- “Do I need to add more to the scene description in the first paragraph? Or have I over-described the scene in Chapter 10?”
- “The pace seemed to drag toward the end of Chapter 14. Any thoughts on how I can pick up the pace?”
- “Will you please mark anything you found confusing or wondered if you’d misunderstood?”

If you’ve kept a list of trouble spots in your manuscript as you were writing it, you can ask your Beta reader for help with them. Remember these readers are troubleshooting your story before you share it with your future readers.

Can you see how identifying any of your concerns might get you more useful comments than letting your betas fly blind?

I always asked my group to write what their goal was for the chapter they were submitting for critique. Since I mostly write by the seat of my pants, I often didn’t have a plan before I wrote a chapter. I trained myself, when I finished a chapter, to think about it. I could almost always see from where the chapter went what I had been trying to accomplish. I’d write that on the top of the first page. Given that information, the reader could tell whether I had accomplished my goal.

- How should you prepare your manuscript for your Beta readers? To get the most benefit from your Beta readers, be sure you’ve done all the heavy lifting and your work has been thoroughly edited.
- As you’re editing, note rough places—things you need special help with. If you’re having a hard time with transitioning from one scene to another, add it to your list. Note if you are concerned with one character’s dialogue—does the voice fit his education and background.
- Be clear about what you need and list your questions or concerns for the beta readers.

Each Beta reader might have already developed their own method for reading and editing, but you might suggest such details as, “I’ve double-spaced the document, so you can make notes right within the manuscript. Please mark any grammatical errors, spelling errors, discrepancies, anything that slowed you down or stopped you.

I’d love to hear what didn’t work for you but would also love to hear what you liked the most about the story, so, as I edit, I can incorporate more of that.

Keep this in mind when you’re writing your book or story:

- Developmental editing comes early in the process, probably after a few drafts, and not every book needs it, although most can profit from it.
- Copy editing and line editing are done when the author has self-edited and/or used a writing program to edit a book they believe is finished. The general belief is that every book

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(Continued from page 11)

needs to be copy-edited.

- Proofreading is the final step right before publication. All books need proofreading.

For more information on Beta readers:

[The Ultimate Guide to Working with Beta Readers](#)

*In the Rhythm of Writing,  
Judythe*

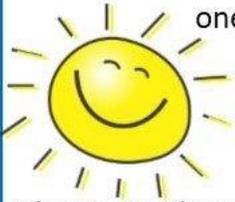
## Sunshine Corner



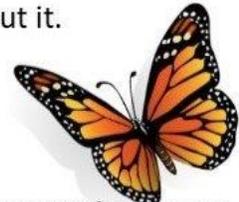
Need a Little Sunshine?

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.

## 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.

## Pacific Atlantic

by Leonard Carpenter

The beach at Playa Santa Maria is *tranquilo*. An offshore reef must protect the land here, for the Atlantic is, you might say, pacific. Mild waves lap ashore, barely foaming a dozen feet or so, to gently retreat. How different from the dark rabid seas lashing Havana's *Malecon* a dozen miles away.

White sand, blue cloudless sky and water almost as pearly-blue invite repose. But for a lily-pale foreigner, napping on the beach is chancy. The palm trees are tall, and their shadow-clusters creep past with the sun's blazing course. If you dose off in fleeting shade, a thorough coating of the heaviest sunblock might not spare you a bad burn.

Also there are *policia*. A solitary gray-uniformed officer makes his way up the beach, chatting with visitors who may or may not know him from his beat. My lover is deathly afraid of being tagged as a *puta*, a *jinetera* street-jockey, out of pride and also from dread of legal penalties. So, as the amiable old man approaches, we must separate. She can pretend she's visiting alone, not escorting and extorting a *rico yuma* foreigner.

Fine, I can throw my Frisbee alone, arching it up into sea breezes that will return it. But what if the kindly officer questions me, what will I do? Show him my passport from my *chica's* purse? I'm not that good a liar, so I'll have to stay in the water till he's gone.

Omigod, what a purgatory, to bask in Caribbean coolth between warm breezes and hot sand! To float idly kicking, and be jostled by friendly wavelets and lulled by the laughter and cries of beach-goers. Or to slip on swim goggles, angle down into the cool depths, and cruise the wave-scalloped sand for fish, shrimp, and other fleeing delicacies.

But coming up for air, I see the cop close in. There he is, sure enough, standing over

my supine darling who sits up on her towel to converse. She's good at that, I know. But is there any pretext on which he might haul her away? They don't do that here, I'm pretty sure. The worst I've seen is a motorcycle cop scolding an errant bicyclist. Still, I'd better keep a nervous eye on things so that, if need be, I can surge out of the ocean to lodge a protest, or a bribe.

I'm alerted quite awhile as it turns out. This policeman is loquacious or inquisitive, and my lady's more than a match for him. A shame she's so fetchingly cute; could he be trying to date her up? No way, he's far too old for her, almost my age!

But the inquisition goes on for twenty, thirty, maybe forty minutes. I could tell for sure, if my diver's watch hadn't drowned. I'm becoming aware that a slapdash application of sunblock, to face, shoulders, thighs and calves isn't going to do it. I'm getting toasted, and not in the favorable sense.

At long last the menace departs, ambling his way off through the sand. There's still time to lie down together, decompress, and have a nice let's-not-chat about it; then to traverse the sand and frolic in the sea, inventing a new game by skipping a Frisbee upside-down across lazy chest-high waves.

As the afternoon recedes, the bus arrival time approaches. So we towel off, making our way across the dune to wait in the grassy parking zone.

A palm-thatched drink kiosk stands along the dune's weedy, brushy backside. There my girl declines beer or rum for us both, ordering instead a cola can. While she, evidently not talked-out yet, chats with the barman in their native tongue, I discover the best free drink I've ever had, one without a beverage!

Lying there in the grass is a discarded piña colada. It's a grapefruit-sized coconut

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(Continued from page 13)

shell with a hole punched in the top and a straw. To this native fruit the sly Cubans add rum and pineapple juice to blend with the sweet coconut milk. Some thirsty *Cubana* has drained it, no doubt, and tossed aside the empty husk.

But I, amazingly with Swiss army knife in hand, am able to scoop out the thin, soft flesh of the coconut and imbibe it off my gleaming blade. This ambrosia, flavored and sweetened by the rum punch, is the most heady, delightful food imaginable, and unique! Where else in the world could I find

such a delicacy? Bali, maybe, or Newport Beach? Not at all like the hard, tough, chewy labor of skinning and digesting a grocery-store coconut. This is heavenly fare!

And then, when the last bit of tasty meat is consumed, I'm in possession of a musical instrument. Blowing across the hole in the shell produces a low, haunting resonance. And, tapped on with my knife, the nut emits a deep orchestral note. Klokking out an Afro-Cuban rhythm, I see passersby look over with surprised smiles. I've tapped into the heartbeat of our primal, tropical heritage!

## 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: [slonnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:slonnewsletter@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.

## A Bridge Across Time

by Anthony V. Toscano

Special relationships defy the distance that our notion of time demands. This is true of my most vivid recollections of my dad. He and I shared two separate summer days that jumped imaginary boundaries to become one whispered story.

Late August. We're walking along a highway made of four-foot-wide pipes that together wind a path through the marsh that connects the mainland with the island.

Dad leads. I follow.

I'm afraid of falling, but I'm determined not to show my fear. This improbable bridge carries fresh water from underground creeks to the ocean-bound residents of a cotton-candy dream named Atlantic City.

Dad walks with a faltered gait that I refuse to accept. I'd rather see him as he was and as I want him to remain. Curly hair. Shadowed beard. Gentle smile.

I slow my pace, so we won't collide and break the silent spell.

I've come back from California for a visit. I want to tell my dad that I love him, but I can't untangle those three words. Instead, I ask him to repeat a remembered journey.

Crab traps roped together, slung across my back, and hanging from my shoulders. Mosquitoes sinking their needled tongues into my sunburned neck. Air that smells like eggs gone bad.

In one hand I hold a burning cattail reed. Its smoldering tip sends a tiny, aromatic tornado tail skyward. My dad tells me that the smoke will chase the bugs away. I resist slapping at their persistent attack because slapping would say, "I don't believe you."

One long ago November morning we bought four new traps, folded them flat and stacked them in the trunk of our '49 Chevy. We set them down in our backyard, on top of several wooden ladders that lay resting on the ground, so the coming storms would rust

the metal cages to match the muddy color of the bay. Dormant sweet pea vines wound and twisted like leather snakes around the ladders' rungs.

My dad claimed he knew the special spots, those faraway destinations where no weekend warriors dared to travel, hideaways where sly sea creatures sought refuge.

And so again, this second time, we arrive at the edge of a crippled dock. Wooden pilings, tarred with creosote, sunk deep into the land beneath the murky water, black mussels clinging to the posts like parasites.

Dad and I kneel down together on the splintered boards. He leads me through our preparations. I follow his directions.

Dad gives me a pen knife. I make an initial incision into one of the fish heads we'd brought as bait, then slip my fingers inside. Delicate bones prick the flesh of my hands. A man's hands transformed into those of a boy by my mind's eye. I poke twine through the fish head's eye sockets and tie it snug against the trap's floor. Beside the severed head I knot a bow of dirty red rag.

The crabs will smell the fish and see the red after the blood washes away," says my dad. I nod.

Dad wraps his arms around my back. He leads our dance, as together we swing the trap back and forth through the air, leaving sufficient slack on the tow end to allow it to fly, splash, land and sink, four doors opened wide, to the bottom world where crabs crawl, desperate with hunger.

And next comes the heart of the game we play. The wordless waiting, until Dad will choose the magic moment and take the lead once more. He'll pull the slack slow and backward toward the bank, both feet planted firm and deep in oily mud reflecting

*(Continued on page 16)*

*(Continued from page 15)*

rainbows. And at the last second, he'll yank and guide the trap's return through summer air to solid ground.

I see all of this through younger eyes that I hold closed against the coming evening hour. Back then in 1959 we snagged two bushels' worth of blue-shelled beauties. Kept them bubbling with breath and clawing at the baskets' slats by covering them with moistened towels.

But today, inside this vain attempt to recreate an earlier occasion, we haven't retrieved a single trap before I hear my father sigh behind me. I turn to see him sitting on a sandy hill, tall blades of marsh grass waving with the breeze, chattering an

ageless tune as they knock against each other.

A gust of wind takes his hair, now thin and gray and robbed of its former glory, away from his scalp. He raises his hand as if to defend himself against attack, then lets his arm drop and surrenders to fatigue.

"You lead the way this time," he says. "You pull them in. I'll follow you."

\*\*\*

Anthony V. Toscano passed away earlier this year. Anthony was a founding member of SLO NightWriters.



Photo by Morgann Tayllor

## Letters to the Editor

We welcome letters to the editor. We would like to offer members and readers an opportunity to:

- Comment on the content of the monthly newsletter.
- Share news that is related to your writing or SLO NightWriter activities.
- Ask if a member has the answer to a writing question.
- Provide information that is useful to other members.

Please send your letters to [slonnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:slonnewsletter@gmail.com).

To the Editor:

I am thrilled to have had an opinion piece published in the *New Times* on 5/20/2021, titled "The Nearly Normal". I use the word "thrilled" because although I write mostly creative nonfiction and poetry, I am also an essayist with few outlets for my ideas. The *New Times* has been good to me over the years and this year has published two pieces, both dealing with the impact of COVID on our lives. If there are others out there with opinions to share, longer than a letter to the editor, I encourage them to submit as I did.

Judith Amber (Bernstein)

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### 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).

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

## Services Offered

### Writer Within Publications

[WriterWithin Publications](http://www.writerwithinpubs.com) 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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