

*SLO Night Writers*

**WORDSMITHS**



**November 2021**

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# President's Letter

by Janice Konstantinidis

Dear Fellow NightWriters,

It appears that you - our members - have responded to the appeals of our Election Committee (Tina Clark and Pat Gimer)! Many thanks to Tina and Pat for their efforts, and to those you who have volunteered to help.

We are anxiously hoping that we are nearing the end of our *final* pandemic surge, and that meeting and mask wearing requirements will be easing in the months to come.

I am excited about the possibilities of the coming year. Now is a good time to think about what kind of activities and programs you would like to see. As our Program Director, Steve Mintz, has mentioned, we are always on the lookout for presenters with helpful information about writing, publishing and creativity.

Please attend our General Meeting on November 9, where we will endorse our candidates and begin a new chapter for our organization.

And you won't want to miss our December 14 General Meeting, which will feature storytelling



by our members and a raffle. Even though the meeting will be on Zoom, we encourage everyone to dress festively to suit the season.

As the holiday season approaches, please stay safe!

*Janice Konstantinidis*

## **EASTERN GREAT EGRET**

An egret was scouting the bay  
on a sunny and calm winter's day.  
His beautiful form  
was really his norm,  
a beautiful sight come what may.

*Janice Konstantinidis*



Photo by Lorraine Flakemore

## General Meeting Previews

Tuesday, November 9

Miguel A. Casellas-Gil

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

**6:30 pm: Miguel A. Casellas-Gil**

### ***A Behind-the-Scenes Look at Earned Media to Build Your Brand***

Getting the media's attention is just the first step when it comes to promoting your book or your brand through print, online, TV, radio, and podcast interviews. How you leverage your media successes is the real key for getting the most mileage out of the power of the media.

After all, you can't just wish and hope the right people will see your great interview or notice your quote in a magazine. You gained enormous credibility when the media recognized that you have something important to say. Now it's up to you to incorporate those media appearances into your marketing and let people know that when the media needed someone who could speak with authority on your area of expertise, they turned to you.

Miguel Casellas-Gil, Creative Director & Strategist at [Advantage Forbes Books](#), will take you behind the scenes and show you how PR professionals get the media's attention and leverage the results.

#### **Bio**

Miguel Casellas-Gil is a vibrant, creative, and passionate communications specialist with over 15 years of public and media relations experience.

Prior to joining *News & Experts* (Part of Advantage Forbes Books), Miguel worked in public relations for over a decade, managing national and international clients, including Fortune 500 companies, government agencies, and not-for-profit organizations.

At *News & Experts*, Miguel has helped authors and professionals in multiple industries build and amplify their personal brand and authority through the power of the media.

As the Creative Director and Strategist, he oversees the creative strategy and execution of publicity campaigns, generating results with the most important news organizations in the US like The Wall Street Journal, Forbes, The New York Times, CNN, and Fox. Around the globe, Miguel has developed relationships with editors, journalists, and producers in The Times & Sunday Times, Financial Times, Capital, South China Morning Post, The Daily Telegraph, CNBC Asia, and Bloomberg Asia. Miguel holds two bachelor's degrees, one in Marketing from the University of Puerto Rico and the second one in Corporate Communications from the Interamerican University of Puerto Rico.



## General Meeting Previews

### Tuesday, December 14

### Storytelling and Raffle

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

**6:30 pm: Storytelling and Raffle**

### ***Your Chance to Tell Your Story and Share with Fellow NightWriters***

Our December meeting this year will be a time for you to tell us a story about a Christmas, Hanukah, or other holiday celebration in your life. We aim to be inclusive of all beliefs and celebrations. The meeting will be conducted on Zoom.

#### **Basic Rules:**

- Your story must be true.
- It must be your story to tell.
- It should be 4 - 5 minutes long.

#### **What to Do**

If you would like to participate, please send an email to our Program Director, Steven Mintz, at [smintz@calpoly.edu](mailto:smintz@calpoly.edu) with a brief description of your story. Steve will prepare a list of speakers to inform them of their turn to speak.

#### **The RAFFLE**

As in previous years, the Board of Directors will contribute gifts to be raffled to members at the December meeting. The choice of gift is up to the board member, but in these Zoom times, they will probably be gift cards or something mailable at low cost.

All members attending the December meeting will be entered in the raffle. Names will be chosen by trustworthy elves.

## **Speakers Needed for 2022**

Our Program Director, Steven Mintz, would like to invite members to speak at one of the meetings in 2022. One purpose is to showcase the amazing talent we have in SLO NightWriters. Addressing the members is a great way to share your ideas, accomplishments, and passion. It also is a networking opportunity.

#### **What to Do**

If you are interested in speaking, or know someone who would be a good presenter, please contact Steve Mintz at [smintz@calpoly.edu](mailto:smintz@calpoly.edu) and provide a couple of sentences about the topic, along with a preferred date or two. Please include email or phone contact information.

# Notices

## Election Committee Update

Dear SLO NightWriters,

Thank you to everyone who engaged in the election process by offering advice or making yourself available to serve our organization.

In our one-on-one discussions with club members about job descriptions and their qualifications, it was gratifying to discover so much talent and willingness to serve SLO NightWriters.

After receiving candidate nominations and going over the duties and responsibilities of the positions with nominees, we ended up with a full slate of nominees. We have one candidate per elected position and all that is left to do is have the membership vote in the candidates at the November meeting.

Please review the Candidate Statements below and attend the **General Meeting via Zoom at 6:30 p.m. on November 9<sup>th</sup>** ([link here](#)) to cast your vote.

In addition, please take note of the many **Appointed and Volunteer Positions** that contribute to SLO NightWriters being the

“premier writing organization on the Central Coast.” The list is included at the end of this article and is also available on our website. If you are interested in adding your name to the team of folks willing to contribute time and energy to our writing community, contact [slonwmembership@gmail.com](mailto:slonwmembership@gmail.com).

Thank you for reading and responding to the election-related emails and articles over the past months. We appreciate your attention and support.

Stay well,

Your Election Committee,

Tina Clark and Patricia Gimer

## Candidate Statements

### PRESIDENT

**Janice Konstantinidis**  
([jkon50@gmail.com](mailto:jkon50@gmail.com))

I have submitted my name as a candidate for President of SLO NightWriters. I am motivated to see our organization thrive again as we exit the pandemic and return to in-person meetings in 2022.

I believe my experience in many SLO NightWriters positions will help us achieve our goals in 2022. I will focus on safely restoring in-person meetings while maintaining our Zoom capabilities. I see Zoom as an

alternative platform at times, having great potential to enjoy speakers and members from many parts of the USA and the world.

I will challenge the Board and our membership to increase our numbers, to market and publicize who we are and what we offer. I will ensure that activities of interest to our members are developed. I will work to ensure that SLO NightWriters has the funds needed to be an active organization.

I will work with our Board's new and old members and appointed positions to ensure that every member feels nurtured and that

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SLO NightWriters is of value to them. As President of SLO NightWriters this last term, much of my time was taken up with the reestablishment of the organization, both financially and with the restoration of status as a non-profit organization. This was worthy work but highly time-consuming, lasting upwards of two years. One of my strengths is the ability to foresee and follow through on necessary tasks. We are now in compliance with state and federal bodies, and we are fully incorporated, which has the benefit of enabling us to be insured, to name one.

Thank you for your support and encouragement in the past, and I look forward to the opportunity of continuing to serve as your Board President in the future.

#### **VICE-PRESIDENT**

**Mary Silberstein**  
([luvlamas@gmail.com](mailto:luvlamas@gmail.com))

I have been a member of SLO NightWriters for the past five years. I recall the very first meeting I attended many years ago as a guest when meetings were held in the SLO County Library. At that time, I felt a bit awkward as I did not consider myself a "real writer." Since then, I have grown a lot in my writing. I won second place in our club poetry contest, published a poetry book and novel on Amazon, and have dipped my toe into many writing workshops. I recently entered two screenplay writing competitions. Although writing can be said to be a solitary activity, it's through others that we learn and grow. The speakers we have had at our meetings do a lot to inspire the craft and by connecting with other writers we can pick up writing tips we might not have thought of.

It is my understanding that in order for SLO NightWriters to remain vital we must have participation from all members, not just a few people doing everything. We must have more

active members and attract new members. We have recently lost key members who did a lot to support the goals of the organization. I am running for vice-president of SLO NightWriters to support the President and our goals as an organization and not only help maintain its vitality but grow as a support to budding writers and professional, experienced writers alike.

#### **SECRETARY**

**Jim Livingston**  
([jlivingston518@gmail.com](mailto:jlivingston518@gmail.com))

My name is Jim Livingston, and I've been a member for three years. I've been feeling the urge to give back to the NightWriters for quite some time. Family responsibilities made me reluctant in the past, but I am now past that stage of my life. I would be pleased and honored to serve as the club's next secretary. I rarely miss meetings and have taken full advantage of the critique sessions before each general meeting. I have previously performed the duties of secretary for professional organizations during my career as an educator. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to serve you.

#### **TREASURER**

**Cheri Grimm**  
([Cheri@CheriGrimm.com](mailto:Cheri@CheriGrimm.com))

I am running for Treasurer, and would like to introduce myself.

I've been a member of SLO NightWriters for several years. I'm not a writer, but am connected to the writing industry through my work with Sam Horn ([www.SamHorn.com](http://www.SamHorn.com)), an internationally-known author, speaker and consultant.

I have served as her Business Manager for about 25 years, and have a strong interest in

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supporting authors in a “behind the scenes” kind of way. Although I haven’t been an “active” member, I’ve enjoyed reading the newsletter, attending the Central Coast Writers Conference (when Sam was the keynote speaker), and have been watching for a time

when I could make a contribution.

In addition to working with Sam, I’ve owned my own bookkeeping company for over 25 years, and am an experienced and professional bookkeeper. I’ve communicated with Steve, your current Treasurer, and I’m confident that I

## Appointed and Volunteer Positions

### APPOINTED POSITIONS

The Election Committee will be compiling names of people interested in the following positions or helping out with them. These names will be given to the newly elected Board. Some of these positions are currently vacant. Some occupants of these positions may want to continue on, or may be willing to step down if they know someone else is willing to take on the job, and others plan to vacate their position regardless.

If you are interested, please email us at [slonwmembership@gmail.com](mailto:slonwmembership@gmail.com).

Programs Director: The Programs Director secures speakers for the monthly general meetings. This includes coordinating speaking dates, costs, and logistics as well as providing Board updates of future meeting programs.

Membership Director: The Membership Director contacts new members to determine their goals and advise them of related organization resources and activities. Duties also include greeting new members at meetings and tracking and updating the Board of monthly membership figures.

Publicity Director: The Publicity Director oversees efforts to increase public awareness of the organization through public outreach. Activities may include coordinating and staffing an information booth at community events and networking with local print media to publicize club activities.

Contest Director: The Contest Director manages all aspects of Board approved writing contests (e.g. the annual Golden Quill Writing Contest). This includes developing contest rules for Board approval, overseeing submissions, and judging logistics.

Newsletter Editor: The Newsletter Editor oversees the publication of the monthly *Wordsmiths* newsletter. This includes soliciting and handling of submissions, formatting, review, and distribution.

Social Media Director: The Social Media Director oversees efforts to increase public awareness of the organization and its scheduled activities through electronic and social media channels. Duties include monthly coordination with the Board to promote program speakers and upcoming events.

Critique Group Coordinator: The Critique Group Coordinator administers the critique group program, ensuring that critique groups are conducted according to SLO NightWriter policies. Duties include assisting members to form new critique groups and adhere to guidelines, updating the website listing, and helping critique group leaders fill openings.

Webmaster: The Webmaster maintains the organization website and initiates global membership emails at the direction of the President.

Historian: The Historian creates and maintains records and/or scrapbooks of memorable

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organization activities and reminds the Board and members of upcoming milestones and other important dates, such as our anniversary.

### **VOLUNTEER POSITIONS**

Let us know if you are interested in any of the following activities. When we start meeting in person again, we will need additional help in many of these areas.

Critique Table Facilitators: The Critique Table Facilitators run the critique table at general meetings, including establishing and implementing submission, reading, and critiquing guidelines.

Hospitality: Coordinates the purchase and setting up of refreshments at regular club meetings and club sponsored activities.

Meeting Greeter: Greets members and guests as they arrive at meetings, coordinates the sign-in process, and directs attendees to their activities of interest.

Sunshine Chair: The Sunshine Chair provides outreach to club members who are known to have become ill, experienced loss, or are going through other life changing events.

Thanks for considering how you can contribute to SLO NightWriters.

Your Election Committee,  
Tina Clark and Pat Gimer

## **Critique Groups Are Up and Running**

Are you looking to join a Critique Group? Many have begun to meet in person again or have been meeting on Zoom and are looking for new members. Check out the website listing [SLO NightWriters - SLO NW Critique Groups](#) to see if one is a good match for you. (Make sure to refresh your browser to make sure you are seeing the most current listing – there are five groups listed.)

## **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.

## Notices

### Monthly Online Zoom Meetings

During the pandemic isolation, we are offering online meetings and presentations via Zoom. **Join the meeting using the link below.** We encourage interested visitors to join us. The meetings are held on the second Tuesday of the month. The Critique Table begins at 5:15 pm and the General Meeting begins 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.slouidnightwriters.org](http://www.slouidnightwriters.org)

### How to Join the Monthly Zoom Critique Table

1. If you desire to have your work critiqued, send your chosen two pages to 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, the link on our website, 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 Terry ([tsanville@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tsanville@sbcglobal.net)) know before the meeting.

### The Zoom Meeting Link

[Click HERE to join the November 9 Zoom meeting](#)

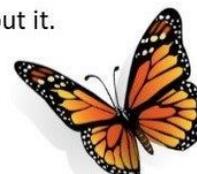
### Sunshine Corner

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.

# WORD PLAY

by Morgann Tayllor

## GENDER BENDERS

No doubt about it. **MEN** can dominate the language. The **MAN** provides the spare rib to make the wo**MAN**, as the story goes, but the language accepts the hu**MAN** species as male and female collectively. One cannot survive without the other.

Flip through any dictionary to find hundreds of words that **MENT**ion the obvious... **MEN**dacity belies the fact that women also fib. A **MAN**dible chews on the fact that all primates, male and female, have one...An exhaust **MAN**ifold is full of hot air (and gases)...You need lu**MEN**s to light up your world.

All **MAN**ner of dictionary words are a**MEN**able to the **MAN**ipulation of the language. Women can literally go through **MEN**opause but men get off with the opaque *andropause*. On the other hand, who but a man could **MAN**handle a churlish **MAN**ticore rising from the mythical depths of horror? The beast has a man's head with horns, the body of a lion, and the tail of a dragon or sometimes a scorpion. Perhaps a woman could toss him a bushel of sweet **MAN**darin oranges to defang his **MAN**trum?

Man's frolic through the language has a practical history. Before the advent of writing, **MEN**folk and **WOMEN**folk were assigned their respective roles. Because of their biological body strength, men were well suited to the daily animal hunt for food and to protect their tribe from predators. As civilization took over from nomadic life, work**MEN** settled in jobs and positions or otherwise labored away from home—stagecoach drivers, farmers, merchants, builders, factory workers, big business. Even office secretaries were mostly men. Other positions opened up—air**MEN**, sea**MEN**, police**MEN**, post**MEN** and space**MEN**; fore**MEN**, sales**MEN**, chair**MEN**, CEOs and **MAN**agers were assumed to be men.

So men "brought home the bacon" and women cooked it. Back in the day, women cooked three meals a day, canned their garden products for winter consumption, cleaned, sewed, kept hearth and hides warm and performed many other household or homestead-related chores. Many organized and served as hostesses for community and personal social activities. Most time-consuming of all, women raised, **MEN**tored and minded the children especially during their early years. Women were pregnant much of the time; large families were the norm.

Family generations of surnames were often defined as predominately male occupations but are mostly irrelevant today in matching the person to his/her profession—EX: Smith (blacksmith), Sawyer (one who saws wood), Chap**MAN** (shopkeeper), Kauf**MAN** (merchant), Bow**MAN** (archer), Cartwright (one who makes carts).

Historical roles aside, some gender-specific words don't lend themselves to change...***MAN**hole covers have been with us since ancient Rome, but that entry to subterranean street utilities and sewage channels is another gender gap that refuses to close. How would one define a **MAN**hole penetrated by a woman?...A beautiful mother and her child disappear into the woods and a search party of men and women fan out in all directions. But it's still a **MAN**hunt...Both men and women can have business **ACUMEN**; today either one could be a **MAN**ager.*

Another practical consideration—**MAN** is only three letters and our everyday language is partial to shorter words. If possible, one syllable. The fewer letters, the better. Calling the above a *womanhunt* or *familyhunt* is too wordy, too awkward, the cadence too

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bumptious. And texting has played an increasing shift toward initialisms, acronyms and hieroglyphic emojis. (Note the devolution of this word for endearment: ***baby*** (*two syllables*) ***babe*** (*one syllable*) ***bae*** (*one less letter*). Since **man** has only one syllable and one vowel, its further brevity would be highly unlikely to impossible in its present form.

Language continues to evolve with the accelerating trend of a gender-neutral work

force. Actors, flight attendants, sales reps, mail carriers, firefighters and others can be either man or woman. Yet the **MAN** will be with us always. And so will the **WOMAN**. Linguistically separate, but equally important.

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

### **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).

# TIPS AND TIDBITS

by Judythe Guarnera

## TIPS AND EXAMPLES TO TIGHTEN YOUR WRITING



...and keep your reader engaged.

...and to be used only after you've finished creating and begun the editing process.

If you know me very well, you know I'm really big on tightening one's writing. During our daily Happy Hour, which we initiated because of the pandemic, I read to my husband, Steve. I talk constantly about writing and analyze most things I read, so he's become a convert to tight writing. He often interrupts me when he recognizes a need for tightening.

Elmore Leonard, the famous writer who passed away last year, said, "I try not to write what people will skip over." My husband, not a fan of flowery language, is a major skipper over. Although—he is a big fan of books such as *Centennial*.

Michener, the author, was well-known for the high level of detail he employed—especially in the setting at the beginning of his novels. As much as I enjoy descriptive language, I'd skip over much of his detail, because I wanted to get to the action.

So why the change in our reactions to Michener's work? Possibly the author's skill level and reputation kept his reader's reading. I did appreciate his description—just became anxious to get to the plot.

If readers skip over too much in your writing, there's a good chance they'll look for something else to read. Imagine a cup, which can only hold eight ounces of liquid. As I pour, I must stop when the cup reaches capacity. This is similar to readers having a

limit—only having the patience for so much extravagant language, or repetition, or excessive details, all of which can prevent them from getting to the action—what most readers are looking for.

If readers have limits, why not do as Elmore did, and take out the words readers will skip over? Besides, when you do that, you leave space in the book for some really good action—again what most readers want.

Often writers use two or more words when fewer do the job. Cutting those kinds of words often helps writers use a more dynamic word in its place, saving space for writerly gems:

He talked quietly to her.

He whispered to her.

This makes your writing tighter and more vivid as you eliminate an adverb and use a stronger verb.

Sometimes modifiers are important to the meaning and are necessary to make a point, and you don't want to drop them:

She brushes her teeth.

She brushed her teeth occasionally.

The second sentence has more meaning to a dentist when they're trying to figure out why a patient's teeth are rotting.

You may come across a warning to not use weasel words in your writing. Weasels are words that equivocate. They are vague qualifiers like generally, most, and probably

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that weaken your writing.

If you eliminate weasel words, you create room to use better words when you really need them for emphasis or meaning.

Examples:

Most people generally state that they probably will vote in the next election. (13)

OR

One hundred of the people polled plan to vote in the next election. (13)

Both had the same numbers of words, but the first version sounds vague and uncertain.

Use only as many words as you need to make your point, but best if they are there because they add needed information:

John checked his watch to see what time it was.

OR

John checked his watch. Late again!

Instead of telling the reader something he can figure out on his own, we learn something about John's character—he's often late.)

I felt tired. I can't think when I need sleep.

OR

I can't think when I'm tired.

In this example, we're able to cut from ten words to six. This comes in handy when you have a six hundred word story, and the requirement is for five hundred.

*Author Note: I just entered a 500 word contest, rewriting a story I'd written earlier. I thought I'd cut it to the bone, but I was still one hundred words too many. I cut about fifty words using the methods above. Then I just got ruthless, checking each sentence to see if it added to the story or not. When I reached 490, I could still have cut another ten words.*

TIP: Weasel words may be okay in dialogue because real people use them often,

particularly when they reflect the way the character speaks:

'Totally' can be a weasel word, but if you cut it in dialogue, it may be out of character for one who is a 'totally' kind of speaker.

My husband is new to writing for publication. He commented how easy it is when an interesting word (like an ear worm) gets stuck in your head, and you realize you are continually using it—sometime in the same paragraph.

TIP: When I know I've done this, I do a search, but I do not replace. As I move to each repeated word, I can then decide, from the context, whether I should use my Thesaurus and find a new word or use it and change the word in later "finds."

**Author Note: Repetition can help add emphasis.**

In my novel, *Twenty-Nine Sneezes*, I used the phrase, "Today, as always," five times, each time in a two-liner.

When you see a word repeated, you might want to find another word, or you may decide to keep it for emphasis or clarity. To build tension in my novel, I repeated the phrase, "Today, just like always," to demonstrate the horror of my protagonist's daily life.

#### EXAMPLES AND HINTS

I find phrases like this, "He closed his lips in a straight line" too basic and thus insulting. How about, "He pursed his lips."

When we explain too much, we insult our readers' intelligence. They've already figured it out. Showing versus telling can often eliminate weasel words.

He walked into the room, swinging his baton, and chewing gum as he surveyed the room. (Can he do all that in the few seconds it takes him to walk into the room?)

Employing the Rule of Three, best not to use

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more than three words in a series of actions, keeps your words from sounding like a laundry list.

Adverbs are okay to use, if done so sparingly. A good, strong verb can eliminate the sing-songy sound below:

Jose walked into the room *jauntily*. He *quickly* assessed the situation and *ruefully* realized his work was cut out for him.

OR

Jose sauntered into the room. One look and he knew his work was cut out for him.

"What the devil is going on," he questioned *authoritatively*.

OR

"What the devil is going on?" His voice bounced off the walls.

The first sentence is telling us his attitude. The second shows us.

"Oh, come off it," Heloise protested condescendingly.

OR

"Oh, come off it." Heloise sneered at the

interloper.

"Ah, Mr. Almighty," Heloise griped purposefully, "as though you never did that."

OR

"Ah, Mr. Almighty," Heloise said, "as though you never did that."

"Get up on the wrong side of the bed?" George asked his friend teasingly.

OR

"Get up on the wrong side of the bed?" George grinned.

"Sometimes I really wonder about you," Sam said, his head bobbing up and down nervously.

OR

"Sometimes, I really wonder about you." Sam shook his head.

Hopefully, this month's tips will help you to tighten your writing and make it more unusual and interesting so you won't bore or insult your readers.

*In the Rhythm of Writing,  
Judythe Guarnera*

## Moved or Changed Email?

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# THE WRITER'S CORNER

by Judythe Guarnera



## A FREE 3-5 PAGE EDIT

Respond to the prompt below or write your own piece on any topic

What's not to like about this FREE offer?

- Your work is published in the *Wordsmiths* newsletter, and you earn a writing credit for your writing resume/CV.
- If you haven't been published before, you'll have the pleasure of being read and applauded by your fellow NightWriters.
- If requested, you receive a free edit of your work by a professional editor who has edited four anthologies, books, and shorter works.

### The NOVEMBER Prompt:

**"This darn pandemic has wreaked havoc with my life, and now it's messing up another holiday season."**

- Respond to this prompt in 3-5 pages by writing an essay, fiction or nonfiction, or a poem.
- **If you request an edit**, your work will be returned in time to for you to rewrite and re-submit.

**Deadline:** November 15.

### Guidelines:

Entries must be double-spaced, Times Roman 12 pt, and 3-5 pages. Please spell-check your work before submitting. Stories may be fiction, nonfiction, essay, memoir. Be funny, serious, angry—whatever.

Be sure to add your name and contact email.

Send Prompt submissions for the December issue to [judy.guarnera@gmail.com](mailto:judy.guarnera@gmail.com) by November 15. Be sure to put "Writer's Corner" in the subject line.

## OCTOBER'S SUBMISSION

Thanks to **Mary Silberstein** for her piece, *Blame: Love Misunderstood*, which appears in this issue.

Mary also wrote this:

*An Ode to Editors*

*God bless editors! Most of us write because we are compelled to express ourselves this way. Editors, however, are a different breed. They practice patience and persistence and adherence to rules unlike the free flow, stream-of-consciousness style most of us practice when writing. In short, they set us straight and*

*help us get across our ideas more succinctly. Thank you to Judy Guarnera for editing my submission and for all her help over the years. Everyone needs an editor. Thank goodness they are there for us! I wrote this for her writing prompt. I encourage you to take advantage of her help and submit something to the newsletter next time. October's prompt was 'Blame.'*

Thanks, Mary, for your participation and your appreciation of editors!

## Kudos, Kudos, Kudos...

### Terry Sanville

Terry Sanville's short story, *Cliff Notes*, will be published in the [Garfield Lake Review](#), an annual print journal published by [Olivet College](#), Michigan.

Terry's ghost story, *Overdue*, is included in an anthology titled [Silver Webb's All Hallows' Eve - The Thinning Veil](#). This anthology of Halloween stories is published by [Borda Books](#) and is available now.

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

### Have You Checked Out Our Website Lately?

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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.

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## BLAME: LOVE MISUNDERSTOOD by Mary Silberstein

It's been almost five years now, but I will never forget an uncomfortable period in my life where blame took center stage. I felt totally at a loss to help someone whom I believed was totally misunderstood and blamed—blamed for loving someone. It wasn't just one person; it was two women. Claire was approaching her sixties and the other, Terra was in her forties. Although they didn't know each other, I knew them both. The deaths of their boyfriends occurred within weeks of each other, under very different circumstances.

Both intensely loved the men they lost and had hoped to build a future with them. After their men had died, both were shamed and blamed for their hopes and dreams for these relationships, and for their love.

Sound strange? Well, it sure as hell was. Their unfair treatment made me very angry at the time and that anger still lodges in my heart at times.

Claire didn't live with Greg, but they had been dating for over a year when he died in a tragic fall from a high building in a foreign country. Not only wasn't she present at the time—she wasn't even in that country.

Terra had lived with Brandon at the time of his suicide. Very different causes of death, with neither woman having been present.

So how were they blamed and treated unfairly after their men's deaths? As I watched their attacks unfold, I was appalled. I will never again underestimate the misunderstandings that public ridicule can project and how a lack of compassion can damage a person.

During Greg's funeral Claire was extremely distraught and sobbed throughout her eulogy for Greg. She talked about how she had hoped they would eventually marry.

Greg had had a reputation as a playboy and had dated many women over the years. His cronies, all men, ridiculed Claire's testament to their love and emphatically and

cruelly denied she would ever have had any future with Greg. This, despite the fact that they had no clue as to how close the two had been and what might have evolved.

Claire was and still is a strong and assertive woman. They clearly didn't like her and couldn't imagine Greg ever staying with her. They behaved like misogynistic bad boys, upholding the image of their friend as a playboy. To enforce their dislike and disdain, they cut off communication with her.

Greg's family also disliked Claire, describing her as pushy. They all rejected Claire's love for Greg as a "delusional fantasy." It was painful to visit Claire and witness her intense suffering and grief over the man she loved. Finally, I couldn't visit anymore because my own family stood up with these men and it was causing me strife at home.

Then there was Terra, who lost Tim. They hadn't lived together very long. After Tim's suicide, his close friends and family, including Tim's mother, went in for the kill. This despite the fact that they all knew Tim had struggled with addiction issues and depression.

From my own experience, I know suicide to be one of those deaths wherein everyone looks for someone to blame. I also know that *no one person* is to blame and *no one thing*. Suicide is a puzzle with many pieces, and only the person who is gone knows the real answer.

I heard horrible comments from friends and family about Terra which I know to be false. She had loved this man, tried to build a life with him, fed him healthy foods, and encouraged his music. I'm sure they had their problems, but she was clearly NOT at fault in his decision to take his life.

Once again, I was at a loss as to how to help this woman. I gave her money and spent time with her. She eventually moved away and started a new life. I was happy that she was

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able to make a fresh start after such heartbreak.

Watching the unnecessary suffering these women went through was very painful, particularly because it was all so unnecessary and unfair.

Today I feel compassion for Tim's mother as she might have drawn comfort in being close to her son's girlfriend instead of rejecting her and blaming her. I feel some compassion for the men who can't deal with assertive women and have little understanding of the roots of deep love that Claire was trying to convey.

At the same time, as I write about this, my anger rises once again. It's painful and heavy in my heart. Life is short however, too short to dwell on past negatives. These lessons coincidentally occurring within weeks of each other are now history.

The best I can do is to try to use them in my own life. There is an American Indian saying that resonates with me: "Be kind to your brother; we all walk a difficult path." Don't judge others; you don't know the path they walk. Have compassion for everyone. We're all in this together. Just like in our writing, we all have our own stories and our own points of view.

## DISASTER BUILDS CONNECTIONS

### by Judythe Guarnera

"Mom, David killed himself." When Tom, my youngest son blurted out these words, the fear and disbelief in his eyes is something I will never forget. Both boys were in junior high when David made the decision to end his life.

One day the following summer, Tom left a note in my car, which I discovered while sitting in the parking lot before one of my finals. I'd recently gone back to school to finish my college degree. The note revealed that he and his slightly under-age friends had been caught drinking beer and I was to expect a call from a detective.

My reaction was pure fear. I read the remorse and desperation in Tom's words; the memory of David's suicide hit me with such intensity that I feared I was having a heart attack. I tried to call Tom, but no one answered.

Fortunately, Tom was remorseful and scared, not suicidal, but the combination of events led me to step up my volunteering. I trained with the local crisis line, making myself available for people, many of whom were suicidal, who needed an empathetic ear. A group of us also did workshops about suicide

at local schools.

Although I had volunteered in the schools as my four children were growing up, these two incidents really marked the beginning of my commitment to volunteer. It didn't take me long to realize that helping others was critical to *my* mental well-being. Others who volunteer almost always agree that they get much more from volunteering than they give.

To those who don't volunteer, this might seem a simplistic comment, but for me, it is the absolute truth. I've learned many things about myself through volunteering. The basic reality for me is that, if I am not connecting with others on a daily basis, something vital is absent. For me, it is, in fact, all about connection.

When I was working full-time, volunteering, and trying to write in my time off, I often complained about the lack of time to write. A friend told me that if I didn't volunteer so much, I'd have more time.

"But, if I don't volunteer, what will fill me with the wonder of life and give me the words

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to write?" Another example of what volunteers gain when they involve themselves helping their communities.

You don't need something as dramatic as the death of a teen to inspire you to volunteer. Just recognizing needs in your community and thinking about what skills you might have to support people in need can lead to a fulfilling and rewarding volunteer experience.

For several years I wrote for *Kind Magazine*, a publication which sought to celebrate local people who contributed in some way to "making a difference." The stories of the different and often unexpected ways that people serve inspired others when they realized they could do the same.

When I was working and managed three volunteer programs, I read that retired people volunteer for three reasons: they want to use the skills they have; they want to learn new skills; or they want to stuff envelopes or do something that helps, but isn't a brain drain.

SLO County has always needed volunteers, but during this time of pandemic and shortages of funds from businesses shutting, unemployment, etc., there are vital tasks that need to be performed and no one to do them.

Politics and pandemic restrictions have stirred up more divisiveness than we're used to. What better way to lessen that than to offer some of your time and energy to support those in need?

*Author's Note: Although this article on volunteering was written for another purpose, it seemed appropriate for SLO NightWriters' current situation—filling the board and other essential positions such as Newsletter Editor, Contest Manager, etc.*

*We badly need connection in our county. From experience I can say how many great connections I've made while on the NW board and since then by the small contributions I make to help the writers in the organization.*

*Give it a try!*

## THE BURGUNDY ROOM by Christine Ahern

A perfect storm is what happens when opposing forces of nature meet with disastrous results. I have weathered my share of these storms. As when I have been forced to perform with an incompatible leading man, or an impossible director or an improbable script. But I don't expect it to happen at Tito's, between myself and an infant *maitre d'*.

"I have a reservation." I stamp my foot just hard enough to cause an elegant click on the tile floor. "Doesn't that mean anything anymore?"

"I can check again Ma'am but I'm pretty sure I don't have a table reserved for you," the *maitre d'* says while a line of young starlets flows past us like a river of precious jewels.

"I am Scarlet Hamilton. *The Scarlet Hamilton.*"

He flips too quickly through several pages of his book while he glances from side to side. Is he looking for my table or someone to help get this crazy old woman off his back?

"I am meeting my manager here at three."

"Your manager?"

"Sylvester Morgenstern. *The Sylvester Morgenstern.*"

"Ah." He flips again. And glances again.

"What are you looking for?" I ask and slam my palm on the book. His silly, blue eyes go wide. "Are you looking for my table or an excuse for losing my reservation?"

"Um..."

"Oh, for heaven's sake." I step into the dining room and glance around.

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I miss the elegant glow this room used to have when it was decorated with circular burgundy booths and deep purple theater carpet. The room gleams much too brightly now with white tablecloths and steel everything else.

"Sylvester," I delicately yell. Heads turn. I smile at their curious faces. Yes, I *am* Scarlet Hamilton. And, yes, I *am* a client of Sylvester Morgenstern's. "Sylvester Morgenstern," I repeat.

I feel a touch at my elbow. "May I assist you?"

I look the man up and down. Blue-gray hair, nice suit. Finally. An adult. "Yes, actually. I have a reservation and the child at the front desk has lost it. Or doesn't know what one is. I'm not sure." I flick my cashmere shawl across my chest and feel it fall gracefully against my back. I touch my earlobe and diamond earring. "My name..."

"Oh, Ms. Hamilton. You don't need to tell me your name." He smiles at me and bows as he takes my elbow. "We have your table ready. Please excuse Jeremy. He's new here. Still learning all the fine nuances of being a *maitre d'*."

"Well," I say with a gracious smile, "I wish him luck."

I'm led past tables surrounded by perfectly attired people and plates sprinkled with perfectly arranged morsels of what I assume to be food. I stop and point at a pink hockey puck on a circle of green leaves. "What is that you have there?"

The woman seems truly surprised by my question. "Salmon mousse. On arugula."

"Ah. Well, I don't think I will be having that."

The nice man pulls aside a heavy curtain and bows again. "This way, Ms. Hamilton. Your table is ready. I will direct Mr. Morgenstern here when he arrives."

I slide into the burgundy booth. He flips on the solitary lamp in the middle of the table. It casts a lovely glow that falls across my hands and blends away some of the bend of my fingers. I touch my hair at my temple. "Thank you, sir," I say. "You are a gentleman. May I have a martini while I wait?"

He bows again and glides out of the room. The curtain falls into place, and I am alone. Mine is the only booth in the room, the only table. There seem to be boxes of some kind stacked against one wall. That is certainly odd. Perhaps they are preparing for a large party. I attended many a large party here in the day. In *my* day.

"Mother?"

Fingers wrap around my wrist. I lift my head from the table. I touch my wet cheek. "Oh heavens, I must have fallen asleep." I laugh. It takes a moment for my eyes to adjust to the soft light in the burgundy room. "Hello, dear," I say. "Have you come to join me for lunch?"

"Yes." She smiles at me and combs her fingers through my hair. "I've ordered us each a steak and baked potato. How does that sound?"

"Perfect," I say. "Just perfect."

## Living With Risk

by Steve Kliewer

With over 700,000 people dead of COVID in our nation, the pandemic is certainly a serious life threat. Why would anyone choose to risk dying? Why not do everything possible to stay alive?

These questions are not trivial. While some people seem to be oblivious to the threat and resort to denial or obfuscation, others are confused because of the many nuances to these questions that make it difficult to process.

The news is full of alarming numbers. However, one must judiciously wade through the confusion of numbers to avoid succumbing to unnecessary fears.

The best way to avoid risking a COVID infection is total isolation. Early in the pandemic, many of us tried this but found it difficult to avoid all contact with people and even objects others had touched. Isolation was also psychologically damaging. Despite such extreme efforts we learned that even this was not a total guarantee of safety. With the advent of vaccines our level of worry subsided only to return as news of breakthrough infections rose and new variants emerged.

We live with risk in all our activities. Riding in a car is a significant risk that we have learned to accommodate. Each of us must evaluate the level of risk we can accept and what efforts are reasonable and necessary to achieve that level.

I don't pretend to tell you what you must do but rather to try to help you understand how to get a handle on analyzing this risk on your own.

### Analyzing Risk:

The SLO Tribune often reports the number of "new cases" of COVID without specifying over what length of time they occurred. Reporters

often do not specify important criteria such as that or of what group they are referring to when they say, "There are 20% more cases"... than when; or 20% of people believe, when that could mean 20% of a city or a state or a group of employees in a meat-packing plant. They often compare numbers that aren't comparable such as the total number of cases in California compared to those in Wyoming with hugely differing populations.

According to a study in the *Lancet*, most COVID cases are contagious from two days before symptoms begin to five days after. This means that most contagions occur within one-week intervals. This implies two things:

1. New cases reported in the past week reflect the chance that a random person you've had contact with might be contagious even without knowing it.
2. Your exposure more than a week ago has little relevance to your projected risk this week.

The SLO County Health Department reported (10/1/21) an average rate of 560 new cases per week. This would indicate that under those conditions one should expect there to be 560 contagious people in the county at any one time during the next week.

Your likelihood of having contact with a potentially contagious person is best measured by probability. Given that the population of SLO county is 280,000 people, the probability that a person you have contact with the next week might be contagious is: the 560 contagious people in the county divided by the total population of the county or 560 divided by 280,000. This means you have a 0.2% or 1 in 500 possibility of connecting with a positive individual.

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Your chance of getting COVID depends on how many people with whom you have close contact; the possibility the virus can overcome your body's normal protections; and the chance that the virus then overcomes the special protections provided by a vaccine.

For example, here is a rough approximation of my risk of contracting COVID during the next week:

I have about a 1 in 500 chance that a person I might come into contact with might possibly be contagious.

Assuming this contagious contact was close (no mask, less than six feet and for more than fifteen minutes), I have a **1 in 30 to 40** chance of getting infected. This reflects variations due to the COVID variant's contagiousness and prevalence of masking and handwashing currently in place.

The Pfizer & Moderna vaccines are 95% effective. This means that even with both doses, 5% of vaccinated people will develop breakthrough cases, most mild. Five percent breakthrough is a 1 in 20 chance of contracting the virus .

Assuming I have close contact this next week with only one person, my chance of contracting COVID can be calculated in this way:

N = the number of close contacts I had this week = 1.

A = the probability that a person is contagious = 1 in 500.

B = the probability of infection given a close contact with an infected person = 1 in 30.

V = the probability that Pfizer vaccine is not effective in evading the infection = 1 in 20.

Thus, my risk of getting COVID from this one contact =  $N \times A \times B \times V = 1 \times 1/500 \times 1/30 \times 1/20 = 1$  in 300,000.

Risk of death is much lower than infection. Given that one has contracted COVID, on average there is a 1 in 30 chance of dying. This would lower my overall risk of death from this one contact to 1 in 2,000,000.

This makes the risk sound low. However, as one increases the number of close contacts (bars, concerts, fairs) or continues this behavior, the risk increases proportionately. One close contact a week for a year or 50 contacts this week will increase my risk of a breakthrough infection to 1 in 6,000.

One item that people often miss, is that risks are always forward facing. It doesn't matter what exposures or risks I've taken in the past. As they say in Vegas, "The dice have no memory." If I went to a concert a month ago, I've already "rolled the dice" and won. I only need estimate the current risks and evaluate my future behaviors or activities. If the conditions and my behaviors aren't projected to change, I could estimate the sum of projected risk over the next year. However, conditions always change, and I must always reconsider my behaviors to match.

### **What is an acceptable risk?**

I don't want to die. However, I face that risk with everything I do, from choking on a ham sandwich to driving my car to the store. How much is too much risk? Which of my behaviors substantially changes this risk and which am I able and willing to change? For example, simply isolating myself strongly reduces but does not remove all risk of COVID. However, it also drastically reduces my enjoyment of life and therefore increases my risk of other health issues.

### **Conclusion**

For me, vaccination made total sense. At almost no risk and no cost, it reduced my risk

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of infection by a factor of twenty.

Both mask wearing and hand washing reduce risk by a factor of two. They add a little annoyance but essentially no cost.

Outdoor dining (instead of home dining) increases risk by a factor of two. Indoor dining by three.

The more people each week that one has close contact with the more one's risk increases. This risk rapidly adds up especially if you hang out in bars, concerts, or fairs.

The conditions predicated in all these risk calculations are in constant flux. These conditions include: the number of new cases per week, the rate of contagion of each new virus variant, booster vaccinations, the prevalence of vaccination and mask-wearing compliance, the opportunity to dine outside as the weather changes.

The single most challenging part of this pandemic is constantly reevaluating one's risks and behaviors as conditions change and our vigilance gets lax.

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