

Literary Landscapes

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF

THE GREATER LOS ANGELES WRITERS SOCIETY

VOL. 2 No.2

2012

Original short stories, novel excerpts,
poetry, opinion, educational articles
and news of the Society authored by:
(in alphabetical order)

Joyce Actor

Angela Cherise Alley

Barbara Ardinger

Neil Citrin

Gloria Mitchell

Lisa Marguerite Mora

Gerry Moylan

Troy Aaron Ratliff

Mike Robinson

Mina Scheller-Wildfeuer

Madeline Sharples

Morgan St. James

Tony N. Todaro



**THE GREATER LOS ANGELES
WRITERS SOCIETY**

WRITERS MENTORING WRITERS OF ALL DISCIPLINES

Literary Landscapes

Vol. 2 No. 2 2012

Editor

Mike Robinson

Associate Editor

Joyce Actor

Production & Design

Michael Rushlow

Contributors

Morgan St. James, Mina Scheller-Wildfeuer,
Angela Cherise Alley, Joyce Actor,
Lisa Marguerite Mora, Neil Citrin,
Gloria Mitchell, Mike Robinson,
Barbara Ardinger, Troy Aaron Ratliff,
Madeline Sharples, Gerry Moylan

Visual Art

Tony N. Todaro

Michael Rushlow

Photos by Vanessa Sick
(Vanessa Sick Photography)

GLAWS President

Tony N. Todaro

GLAWS Vice President

Leslie Ann Moore

Founders

Tony N. Todaro, Neil Citrin

www.glaws.org

Literary Landscapes is the official periodical of
The Greater Los Angeles Writers Society. All Rights Reserved 2011.
All work remains the property of the individual author.
The words of the writers do not necessarily reflect the opinions
or policies of the society's members or staff.
Original material may be submitted by GLAWS members
in good standing for editorial consideration.

We take poetry, fiction, articles and excerpts between
500 and 3,000 words (preferred).

Send submissions by email to: editor@glaws.org
There is no reading fee. As this publication is distributed free,
no royalties are paid. GLAWS is a 501(c) non-profit.

Contents

03 Message From The President

04 Editor's Forum

05 What In The World Is Creative Nonfiction?

Morgan St. James

07 Odds Against Me

(Memoir Excerpt), Mina Scheller-Wildfeuer

08 Hope Reincarnated

(Poetry), Angela Cherise Alley

09 Critique Groups: Why Bother?

Joyce Actor

12 The Use Of Fine Detail

Lisa Marguerite Mora

13 Balance

(Poetry), Neil Citrin

14 A New Game

(Memoir), Gloria Mitchell

16 Dispatches From Arkham (On Lovecraft's Significance)

Mike Robinson

17 Crisp Green Empty

(Poetry), Neil Citrin

18 Smilin' Through (From "Secret Lives", Chapter 14)

Barbara Ardinger

23 To Stir In Your Juices Or Be A Flash In The Pan?

Troy Aaron Ratliff

25 Lunch (Excerpt From "Leaving The Hall Light On")

(Memoir), Madeline Sharples

28 Declaration

Neil Citrin

29 Minihan's Lot

(Memoir Excerpt) Gerry Moylan

31 Now Available From GLAWS Authors

30 Upcoming Events

Message From The President



By Tony N. Todaro

I once met a man who changed my life.

It happened when I was least expecting it. It was years after my songwriting father had passed on and left me a legacy of words that meant nothing more than a periodic royalty check in the mail. I had been a writer of songs and prose – among other presumptively artistic indulgences -- since I wrote my first column for the high school newspaper and quickly got summoned to the Principal's office. It was a few hundred words frothing with stupidity and youthful ruminations. Nothing of substance, or real grit to the world. Except to the subject in my crosshairs at the time.

I spent decades writing bird-cage fodder that earned me a corporate reputation and cash money in the bank – as much as ten grand for a three word slogan that was plastered on billboards and store signs. But no real, inner satisfaction.

Until I met that man.

I was drawn to his lecture at Royce Hall on the UCLA Campus. I remember it clearly: the unexpectedly long lines, the big screen projection of a man too weak to stand that he had to be delivered on stage in a wheelchair. Still, the crowd went wild at his appearance, as if a rock legend had appeared to perform his greatest hits.

He began to speak in a firm yet labored voice. Full of more passion and conviction than I could have ever imagined. I learned how he rented a typewriter in his teens and often worked in the basement of a library. How he shaped stories that changed the way people saw the world, and came to mean the world to me. Stories such as “Something Wicked This Way Comes” that dealt with the relationship between a father and son in metaphors that strangely reminded me of my own.

And there were the stories he wrote of impossible characters in far away places and worlds that became “The Martian Chronicles” and “Fahrenheit 451”, which taught us to look at our little world and frail lives with big fresh eyes. Each was a compelling metaphor for a facet of life that still haunts me.

He spoke of his love for books and words and libraries and people. And how he saw the metaphors in everything that inspired his work. It was somewhat anecdotal, yet emotionally humbling. And as I sat there, furiously trying to



In the official photo (left), Mr. Bradbury is flanked by (top left) **Jay Greenstein**, Senior Field Deputy, Council District 5 of Los Angeles; **William Allen**, President of the Los Angeles High Alumni Association; **Richard Harmetz**, Westside Neighborhood Council; **Maggie Johnson**, Senior Librarian, Palms-Rancho Library; **John Weiskopf**, Events Chair of the Greater Los Angeles Writers Society (GLAWS); **Neil Citrin**, Vice-president of GLAWS; **Tony N. Todaro**, President of GLAWS; **James Greenwood**, President of the Friends of the Palms-Rancho Park Library; and (kneeling) **"Ace" Antonio Hall** and **Sherry Gideons-Martin**, GLAWS members.

take notes until I felt so enraptured by his words that I put my pad away (his speech at that point was no longer a lecture but series of life lessons), I now wanted to write, not because of a deadline, but because I felt compelled to set my own morality plays to paper. Perhaps only myself for starters, then perhaps for others. I wanted to tell my own stories that would enrapture and amaze.

And when this man had finished speaking and received a well-deserved standing ovation, I left with a fresh fire in my gut. I went straight home to write as if I had never written before. Sometimes it was garbage that would never see the light of day, and sometimes it was tales of, hopefully, compelling characters, desperate situations, and worlds of wonder that I felt strongly about.

It became a passion, an obsession. One that I haven't shaken to this day.

I met Ray Bradbury in person several times over the years; got down on my knees once so he could see me and maybe hear my words -- he'd gone almost deaf by then. I wanted him to know how much he had inspired me. And how I'd learned to love writing for the cleansing truth of it. Not for fame, or another check in the mail.

And though I've been fortunate enough to have since met other inspirational writers, I will always be thankful to that man and how he changed my life.

Tony N. Todaro

President & Co-Founder



Editor's Forum

By Mike Robinson

Quietly, writers -- especially prose writers and poets -- assume many roles in their work. Beneath the outwardly docile act of sitting and tapping keys or scribbling ink on paper buzzes a chaotic scene not unlike that of a movie set, the only difference being all roles, from producer to peon, are embodied in one person, the singular writer who is at once the director, the grip, the teamster, the art and set designer, the cinematographer, a pyrotechnic of special effects wizardry and ultimately a projector, one who throws the final vision onto the screen of our imaginations. Why shoulder so much? "For love!" as the late Ray Bradbury, who, in his work, exemplified so many of such traits, once proclaimed to us.

Yes, for love. And to understand. And even to heal. In this issue, our second, you'll come to understand some of the harrowing events, both historical and personal, faced by fellow GLAWS members. And you'll see also how they helped heal themselves through our shared craft.

Also in these pages you'll find more invaluable advice from some of our most accomplished writers and editors. No matter your genre, you'll want to see what they have to say. Be sure as well to check out the new feature of the Author's Page, a listing of published work currently available from members.



What In The World Is Creative Nonfiction?

By Morgan St. James

Many people are a bit flummoxed when they hear “creative” and “nonfiction” in the same breath. That poses the question: “What in the world is creative nonfiction?”

The genre of creative nonfiction is enjoying a renaissance of sorts these days. I recently finished one myself, to be released in September 2012.

What type of books qualify as creative non-fiction?

The range is wide. There is fertile ground for creative non-fiction because so many out-of-the-ordinary things happen in real life. It can be anything from life as a spy for Churchill as in Churchill’s *Secret Agent*, to a child on the run with his parent who was one of America’s Most Wanted — Chip St. Clair’s *The Butterfly Effect*, to a romantic romp. Ninety to ninety-five percent is true, with a few creative touches here and there. Maybe this genre is enjoying resurgence because reports of bizarre experiences spew from every newscast, tabloid, radio talk show and other types of media these days. Reality shows demonstrate the degree of humiliation or challenge a human being is willing to endure for money and publicity. Some stories are fascinating, some make the heart go atwitter, and some cause revulsion. Defining creative non-fiction as “not fiction” is almost like calling classical music “non-rock.” Simply put, it is the art of adding some creative details to the reality as the story unfolds.

It actually started centuries ago

Back in the days of yore, literature was mostly non-fiction—it just wasn’t called that. Books recounted actual events in a storytelling style. Myths were basically the fiction of the day. It is natural for people to tell stories about events in their life, and that said, I must be the poster child for over-the-top stories. If anything, I almost have too many of my own stories. Sometimes I have to heed a mental “T-Sign” and slow it down, so for

the most part those experiences turn up as scenes in my fiction books.

Example of a creative non-fiction story

One of the award-winning stories in the recently released *The Mafia Funeral and Other Short Stories* collection is *The Second Time Around*—a hilarious, over-the-top story about a woman who remarried her first husband thirty-six years after getting divorced. When Husband #4 died at the race track with a winning ticket in his hand, she decided to find Husband #1, the dashing tango dancer of her youthful memories.

Although he turned out to be an aging, potbellied little man with a Desi Arnaz accent and a sprinkling of thin gray hair across his pate, to her he was Antonio Banderas. Who was the woman? My former mother-in-law and but for a few details, it’s all true. It’s a great story and a terrific example of creative nonfiction.

Maybe this genre is enjoying resurgence because reports of bizarre experiences spew from every newscast, tabloid, radio talk show and other types of media these days.”

Most people have stories about what happened at the office, how they met their spouses, perhaps a hilarious misunderstanding that resulted in something wonderful or something awful. It goes on and on ad infinitum. When telling these stories, we often embellish the facts for the shock or humor value by adding details that didn’t actually happen and exaggerate or eliminate some that did. What does a story like that become? Creative non-fiction. Facts mixed with fictional details.

Manipulating the story while being “sort of” true to facts

Think about it. Often the tendency is to leave out details that might make us look bad, stupid or gullible. When we are talking about someone we don't like, they might be depicted as a real ogre when in fact they are only someone with bad habits. However, it's far more entertaining to give them extras that make them loathsome. Let's not call these lies. They are “prevarications” — statements that don't really give a direct and honest answer or opinion, or perhaps offhand comments that dance around a clear and truthful account of a situation. Adding controversy or being deliberately ambiguous or misleading, doesn't qualify as a bald-faced out-and-out lie. At least that's my story and I'm sticking to it.

What makes the story change?

Depending upon the point-of-view we choose, the story changes. Are we telling only what we can see (first person)? What someone else has seen and is now telling the reader (third person)? Perhaps a God-like knows all/sees all point-of-view that includes knowing thoughts of various people (omniscient). Or, a combination of any of the above. We determine who is important to the story, who will be most likable, what events will trigger the reader's emotion, etc. This might not be the way it really happened, but it makes for a better read. We are being creative with factual information plus some manipulation and prevarication thrown in for good measure.

Just remember, real stories don't always turn out the way you wish they would, so it's your decision to keep with reality or spice it up a bit.”

If you want it to keep the book or story in the creative nonfiction genre, you do have to stick with what really happened at its core. Add too many details and scenes that exist only in your imagination and it becomes fiction inspired by actual events or people.

Take a crime caper that didn't happen, but was conceived based upon experience and knowledge — something that could probably be pulled off. Real conditions and situations may have inspired this story, but if the embezzlement scheme didn't really happen, it is fiction,

plain and simple. However, if the embezzlement did happen, but the author chose to embellish scenes with humor, a few over-the-top close calls, characters that didn't exist although everything else is true, that could be considered creative nonfiction.

Whichever path you choose, it's your story and you can play with the endings. Just remember, real stories don't always turn out the way you wish they would, so it's your decision to keep with reality or spice it up a bit. In any case, if you haven't stuck to the truth, don't represent it as such.

Take for example *A Million Little Pieces*, the memoir author James Frey represented to be a nonfiction memoir of his years as an alcoholic, drug addict, and criminal. It sold several million copies and made him a rich man. Later it was uncovered that it would have fit into the creative non-fiction category much better because many of his claims were debunked. Would it have sold any less if he'd been honest about that in the beginning? Possibly, but who knows? Looking at reader's reactions, they basically split into those who didn't care and those who were angry at being fooled, plus many ambivalent readers who viewed it simply as a compelling book.

If you have some great stories, why not try your hand at turning real events into a captivating combination of dialogue and narrative with a little help from your imagination. Even if it doesn't get published, it would be an interesting jaunt down Memory Lane.



About the Author: Morgan St. James co-authors the popular Silver Sisters Mystery series with her real life sister Phyllice Bradner. She has published over 500 published articles related to writing. Her books are available at most online booksellers or order from your favorite local bookstore.

Odds Against Me

Memoir Excerpt

By Mina Scheller-Wildfeuer

Coming to a large wasteland, we joined a group of other refugees and left the highway, parting company with the troops and ignoring their warnings. Presuming it to be a shortcut to safety, the throng of people trudged along the open field. Trundling bundles of their possessions, hauling wheelbarrows, pulling wagons and pushing baby carriages, young and old alike left the forest and its protective trees.

Events quickly moved towards catastrophe. The ominous hum of approaching low-flying planes craned our eyes skyward. They came so close to the ground we could glimpse the faces of the airmen, hidden behind large goggles. Instantly the staccato sounds of machine guns exploded in the air. Bullets, darting across the field like playful pebbles, punctured the earth, dispatching short bursts of dirt.

Dreadful realization struck us. Caught in a trap, hunted down like animals, we had become the defenseless targets of an inhumane shooting game. We dropped to the ground, hugging the moist soil, pretending to be dead to hopefully escape the merciless hunters. Swooping down, they continued to spray their deadly ammunition, mowing down everybody regardless of age or gender. Indiscriminate bullets, cutting through the air, more often than not found their mark.

I saw a wounded old woman, tenaciously dragging herself along. Hit again, she slowly sank to the soil, lay motionless. Closer to me a terribly frantic young woman pushed a baby carriage, the child in it wailing incessantly. Father shouted for her to get down, just as the woman reeled up, blood gushing from her neck. Her head flopped back and with a quick turn she fell heavily upon the stroller, which disintegrated. The infant was sent flying, its screams shriller, piercing even through the sound of gunfire. Then, in a second, there was nothing: mother and child lay engulfed in deadly silence.

Those still alive did not move. We obeyed Father's hissed command to keep motionless. Even the very young Annemarie, born during war years, whose cradlesongs had been of danger, death and rules for survival, heeded this command.

The shootings, salvo after salvo, went on as long as there was any movement. Eventually satisfied with a job done, the death-bringing machines whined away, leaving behind a field of dying moans and utter devastation. We remained on the ground. It took a while to find courage to rise, to take in the sight. Spread around like discarded rag dolls, all the silent witnesses to the massacre, lying in awkward positions, sprawled, littering the moor as broken pieces of humanity - wretched creatures who had only looked for an escape and instead were delivered into gruesome death, their existence snuffed out in an instant.

Fearing possible further attacks, Father aimed to return us to the security of the forest. Bugged down by the wet marsh, we struggled to make it out of that treacherous field. Leaving the carnage behind, we scrambled back towards the main road and once more found the woods. Unending streams of bomb squads roared overhead, but we were sheltered by the canopy of the forest. For now, we dared to feel somewhat safe again.



About the Author: Mina Scheller-Wildfeuer was born in Galicia (West Ukraine). She and her family spent six years as refugees in occupied territory and in camps. After World War II she lived in Germany, where she received a teacher's degree. As a young adult Mina immigrated to the United States and experienced many new adventures, which she wrote down and published in newspapers. Mina made her home in Los Angeles, married and had five children. She still lives with her husband in California.

Hope Reincarnated

By Angela Cherise Alley



About the Author: Angela Cherise Alley, otherwise known as Angel, is the author of *LuvEnlightens™*, a blog sharing messages of love to enlighten the soul. Angel is launching a global project to heal the world through prayer called *I AM Your Countryman™*. You are invited to join her beginning 6/11 through 11/11/2012 at 7am (PST) to pray for the 7 nations streamlining on www.luvEnlightens.com or <http://www.ustream.tv/user/LuvEnlightens>.

Someone asked me before “Do you believe in reincarnation?”

My answer then was, “No. I don’t know too much about it.”

If you were to ask me today I’d tell you, “Yeah. I hope everyday.”

Hope is the essence of reincarnation. Hope lives. Hope dies.

Then, hope is reborn again. In someone or something.

I go to bed thankful. I rise being hopeful—most days.

Hopeful for that chance meeting, exchanging glances and smiles

that leads to polite awkward conversation and hopefully to romance.

Hopeful that today, maybe today, or someday soon, I’ll begin to understand myself better

and hopefully have more fortitude to deal with life and its circumstances

with more grace than frustration. Hopeful that things will begin to make sense.

I’m not asking to take the bitter out of the sweet,

just a little more sweet to squelch the bitter when it comes.

Always is too complicated. Never is too narrow

And, forever has its limits. Hope has no parameters, no boundaries to be confined.

It’s like air. You need to take in deep breaths of it;

Exhale, release anything that tries to kill it.

For Hope is the regeneration of life.

Critique Groups: Why Bother?

By Joyce Actor

American Idol changed my life.

Since I'm a writer, you might be wondering how that happened. It was three years ago and watching that pop culture phenomenon woke me up from my naïve optimism that it was going to be easy to become a published writer.

One summer night a few years ago, my legs were cramping after sitting for hours in front of my computer, working on my first manuscript. I decided to take a break and watch *American Idol*. My writing was going well. Words and ideas tumbled out of me, embellishing empty pages with evocative images. I was confident it was good. At least, it wasn't like many other nights when I spent hours on one sentence trying to figure out why this or that sounded awkward.

Allowing myself some escape time, I sat in my living room watching television. *American Idol* was the number one show and I admit I enjoyed the kids' painful auditions as they clamored for attention from Simon Cowell, *American Idol's* antichrist.

After one sad-looking pubescent boy sang off-key, Simon asked him, "Have you ever sung for anyone before?"

The young man pushed his hands into the pockets of his overalls and shuffled his feet on the linoleum floor. "Yeah," he said, "my family."

"And what did they say about your singing?" Simon asked.

The boy looked up with such innocence that instead of enjoying his humiliation, I cringed with embarrassment for the wannabe singing star.

"They said I was good," he replied.

I stared at the television. He couldn't hear, or didn't want to hear, the strained, tone-deaf sounds that millions of people had just heard him sing. "He's

delusional," I said out loud.

And then, my confidence seeped out of me while a streak of stomach tightening fear grabbed my insides. *Maybe I'm delusional, too. Maybe I can't write.* Once again, I went back to my computer to rewrite my work.

Everyone has doubts when they begin writing. But how do you overcome that uncertainty, enabling you to complete that first draft?

My friends said my writing was good but, they wouldn't criticize me. They didn't want to hurt my feelings. My instructor at UCLA said my "voice" was strong.

Of course she would say that. I was paying her.

Writing alone in my bedroom/office did not enable me to see where my work could be improved. How could I elicit an unbiased, knowledgeable critique? I needed other writers to give me constructive criticism so I could understand my strengths and weaknesses.

Around that time, GLAWS started their genre specific critique groups. When memoir came up, I volunteered to lead it.

Now, three years later, I have finished my manuscript. (Yes, three years!) And what I have learned from my critique group has taken my story far past anything I could have written alone.

Shelly Youngren, the co-director of the critique groups, had this to say about why critique groups are important.

There's so much that you don't catch in your own writing, from typos and grammar errors to major plot or character problems, that showing someone your work can be invaluable. Friends and family members are often happy to read what you write, but they tend not to say anything that could be construed as negative, so even if they happen to be intelligent readers they're not as helpful as they might

be. In a critique group you're still told what's good about your work but the feedback is less lopsided—and the members often have suggestions about the things that bother or confuse them. You get suggestions from people who've studied and practiced the craft and who've battled the same problems.

And here's a little critique-group secret: You also learn even when you yourself don't have anything under discussion. Reading the work of other members, preparing (and making) comments about it, and hearing the comments of other readers can be very illuminating...and it can get you thinking about all kinds of things you hadn't considered before.

Every genre of the critique groups runs differently, according to their needs, while adhering to the GLAWS guidelines on how to critique a writer's work.

In the Memoir workshop, each person reads five pages as the writers follow along. We use our copies to look back on the work and praise the parts we enjoyed while offering constructive criticism ranging from grammatical errors to fixing confusing story lines. We offer a supportive, professional atmosphere where writers can feel safe to experiment and transfer their emotions to the page.

Shelley Youngren also leads the Literary Fiction critique group. She explained her group like this: Literary Fiction lends itself more readily to short stories than a lot of genres do, and the short story is a great (though demanding) form. I love to get those entire, fresh little stories, and I never quite know what to expect, even from the person who submitted a short story last time. We mostly have novels, though, and with them it's exciting to receive the next installment. As readers we can really get caught up in the ongoing novels we're discussing.

We get a lot of variety in both story and style. We've had historical novels set in four different centuries—and various continents—plus fictionalized memoirs and works of pure imagination. Some even have elements of fantasy or science fiction; I like to encourage people to sit in on any and all groups that might have a bearing on their work, and see where they fit in.

Lisa M. Mora, the leader of the Poetry Critique Group, explained her poetry meetings in this way: GLAWS Poetry Critique group meets the 4th Sunday of every month from 1 to 2 p.m. in Beverly Hills at the library. Bring copies of a poem, read it aloud to us, and the group will offer feedback from what struck us, what

we remembered, and where it wasn't clear. As a professional editor and as a writer/poet who has published, I will offer this kind of feedback along with suggestions for line breaks, mechanics of language, and where I sense more can be explored or what may be redundant. Co-chair Dan Lambert is an English teacher in the community college system and he will offer his sensibilities as a teacher of literature as well as a writer of fiction. Since Dan and I both work with writers of all levels, we bring our professional expertise to those meetings and as writers, our compassion for the process.

And Morgan St. James, of the Mystery Critique Group, said that her group is open to all mystery and thriller sub-genres with a mission to improve their work through input from other writers. She also wrote that they were a small friendly group, ready to help each other. They do enforce the attitude of “no blood on the floor.” Killing off the characters is enough. They don't believe in destroying the enthusiasm of members by abrasive critiques. Constructive comments are what they're looking for. The co-leader of the group is Dr. Elaine Mura, a psychologist who works with the prison system and Morgan is an author of multiple books in the mystery and suspense genres. They have members at all stages of their career. The group meets on a Sunday near the end of the month at 2:30 p.m.

I needed other writers to give me constructive criticism so I could understand my strengths and weaknesses.”

If you are not convinced of how a critique group can help you, maybe statements from current members will change your mind. Daniel Brandler from Literary Fiction writes:

Getting my work vetted by other writers was essential to building up my self-confidence. I spent a lot of time in classes and workshops at UCLA before publishing my first book. Now my GLAWS critique group is giving me the confidence to self-publish the next book.

And Nancy Shiffrin, also from Literary Fiction writes:

Critique groups have made my work better and stronger and have given me the community spirit I need to submit for publication and self-publish when all else fails.

James Willwerth, a weekly member of the Memoir Critique Group had this to say about the

writing process:

Ego and denial are constant threats to good writing. In both cases, the writer is convinced he has written the perfect page when, in fact, he has written something that could be severely embarrassing. That's where critique groups come in. A good group forces those in denial to wake up and has little tolerance for ego. If you accept the group's authority, you'll benefit. They aren't always right, but if you are smart, you'll think seriously about every objection registered. The good news is that they also offer deserved praise. A night of kudos at your critique group could send you home glowing. If you can service week after week of such hard rain, you're probably en route to being published.

Another member of the memoir group, Gerry Moylan, volunteered this opinion in a recent email after only three meetings:

Being in a critique group like this is such a gift. I've already received so much invaluable feedback and made huge strides in reworking my story. There are times when you have a knee-jerk reaction to something someone has suggested, and your natural reaction is to ignore or defend it. But when you sit alone and take it to heart, the payoff can be huge. So much of what we miss in our writing is right in front of us. We're just so blinded in our isolated world that we oftentimes miss it.

My point is that there are writers all over the world who, no matter how good they are, miss this vital stage in the process toward publication. Or, they have no access to a group like ours. And that is unfortunate and tragic. Without a critique group you are just opening yourselves up to rejection without explanation. I am so grateful to have found GLAWS and my lovely group.

A writer doesn't know where inspiration comes from. I never would have guessed that an episode of *American Idol* would have led me to discover a process that changed my writing for the better through the suggestions of others.

Although writing is a solitary pursuit it does not have to be a lonely one, too.

Critique groups are an important part of what GLAWS is all about: writers mentoring writers. And that simple idea has changed my life.

Below is a list of all the current genres, critique group leaders and their email addresses.

Literary Fiction: Shelley Youngren Strohm – sdy@sdyc.org

Memoir: Joyce Actor – writinactor@yahoo.com

Mystery: Morgan St. James – stjameswriter@gmail.com,
Elaine Mura – drmura@sbcglobal.net

Romance: Toni Nelson – nelson.mermaid3@gmail.com

Science Fiction/Fantasy: Ace Hall – saintwasteland@yahoo.com

Screenwriting (Valley):
Dan Watanabe – watanabedan-eitc@yahoo.com

Screenwriting (Westside): John Gwinner – john.gwinner@cornell.edu

Self-Help: Marissa O'Neil – marissa.oneil15@gmail.com

Check the GLAWS calendar for more information on critique groups. GLAWS is currently looking for leaders in:

Children's & Young Adult – We are especially in need of a leader for this one!

Horror

Poetry

Western

Historical Fiction

Nonfiction-Narrative (History, Biography, etc.)

Nonfiction – Current & Professional Trends

Arts & Entertainment

Journalism

If anyone is interested in becoming a group leader, please drop a line to Shelly Youngren at sdy@sdyc.org.

Write well.



About the Author: Joyce Actor has a BFA in theater from The University of North Carolina School of the Arts. She has studied at UCLA and has an MFA in creative writing from Queens University. She leads the GLAWS memoir critique group and is currently working on a memoir.

The Use Of Fine Detail

By Lisa Marguerite Mora

I recently read an article by a writing instructor who discussed the purpose of small detail. He argued that characters who focused on small details were in a melancholy state, and that description of small objects, or fine detail evoked sadness because small things expressed a kind of vulnerability.

I disagree because the description is incomplete.

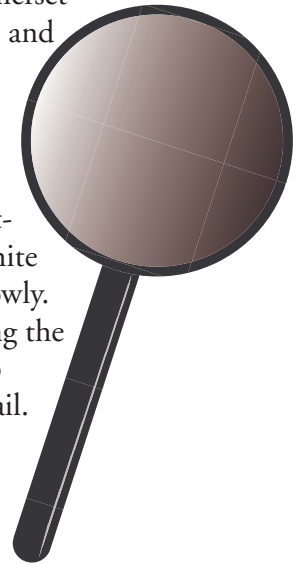
Fine detail accentuates a moment, whether it is sad, buoyant, or bored. It can highlight the character's uppermost thought, or his unconscious desires. The right detail will foreshadow coming events, underscore the mood of the scene, or enlighten us further into the protagonist's character. Fine detail can allow us to pause, take a breath and assimilate what has just happened whether it was within dialogue, a character's ruminations, or a car chase.

An example from Bernard Schlink's *The Reader*: "Next day she was gone. I came at the usual time and rang the bell. I looked through the door, everything looked the way it always did, I could hear the ticking clock." The ticking clock allows us to pause and take in what has happened. Hanna is gone, her apartment is empty. In that moment the protagonist hears the ticking clock we can realize many things as we experience with the protagonist this change of events. Is it a moment of sadness? Yes. But it is also a moment of clarity, of sobriety, and it foreshadows how time itself becomes a character that instructs, reveals, and arguably heals.

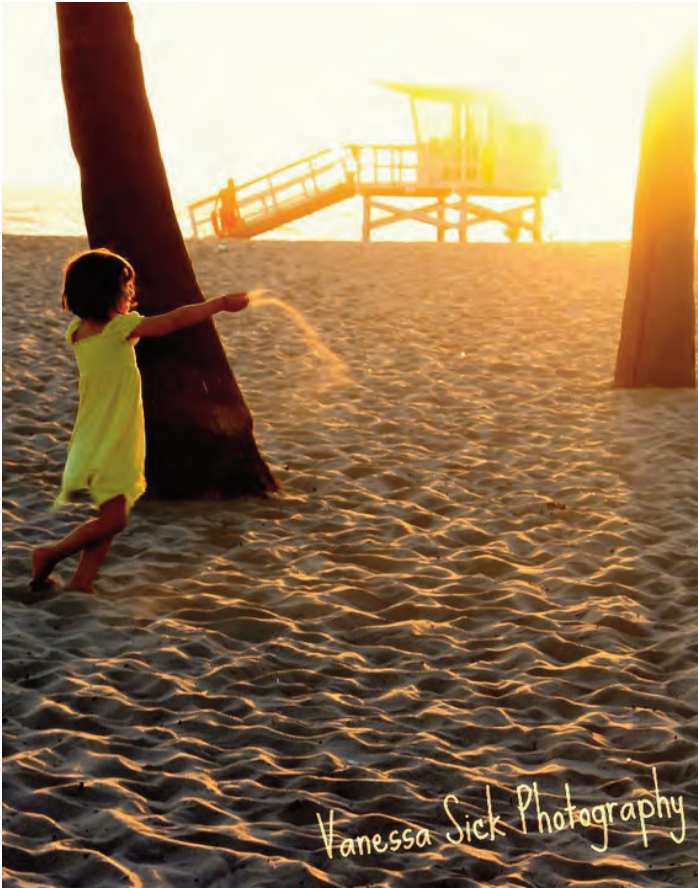
From *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak: "Some days Papa told her to get back into bed and wait a minute, and he would return with his accordion and play for her. Liesel would sit up and hum, her cold toes clenched with excitement." Cold toes clenched tells us something about the environment—it's freezing, it's winter. This is not a time or place where warm bedrooms are a given, and Liesel is happy and anticipatory in this moment, despite it all.

From *The Painted Veil* by Somerset Maugham: She caught her breath and put her hand on his arm. He followed the direction of her glance. They stood facing the windows that led out on the verandah. They were shuttered and the shutters were bolted. They saw the white china knob of the handle turn slowly. They had heard no one walk along the verandah." The white china knob does so many things as a fine detail. Because they are in a darkened room the color white stands out like a ghost carrying with it the fear and tension of the moment; china speaks of wealth and opulence, letting us know something about these people and their social class; and in this setting the image can be taken a step further and appear to be a cold bony hand, the knuckles of death and of endings.

Fine detail rivets us to the moment, makes us take notice, and sets us up for the next turn of events. Without it, the reader is forced to race along in dialogue, action, and exposition ending up either exhausted or bored. But too much fine detail will wear down the reader just the same. Choose your details wisely, sparingly, and allow them to work for you.



About the Author: Lisa Marguerite Mora is a prize winning poet and published writer. A nominated member of PEN, she now facilitates Wordsmith Creative Writing Workshops. Lisa was a recent panelist for Beyond the First Draft for the Greater Los Angeles Writers Society. Lisa is working on a novel.
www.barringtoneditorial.com.



**“He felt that his whole life
was some kind of dream
and he sometimes wondered
whose it was and whether
they were enjoying it.”**

-Douglas Adams

Balance

By Neil Citrin

Four hundred years since the division occurred,
material yanked from the spiritual,
a teenager thrust from its home.
This allowed necessary growth
but the youth grew arrogant
and no longer recognized
the value of his prime point;
viewing himself as the all,
a tail mocking its head,
a bird with one wing or a
rowboat with one oar.

Movement into the
new millennium
Cordial harmony.



About the Author: Neil Citrin’s writing interests cover a wide range, from shorty poetry to screenplays, from mainstream to science fiction and interstitial. He is the co-founder of the Greater Los Angeles Writers Society and a Young Adult (teen) librarian with the city of Los Angeles. In addition to writing, he loves music, sports and uses Buddhist practices to keep balance.

A New Game

Excerpt from *Letting Go Of Secrets, A Memoir*

By Gloria Mitchell

We had only been living in Marshall Village two weeks when I walked to my best friend Mary Jane's apartment one sunny afternoon. I was looking for the second best hopscotch player in the village. Of course, I was the best. I stood at the front screen door and knocked, but no one answered.

I heard what sounded like "oh," "ooh", and "ah" coming from one of the bedrooms. I knocked again and waited, but no answer. I pressed my face against the rusty screen door and saw the bedroom door open. I wondered what was going on in there, so I pulled the screen door handle and it popped open. I walked toward the sounds, calling, "Mary Jane!" Moans and giggling noises got louder as I got near the bedroom. The door swung shut like somebody had kicked it, but it didn't close all the way. I looked through the cracked door and saw a naked man on top of a naked woman on the bed. The man had sweat dripping off his back and the woman, with her arms wrapped around his back, was digging her fingernails in his skin. They were whispering words that I couldn't really hear, and laughing. Their game on the bed looked like a lot of fun. That's not Mary Jane, I thought. It's her mama.

I turned around and dashed across the living room floor. I felt bad about my flip-flops making a flapping noise. I eased the screen door shut behind me so I wouldn't disturb their game any more than I already had. I was bubbling with excitement. A picture of the brand new game was stuck in my mind as I ran home. Harry and I had played lots of games, but not like this one. I was going to have fun teaching him. It was a different way of playing house from baking mud pies in the sun, and spanking doll babies and crying for them.

Harry was all alone in our apartment. He was sitting at the table eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and drinking a glass of Cherry Kool-Aid.

"I saw the neighbors playing a new game on top of

the bed, and it looks like a whole lot of fun," I shouted. "Let's try it! I'll show you how to play."

"Okay," he said. "Wait till I finish my sammich."

As his six-year-old big sister, I was excited about showing Harry, who was almost five, everything I had just seen. I went into our bedroom and took off my tank top, shorts and panties. Then I sat on the edge of the bunk bed and waited for Harry to finish his sandwich.

Moans and giggling noises got louder as I got near the bedroom. The door swung shut like somebody had kicked it, but it didn't close all the way."

When Harry came into our bedroom a few minutes later I closed the door and turned the knob to lock it. I just felt like Mary Jane's mama should have locked the bedroom door before they played that game. If they had done that, then I would not have walked in to disturb them.

"Now you take off all your clothes and come lay on top of me," I said, as I lay down on my back on the bottom bunk.

Harry climbed on the bed and crawled on top of me.

"Okay. Now what?" he asked.

"Start wiggling and laughing," I said.

"Ha, ha, ha," he said. He didn't sound like he was having fun.

"Oh, oh, oh," I moaned. "Now you say what I say."

I was trying to make it fun.

We had just started wiggling against each other when we heard Daddy and Zenobia talking outside the room.

Somebody turned the doorknob.

Harry jumped up and put on his briefs and shorts. I jumped up too and dressed as fast as I could, but I had more clothes to put on than he did. Wide-eyed Harry stood by the door watching me as I put on my tank top. I could tell that he was ready to open the door.

“Who’s in there?” Zenobia yelled. She twisted the knob and banged on the door.

I was still putting on my tank top when Harry turned the lock on the knob and Zenobia’s fist hit the air as he yanked the door open. I froze like a Popsicle. One glance at my big sister’s eyes let me know we were in big trouble.

“Daddy!” she shouted, “Davida and Harry were in here playing husband and wife!”

“Go get my strap!” Daddy yelled from down the hall. Then he dashed into our bedroom like a madman.

I was scared stiff! The look on his face could have killed me.

In a few seconds Zenobia brought the strap Daddy kept on the wall beside his bedroom door.

He whapped me first.

I felt like the holes in that strap were sucking the blood out of my booty as each blow took my breath away.

Sounds of “Pow! Pow! Pow!” mingled with my cries, filled the air. My booty felt like somebody had set it on fire. I thought I would drop dead any minute.

When Daddy got tired of whapping me, he swung at my brother. Harry had cried and pranced around while he waited his turn. Every now and then I’d seen him shift his weight from one foot to the other, like he felt every blow that hit me.

Even though I learned that the name of the new game was “Husband and Wife,” I decided to stick to playing familiar games like hopscotch, jacks, dodge ball, yo-yo and hide-and-seek. I felt like I had been struck by lightning and I didn’t understand why. Neither Daddy nor Zenobia told us what we did wrong.

When Daddy got tired of whapping him, Harry ran back in our bedroom rubbing his booty too. I felt bad

that my little brother got a whapping because of me.

“I can’t believe Daddy beat us just for playing a game!” I said between sniffs, as I pranced around rubbing both hands on my stinging booty.

“That game was no fun at all,” Harry said. “It wasn’t worth a whapping.”

“You got that right,” I said. “I wonder what’s so different about the husband and wife game from all the other games we play.”

I was too scared to ask anybody why we got a whapping, but I learned two things: the name of the game was “husband and wife,” and never to play it again.



About the Author: Gloria Shell Mitchell, author of *The Garbage Man's Daughter Series*, is an educator, a minister and divorce researcher. She is a South Carolinian who writes about family dysfunction and divorce from a child's perspective. Visit www.encouragemintbooks.com for more information.

“The only thing that makes it all bearable is knowing that somebody else has felt the way you feel, has faced it, run from it, lamented it, and transformed it into art; has been there, and returned, and lived, for the only good reason we have: to tell the tale.”

-Michael Chabon

Dispatches From Arkham

On Lovecraft's Significance

By Mike Robinson

The moment I cemented my decision to not pursue an M.F.A (or any academic training) in writing is vivid. While enrolled at Otis College of Art & Design, I found in my mailbox a little perfect-bound literary booklet featuring work by the graduate students in fiction. I flipped it open to a random story. After wading cautiously into the second paragraph of a painful scrutiny of eyebrow-plucking, I was done. Other entries weren't much better. Too many of them seemed concerned with stereotypical, high-literary minutia, unfortunately the focus and baffling preference of innumerable professors, awards, journals, and workshops (I'm looking at you, Iowa).

No doubt a lot of what follows stems from personal taste. Quite candidly, I have little interest in quaint journalistic accounts of Malaysian transvestite violinists at the turn of the century (a fabricated example – save yourself the Google), or the endless slew of aptly-termed “McFiction” featuring some cocky narrator coming of age amongst his or her overfed, dysfunctional family. No, I prefer going head-on at the Big Questions, going at them, as George Carlin might say, with no less than a sledgehammer. Give me ballsy confrontations with Life, Death, the Cosmos, with Existence, with God. Too big? So what? As Salmon Rushdie reminds us, “Grand failure is better than mediocre success”.

In their noble attempts at social redemption and inclusion, many contemporary teachers of literature present writings in the framework of their political

significance. I am hardly one of their neo-con critics, but such attempts seem to me nothing more than new forms of division. It is looking at the grains and forgetting the shore. Does the world really need a Marxist reading of *Huckleberry Finn*, complete with ten-dollar jargon? Academics are on the lookout for the “next best

thing,” the new trend in analysis, the new prism through which to see literary works of yesterday and today. I say: what about our shared heritage? Our shared – and uncertain – future? Not as any one ethnicity, gender, party, or faction, but as an entire civilization. A species. A collective piece of this vast Universe.

Of course, much of this material is studied, and much of it is exhaustively considered and written about. In the fictive arena, most of such writings arise in the umbrella field of speculative fiction, which includes science fiction, horror and fantasy of many shades and stripes.

As anyone who follows such genres will likely know, H.P. Lovecraft revitalized speculative fiction (largely posthumously), defying tropes of ghosts and vampires and expanding imaginations with interconnected tales of ancient civilizations antedating our own, of towering alien-gods, of unseen dimensions and humanity's sanity-shattering smallness in an inexplicable cosmos. His unknowns are truly Unknown, and will forever elude explanation.



Certainly Lovecraft's work has failings, failings probably more surface-level than those of other lauded authors. He was well aware of his own wooden dialogue (hence, quotation marks are scarce in his pages) and his prose sometimes gushes into the purple. Nevertheless, his voice, with its richly archaic, darkly celebratory cadence, stands alone, and will survive as long as we're unsure what lurks "out there".

Sadly, Lovecraft, and especially his "Cthulu" mythos, have become somewhat franchised, relegated to corners of the market generally aimed at *Dungeons and Dragons* fans, horror enthusiasts, and nihilistic young adults sporting black fingernails and lipstick. It is a wide "cult following", but nonetheless a cult following. Although some scholars have acknowledged his importance, many see him as a troublesome bridge from Poe to Stephen King. It is this identity that has, I'm sure, dissuaded many from giving him a serious go. "Lovecraft? Oh, no, I don't like that *horror* stuff."

Crisp Green Empty

By Neil Citrin

On the street they plead and clutch
at emerald life rafts
crisp no longer.
Blinded by faded radiance,
parched by minimal irrigation.
Unable to discern
blazing deserts behind the
shimmering pond.
Unable to reveal their
eternal fountain.

But back up. I don't necessarily consider Lovecraft "horror". Certainly there are horrific elements in his work, and his career does include several standard supernatural yarns. But in his treatment of cosmic mysteries, and the shadowed realms of prehistory, his is more a prying curious eye, forcing us to consider those Big Questions, to ponder notions of, and issues with, the likes of religion, biology, cosmology, archaeology, and psychology. He sets you on the outside looking in, a contrast to being in and looking further in to the point of navel-gazing. This exercise of outside-looking-in, one I believe most writers of fiction should undertake, helps in a kind of rounding out of thought.

No matter the genre in which one writes, I believe the best, most poignant stories have at least an undercurrent of this "larger awareness", a perception conveying authority and wisdom. So many stories feel constricted by their own world, characters or concerns. Yet to read Lovecraft is to confront directly that raw Unknown that surrounds us, that is us. It is to be reminded of our collective fragility, to appreciate the vastness of history, to be humbled by our kindergarten knowledge of the universe and the possibility of greater intelligences possessing unimagined secrets. In short: perspective. A shambling, roaring, behemoth upswell of perspective.

Such perspective can heal, too. In an era of economic, cultural and political tumult, when millions of Davids the world over shout in fiery voice against the few far-reaching, corrupt Goliaths, there is morbid comfort in knowing that, despite whatever the megalomaniacal egos of sadistic leaders, immoral bankers, or bribe-pocketing politicians might make of themselves, there are impenetrable forces beyond all of them that will cast mocking eyes towards their suited-up, gold-rimmed delusions, if they even care to acknowledge them. Lovecraft reminds us just how little power the powerful actually wield. After all, Goliath was, what, ten feet tall? When the mountain-sized Cthulu rises once more, those people will be nothing but scrambling ants -- along with the rest of us.



About the Author: Mike Robinson is the managing editor of *Literary Landscapes*. His debut novel *Skunk Ape Semester* was released earlier this year. He also freelance edits, and can be reached at mrobwriter@gmail.com.

Smilin' Through

From Secret Lives, Chapter 14

By Barbara Ardinger

Note: The style of this novel about grandmother who do magic is magical realism. Bertha is one of the crones who live in a senior citizens complex managed by Frances J. Swift, the compleat bureaucrat. Madame Blavatsky is the circle's familiar, a talking cat who was the famous occultist in an earlier incarnation.

Hearing a mild rumble and a sliding sound followed by a significant thud, Bertha sat up in bed, found her glasses, and looked around for other signs of an earthquake. No. Nothing swaying from the ceiling. She found her housecoat and went into the living room. Damn cat! Why couldn't she sleep past dawn like normal people?

Massaging her arthritic knuckles, she surveyed the room and spotted the cat lying on her back, all four legs outstretched, straight up. Playing "dead kitty" again? The fallen book (source of the thud) stood up, wobbled, waddled on its two lower corners toward the TV stand, and leaned against the bottom shelf as casually as a drunk encountering a friendly parking meter. The cover opened and closed, and a second later the book executed a spinal flip, landed upright, wobbled, and settled back against the TV stand.

The cat stretched with all the fluid grace of a wrung-out dishrag, rolled over, and leaped at the book. She batted the cover open and delicately licked her right front paw, hitching at the first three or four pages until she got them turned.

"Blavatsky, I surely am glad you've finally learned to turn the pages yourself."

Studying the book's table of contents, the cat looked over her shoulder for a second. "Oh. It's you."

"Who'd you expect? Morris and his cha-cha cat food?"

"Dont be a smartass, dearie."

"You be careful who you call a smartass. Talk about

the pot calling the kettle black." Bertha made her sleepy way to the bathroom.

"You know what they say," the cat called after her. "There's no snooze alarm on a cat that wants its breakfast."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah." Bertha closed the bathroom door.

When she came back out, the cat arched her back and rubbed winsomely against her legs. "Ya know, dearie, I been readin' some a yer Reader's Digest Condensed Books." Avarice gleamed in feline eyes. "Ya think they'd like ta do my *Secret Doctrine*? Condense it down ta just th' juicy parts?"

"I'm not sure how to break the news, Madame, but there's not much of a demand these days for your works."

"Oh yeah?" The cat gave a tiny meow and looked piteous for a minute, then shrugged philosophically and twisted to lick her shoulder. "Oh well. Say la vee." She looked up at Bertha. "I finished *Pinocchio* yesterday. Now there's a real smartass kid fer ya. But that *Mrs. Wiggs a th' Cabbage Patch*?" A bushy tail pointed at the book case. "Sappy book, if ya ask me. Now this *Alice in Wonderland*," she nodded at the book leaning against the TV stand, "on th' other paw, this looks like a good read."

Bertha nodded shortly. "Since when did you become a literary critic? You should talk to Cairo."

Tail in the air, the cat returned to the book. "I'm busy with this great literchur, if ya dont mind." Sitting down and slapping her tail on the floor to signal that no further interruptions would be permitted, the cat dove into Chapter 1 and down the rabbit hole. "Unless breakfast is forthcomin'?"

"Madame, I am forever at your service."

Ignoring the sarcasm in Bertha's voice, the cat bounded to the empty bowl in the walk-in closet and sat down, peering back around the corner and waiting for Bertha to catch up.

Muttering to herself, Bertha fed the cat, then got dressed and went down for her own breakfast.

* * *

When Bertha returned to her apartment with a smuggled sausage patty wrapped in a napkin, Madame Blavatsky was well into the book, laughing from time to time and studying the Tenniel illustrations with great attention. "Wish he'd a written more about that Dinah. Ya know, dearie, I remember some a these pomes. But not quite th' way he's got 'em here."

The cat killed the sausage patty and gobbled it down, then batted at the paper napkin until it sought refuge under the end table. ... "Well, whaddaya know," she said a minute later. "Another cat. Sittin' up in a tree and grinnin' like it just struck gold in Nirvana." She read on and laughed aloud. "Ya know, dearie, I like this cat's style."

"That figures."

When Bertha came back from lunch, with another smuggled goodie, the cat (having nothing much else to do today) was still reading.

"This Queen a Hearts, now, she reminds me a that ol' busybody, Frances," she told Bertha.

Bertha bent over to peer at the Tenniel drawing and chortled. "You're right! Same figure, same pointy nose, same big, loud mouth." ... She looked at her watch. "Oh, good, it's culture hour." The TV turned on and the witch and her familiar settled back to watch *As the World Turns*, *General Hospital*, and *All My Children*.

"You wanna watch any more?" Bertha asked as the last cliff-hanger faded into a detergent commercial. "I think I'll just drop in on Sophie for awhile."

"Fine, dearie." The cat curled up for a nap.

Bertha had been gone for less than half an hour when there was a loud knocking on the door. The cat raised her head and looked at the door with sleepy malice. "She aint here!"

There was an "oh" on the other side, then the sounds of departing footsteps and loud knocking at another door.

* * *

Late the next morning, the knocking returned.

"Miss Bertha? Are you at home? It is I, Frances J. Swift. May I come in?"

"I'd like to give Miss Frances a good swift kick," Bertha muttered as the cat dematerialized.

She crossed the room and opened the door. "Why, Miss Frances, what an unexpected—" She barely got out of the way as Frances rolled into the room like an inquisitorial tank.

The residence manager stopped just before she stepped on the open book in the middle of the floor. Her nose working as hard as her eyes, she looked suspiciously from Bertha to the book on the floor and back up to Bertha. "Miss Bertha, in your haste to admit me, have you dropped or discarded your book?"

Bertha closed the door, counted under her breath, and turned, but before she could open her mouth, Frances charged on.

"I am here, Miss Bertha, to discuss certain ... er ... anomalies which have ... ahem ... recently been brought to my attention and pointed out to me. It has recently been brought to Mr. Nankhani's attention that you are often observed steal—removing food from the dining room, food wrapped in our napkins."

Unable to resist, Frances touched the book with one pump-shod foot, moving it so that she could see what Bertha was reading. As the book turned, the drawing of the Queen of Hearts, cavernous mouth wide open, seemed to rise before her, as big as life.

Off with her head!

From where and what source had those words come from?

Frances blinked in spite of herself and looked down at the book again. Pushed by an unfelt breeze, a few pages turned. There was the Cheshire Cat, grinning down from the clouds at the King and the Executioner. Another page turned. Chapter 9. *The Mock Turtle's Story*.

Well! She would accept no sad stories today, not here, no, sir. Frances regrouped and faced Bertha.

"Now, as you must know, we cannot tolerate wasteful habits and practices here at the Center Towers. Our esteemed management, that is to say, our highly trained culinary dietician, plans our culinary menus with the greatest possible care to fulfill the daily nutritional needs of our elderly senior citizens who reside here with us, such as yourself. And we hope and expect that all meals will be taken in our luxurious dining room, except in the case of unavoidable illness, that is ... of course unavoi—"

"I eat there every day. I'm almost always nutritionally and culinarily satisfied."

"And you ... er ... carry purloined food away." She leaned toward Bertha, peering at her as if to detect evidence of a guilty conscience. "I'll come plainly to the point, Miss Bertha. Are you ... ahem ... saving, collecting, or hoarding food to save? So many of our elderly residents feel such a need to hoard, to clutter their ... now you must be aware that hoarding is unnecessary and unsanitary. It betrays an exhibition of poor citizenship here at the Center Towers, as it could lead to inexact and imprecise planning and significant overexpenditure from our already generous nutritional food budget line. And hoarding can ... ahem ... also lead to infestations of noxious insects, which would lead to the further monetary expense of fumigation." She took a deep breath. "This is only a teensy hint, Miss Bertha, but if you are in need ... if you would wish to counsel and speak with our good Dr. Kingman, who is, as you must know, a recognized and acknowledged authority on the gerontological diseases of the aged, I would be only too happy and pleased to arrange an appointment for you at your mutual convenience as soon as possible. And," she finished, "we also frown upon any wastefulness of our table napkins."

Bertha couldn't help but blink. "Paper napkins?"

"They do add up. If we watch our pennies, you know, our dollars will ... ah ... additionally take care of themselves. We must always strive and reach for fiscal responsibility here at the Center Towers."

Off with her head!

Frances looked behind her, above her, around the room. "Did you say—did you hear—"

"What? No. I'm trying to figure out how fast paper napkins add up to dollars taking care of themselves."

Frances looked around again. "I am positively sure I heard a voice just now. It was quoting unpleasantly from that juvenile book. And why, may I ask, is it on the floor?"

"It fell out of the bookcase."

Frances nudged the book with the toe of her toe again. "Miss Bertha ..."

"Have I ever lied to you?"

"Well, as long as we're having this cozy little chat, and I do love my cozy little chats with our residents who live here, let me also bring to your attention a rather curious and perplexing incidence that I experienced yesterday as I tapped at your door. I distinctly re-

member hearing a voice saying that you were not at home. Now just whom, may I inquire, could have said those words?"

"I couldn't say. You probably imagined it."

"Miss Bertha, I am proud to say that I have no imagination. I have never had an imagination."

Off with her head!

There is was again! Perhaps the best course of action would be to ignore it this time. Why did Frances always feel discomfited when she visited Miss Bertha and her friends? There was something strange going on, no doubt about it, something she was determined to get to the bottom and foundation of, no matter how long it took. They couldn't get anything past Frances J. Swift, no, sir! And what did that Cheshire Cat remind her of? Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

"And may I further remind you that I ... er ... that Mr. Nankhani and I still suspect the presence of an animal on these premises, a feline cat, to be specific. Now you are certainly aware of our regulations regulating animals, are you not? Fish are permitted, in aquariums only, and the occasional bird, with the proper registrations and licensing and our own modest fee, to be sure, but four-footed animal pets are strictly prohibited. Do you know who has a cat, Miss Bertha?"

"I have a friend whose daughter has a cat. Mrs. Melos's granddaughter? Turtle?"

"Her granddaughter is named Turtle? Surely not." Frowning, Miss Frances began to tap her foot. This resident was either lying or her faculties were failing at a faster rate than she had previously suspected. Here was yet another resident upon whom she'd have to keep a close eye, not that she didn't already observe her comings and goings wherever possible. It was, after all, her duty to protect and safeguard the property. Well, she saw no visible evidence of any interdicted animals, but with these senior citizens ... well, one could never tell. Some of them were extremely crafty, cunning, and devious.

"Well, let me just say how pleased I am that we've had this teensy chat today. Words to the wise. And if the shoe fits, well, you can be assured that I know you will fit ... wear ... it. Good afternoon."

Frances let herself out and Bertha slumped on the sofa. The cat materialized just behind her left ear.

Off with her head."

"Blavatsky, you just said a mouthful."

It was 8:30 post meridian, and Frances J Swift was marching down the third-floor corridor, feeling quite self-laudatory regarding her expeditious handling of that inebrious Mr. McDermott. The old man had been smuggling hard liquor—whiskey, to be specific, and a cheap brand, moreover—onto the premises for some months now, and she had finally obtained the requisite evidence and proof. Her diligence in searching the third-floor trash every day for five consecutive days in a row had paid off. She had displayed the ocular evidence of his wrong-doing to him right before his very eyes and delivered the penultimate warning: if she caught him just one more time, he would have to make new arrangements for lodging and residence. Management did not tolerate insobriety among the residents who lived here. Although she knew she had the goods on him, the old fool had remained obdurate. Well, no one was going to put one over on Frances J. Swift. He knew that henceforth from now on she would be keeping an eagle eye on him. Mr. Nankhani would be pleased with her weekly report this week.

She turned the corner toward the elevators and stopped in her tracks. There, sitting above the first elevator door, there was a large, fat, striped cat. A cat with a giant head, giant ears, giant teeth. It was grinning down at her. The cat looked straight at her. It flexed its giant claws. It poofed out of sight.

Hand over her heart, Frances looked around. Was anyone there? Was this a ... a joke? Had any of the residents witnessed this ... this prankish joke? She looked again, pretending to search the walls for fingerprints. No, the hall was totally and completely empty of everyone except herself. She stood up straight, shook her head firmly, pressed the elevator button, and suppressed the afterimage of the cat.

Cats were strictly forbidden on the premises. It was plainly written in the regulations.

At 11:12 p.m., the last residents had signed in, and at 11:13 Frances locked the front door. She surveyed the lounge. A few old men, swamped in cigarette smoke, were winding down their pinochle game. Two old women were still chatting over their knitting. Since everything looked to be under control and as normal as usual, she went into the office, closed the sliding glass window, and covered the office machines.

There was something on the message pad beside the telephone. Just like Marley's ghost, another striped cat slowly materialized and winked at her. Nonsense! It

grinned at her. Absurd! A touch of indigestion from the boiled tongue served at dinner, that's all it was. Simple indigestion! Most assuredly not real. The cat stuck out its tongue, winked again, and vanished with a loud belch.

At breakfast the next morning, Frances sat at her solitary table making her customary breakfast notes. She had to break in and indoctrinate two new residents, and let us hope they were civilized senior citizens, properly well-behaved new residents. She looked across the room. There was that Bertha Mutspell again, wrapping up a slice of bacon, and thinking no one noticed. Where was Mrs. Oberlin? Sick again? What was the status of her health insurance? She had a 10:30 appointment with Mrs. Allison's son and daughter-in-law. They would be taking the woman home with them following the husband's funeral, which meant she'd have to have that apartment cleaned, painted, recarpeted. Would the drapes stand another washing? Then she'd have to advertise the vacancy. Busy, busy, busy! A residence manager's work is never done!

Feeling smugly in control, she thought she heard a scratching sound above her. She looked up. A cat's head as big as a chandelier was materializing beneath the stained acoustical tile. It hung there, looking down at her with all the enthusiasm of an entomologist examining an especially odious arthropod. Then it grinned, winked, and faded away.

Frances blinked several times. Should she get her eyes checked and examined? What nonsense! She was merely seeing ocular illusions. Nevertheless, she decided to forego her second cup of decaf and walked quickly and firmly to the office, glancing up once or twice, just to be sure.

All things looked normal and familiar in the office. An hour later, however, when she had found and secured time to check the Allison file for fees and damages against their deposit, she happened to look up. A big tree was growing right out of the photocopier. Did Earleen perceive ... anything out of the ordinary?

"No," the bookkeeper replied. "Everything looks just fine to me."

The tree looked so solid it was all Frances could do to restrain herself from feeling the bark. Pretending to have something to copy, she walked over and looked up into the tree.

The cat appeared, winding in, tail first, stripe by stripe by stripe. It sat on a fat lower branch and grinned down at her. "We're all mad here," it suddenly said. "I'm

mad. You're mad." The cat winked and, starting again with the tip of its bushy tail, unwound stripe by stripe by stripe. Then, limb by limb by limb, the tree faded away, too.

"Earleen, I must ... I seem to have left a document in my ... apartment."

"You want me to fetch it for you?"

"No! That is, that will not be necessary. I'll ... ahem ... fetch and collect it myself."

"Miss Swift, are you feeling all right?"

"Of course! I am perfectly well. Fit as a fiddle." She laughed self-consciously. "Well, perhaps a wee touch of ... you know ... blockage? I have such a sensitive constitution."

Off with her head!

"I beg your pardon!"

"Yes, Miss Swift?"

"Nothing, Earleen. Nothing."

And that's how it went, all day long. And the next day, and the day after that, and the day after that. Frances would be striding down the corridor and suddenly see a grinning feline face peering at her through the stripes in the wallpaper. She would be tracking down a perfect ordinary miscreant who lived there, and the cat would wave at her from on top of a window. Or wink. One day she was examining a file and suddenly a phantom sentence appeared, right in the middle of the list of someone's rent payments:

We're all mad here. And how are you, Frances J. Swift?

At least once during every conversation, she (but no one else, no, never anyone else) would hear those dreaded words.

Off with her head!

These unusual and persistent phenomena were beginning to disturb her equanimitable composure. They were beginning to interfere with her execution and performance of her duties. They were beginning to make her hesitate and pause before she went anywhere on the property, to continuously look, in fact, before she leaped.

Frances J. Swift was getting positively twitchy.

A week later, there was still no end in sight. Only the evilly grinning face of that despicable feline. Those indigestible visitations were pursuing her all over the premises.

She was standing in the second floor corridor. On one side, there was the usual suspicious laughter coming through the door from the Misses Bergman and Dellagaia's suite. On the other, there was an equally suspicious silence emanating from Miss Bertha's apartment.

The tree rose out of the middle of the floor. It reached the ceiling, branched out, and kept going. The cat appeared, sitting on the fattest branch. It grinned down at her, its mouth a half-moon with teeth. "I'm mad. You're mad. We're all mad here." Then, beginning again with the tip of its bushy tail, the cat faded away, stripe by stripe by stripe, until all that was left was its toothy grin.

A grin without a cat. That's not possible! It's indigestion. Constipation. An allergy. The negative and energizing effects of the blowing Santa Ana winds.

I am feeling distinctly unwell. I think I'll just go to my room for a teensy nap. She turned and walked toward the elevator like Captain Hook walking his own plank, only instead of the tick-tock of a crocodile, what she heard was We're all mad sung by a grin without a cat.

The grin zoomed around her head a dozen times, then bounced along in front of her like a rubber ball doing the lyrics for a tone-deaf audience. "You'll see me there," it sang to her.

* * *

"Did you guys see the paper this morning?" Rosa asked at lunch two days later. "Edgcorp's advertising for resumes. We may be getting a new residence manager."

"Let's hope this one has a sense of humor," Neill said. "My dear Miss Mutspell, I haven't seen the kitty ears in several months."

Bertha grinned toothily, twitched an ear, and took two more napkins to wrap a chicken breast patty in.



About the Author: Barbara Ardinger, Ph.D. (www.barbaraardinger.com) is the author of *Secret Lives*, a new novel about the crones and other magical folks, and *Pagan Every Day*, a unique daybook of daily meditations. Her day job is freelance editing. She has worked on more than 250 books, both fiction and nonfiction. She lives in Long Beach.

To Stir In Your Juices, Or Be A Flash In The Pan?

By Troy Aaron Ratliff

Before I start this tirade, I should let you know right off that I understand every writer is different. The way you choose to dig up ideas, execute them to the page, edit your work and publish them to the world is all your business. It's your baby, after all. And rest assured, this article is just as much for you as it is for me, because while I see some writers twittering about what they are writing, how many words they've written that day and practically giving the story away through social media, I admittedly have a tendency to do the exact opposite. Reason being is because I have a focus problem. I admit it.

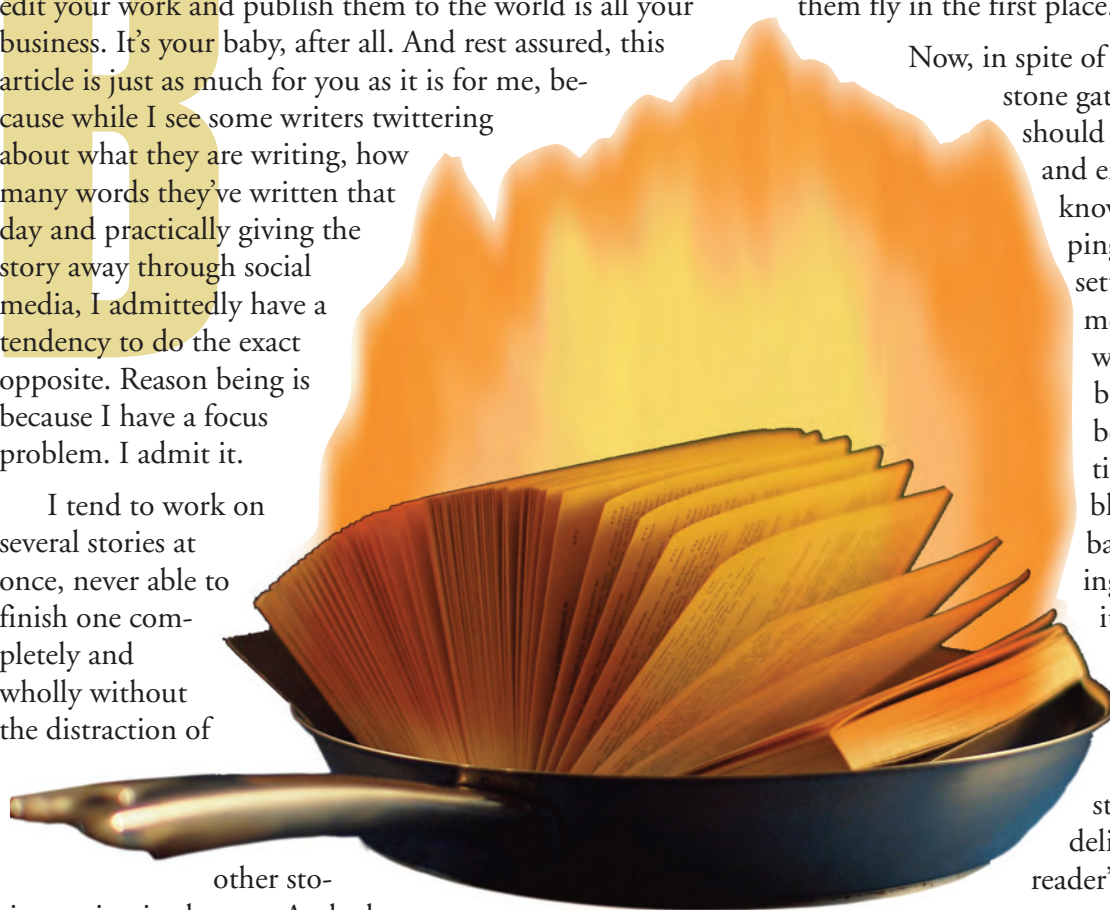
I tend to work on several stories at once, never able to finish one completely and wholly without the distraction of

other stories getting in the way. And when I do finally finish one, I tend to put it aside, and move on to the next idea I have burning in the back of my head, usually without editing and applying the polishing final touches that are needed while in the heat and passion of writing the story. In doing this, I'll usually lose the story's drive, feeling it sputter like an airplane, before the sputter becomes a powerless glide through the air, which leads to the eventual freefall back to earth with less than desirable consequences. No, my stories don't explode in my face, and I think I've tamed my pen

from writing myself into a corner, but, unfortunately, some of those ideas tend to remain grounded for a while before I'm able to rekindle the same spark that made them fly in the first place.

Now, in spite of this, I do believe a rolling stone gathers no moss, but that should never mean you can't stop and enjoy the scenery at all. Just know the difference in stopping to smell the roses and setting up camp to live. To me, giving yourself and your work a breather shouldn't be frowned upon. It should be encouraged. This sort of ties in with my Nanowrimo blog post a few months back when I alluded to waiting on the story and letting it, not so much fester, but simmer in its juices. You are the writer after all, so you are the chef, the one serving up the story steaming and delicious to the reader's mental palate.

Factoid about me: I'm no vegetarian. Not by a long shot. I love ribs and roasts and what I think any meat lover will agree with me on is the best kind of meat is the kind that falls off the bone. The kind that tastes like it could melt in your mouth, tender and succulent. How does that happen? Well, in Casa de Ratliff, we have a slow cooker. After applying the right amount of spices, water, bouillon cubes and broth, we wait...very...very patiently. Soon, the smells begin to fill the house, creeping into the air like a discreet morning



fog. You've employed everything you could think of when you were prepping the meat, adding all the right fixings and setting the temperature just right.

Now, as you wait for the food, do you sit right by the slow cooker, peering in every couple of minutes? No, you go do other things: prepare the sides, bake the rolls, get the plates out, do a load of laundry, network online, feed the hippos, flirt with your supermodel wife, engage in some yoga, work on a story, bend time and space... Oh, wait. That's me.

Anyway, you get the point. But what is it that you *have* to do with that roast? *You have to check on it.* You have to turn it over so one side isn't dry and the other is a juicy perfection that would bring Vikings to their knees, tears streaming down their faces, claiming it's a celebration in their mouths and all of Valhalla is invited. Sure, that one side is great, but you don't want that. You want all of it to be perfect, don't you? You want every bit of that roast to be delicious and tender, not just one side. If you haven't stopped reading by now and ventured into the kitchen, you've probably figured out that this is how I write.

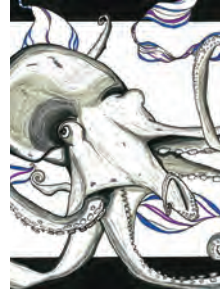
In that same line of thinking - not to justify a stagnant work ethic - let's not think that it's ok to let the roast sit for too long either. If you do, the meat will be tough and hard to work with no matter how much sauce you add, no matter how many other garnishes you make, no matter how sweet the tea is. Such a disgrace would bring a Nordic massacre of bloodshed and plunder upon your house. What I'm saying here is Mind Your Meat. That's all I'm asking.

When readers come hungry to the dinner table, or the couch or the porch or the lanai, they're looking for a good meal, something to sink their teeth into and enjoy. Do you want them to struggle with it, chewing vacantly in an attempt to think of something else other than the catcher's mitt they're eating? No. You want them to take that first glorious bite, roll their eyes into the back of their head, lean back in tongue slathering ecstasy and allow the food to declare war on their taste buds. That's what I do when I finally eat something I've been craving. I slowly close my eyes, blocking out all other senses to allow my mouth to relish in every single flavor. And I expect that down to the very last bite.

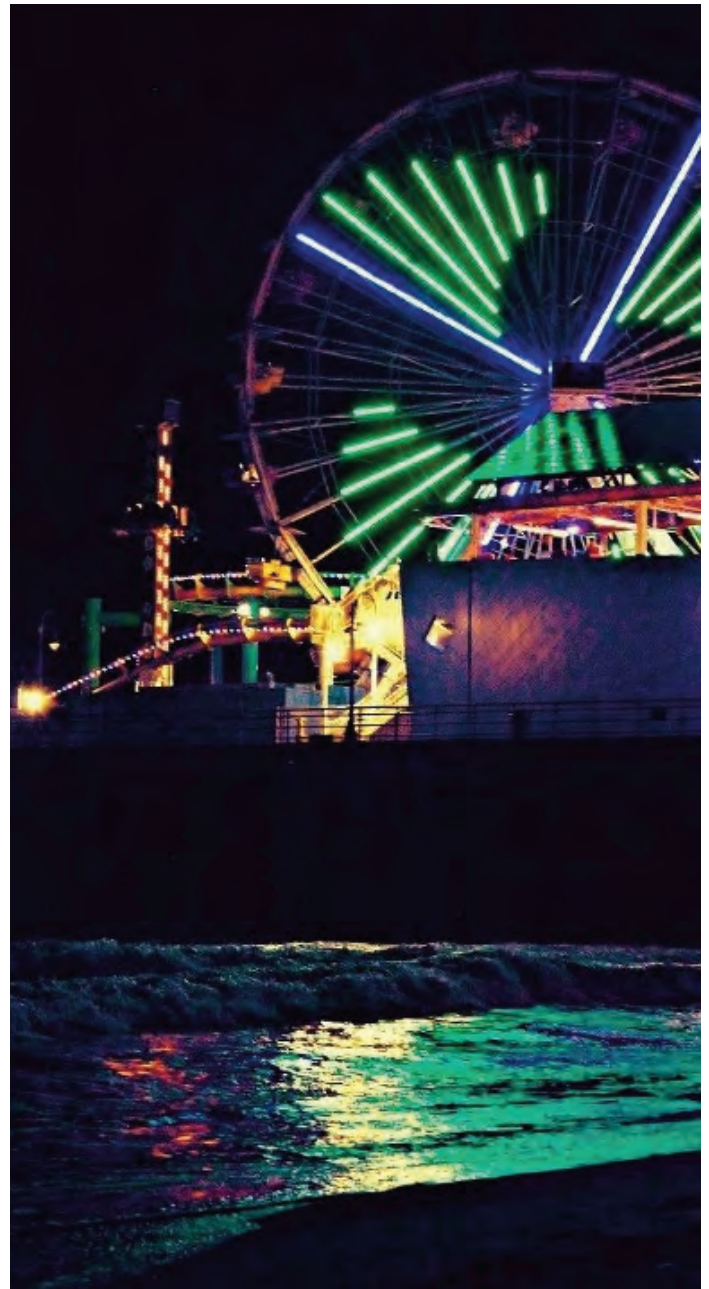
If you've never experienced that with reading or even your own writing - which given the platform I've presented this piece on I think it's safe to say many of you have - you need to find something that will. Writers, are you giving your story away, raw, undercooked,

and still way too pink for human consumption? Or is it tough and chewy and old? Or is it that picture perfect color, tender, juicy, the words falling off the page? Because, if you think about it, why else would the pages of some novels be "Bone-colored"?

Dig in, everybody.



About the Author: When he's not cooking up his next monstrosity, you can generally find Troy defending the galaxy from the forces of evil, feeding hippopotamuses, dining with foreign dignitaries and Zen Masters, waking up to his supermodel wife, altering the space-time inter-dimensional warp or, most likely, fighting traffic. See his work at www.troyaaronratliff.com



Lunch

Excerpt from “Leaving the Hall Light On,” A Memoir

By Madeline Sharples

I sit by the window at a corner table in a macrobiotic restaurant on Santa Monica Boulevard. The room, filled with small wooden tables and straight-back chairs, is almost empty. A couple of people are eating at the counter at the far side. Plates of breads and muffins are on a ledge above the counter. A sign above the counter says no dairy and white flour are used in any of the bakery products. I smell the herbs and the heavy aroma of Indian spices in the soup pot heating behind the take-out counter.

I look toward the window and see Linda crossing the street. I check my watch: 11:50. I've only had to wait five minutes – not bad for her. I haven't seen her in at least eight months – not since before Paul died.

I'm apprehensive. This is one of my first lunch dates in such a long time. It is still hard for me to venture far from home and socialize. I'm not even sure I can still carry on a decent conversation. Crowds really bother me, though the vibes here, the sound of quiet instrumental music are soothing. Maybe today will be okay. Maybe this healthy place will be good for me. And I've looked forward to seeing Linda for so long.

She enters the restaurant, spots me immediately, and rushes over to our table. I get up and we hug, giving each other an air kiss. "I'm sorry to keep you waiting," she says as she sits down across from me.

I fold the menu and set it down on the table in front of me. "That's okay," I say. "It's great to see you finally. I know how hard you've worked at getting us together."

"Yeah, you're a hard one to pin down." She puts on her reading glasses and picks up the menu. "Do you see anything here that you like?"

She's right. I have been hard to pin down. I want to avoid these social things where I have to sit and talk and make an attempt to eat.

I pick up the menu again and pretend. I'm good at pretending. "Oh, yes. You chose a great place. I'm not a total vegetarian like you, but I love this kind of food." I look back down and study the menu a bit more. There are lots of salads and soups to choose from, but I'm drawn to the bowls. "I think I'll have the brown rice and veggies with tahini sauce," I say. Maybe that will stick. I've had a very hard time keeping food in me – especially dairy products – I hope this food might work for me.

Her once fine, clear skin now has deep lines - in her forehead, around her mouth, in her chin. Yet I don't find her less beautiful than when I first met her over forty years ago ."

She looks up, takes off her glasses, and closes her menu. "That's my favorite thing here. I'll have that too."

I look out the window at a car swerving to get out of the way of a jaywalker.

"I used to go to Hi De Ho Comics across the street to buy my son Ben his Garbage Pail Kid cards," I tell her, making every effort to keep the conversation light. After all, this is a girl's lunch – with lots of chit-chat and gossip expected. "They were his passion when he was twelve, and like a good Mommy I would drive all the way up here to find him the ones he couldn't find in the South Bay."

She looks at me like I'm talking in Chinese. "Garbage Pail Kids? Are those anything like the Pokémon cards that are so popular now?"

"How do you know about those?" One of Paul's last

social interactions was with a young boy who came over to visit us with his parents. Paul had never seen Pokemon cards before, and the boy gave him a couple. I found them in his wallet when I went through his things after he died.

"The kid next door collects them. He showed me his album and gave me one of his extras."

"Well, the Garbage Pail cards were really sick. Definitely not my type of humor. Cartoons of chubby kids sitting in garbage cans dressed in all kinds of regalia. Now there are boxes of them on a shelf in his old room at home. I can't imagine they'll ever be worth anything. And I can't imagine why I spent so much money on them. Twelve dollars for one card. I must have been nuts."

The waiter arrives. We order the same thing with a mixed salad to share.

"I'll have chai," she says.

"Just water for me – without ice." Ice-cold liquids going through my system gives me headaches.

The waiter takes our menus, turns, and leaves.

The small room is beginning to fill up with the lunch crowd. All the counter seats are full. I'm glad I arrived early and snagged this table in its little corner alcove away from the flow of traffic. Two waiters are hurrying back and forth across the wood floor.

I can feel Linda looking me over. I wonder how much I've changed in the last eight months. I wonder how much damage eight months of grief can do to a person. I look out the window again, gaze at the comic-book store, and yearn for the days when Ben was little and Paul was free from his manic-depressive illness, still alive, just the pain-in-the-neck teenager who used to drive me up the wall.

Linda's question brings me back. "Are you working?" Good, more chit-chat. I'm still safe.

I put my elbows on the table and hold my chin in my hands, looking straight at her.

"Yes, I still write grant proposals for the homeless shelter downtown. I went back to work almost immediately. I have to keep busy or I'll go nuts. The problem is working at home alone. It's so hard to concentrate sometimes. Too many memories of Paul's death there."

She nods and takes off her sweater, sweeping her thick red hair up off her neck as she moves the sweater across her shoulders. The sun pours through the win-

dow, laying a bright light on our table. "I know what you mean," she says. "Luckily for me I have a lot of client meetings that take me away from my office. I miss the face-to-face people interactions when I work at home alone."

I sit up straight, push back my chair, and cross my legs at the knees. "Are you still trying to help retirees transition into their next lives?" I ask, still trying to avoid the real reason for this lunch date. Linda is a real people person. She's a great facilitator and motivator. I've always envied how comfortable she is in front of a room full of people.

"Well, you should know how hard that is. You haven't been a very successful retiree yourself," she says.

Linda and I first met at college. She was in another sorority, but her hair got my attention – carrot orange, large, curly, gorgeous. It overwhelmed her thin face and body. "You look great," I say. "I love that color green on you. It matches your eyes. And, your hair is still gorgeous."

She gives me an impish smile while combing her fingers through her mane. "It comes out of a bottle now. I tone it down from my natural shade – a little more geared to my age."

I continue with the girl talk. "Yeah, I won't give up the bottle either. My stylist weaves low lights through my hair so some of the gray shows. I think going totally dark would really age me too."

"Low lights? I never heard of that before."

"Oh, sorry. I thought you knew. Those are like high lights in reverse."

I look up and spot the waiter coming toward us from behind the counter. I spread out the fork, the knife and put my napkin on my lap. I take a sip of water. He sets down our bowls of rice and vegetables and puts the salad in the center of the table. I take a bite, chew, and barely swallow it. It tastes delicious, but I have no appetite. I haven't had one for months.

Linda looks like she doesn't eat much either, but that's no different from always. She's always been thin and never had to watch her weight. Without her sweater on I can see her prominent collarbones and flat chest underneath her pale green t-shirt. She never wears a bra. "Have you seen Alice and Richard lately?" I ask.

I've known Alice since I moved to Los Angeles in 1961. After I graduated from University of California at Los Angeles, we took art lessons together for years, every

Thursday night, until I stopped painting. Now she has a couple of paintings at the Smithsonian and one of Chelsea Clinton that she personally presented to Hillary. She also painted a wonderful portrait of Bob and me that gets rave reviews from our visitors.

I reconnected with Linda a few years ago when Alice and Richard renewed their marriage vows in the backyard of their home in Ojai. I kept looking at her across the yard as we all stood in a circle during the ceremony, telling my husband Bob that I knew her from somewhere. Once we started talking and asking each other where we were from and where we went to college and how long we'd been in Los Angeles, we discovered that we first met at the University of Wisconsin. We clicked immediately and though we were never very friendly at college, we've been good friends since that Ojai party. We even tried to figure out how we could work together, but never came up with anything common to both our skills and interests.

She looks up from her bowl and sets her fork down. I take a bite of salad. I gulp it down.

"I was out there last weekend," she says. "They're great. Alice is doing a new project – a series of paintings of naked old ladies."

"I know. That project is amazing. She wanted to paint my mother, but she refused. I offered, but she said I'm not old enough."

I try another bite of the rice while Linda digs into the salad. The waiter comes by to see if we need anything else. We don't. "And what's Richard doing?"

Linda puts down her fork, picks up her napkin, and wipes her mouth. Her once fine, clear skin now has deep lines – in her forehead, around her mouth, in her chin. Yet I don't find her less beautiful than when I first met her over forty years ago.

"Oh, you know Richard," she says. "He putters in the garden, leads that men's group in LA once a week, and does those wonderful sculptures of old men. Sort of companions to Alice's old ladies."

"I love their creations," I say. "Alice and Richard are amazing. They live simply on that idyllic piece of property and are so mellow and happy together. They are like the love children of the 60s. Like they never grew up."

Linda takes another bite of salad and a sip of tea. She squints. The sun is coming straight at her now. "I know. I've always called them the oldest hippies around. Did you know they are planning to write a book some-

day about the art of aging with images of their work?"

I take another bite and chew for a long time. Then I put my fork down. I can't eat anymore. "Yes," I say. "They are in the perfect spot to inspire their creative juices."

"Madeline, are you all right?" Linda asks. "You're not eating anything."

I want to scream at her and all women to take care of those little boys and cherish every minute they have with them."

"Sure, but I can't seem to get much down. It's called the stress diet. Whenever I'm stressed, I lose weight."

"Well, some would think that's lucky," she says. "I have a hard time keeping weight on myself." She takes her fork again and tries to pick some carrot sticks off the salad. They fall off so she picks them up with her fingers and munches, picks up one or two more, turns them around in her fingers, and drops them into the bowl. They are so fresh looking – almost the color her hair used to be. "You know, we haven't talked about Paul," she says. "Would that be all right for you?"

I look up. "What do you want to know?" I ask. I uncross my legs and re-cross them with the right leg on top. The time has finally come to get down to the real stuff.

"Well, I know he killed himself. Alice told me that. But she didn't know how he did it," she says.

I look out the window again and see a woman with two young boys enter the comic-book store. I stare at them for a few seconds. I want to scream at her and all women to take care of those little boys and cherish every minute they have with them. Then I turn back and reach around to the back of my chair and into my purse for a tissue. I wipe my eyes and look back at Linda. "He put himself in the bathtub and slit his throat," I say.

She clamps her hand over her mouth and chin and opens her eyes so wide they seem to take over her face.

The waiter comes by to take away our plates. He asks if we want any dessert.

"Why don't we share the apple crisp?" I ask. "Maybe we can manage to eat that."

Still holding her chin in her hands, she nods up and down, and the waiter leaves.

"I'm sorry to shock you, but you wanted to know." I take her hand and she squeezes mine. But, that's all the comforting I have in me right now.

"Oh my God," she says. "How horrible for you." She lets go of my hand, wipes her eyes with her napkin, and straightens up in her chair.

The waiter comes back with our dessert and two spoons, and we each have a few bites as I watch a fly on the other side of the window trying to get inside. In the bright light its body looks like electric blue velvet.

"This is delicious, isn't it?" I ask.

"No," she says, "I can't eat anything more."

Finally, we pay our bill and get up. She puts her sweater back on, and I take my purse from where it's hanging on the back of my chair. She puts her arm around me as we walk out the restaurant door. I put my head on her shoulder. Linda has never married or had children. At this moment I think she is lucky. She didn't have the worries, the sleepless night, the fears. Right now that's all I think about. Right now it's hard to remember the good parts.



About the Author: Madeline Sharples' memoir, *Leaving the Hall Light On: A Mother's Memoir of Living with Her Son's Bipolar Disorder and Surviving His Suicide*, was released in 2011. She also co-authored *Blue-Collar Women: Trailblazing Women Take on Men-Only Jobs*, as well as co-edited the anthology *The Great American Poetry Show*. Madeline's articles appear regularly in the *Huffington Post*, *Naturally Savvy*, and *PsychAlive*. She posts at her blogs *Choices* and *Red Room*.

Declaration

By Neil Citrin

Armed to the teeth with their laws
and jails war they declare
on what they do not know.
Laws wielded harshly to stamp
out the beast that grows
strong on laws they ignore.

**"Man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage
to lose sight of the shore."**

-Andre Gide



Minihan's Lot

Excerpt from *Cheating Death on September 11th & Other Complex Calculations*, a memoir

By Gerry Moylan

(1966) My mother came running into the house in a panic, a heavy winter coat hiding her white nursing uniform. It was very early in the morning. She'd worked the overnight shift at Boston City Hospital.

"Tom!" she shouted for my father. "TOM!"

Upstairs, I was still buried under my warm blankets. I'd normally be up before seven, even on weekends, but the cold New England winter kept me hunkered down. I was normally a pretty hyper kid, never sitting still and always wanting to get going. But we also had a rule in our house -- no kids downstairs until mum and dad were up. When I was around three, my parents say I would cover myself with a blanket and crawl past their bedroom doorway toward the staircase leading downstairs, apparently believing they couldn't see me. Now that I was five, they were a bit more trusting, as long as we kids promised to always hold onto the railing the whole way down.

I could hear muffled voices coming from downstairs, followed by the sound of adults climbing the creaking wood staircase. My parents were coming. Although I've always been a super curious person, that still wasn't enough to get me to leave my cozy blanket igloo.

A short while later, however, my brother Paul and I finally crawled out of our beds, because we heard someone crying. We found our parents in my sister's bedroom. They'd just finished explaining to the older kids about a horrible, early morning house fire in the neighborhood. And then, they had no choice but to tell me.

The house that burned down was a typical two-story home for Third Cliff. The only difference was the aluminum siding. Almost every house in our neighborhood was covered with weather-beaten, wooden shingles, the salted air from the Atlantic Ocean at the bottom of our street soaked into every last one of them.

But this house had pink aluminum siding.

I would later overhear my parents talk about how they'd learned that's what made the early morning fire so destructive. The aluminum siding was like a huge oven, trapping the flames and heat inside until it reached such intensity that the entire structure burned to the ground.

It's strange that we'd only heard about the fire from our parents. We didn't see or smell it or hear the fire trucks, even though the house was just one street over from ours. Hop the backyard fence and cut across the Jennings's yard to Cliff Avenue and there you were.

The Minihans lived there. George and Sara had seven children, one more kid than our family. Tommy Minihan was my age. And like me, he was covered with freckles. Unlike me, Tommy had a wiffle haircut, while I got to grow out my bright orange hair. We were best friends and attended kindergarten together at Jenkins Elementary school. He had a younger brother, Andrew, who used to follow us everywhere. An older sister, Roberta, hung out with my sister. She came over to our house for sleepovers and birthday parties, maybe Girl Scouts, too. We still have pictures of my sister and all of her girlfriends posing in our yard, and Roberta's in some of them.

Both Roberta and my friend Tommy died in the fire, as did Andrew who was only three. The parents rescued the one year-old baby and another daughter who was ten. Two older daughters weren't home at the time of the fire. Mr. Minihan ended up at Mass General Hospital in Boston with severe burns over his entire body. The result of a father's desperate attempts to save his children.

I cried when my parents crouched next to me and tried to delicately explain that I would never see Tommy again. Then, we reminisced.

“And remember the Easter egg hunt at their house?” I asked.

“I sure do,” my father replied.

My voice gurgled, because of the tears and snot that ran down the back of my throat.

“I found the colored egg at the bottom of that thing,” I explained.

“Oh yeah,” my mother said. “It was hidden inside the base of a gutter downspout.”

Mum used some toilet paper to wipe the tears from my face and had me blow my nose. I then recounted how a bunch of us neighborhood kids had recently celebrated Tommy’s fifth birthday party at his house. My parents just stayed by my side, holding me and letting me talk it all out. Everything I’d done with Tommy Minihan as far back as a five year-old could remember. I’m sure my parents were relieved that I’d stopped crying and seemingly moved onto acceptance (the final stage of grief) so quickly. Until I pitched my mother a curve ball she should have known was coming.

“But can’t you fix them at your hospital?” I asked.

My mother turned away and began to cry. I’d never really seen her cry before. Little did I know how much she’d dealt with death everyday at the hospital, but this was still too much for her. Of course, the concept of death was totally foreign to me -- I’d never experienced it up until that day. Not even a pet.

All that was left of the Minihan’s house was a heap of charcoal and twisted, pink aluminum siding. Just two weeks before Christmas. Within months the lot was scraped clean and remained vacant for years. Tall, uncut, dry grass, dirt and memories of a destroyed family.

Over the years, everyone on Third Cliff referred to it as Minihan’s Lot. We used it as a cut-through to the top part of the neighborhood. A track to do wheelies and navigate jumps on our Sting Ray bikes. Played cowboys and Indians and cops and robbers in the overgrown grass and weeds. Threw rocks at each other, during battles with neighborhood rivals. And there were many fist fights there -- two boys duking it out inside a circle of kids who were out looking for blood.

Life simply marched on. We’d talk about the Minihans every now and then, but the subject came up less and less.

I was aware of the older sisters who had survived. As

we grew older, we’d occasionally spot one of them walking past the quaint shops along Front Street down by the harbor in Scituate, the small fishing town where we lived.

My mother would whisper, “Oh there’s Georgianne. Remember her?”

I would say something like, “They must be sad. I miss Tommy.”

Mum would just stare after them and make that clicking sound with her tongue against the roof of her mouth that meant ‘what a shame’...

It was nearly ten years from the night of that awful fire when another family finally bought the land and built a large, two-story home on it. New kids. New family. New memories to make.

I will never forget the Minihans and their pink aluminum house



About the Author: Gerry Moylan graduated from The University of Massachusetts, North Dartmouth, with a degree in English Literature & Criticism. For a while he worked as a popular disc jockey at major New England radio stations. Now a licensed real estate broker, Moylan is also a member of The Greater Los Angeles Writers Society and the author of several screenplays and poems. His forthcoming memoir is due out in 2013.

“Writing is like prostitution.

First you do it for love,

and then for a few close friends,

and then for money.”

-Molier

Now Available From GLAWS Authors!



Irene Vincent's book, *Revealing: The Evolution of an Artist's Soul* is not only a visionary artist's memoir. It is a fast paced adventure story about a young woman's unconventional journey toward enlightenment. It is a heart warming, tear jerking, uplifting odyssey spiced with humor that will take you deeper into your truer self. It will also inspire you to seek your own dreams and enhance your own destiny. Irene's artwork can be seen at: www.irenevincent.com.

Daniel Lambert's *Love and Other Diversions* is available from <http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/proflambert>. Horror filmmaker and author Adam Barnick has this to say about Lambert's first poetry and prose collection: "Mr. Lambert successfully switches genres, themes, and structure with an enlightened ease that towers over most writers' tendencies to fixate with one idea or theme. Yet nothing feels unfocused, dispersed, or dishonest. He touches on love, of course; regret, respect, and reverence for the past; finding the beauty in all things; sensing the darkness inside as well as beyond man. He even has time to throw in some much-needed political incorrectness, clever rhymes that are polar opposites of the Hallmark standard, and some sly humor. I am definitely on the mailing list for volume II."



Nancy Shiffrin's new collection of love poems *Game with Variations* is now available on-line, at www.unibook.com/en/Nancy-Shiffrin/GAME-WITH-VARIATION. Critic Robert Peters calls her poems "... gut-land responses to a personal life of risks, frustrations, and celebrations. Her writing is lean, sensitive, erotic. She celebrates the female body with a rare vigor."

Vanishing Act in Vegas by Morgan St. James. A fun-filled Silver Sisters escapade in "Sin City". After Godiva's son Torch buys a condo in Las Vegas, his grandmother Flossie and great uncle Sterling, elderly former vaudeville magicians, pay him a visit and drag him to the Pageant of Peacocks starring sexy Mara the Magnificent. It's love at first sight, the romance blossoms but when Torch returns from a meeting in L.A., Mara seems cold and distant. The Silver twins, Flossie and Sterling poke around in their clever but kooky fashion and uncover a diabolical plot involving murder. Available on Amazon.



The Uninvited Guest by Troy Aaron Ratliff. When teenagers Harland Jacobs and Jose Rodriguez crashed a wedding, they weren't doing anything terribly wrong. Jose only came because his nagging mother made him. Harlan only joined him to make it tolerable for his friend – and the free food, the girls and the dancing, of course. Why not? Yet they never dreamed this wedding would have taken such a staggeringly horrific turn. They never dreamed they would be fighting for their lives in this tucked-away lodge. They never dreamed a wedding day could offer up so much terror. Available for Amazon Kindle.

Leaving the Hall Light On is about living after loss – about how author, Madeline Sharples chose to live and go on with life and take care of herself as a woman, wife, mother, writer. It is about the steps Sharples took and the milestones she met in living a full life after the loss of her son, including making use of diversions to help ease her grief. She says, "to let ourselves grieve is to feel the depth of our love. For those whose children have died, that may take the rest of our lives, but we will discover the gifts of our loss in the process."



"In her latest novel, *Secret Lives*, Barbara Ardinger explores woman's journey through time, culture, sexism, spirituality, aging, and even death. With artful skill and meticulous Neolithic detail, Ardinger's characters across time show that the ancient feminine journey isn't that different from the modern one." — HUFFINGTON POST. Available through Amazon. See more at www.barbaraardinger.com

Upcoming Events

The Greater Los Angeles Writers Society presents:

"Confessions of a Former Literary Agent - Things I Couldn't Tell You Before"

June 23, 2012, Saturday 2:30 pm

Long-time friend and GLAWS member **Denise Dumars** shares her unique perspective on the Publishing Industry from the viewpoint of a professional insider. Now retired from a well-known and respected agency* to write and teach, her "confessions" details the good, the bad, and the reality of the publishing industry in New York. This special event is not for the faint of heart or the squeamish. Come prepared for a different kind of reality show, and hopefully leave with a smile and a fresh outlook on the world of publishing as it exists today and the literary agents trying to survive it. Admission is free.

Ms. Dumars will also have information on her upcoming workshops for writers.

Palms-Rancho Park Library, Ray Bradbury Room
2920 Overland Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90064

The Greater Los Angeles Writers Society presents:

How To Write A Great Script for a **BAM-WOW-POW!** Successful Graphic Novel

Saturday July 21, 2012

A panel of industry professionals, **Art Holcomb (M)**, **Barbara Kesel**, **Jim Krueger**, and **Neo Edmond**, will discuss how to script a successful graphic novel, or convert your book to a viable manuscript. **FREE - RSVP** to SSE@glaws.org

Los Angeles Valley College
Monarch Hall, 5800 Fulton Avenue, Van Nuys, CA 91401

West Coast Writers Conferences - WC² - Presents:

Greater Los Angeles Writers Conference

July 20-22, 2012

A full weekend of panels, workshops and presentations by educators, noted speakers, and industry professionals focused on the craft and business of writing. The conference offers individual program streams for **Aspiring**, **Active**, and **Accomplished** writers. Topics are offered in progressive streams so you learn all weekend in an exciting and educational environment. A fee-based event. Discounts for GLAWS members & LAVC student available. Register early and save at www.wcwriters.com

Los Angeles Valley College, Campus Center

*The Greater Los Angeles Writers Society
is proud to showcase a booth full of authors at the:*

6th Annual Leimert Park Book Fair

Saturday June 30, 2012, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

The 2012 Leimert Park Village Book Fair brings a world-class, unrivaled literary event to Los Angeles as thousands of book lovers, families, and fans of all ages converge on the Vision Theatre backlot in historic Leimert Park to celebrate the written word. There will be over 150 celebrity readings, book signings, writing workshops, panel discussions, poetry readings, and musical performances during this day-long festival. GLAWS is the first two booths at the entrance. Admission is free.

The Greater Los Angeles Writers Society presents:

"GLAWS Summer Party"

Saturday August 11, 11am-2pm

Potluck lunch, Open Mike, and fun for all done Hawaiian-style! **Prizes for best aloha attire!** Note **EARLY** start.

Palms-Rancho Park Library, Ray Bradbury Room
2920 Overland Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90064

*The Greater Los Angeles Writers Society
is a proud participating sponsor of the:*

UCLA Extension Writers Faire

Sunday August 26, 2012

This festive day features 24 **free** mini-classes and panel discussions in creative writing and screenwriting, hosted by fall Writers' Program instructors. Students get free writing instruction, chat with instructors, register for most fall courses at a 10% discount, learn more about the Writers' Program, discuss goals with advisors, and visit with graduate writing programs, community and professional organizations, and writing-allied businesses.

UCLA Campus, Young Hall Courtyard

The Greater Los Angeles Writers Society presents:

"Strategies for Self-Publishing to the Global Market"

September 15, 2012, 2pm

Keith Ogorek, Senior Vice President of Author Solutions, with imprints AuthorHouse, iUniverse, Trafford, Xlibris, Author Learning Center, and Booktango, will reveal strategies to market and sell your books in today's global market. An important presentation with special offers for attendees, plus a publishing announcement from GLAWS. **FREE - RSVP** to SSE@glaws.org

Los Angeles Valley College,
5800 Fulton Avenue, Van Nuys, CA 91401