

Literary Landscapes

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE GREATER LOS ANGELES WRITERS SOCIETY

VOL. 2 No.3
FALL 2012

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

Javier Chagolla
Barry Gilfry
Eric J. Guignard
Shannon Gusy
Art Holcomb
Aaron Mason
Kevin McKenna
Michael Rushlow
Tony N. Todaro
Dan Watanabe
Gabrielle Whelan
Shelley Youngren



**THE GREATER LOS ANGELES
WRITERS SOCIETY**

WRITERS MENTORING WRITERS OF ALL DISCIPLINES

Literary Landscapes

Vol. 2 No. 3 2012

Editor

Mike Robinson

Copy Editor

Barry Dale Gilfry

Associate Editor

Joyce Actor

Production & Design

Michael Rushlow

Contributors

Dan Watanabe, Shelley Youngren,
Gabrielle Whelan, Shannon Gusy,
Barry Dale Gilfry, Aaron Mason, Michael Rushlow,
Kevin P. McKenna, Art Holcomb,
Javier Chagolla, Eric J. Guignard

Visual Art

Tony N. Todaro

Michael Rushlow

Irene Vincent

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 Editor's Forum

03 Message From The President

04 From The Desk Of The Development Department

What Type Of Writer Are You?

Dan Watanabe

05 Q&A With Shelley Youngren

06 Whoooa Girl

Gabrielle Whelan

09 Shelter Me

(Excerpt), Shannon Gusy

12 Cocoon

(Poetry), Barry Dale Gilfry

13 All Ocean's Aglow

(A Novel), Aaron Mason

19 Party In Ann Arbor

(Memoir Excerpt), Michael Rushlow

21 If I Could Touch You

(Poetry), Kevin P. McKenna

22 Mash-Up

Art Holcomb

25 The Dog Named Elvis

Javier Chagolla

29 Mannequin Madness

(Poetry), Barry Dale Gilfry

30 Vancouver Fog

Eric J. Guignard

31 Now Available From GLAWS Authors

32 Upcoming Events



Ohana

By Tony N. Todaro

Writers who know nothing about The Greater Los Angeles Writers Society sometimes ask, “What’s different about GLAWS?” And then there’s writers who have seen us in action and seem stunned when they ask, “Why is this group different?”

There’s a subtle distinction here, because of their respective POV, but the answer is the same and might surprise you. It’s not just because we have Special Speaker Events on the craft and business of writing, instead of monthly general meetings. And it’s not because we have genre-specific critique groups, where writers can meet with peers of similar interests and get constructive feedback on their work-in-progress.

And we don’t just pray that our members find a way to publish their work, we introduce them (at least a couple of times a year) to literary agents and industry contacts, where members have been signed and gotten deals. And we don’t just hope members find a way to sell their books, we arrange platforms for them at major book fairs and booksellers from the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books to the West Hollywood Book Fair, and B&N. Some groups do some of these things. GLAWS does ALL of them. That’s a big part of what’s different about GLAWS.

There is one thing more. It’s more intangible than the rest and possibly the most important. It’s the feeling we have of “Ohana,” a Hawaiian word I learned when growing up in the islands, but didn’t fully appreciate its meaning until more recently.

“Ohana” means “Family”. It’s the mortar that holds everything else together. It’s a sense of community and friendship. And of people with common goals and dreams. Not of politics or religion, but of ideas and sensibilities. And certainly of Respect for another’s point of view. It permeates the society like no other. Our feeling of Ohana -- that you are all members of our family -- runs deep. It has led to long friendships and meaningful relationships, including the recent engagement of two of our more prominent members.

That event was not planned; it just happened for the best of reasons. It may never happen again. But it enriched our lives and our family of friends and fellow writers in a satisfying way. And helped us grow immeasurably.

Although GLAWS is one of the largest groups of its kind in the region, we remain humble and thankful to have each and every member of our amazing “Ohana.”

We have room for a few more. Including you.

So, as they also say in Hawaii, “Komo mai”. Come on in.



Editor’s Forum

By Mike Robinson

Think about how much stuff fills your skull, the many memories and moments that have made you *you*. Tracing your life across the decades, it feels so large, your own personal Homeric epic. This is everyone. We are all walking epic books, weighted with story, and very few media beyond writing will allow one true glimpses of the journeys that make a mind.

In this issue, you’ll find a variety of journeys, from that of an otter, to a punk rock band, to a simple (so it seems) toboggan ride. We also feature what is our first Poe-tinged horror story. In addition, you’ll find helpful Hollywood advice from industry veteran Dan Watanabe, and a neat exercise in idea-mashing by screenwriter and graphic novelist Art Holcomb. And, because as writers we can become too serious about a craft best done in a playful spirit, for levity we have our first cartoon feature, by yours truly (no, I won’t be monopolizing this feature -- we welcome visual submissions, too).

Happy scrawls!



From The Desk Of The Development Department

What Type Of Writer Are You?

By Dan Watanabe

The development department is one of the biggest mysteries of show business. What goes on behind those mysterious doors, where decisions are made and the lives of writers hang in a precarious balance between capricious and often conflicting interests? This series of articles will attempt to provide a “road map” of how the development department works, and why a “No” is but the first step to a “Yes.”

The first thing to do if you want to be a successful writer in Hollywood is to understand exactly what your talents are and capitalize on them. Unlike the real world, where we are continually told we should be well-rounded individuals, in the meritocracy that is Hollywood, being “good enough” just isn't. If you look at your true competition as not last night's cheesy Movie-of-the-Week but rather the works of the greatest writers, you will see why you must play your strongest hand at all times.

If you look at your true competition as not last night's cheesy Movie-of-the-Week but rather the works of the greatest writers, you will see why you must play your strongest hand at all times.”

Perhaps the biggest problem development execs encounter is writers who are trying so hard to fulfill all the requirements of a Fields, McKee, Trottier that they do not capitalize on their true strengths. If you know your strengths and play to them, your weaknesses, very often, can be overlooked.

Most writers find themselves especially strong with at least one of the following aspects of writing, but



probably not all three. This should not be a cause for despair!

- **Story oriented:** Have no problem with plot or structure—the ideal candidate for a story oriented writer is someone who finds the Syd Field type of books easy to follow and emulate. Three part structure stories flow naturally and easily. Structure is not an issue. Having your plot points fall just where they should is not a cause for sleepless nights and OD-ing on caffeine. The downside of writers who are strong on story is that at times their characters can appear in service of the plot, rather than the plot being a way to explore their character. Highest and best career moves for those who are strongly story oriented are television one hour dramatic series, which place a premium on keeping an audience glued to the set by plot machinations.
- **Character oriented:** Writers who are character-oriented create memorable characters who have a lot

of verve and possess distinctive personalities. These are the types of roles that performers love to play, as nuance and subtlety and subtext exist all around. On the downside, the stories can occasionally be shopworn or cliched. This is not necessarily a bad thing -- audiences may think they like the completely new and different, but in all truth, they prefer the familiar, with a slight twist. This is why the old development comment of “we want it to be the same... but different” appears so frustrating yet is so true. The highest and best career path for writers who are strong with characters is sitcoms and romantic comedies. The biggest danger is writing material that can veer toward being too theatrical.

- **Scene oriented:** A writer who is scene-oriented has an ability to create great individual scenes, often in the face of unsurprising stories and archetypal characters. Genre pieces (and big budget, flying-glass-no-brainers) are strong suits, and such writers often have the greatest tendency to develop cult followings. Of all the types of writers, these are the writers most often accused of being “hacks”. But, it must be remembered that in Hollywood, it is a supreme compliment to be paid to sell out. With all the competition out there, you will not be asked to sell out unless you are extremely talented and have a way with words. Also, directors like Howard Hawks and Alfred Hitchcock were practitioners of great set pieces over well-balanced storytelling or intense character interplay.

The above categories are extremely broad, and of course the majority of writers will be hybrids of one type or another. The important thing to remember is not to obsess over what you do or not do perfectly, but rather perfect what you do better than anyone else. That is what will make you stand out and be asked back.



About the Author: For over twenty-five years, Dan Watanabe has been a development executive in the entertainment industry. Sixteen of those years were spent at the company now known as FremantleMedia, where he served as the Vice President of Current Programming, which included front office, on-set, post-production and distribution/marketing duties.

One-hour dramatic series he supervised included Baywatch, Air America, Sirens, numerous movies of the week, pilots, and game shows (Family Feud, To Tell the Truth, The Price is Right).

Q&A

With Shelley Youngren

Q: I'm a new writer, and I feel I need help. However, I don't have anything ready to show a critique group. Could I join one anyway, or do I have to wait?

A: Certainly you could join. You're not required to submit material for every meeting; in fact, as regards your initial meeting with an established group, you should just listen to the other members and get acquainted with the way the group runs, without having to worry about hearing your own work discussed for the first time. Nervousness is very distracting!

If you become eligible to submit, but still don't have anything ready, you can always ask for advice from the other members, and you'll gain insight from hearing--and making--critiques of other works. You might even pick up the motivation, inspiration, and confidence you need to ready your own submission. Then you'll be on your way . . . and your project will be off to a good start.

Those with questions about critique groups and other aspects of GLAWS should direct their inquiries to editor@glaws.org. We'll have an expert on it!

Whooha Girl

By Gabrielle Whelan

If I were to create a timeline of my life, it would be demarcated by the things that scarred me, the scars serving as before-and-after hash marks of how I formed psychologically—as in, before and after my parents’ divorce; before/after my dad’s death; before/after my career. Yet in my early, clean-slate childhood, the first hash mark was a physical one, and I began to regard that period in terms of, before/after the fat girl-rode-me-down-a-mountain-that-ripped-apart-half-my-face.

It was the year of the Rooster. Winter had come early, and the blizzard beat relentlessly on top of whatever section of the driveway I’d finally finished shoveling. My dad had started the car twenty minutes before it was time to drive us to school, but the Oldsmobile’s cold interior had a sting that wouldn’t go away for another hour. I always entered with a cup of something warm in my mittens, which I’d promptly spill on my lap.

“Like I always say,” my dad remarked, wiping me down as welts formed on my thighs, “coffee’s the world’s most dangerous drink.”

“It’s cocoa.”

“Well, that too.”

I missed the bus a lot. I said it was because of my underactive thyroid, but really, it was because of Bud McConnell, aka, The Antichrist.*

As we pulled onto Sugartown Road, my dad turned the radio to the station that announced school closings.

“You never know,” he smiled.

A few minutes later, I cheered as the name of my red-brick middle school was listed.

“Can I go sledding?” I asked hopefully, as the local golf course came into view.

“I dunno sweetie,” my dad said, running his hand through his salt-and-pepper beard. “I don’t want you doing that on your own.”

“Oh, it’s fine; there’s tons of kids up there on snow days. Just for like an hour.”

“Maybe you should just...”

“It’s just that it’s been a rough time lately, at school and all.”

This resonated. It’d been a rough year for him too. He’d lost his job, we’d lost our home, and now we were shuffled into my mom’s parents’ house; and they reminded him daily that he’d better find a new job and a new home for us ASAP.

“You don’t like your new school, do you Brie?” he said.

I shook my head.

“Are they mean to you there?”

I nodded.

“Well beans on them!” he exclaimed suddenly. “Who do they think they are, being mean to my daughter?”

I shrugged.

“Total boobs, that’s what they are.”

I nodded.

“One hour, okay?”

I nodded.

The golf course was jammed with kids, bellyflopping onto their sleds in a dramatic push-off, then coming to a sad stop three feet later on the putting greens. The course had one hill, however, that was so mighty that only the older kids dared go up against it, and it was by the 14th hole. I pulled my sled from the trunk and waved back at the Oldsmobile.

As fate would have it, also marching up the hill that day was one BethAnne. BethAnne went to a different school, and I only knew her because we both liked to ride our bikes around the same cul-de-sac. The main thing I recall about her was her unfortunate height-to-

weight ratio of 4'10" to 220 pounds.

"Hey, girl," said BethAnne, dragging an old-fashioned wooden sleigh in the shade of her eclipsing shadow.

"Hey," I said, nodding, using my teeth to pull my other glove over my wrist.

BethAnne was scoping out my sled with interest. It was a sleek, saucer-like one that'd been getting the job done for six winters.

"Yours is better than mine," she observed. "I'm riding with you, girl."

I glanced down at my saucer, then back up at BethAnne in panic. There was just no way we were both gonna fit on that thing, unless I sat on her lap and created a makeshift seatbelt from my coat lining to ensure we weren't ejected into the brittle arms of death. For

I missed the bus a lot. I said it was because of my underactive thyroid, but really, it was because of Bud McConnell, aka, The Antichrist."

Mr. Bell had explained that the laws of nature are finite, and force will always equal mass times acceleration. BethAnne's mass was simply too great for my saucer. Blood would be shed.

"Um, do you really think that's such a good idea?" I asked sheepishly.

We'd reached the clearing. The world was suddenly quiet. I could see out over the tops of all the suburban homes, from here to Pottstown.

"Oh, don't be such a little girl," she said, rolling her eyes.

Her cheeks were bright red, which made me wonder the color of mine at this point. There was a fluttering feeling in my stomach I'd later recognize as impending-doom intuition.

"I'm gonna go," I muttered, sitting on my saucer and preparing for takeoff.

BethAnne grinned and hopped on with me, her arms encircling my stomach, the full weight of her form poised to hurtle us forward from the rear.

"Haaaa!" she screamed, kicking at the sides of the saucer. And we were off.

It all happened so fast, and yet, certain details stand out with haunting stillness: BethAnne reaching out to scratch her hand, scratching mine by mistake. The sound of the wind rushing in my ears mixed with her uneven breath. Then, somehow, during that hellish 200-mph commute, I managed to turn around and straddle her. Her cheeks were flapping in a gravity-less vacuum outside the space-time continuum. "Don't Stop Believing" by Journey began looping in my head. And that's when we hit an incline. I shut my eyes and braced for the end, while we soared in the air towards the Canadian border. In the next moment, there was an awkward, thumping touchdown, but then, inexplicably, our death-ride resumed. I couldn't figure out why, until I realized that I'd landed on my belly, and that the saucer, with BethAnne still onboard, had landed directly on top of me. What's more, one side of my face was pressed against the snow, despite my desperate efforts to lift it.

"My face is..." I screamed in my head.

BethAnne dug her boots into my ribs to steady herself.

"Haaaaa!" she yelled in the voice of a seasoned equestrian.

"Holdontothatfeeling! Street lights. People. Ohhhh, OHHHH!"

At first, the smell of burning was coming from my forehead. Then it was coming from my right eye, followed by my right cheek. It got pretty pungent after a minute, the way the smell of smoke does when you're like, "Do you smell smoke?" and then a few seconds later you're like, "Wait, seriously, you smell that now, don't you?"

"My... My face is coming off! My face is coming off!" I hollered into the drowning white noise.

I wasn't aware we'd stopped until BethAnne dismounted me, my body splayed out in the murder-victim pose beneath three inches of powder. A hand rolled me onto my back.

"Whooooo girl," breathed BethAnne. "Whooooooa."

The blood in the snow looked fake. Like ketchup or something. I figured this meant it wasn't mine, while I rose above the pain of the physical world and felt giddy and free.

"Don't touch it," BethAnne warned, as I lifted an ungloved hand to my face.

I was prepared to feel the baby-soft skin, the kind only revealed by violently exfoliating yourself against a mountain of hard snow. Instead, I felt ligaments.

“Hee hee,” I giggled.

Then, there was darkness.

I came to in a strange bed, facing a low-hanging television. Bob Barker was in the middle of saying something. I gently outlined the contours of surgical tape and gauze with my fingertips. People in the adjacent room were speaking in low whispers. My dad came in and smiled.

“I don’t feel well,” I explained.

“It’s okay, sweetie; just get some rest.”

“Okay, but first can you just lemme take this off and see a mirror for like a second?” I pleaded.

“I think you should just take it easy for now.”

I panicked. “Now!”

He led me to a bathroom. I pulled back the gauze and gaped into the mirror. The swelling was black and considerable. The wounds were open and angry. For a moment, I regretted it was only on the one side of my face, while the image of a conniving comic-book character rose before me.

“Two Face,” I whispered, my breath fogging the glass.

“Honey, it’s really not that bad,” my dad insisted.

“Oh yeah?”

“Abso-rooting-tooting-lutley!” he exclaimed. “Why, the doctors say that after the swelling goes down, and your black eye goes away, and the burst blood vessels around your cornea clear up, and the four-inch gash above your right eye mends, and the five-inch gash under your right eye scabs over, you’ll be totally fine!”

I blinked one eye into the mirror, then the other, the disfigured side of my face fading in and out.

Camera one. Camera two.

“Hey, I’ll make a bet with you,” he said cheerfully. “I bet that by midway through high school, you won’t even be able to see that anything bad ever happened there!”

I deadpanned him.

“Well. This is just PERFECT!” I cried, with the deranged agony that only a disfigured, adolescent girl with an overbite can conjure. “It’s bad enough they bully me when I’m looking my best! Why not go ahead and let

some giant ride me down me a mountain and rip half my face off!”

Hot tears splattered against my raw flesh. He helped me back into the bandages, as my thoughts quickly turned to masks and martial arts and life in a sewer with a talking rat.

Months passed. One piece of gauze was replaced by another. The Antichrist found countless creative ways to merge injury with horse humor. Gradually, as the wounds began to heal, my dad beamed he was winning the bet.

“Told’ya they’d heal, Brie,” he smiled the following winter, a teetering cup of coffee on his lap, while I studied my fading scars in the mirror. “It’s almost like nothing ever happened there.”

“Almost,” I nodded.

We drove past BethAnne biking around a cul-de-sac. She waved blissfully at our Oldsmobile. I waved back, despite myself, and watched in the passenger’s side mirror while her bike swerved into a figure eight. It’s hard staying mad at someone so utterly oblivious of herself.

“Talk about a boob,” I told my dad, motioning towards BethAnne.

He looked back, as some coffee dribbled down his shirt.

“Total boob,” he nodded.

**The Antichrist was a wiry, blotchy-faced boy with crunchy blond hair and rectangular glasses--not exactly a catch; then again, neither was I, and he let me know this at every opportunity.*

“Neeeiiggghhh!” he’d neigh behind me on the bus.

“Neeeiiggghhh!” he’d neigh behind me in Mr. Bell’s science class, throughout periodic table breakdowns.

“Pssst. I’m neighing at you,” The Antichrist would say, when it was clear I wouldn’t turn around. “Because of your overbite,” he explained in basic terms. “Neeeiiggghhh!”



About the Author: Gabrielle Whelan is a GLAWs member currently editing her debut coming-of-age memoir *I’m Wasted By Accident*. She has participated in sketch writing and improv with the Upright Citizen’s Brigade, in addition to training at Groundlings, and is in development of the web series based on her sketch comedy. A freelance editor and writer, she has a master’s in Comparative Literature from Kings College London.

Shelter Me

Excerpt

By Shannon Gusy

Preface: Bulimic Werewolf - August 2007

In a small room with five or six cots next to the nursing unit at Rosewood Center for Eating Disorders, I wore one of my boyfriend's baggy Abercrombie t-shirts, the "don't touch me I'm fat" shirt I usually put on after a binge. These kinds of clothes were like tinted windows to my body. I felt safer inside them, less likely to be seen or touched.

The girl in the cot beside me looked like a Playboy Playmate who hadn't eaten in a year, wearing a shirt that showed off her implants. Her perky boobs seemed held up by puppet strings, while the rest of her sinking face and body fought with gravity. A girl in her twenties slept across from us. She had just returned to Rosewood after a suicide attempt and didn't want to talk about it. She didn't want to talk about anything actually, and had been near silent since they day she arrived.

A teenage girl slept in the cot beside her and had been in this room for a while. Whenever she left it, fresh cuts on her olive skin spoke up for her pain. I could imagine a bear set loose every time she was given an inkling of freedom.

There was also an old woman, who kept getting up and looking for something in the dark. She had searching eyes. They reminded me of an abandoned Shepherd looking for its owner, so loyal and unsettled, desperate for a smell that's long gone.

Since I had to get up at 6 a.m. the next day for what my crowded, block treatment schedule called "vitals, hygiene, and meds", I put in a sincere effort trying to fall

asleep. And in the small space between my pupils and eyelids, I enjoyed a few seconds of blissful blackness--not the kind of darkness that makes you feel for the walls on your way to the bathroom at 2 o'clock in the morning, but a boundless, hanging-on-a-limb kind. There were no walls here, just one flat piece of paper blending into another, and then another: unending, crinkly black pages.

But the brain silence didn't last long, and then scenes started ripping through my memory, replaying without my permission. I saw the California moon sitting with a cluster of stars in the sky, so sure and confident of its place, like a father's seat at the dinner table.

She had searching eyes. They reminded me of an abandoned Shepherd looking for its owner, so loyal and unsettled, desperate for a smell that's long gone."

I saw me, the bulimic werewolf, waking up from a dead sleep, craving cookies. It could have been any



number of times in the past year, when I threw on some sweats and a t-shirt without a bra to sneak out. I carefully opened and closed the front door of our rickety beach house, so as not to wake up my roommates. My Nissan Sentra sat at the end of the driveway, and I winced at the sound of the ignition. I waited to put on the headlights until I was safely down the street, heading to the only places open at that hour (7-11, a 24-hour CVS, a burrito stand). I devoured fifty dollars worth of food in thirty minutes. Since there were no bathrooms open at that time of night, I went to the beach to throw up.

My only company were a few random homeless people and the familiar ink-black water. I felt ashamed in their presence. Violently shoving my fist down my throat by a dumpster in the sand, I vomited until there was nothing left. A girl was raped in the middle of the night on Pacific Beach, but still, I walked around by the water. I took my flip-flops off and aimlessly wandered along the wet, cake-batter sand, thinking, maybe everything doesn't happen for a reason. Maybe some of us just hurt ourselves until we die, and no meaning ever comes of it.

As I felt the ends of the ocean, white crests of waves tumbled towards me like thousands of baby polar bears. I looked out into the roaring icecaps and said it. "I hate you God. I fucking hate you."

Chapter 1: Fathers and Freedom - January 2012

Two nights after moving to Los Angeles, and I had yet to sleep peacefully.

I grabbed my Mac from the nightstand and typed "monkey experiment". The keyboard clicks didn't bother my boyfriend Danny and our Miniature Poodle, Bella, who shared the same pillow. Bella was oddly sleeping on her back, in a position that looked as if she had begun stretching and never quite finished. She was exhausted from all her pacing and barking in this new apartment. Every sound had been a threat, every movement observed.

When I first heard about the "attachment theory", I was a Teacher's Aid in a college introductory psychology class. The class was taught by a short, white-haired professor who, on the last day of our working together, looked me up and down and said, "Girls like you can wear skirts like that. Obviously, you can. But some other girls walking around campus shouldn't."

He probably thought he was giving me a compliment. Or maybe he was sexually harassing me. Either

way, I walked out of the room feeling both disgusted and relieved for the wrong reason. No matter how many pounds I lost or tanning beds I lay under, I never felt worthy of this elite category he referred to. The girls that can.

My laptop on my stomach, Wikipedia brought up a white screen full of text, no images. I read:

In Harlow's classic experiment, two groups of baby rhesus monkeys were removed from their mothers. In the first group, a terrycloth mother provided no food, while a wire mother did, in the form of an attached baby bottle containing milk. In the second group, a terrycloth mother provided food; the wire mother did not. It was found that the young monkeys clung to the terrycloth mother whether or not it provided them with food.

What about fathers? I thought. What about the Dads who not only protect and comfort, but who love as ferociously as mine had. What about the Dads who invented fun. The ones whose toe-tapping love for life and music shaped their daughter's world?

Dad declared me a genius when I spoke for the first time: "Dahhhh," then "Dadada," then "Dadu," and finally, "Daddee." When I made the sounds of farm animals, even sucking in my cheeks and pushing out my lips out to make fish noises, he nearly fell over. Even today, I could write three words, and he'd think the effort Pulitzer Prize worthy.

Bella shifted from Danny's pillow to mine, and I tried to remember a single moment of my childhood being affected by Dad's alcoholism. He recently said that the "really bad drinking" started when we moved to Pittsburgh, when I was in fourth grade and Julie was in first. But honestly, I didn't remember the drinking being "bad" until my senior year of high school. Up until then, I felt cherished by him. Adored.

I used to tell Dad everything. One time, in the first or second grade, I stole a green mint from the grocery store. I grabbed the mint in a split second, heat rising to my face, as I unwrapped it and plopped it into my mouth.

In my catholic school class a few days later, we learned about the Ten Commandments. "Thou shall not steal" may as well have leapt out of the bible and pinned me against the wall, handcuffing me at the wrists.

I went home, found Dad, and told him that we needed to talk. We went to the living room, and he sat down on our cream-colored couch. I was too nervous to sit, pacing in front of him.

"I did something bad," I began. "And I think I'm in big trouble... with God..."

His face, tan from our last family lake vacation, looked puzzled. "What is it sweetheart?" he asked. "You know you can tell your Dad anything."

"I stole a peppermint candy!" I blurted, putting my hands over my face in horror.

Dad smiled, looking relieved. "Honey, restaurants leave those for you to take for free. It's how you get clean breath after eating lots of spaghetti."

"No Daddy, it wasn't that. I was at the grocery store with Mom, and there were plastic bins with candy in them, and I just grabbed one."

"Oh. And you didn't have Mom pay for it?" he asked.

I shook my head and started to cry.

"Well, are you sorry?"

"Yes. I'm so sorry!"

"Well, of course God knows that then. God knows you are sorry and that you are a good girl. Sweetheart, you are a very good girl."

Dad declared me a genius when I spoke for the first time: "Dahhhh," then "Dadada," then "Dadu," and finally, "Daddee."

Dad never hit and rarely screamed when drunk. Instead, his voice softened, trembling like the legs of a calf walking for the first time. The man who looked so handsome in Nordstrom's business suits suddenly became infantile, his face endlessly squinting. His eyes spoke the need of a begging child, not of a corporate leader with a six-figure salary. He was starving without his bones showing. He threw punches without moving. He was desperate without saying a word.

It was hard to watch him leave, knowing I could still hold his hand. To see him drift away when he was standing right next to me. To recognize that the things I loved most about him were swallowed up by a sea of Russian vodka and denial.

This evening's dream, that had me up and reading about terrycloths and monkeys at 2 a.m., was one image: Dad trapped inside a barbed wire cage.

I visit "jail" a few times a week. Willingly.

Because it saves my life.

The inmates are dogs, at least sixty of every breed and color, screaming and shivering in the unusually cold Los Angeles air. Behind the padlocked, tall metal bars, there is no bedding, no toys or bones. Just desperation and water bowls.

On my first day of volunteering at a shelter in Los Angeles, I walked down a row of kennels, as the water system turned on to clean the shit and urine. It washed over the concrete floors that slanted downward towards a drain. A toy Poodle performed a terrified dance, lifting her paws interchangeably. Frantically. Her tail was tucked, eyes wide. She wailed at the sight of the rushing water, as if she were drowning. It went halfway up her cream-colored legs. She cried even louder than her Mastiff neighbor two cages down, an ear-piercing howl from the back of her throat.

The strays don't have names at this shelter, but I named them anyway. One nine-year-old Pit Bull I named "Blue" because of his eyes, bright as police car lights.

With my green volunteer vest on and a handful of treats, I entered his kennel. Blue focused one hundred percent on me, not the barking and crying dogs all around us, screaming because they wanted someone in their kennel too. I tried to keep focused on Blue, not the yellow Lab across the aisle, who had chewed the bars of his door into jagged lines. Not the dog around the corner licking the floor to relieve his stress, or the Chow Chow across from him, panting so hard that it sounded like an asthma attack.

Blue leaped into my lap and rolled over so I could scratch his belly. I was suddenly cradling a sixty pound puppy, all four of his legs up in the air. "You're going to be okay, Blue," I said, which made his tail wag. He seemed so alive, bursting in canine song and praise. He let out whimpers of joy and kissed my hands and face. His kennel was a place of revival, Sunday morning at run-down Baptist church.

"Who cut off your ears like that?" I asked, petting Blue's head. "Where did this bruise on your belly come from, this cut on your leg?" He looked up at me in a state of pure ecstasy. Crumbs of treats were stuck on his pink, wrinkly lips, hanging upside down like a big, droopy smile.

After I shared ten minutes of cuddling and Blue's undivided attention, a family walked by. His head perked up as a little girl, maybe five years old, speaking

Spanish, with long dark hair in pig tails, waved from the other side of the bars. I watched Blue get up, which took a lot of effort, considering that he had a bad case of hip dysplasia and arthritis. He went straight to her. She smiled and said, “Hola.” His tail wagged like crazy, as he tried to kiss her through the bars.

The girl’s mother came from around the corner and grabbed her hand, letting out a big sigh. I understood that sigh completely. It was a helpless I wish the world were different sigh.

I looked into the mother’s eyes and nodded.

Blue watched them walk away until they were out of sight, and then he came back to me, lying once again in my lap. How exhausting it must be, I thought, to be teased by every single person that walks by your kennel. With unfailing optimism the dogs think, Maybe now will be the moment. Maybe now I will get out. Go home.

Across the way from Blue was a three-month-old Pit Bull puppy. He had a little head, big tummy. His ears were permanently flopped forward, and he was hopelessly trying to climb the bars of his kennel, whimpering.

Then, a large, green leaf flew into his cage. He was in ecstasy. He tossed the leaf into the air and caught it repeatedly, his own personal game of fetch. The wind blew it a little to the left or the right, and he chased it, pawed at it, shook it in his mouth, tail wagging. This leaf rocked his world.

Water poured through a hole in the wall to clean the floor again. The leaf was picked up by the stream, and he splashed around following it. He triumphantly snatched it in his mouth and began trotting around the width of the kennel with it in his teeth. A victory lap.

He was a revelation to me.

In the middle of all of this suffering, here he was, overjoyed.

The perfect name came to mind: Free.



About the Author: Shannon Gusy is currently pursuing her MFA at Pacific University and writing a memoir on her life with animals. She resides in San Diego, California.

Cocoon

By Barry Dale Gilfry

within all things the hidden states

beyond this stage a path awaits

just where it leads not our concern

but all who passed from first to last

this way did not return

“Hold fast to dreams,

for if dreams die,

life is a broken-winged bird

that cannot fly.”

-Langston Hughes

All Oceans Aglow

A Novel Excerpt

By Aaron Mason

CHAPTER 1

A Tight Squeeze

Sleek ran for his life.

If he slowed, it would mean the end. A very painful end.

Behind him, a monstrous shadow scuttled out of the surrounding black. Sleek saw in quick silhouettes a multitude of chitinous limbs bending at sharp angles, as it gave chase with voracious intent. Going backwards was certain death.

Sleek's four legs pumped, his lungs ached, and his tail swayed in counterbalance to his fearful momentum. The Lontra river otter was exhausted, yet that was the cost of a successful theft, the prize nothing less than the sweet-sweet taste of fathomless magic.

Somewhere ahead, the promise of escape was marked by a flutter of silvery moonlight that crept past the great boulder wedged into the cave's tortured throat. Beyond this immovable obstruction, the cold vastness of The Blue waited.

That was the way out... the only way.

Great Ookl willing, there would be no hindrance to reaching the exit. However, such intervention was unlikely. Old Father Fathom was sleeping, starving even. He wouldn't help, probably wouldn't even hear. He never saw, heard, or spoke anyway. Being blind, deaf, and dumb was no way for a divinity to behave.

If Sleek wanted to get away this time, he'd have to make his own luck, and he was good at that; very good if pressed.

Among his river otter Holt, he was the fastest, both nimble and silent. Since puphood, he had worked hard to become so. He was a peerless hunter, and if any one of the Lontra could snatch a morsel of awareness-raising



food from The Garden and get away without Bitter Chac'Xib eating them, then it would be he.

So he ran faster than he had ever thought possible.

* * *

Getting into the cave was the easy part. Its initial purpose was to befuddle those animals accustomed to the deep darkness, who, from time to time, would wander innocently inside. As the creatures roamed, their path would turn back-to-front, until they eventually retraced their steps and exited the cave.

It was known that only those animals 'chosen' by The Garden could successfully traverse the maze, and Sleek recalled from his youth following his parents safely into the confusion of passages. They taught him the twists to follow, the turns to anticipate, and the dead ends to avoid. Plus, being naturally adapted for stealth predisposed Sleek to find his way through the fractured limestone labyrinth with the greatest of ease... at first.

Among the older Lontra, it was whispered that the barnacle-jagged walls would sometimes rearrange themselves without warning. If this was caused by the will of The Aggressor, or just proximity to the reality-bending nature of The Garden, only Great Ookl knew for sure.

Sleek dismissed those rumors as just that. They were nothing more than tall tales to amuse the pups at bedtime.

Nevertheless, when the tunnel began to shake, he saw, and felt, the truth firsthand. The rock he occupied actually moved by itself! It tumbled forward, as if pushed by invisible paws.

Sleek leapt for safer purchase and watched in amazement as the rock rolled away and settled into a new location. Then, as if things couldn't get any stranger, a stone wall dissolved into an avalanche of pebbles and grit, while at the same moment, a partition of rough-hewn granite bisected an empty section of passageway. It grew from the floor in a grinding tumult, as the freshly exposed stones settled into new configurations.

To guess the type of power needed to cause such a phenomenon was beyond Sleek's grasp, but he refused to let that stop him. Unanswered questions are all we can ever expect of life, he thought.

The river otter pressed forward, keen nose, ears, and whiskers guiding him in the inky black. Sleek was accustomed to hunting for food in shadowy waters, so an unlit cave hardly slowed him. The real dilemma was the wandering labyrinth. He couldn't afford to be going in circles, but that's what he felt he was doing.

The only hint of light in the tenebrous atmosphere came from the soft glow of the blue ureola, the woven bracelet of living coral that adorned Sleek's slender wrist, a symbol of his Beta status among his clan. He considered removing it, on the off-chance it marked his position, but ultimately decided against it.

I'll be in and out before The Aggressor even knows I'm there, he thought.

Finally, after what seemed like hours scampering through the dank and barnacle-carpeted tunnels, and not getting anywhere but hopelessly lost, Sleek saw the first hint of The Garden breaking the midnight symmetry. He was relieved to discover the slender vein of geoluminescent rock, no wider than a pup's whisker, twisting through the cold tunnel floor. The glow it produced was minimal, but was enough to follow.

As the number of gossamer deposits swelled, so did their cumulative light. More and more of these veins pulsed in the substratum, converged, and grew into brilliant arteries. These in turn threaded through the bedrock, their fluorescence guiding the wily river otter towards his eldritch destination.

Before long, the first outlier orchard of The Garden

appeared in all its luminous majesty. Sleek took a moment to bask in its radiance. He conjured an image of every star in the sky falling to earth, taking root in this one spot, and then growing faster and lusher than any kelp forest in The Blue ever could. The bedrock was completely saturated with energy, its substance more fiery glass than granite.

Yet when Sleek's eyes grew accustomed to the brightness, a gasp of dismay caught in his furry throat. Oh, no! Look at all the ruin!

Being blind, deaf, and dumb was no way for a divinity to behave."

Entire swatches of The Garden had fallen under the unforgiving appetite of Bitter Chac'Xib. Everywhere Sleek looked, the once bristling bioluminescent groves were shorn to bare stone by relentless pincers, the very rock underfoot gouged and chipped.

Sleek scurried deeper into the scarred place, his heart sinking in grief at the devastation around him. This wasn't The Garden he remembered from his care-free youth. In that Garden, all the natural laws that Sleek had taken for granted were askew. Water flowed up and pooled on the ceiling, yet the ceiling and floor were not fixed and often changed places, seemingly at random. That Garden had been a riot of incandescent life so complex that viewing the tiniest fraction of it made one's brain ache. Even the water that constantly dripped from the innumerable rock pools scattered on both floor, wall, and ceiling had been equal parts liquid and light.

This Garden was but a tattered carcass of its former glory. In Sleek's imagination, he heard it cry out, "Save me." I will, he thought. I'll make that monster pay.

He was soon relieved to discover, however, that many of The Garden's wounds were already in the process of healing. It seemed that, despite all that had been devoured, there remained such a renewable surplus of life that even the bottomless gluttony of The Aggressor couldn't hope to consume it all.

The ambient radiance of The Garden doubled, and quickly doubled again. Soon it would be far too bright for Sleek to see.

Yet among this confusion of opposing light sources, Sleek's acute eyesight located a clutch of delicious ruby-shelled sundial snails. The iridescent mollusks grazed

languidly on lustrous green algae, patched between a ridge of prismatic corals and a colony of silver-veined tube-worms. A veritable treasure waiting to be taken!

With dexterous fingers, the young otter pried a fiery sundial loose and devoured the plump snail as quickly as he could. Each bite, each swallow, inflamed his mind with renewed clarity, creating an indescribable sensation. Enhanced electrical signals tickled his spine and made his whiskers bristle with sensitivity. His senses throttled into overdrive. Every hair on his body, from lips to tail, vibrated with energy.

And the flavor! It tasted sweeter than he remembered from his youth; so he took another sundial, secured it within an inner cheek pouch, and then plucked loose a third.

Greed and hunger had distracted him: He had lingered and was about to pay a painful price.

Snip! The deadly, black-tipped pincer came out of nowhere.

Only Sleek's newly-heightened quickness saved him from a gruesome bisection. A minor cut on his right hind leg, shallow but bloody, was the worst of it. If he survived, it would heal, leaving a nice scar to remind him not to be so careless.

But only if he survived. That was his immediate goal.

He wanted to live to see tomorrow, and that meant running for his life.

* * *

The scratched limestone boulder was close now, perhaps only a hundred 'tails' away. In the tunnel beyond, the crashing waves and sweet air of The Blue taunted Sleek, with their twin promises of safety and freedom.

All he had to do was reach them. However, his wounded leg made running especially difficult.

Sleek couldn't see The Aggressor, but he could smell it—and it was close. The odor of life was strong. Life meant food! But that scent didn't belong to Bitter Chac'Xib. Its natural odor spoke of death and insatiable hunger.

No, that ever-so-sweet perfume of life The Aggressor used to camouflage its ghastly stench came from what grew, and glowed, within The Garden. That was the horrible irony. That fertile aroma threatened to stall Sleek just long enough with its promise of a full belly—and then death would fall.

Not just death, but digestion. Truly horrible.

The Scare, that instinctual 'call to flight' always present, yet restrained, in the Lontra, swelled louder and louder in the recesses of Sleek's mind. Even the added lucidity of the ruby sundial couldn't mute it. He had to get away while he could still think, before blind fear made all his choices for him.

If the Scare took over, as it had with his poor Holt-brother Diver, he might never learn to think properly again. He would be no better than the monoa, the 'unaware' animals. Lovely Gloss would never want him then.

No! Sleek thought. I can't dwell on that.

The midnight-blue river otter pushed the distraction out of his head. He scampered up the craggy rock-fall that led to the limestone boulder—and sea level.

Sleek's ears easily picked out the ominous stone-against-stone sound of Bitter Chac'Xib's grinding mandibles somewhere behind him, the hiss and bubble of the creature's fetid breath, the snip-snap of its terrible pincers that displaced the air like thunderclaps. He had felt those pincers once already. No need to feel them again.

Just get out. Just live to tell the story. The two ruby sundials in Sleek's cheek pouches irritated his gums, so he shifted their position. Ah. Much better.

He hoped The Aggressor wouldn't follow him all the way to The Blue. He hoped it would stop at the scratched boulder. Indeed, it had wedged the boulder into the cave's throat securely enough to keep everything else out, yet hadn't noticed the slender gap that allowed Sleek to squeeze through to pilfer his mind-enhancing dinner.

The Aggressor, however, wasn't also called 'Bitter' for no reason. It hated anything that dared to sneak into The Garden.

Its Garden.

That was a lie, of course. Everyone knew Bitter Chac'Xib had stolen The Garden to feed its endless gluttony. Now Old Father Fathom was starving, as were his forgotten children, the Ulurii; as were the sea otters, or Lutris, Sleek's Holt-rivals; as was the river otter Holt.

As was Sleek.

The Aggressor was gaining.

It may have been a lumbering giant, but it was faster on its six legs than Sleek remembered, and far more de-

terminated. It would pursue to the very last, and if the tiny river otter were caught, he'd be gobbled up whole or snipped in half, as had so many of his kin.

The thought sent a shiver coursing down Sleek's back and tail.

I shouldn't have stopped for that third sundial, he thought. But I'm so hungry. No! I won't end up like Diver. I will get away! I must see Gloss again!

Up ahead, a thin beam of faded moonlight squeezing between the scratched boulder and the wall marked the exit. The young Lontra felt euphoria rising in his furry breast. Almost home!

Though the bloody cut on Sleek's hind leg hobbled his full speed, he reached the boulder with a few moments to spare, before Bitter Chac'Xib was close enough to strike. He jumped onto the barrier, gripped its coarse surface with dexterous paws, and climbed for his life. Chancing a backwards glance, he saw the great shadow of The Aggressor as it scuttled towards him, knots of crimson innards burning behind a translucent shell.

“He had to get away while he could still think, before blind fear made all his choices for him.”

It reminded Sleek of a tangle of red seaweed he had found on the beach once...

Snip! The serrated pincer lashed out, missing Sleek by a whisker. It struck the boulder beside him, gouging another deep furrow. Rock fragments leapt, as did Sleek.

He forsook his purchase on the boulder for that of the cave wall. It bought him another second, maybe two at the most. Sleek hoped that in the dim light of the cave his fur, such a deep shade of azure that it approached black, would confuse The Aggressor long enough for him to squeeze through the slender opening between the boulder and rock wall.

Snap! The black-tipped pincer scissored wildly, clipping a rocky protrusion from the boulder where Sleek's head had been an instant earlier.

There was no mistake. Bitter Chac'Xib could see him just fine, or rather the glowing blue ureola he wore. To the acute eyes of The Aggressor, it must shine like a beacon, marking the river otter's every move. The impetuous Lontra now wished he had heeded his own advice and taken it off when he'd had the chance.

With all the urgent thoughts and regrets bouncing inside Sleek's head, one particular aspiration rose to the surface. I wish I had the Skint right now. Then I wouldn't be running, but fighting! I would be the one doing the chasing!

This idea provided a moment's comfort, which quickly passed.

Speed was Sleek's only real hope, not the wishful thought of owning a fabled power he would probably never have, or live to see another possess. Thus, he climbed faster than he had ever climbed before, trying his best to ignore the pain searing his hind leg, and the Scare rising in his head like the high-pitched wail of an angry tempest.

At that most harrowing moment, Sleek broke the promise he had made to himself and offered up a prayer—the first in a long time. It was the Holt-prayer that Suckling Mother had sung when he was still a blind, nursing pup. She said it had the power to chase away the monsters watching in the shadows:

“Great Ookl dreaming in The Blue, let me hide in your coils until the danger is past; keep me safe in the currents of your Breath...”

Sleek reached the gap between boulder and rock, flattened himself, squeezed in... and got stuck! He pushed with all his strength, trying to force himself forward.

The dexterous river otter exhaled all the breath from his lungs to push deeper still. He was almost through, but Bitter Chac'Xib was closing in, deadly pincers splayed and reaching. Sleek wanted to scream, but didn't have the breath for it. All he could do was push. The opening widened a little and then a little more...

Please, please, Father Fathom... he thought past the Scare ...let me LIVE!

In its attempt to devour Sleek, The Aggressor, charging madly, careened into the boulder. The weight of the great rock shifted, the gap of escape widening the additional fraction Sleek needed to slither out. As the resourceful river otter fell towards safety, he saw fingers of silvery moonlight filtered through the rattled timbers of the beached crab boat that concealed the cave's true opening.

The next moment, he plunged into a gentle swell that waited to receive him. The cold waters of The Blue kissed his wounded leg and soothed it.

He was free to see another day.

Sleek surfaced and inhaled. As the sweet air filled his oxygen-starved lungs, the Blue's salty fragrance washed away the life-and-death stench of Bitter Chac'Xib. The Scare faded as well, and a welcomed calm returned. He looked back and saw the deadly serrated pincer of The Aggressor protruding from the gap between boulder and wall, its lethal, wedge-shaped blades snapping blindly.

Luck was on Sleek's side after all. The tide was rising again, and even if Bitter Chac'Xib moved the boulder to renew the chase, it would never catch the crafty Lontra now. Not when he could just swim away into the open sea. He was far too fast and far, far too agile.

The black-tipped pincer withdrew behind the scratched boulder. It was gone for now, but Sleek knew he would be seeing it sooner, rather than later.

He checked his tail to make sure he wasn't missing any pieces of it, and then swam towards the cave entrance. The debilitating shriek of the Scare was now gone. Perhaps Old Father Fathom came through this time, Sleek thought. Perhaps...

The calm, steady breath of his noble Lontra heritage returned. That was one of the many gifts The Garden bestowed on those that ate from it, the chosen anandi. Only they possessed the calmness and clarity of higher thought that muted the Scare, and elevated them above the poor, unthinking monoa.

The anandic-condition was the greatest of all gifts, and not one to be squandered. Being 'Garden Aware' was an unsurpassed blessing, but it did not come without caveats.

Sleek knew it would only be a matter of time. A few months perhaps, six at most, and the dulling of his thoughts would be too great to ignore. The fear of losing his anandi-grace would compel Sleek to creep back into the cave, not to quell the hunger in his belly, but the hunger in his mind.

Knowing the glory of The Garden, and then having that knowledge slowly stripped away, was a horrible feeling. It was like having your whiskers plucked out individually, or gnawing off your own tail. Perhaps even worse.

Still, that was something to worry about later. For now, he could peacefully eat one of the ruby sundials without the fear of being eaten himself.

Sleek swam through the gaping hole gouged in the underbelly of the wrecked crab boat. He climbed up a splintered support timber, transitioned to a second beam, maneuvered through the cobwebbed joists, and

then squeezed through an open hatch and onto the moonlight-kissed deck.

Leaning against the wall exactly where he had left it was his spear. The four-tail length of silver-and-blue fishing pole was his prized possession, and in his paws it was a deadly tool. Lashed to the top of the shaft with polymer fishing line was a long, stone-flattened metal fishhook. It was a scavenged weapon, but a kingly one. Only the spear of his father, Den Sire, was superior.

Yet as fine and lethal as the spear was, there was no point in taking it to The Garden. No weapon the otters possessed could contend with the armor and pincers of Bitter Chac'Xib. Only the Skint could do that.

Sleek spat the ruby sundials into his webbed hands, where they glowed with an inner light, like two aquatic embers. He considered the snails, what they meant to his father, to his kin, and to the rival Lutris.

All anandi referred to any organism living in The Garden as pryzoa, or 'Blessed Life', be it sail or limpet, anemone or chiton, sponge, flatworm, or any number of countless species. Because these enchanted creatures dwelled closest to the mysterious Golden Barnacle, that singular place where all realities of The Blue and of nature fell away into bubbles and froth, they were prized above all other things.

Most anandi considered pryzoa sacred. Entire frameworks of etiquette and ritual were built upon possession of them. The more Blessed Life an anandi possessed, the more influence wielded among his or her peers.

Sleek pondered the state of affairs between the species. Currently, the balance of power among otter-kind resided in the hands of the Lontra, under the rule of his father, the Den Sire. But for how long? If the Lutris ever possessed an equal amount of pryzoa, they could challenge for the right to rule.

Then there would surely be bloodshed. But for now, there was peace.

Sleek thought it was all very silly. Pryzoa were food after all. But he knew the consequences if anyone found out he had stolen them from The Garden. That would tangle a knot of troubles so dire that not even Cixtindi, his Ulurii friend, could untie it.

He felt the weight of the sundials, examined the surface details. One was sizably larger. "I'll save you for Gloss. That should impress her," he said, and set it aside.

Under the silvery moon, Sleek dined on the tender meat of the smaller gleaming ruby sundial. He ate the pryzoa quickly, efficiently, savoring each mouthful. He felt his freshly-honed faculties sharpen even more with each swallow.

Sleek knew he couldn't dally, that he must return to the Holt before Den Sire and his party returned from hunting cuttlefish. If the elder ever discovered that his disobedient son had sneaked into The Garden, he would give Sleek a very painful ear-nip. By binding treaty forged in the sacred Council Pool, The Garden was off limits to all anandi, regardless of species.

None was allowed to enter until a reckoning could be reached on how to deal with Bitter Chac'Xib once and for all. It was becoming painfully clear, however, that that day might never come, and they had waited so long already...

Sleek despised waiting. It was one of his many admitted flaws. And, even more, he despised hearing Den Sire preach about how entering The Garden "... is forbidden and disrespectful to Great Ookl, our Old Father Fathom. It's a test he has set before us, a test of self-control..." That was just superstitious nonsense. Wasn't it?

After all, hadn't Sleek been deep into The Garden? Hadn't he nearly seen the legendary Golden Barnacle for himself? It was in there, just waiting to be discovered. He could feel it. Possession of the Skint would make the finding that much easier, but even without it, Sleek felt his father should let him try. He knew he could locate it if given a proper chance, and then everyone would benefit.

I know better than he does, the crafty river otter thought, and carefully picked the ruby shell of any clinging bits of sweet snail-flesh. The Garden belongs to all of us. It's our birthright. Next time, I'll do better. Next time I'll bring back enough pryzoa for the entire Holt.

But he had to wait to get his chance, and he despised waiting. The magical moment of The Glow hadn't yet arrived.

It was getting closer, true. However, many, many tides had yet to wax and wane before those special waters disseminated their luminal wonders to the world. Sometimes he felt as if The Glow would never come.

Nevertheless, if Sleek were lucky, and quick enough, then maybe, just maybe, the Skint would find him

amidst the radiant currents of The Glow. He did not know why or how the water glowed, only that it did; and by doing so, it renewed all life in The Blue.

With the Skint in his possession, all obstacles would be cleared from his path. He would finally end the war with the Lutris, and the Garden would be his. And so would Gloss. Lovely, lovely, Gloss. They would start their own Holt. Together.

Other things needed to be resolved first, however, like hiding the pryzoa. Most anandi would attack Sleek on sight to own it, and the number of scavenging animals in The Blue was too great to count. It was only a matter of time before the pryzoa was sniffed out by a passing nose, and then the trophy Sleek nearly died to possess would be eaten by another.

Luckily, Sleek was resourceful and had one or two tricks up his furry sleeve. I know just where to hide it, he thought. No one will find it there.

He tucked the remaining ruby sundial into his cheek pouch. It tingled pleasantly against his gums.

Sleek discarded the still-glowing shell of the pryzoa he had just eaten, grabbed his spear in webbed paws, and slipped into The Blue. It was imperative to hide his pilfered prize during the cover of darkness, where his deep-azure fur would make him just one more shadow against multitudes. In daylight, the task would be far too dangerous.

The empty sundial shell tumbled down the sloping deck, bounced once, twice, landed in a coil of weather-worn rope...

And there it waited to be discovered by inquisitive human hands.



About the Author: With a penchant for fine scotch and cheap cigars, Senior Mason decided to follow up his award-winning illustrated book *The Baffelgagging Blundernagging Brothers in Curse of the Bog Frog* with something a little more down-to-earth. So obviously, an epic trilogy about magical talking otters ensued, hence *All Oceans Aglow - In Eldritch Currents*. His first feature screenplay *Panzer 88* is currently in development with producer Gary Kurtz (Star Wars).

Party In Ann Arbor

Excerpt from *Trouble Again*, a memoir

By Michael Rushlow

In 1978, the punk rock scene in Detroit was just gaining momentum. At the beginning, "punk rock" was kind of an umbrella term, describing any band that played music that wasn't Lynyrd Skynyrd or Boston. My band, The Pigs, which was comprised at the beginning of me (Mike Rushlow), Al Fay, and Steve King, three bespectacled, svelte suburbanites, was on the scene from its early days. The only band in town featuring an acoustic guitarist (that would be me), we were the first to play many of the trendy venues of the time. The gigs became pretty routine; we'd hit the stage, play our songs, and exit. However, the events that happened before and after the gigs are still fresh in my mind...

I stood with a batter's stance, swinging the broom at the fresh fruit Steve pitched across the kitchen. It being Jerry's mother's house, Jerry--also known by his punk-rock moniker Jerry Vile--ran about like a frazzled parent confiscating things from us, yet as soon as he did, we'd find some other mischief to occupy us. When I started pouring household cleaning products into the blender, an exasperated Jerry said, "Everyone told me not to hang out with the Ramrods; they just get into trouble. Now I know it's The Pigs I've got to worry about."

Over the next couple of years, our uniform glasses, lankiness, and Salvation Army-purchased suits saved us from much suspicion. I guess the feeling was that a bunch of nerds wouldn't, or couldn't, harm a flea. So, much like Clark Kent's glasses concealing his secret identity, our glasses hid our miscreant superpowers, if you will, which often took us into areas between mischief and outright vandalism.

Jerry usually would have been the last person trying to stop flying fruit and swinging brooms, but this was his mom's house, the one with the indoor pool where

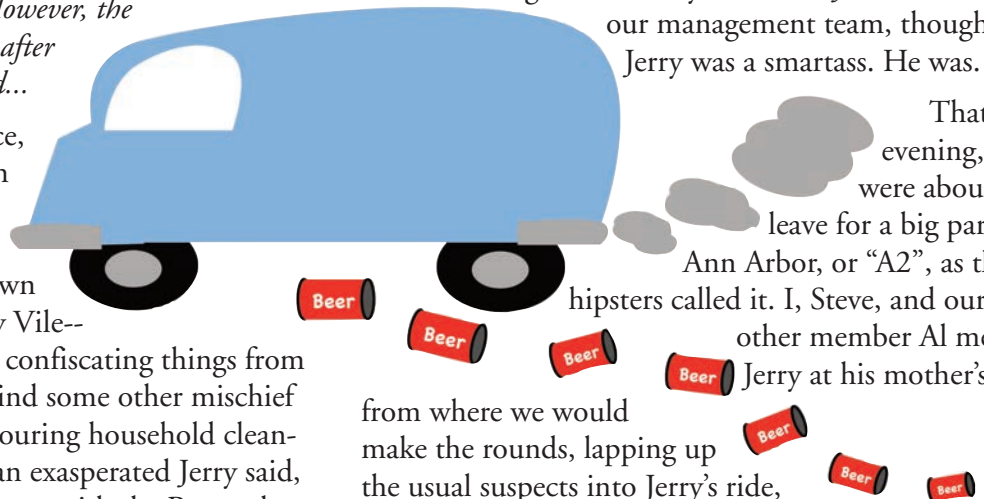
he would bring girls, girls who, impressed by the pool, would often slip into bikinis or less. Thus, Jerry worried about being denied this privilege as a result of any unpleasant behavior.

It was only recently we'd begun hanging around with Jerry, an acquaintance of the fruit-pitching Steve. Along with his friend Paul, Jerry was ostensibly a journalist, an editor at *White Noise Magazine*, a pipe dream publication that, at that point, was just an excuse to gain free entry to shows. Jack and Don, our management team, thought Jerry was a smartass. He was.

That evening, we were about to leave for a big party in Ann Arbor, or "A2", as the hipsters called it. I, Steve, and our other member Al met Jerry at his mother's, from where we would make the rounds, lapping up the usual suspects into Jerry's ride, known as the White Noise Van.

With everyone piled in the back, we got to "A2" at around 9:30 or ten. Despite having loaded up on beer during the ride, we went to The Blind Pig, an Ann Arbor institution, to grab some more drinks and get something to eat. At least I think we got something to eat there. That piece of memory is a tad cloudy.

We walked out of the bar. Immediately, Steve wandered off somewhere. We scrounged for him in parking lots and alleyways, yelling his name, surely a nuisance to the neighborhood. Most likely, we annoyed them even more with our constant pissing on the sides of buildings. At that point, we must have been eight or nine beers deep into the night.



Finally, after ten or so minutes of this, Steve just wandered up to us.

"Hey guys, what's up?" he said.

I would soon find out that this wandering-off business was a habit of Steve's. There was another time, in leaving a house party, when we couldn't find him, and so assumed he'd gotten a ride with someone else. Early the next morning, he called to see if I could come pick him up. It turned out he had passed out in the closet, only to awaken the morning after to find that the party was long over.

Once the elusive Steve was back in the fold, we again squeezed ourselves into the van and were party-bound. We arrived at a large white house, and, stepping inside, noticed immediately the "old people" aura that smothered it: dark wood furniture, lace tablecloths, creepy old paintings whose eyes seemed to follow you around the room. It belonged to the parents of one of the former members of the band MC5. This was quite disillusioning for me, as MC5 was a Detroit legend, cited often as an influence by many punk and hard rock bands. Yet here the guy was, in his thirties and living with his parents.

Just when I was starting to think I had a shot at minor-league stardom, I got a glimpse of what could very possibly be my future.

We wandered around the house, under the close watch of the MC5 guy, who, like Jerry, didn't want us upsetting anything in his folks' home. Ron Ashton, a former member of the band Stooges, and current member of Destroy All Monsters, was there. As part of my hobby of recreationally annoying people, as soon as I spotted him, I said, "Hey, it's the legendary Ron Ashton!"

He just smiled sheepishly and said, "Well, I don't know about that."

When the party was over, we made our way back to Jerry's van. After stopping once again to piss like a pack of mangy hounds, we came across a parked bus. The driver was absent, maybe having gone on break. The door was wide open: too much of a temptation for Steve to pass up. He went up into the bus and looked around. Next to the driver's seat was a metal box. Almost on instinct, Steve grabbed it and brought it out of the bus. It was a roadside emergency kit. Of particular interest to Steve, not too surprisingly, were the flares.

Nearby, stood a gorgeous old house, reminiscent of the Munster's or Addams Family houses. It was huge

and white and wooden, even larger than the house we had just come from. As we looked upon it, Steve lit a flare and handed it to me.

"What the fuck am I going to do with this?" I said, feeling like Wile E. Coyote, holding a stick of Acme brand dynamite.

The house had one of those rural-style mailboxes on a post, with a raisable red flag. I opened the little door and placed the flare inside, the lit end jutting from the opening. As a finishing touch, I raised the red flag to indicate that something was in the box.

Steve lit another flare, then heaved it through one of the upstairs windows.

"Fuck!" I said. "You're gonna burn down the fucking house!"

Apparently, nobody was home, as I think a lit flare crashing through an upstairs window would have sparked (no pun intended) some intense commotion.

We hightailed it out of there toward the van/get-away car, looking back periodically to watch for any flames licking at the sky.

"I can't believe I made it through the window!" Steve said.

"I can't believe I may have burned a letter," I replied.

Once we were on our way, we all cracked open a beer for the road. I am being conservative in estimating the number of beers consumed by each of us as somewhere between eighteen and twenty.

One by one, those of us in the back soon started nodding off, or, maybe more aptly said, passing out. Suddenly, we were all jolted awake. The van had stopped. Peering out the back window, we could see that we were in a sizable snow bank. In the more rural areas of Michigan, storm drains are essentially just ditches running alongside the road. We were in such a ditch, which was filled over the top with snow.

"What the hell happened?" one of us asked.

Jerry replied, "Um, I must have fallen asleep."

Jerry made a few feeble attempts at trying to drive out of the ditch. It was quickly apparent, after rocking back and forth, that we were just getting in deeper.

A couple of us opened the back door of the van to survey the situation. The snow was right up to the door. There was no way we were going to drive out of this.

We saw a distant farmhouse, but decided it wouldn't be a good idea for a bunch of drunken punk rockers to be pounding on a door at three or four A.M. in an area where pitchforks and shotguns were plentiful. We would wait until morning, or walk a bit to see if there were any gas stations nearby.

In the meantime, we would try to get some shuteye. For warmth, Jerry started the engine. After a few minutes of this, we were all overcome by wooziness. Tom once again went out to check on things. The exhaust pipe was buried in snow. Tom cleared an area around the pipe, so that in the morning, we would be less dead than we might otherwise have been.

Sleep was difficult. I was alternately hot and cold, and was nagged constantly by the feeling that I might have burned some important letter. The idea that we'd possibly torched an old house to cinders didn't prove too comforting, either.

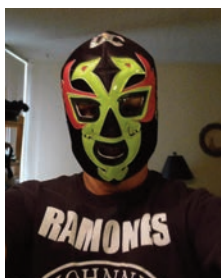
Around six o'clock, as the sun started to rise, there was a knocking on the driver side window. Two men stood there. Jerry rolled down the window. They asked if we wanted them to tow us out with their pickup truck--albeit for a fee. It seemed as though they trolled these roads on a regular basis, looking to exploit situations such as ours. Maybe it was a common thing, drunken punk rockers getting in trouble on the return route from "A2".

In a matter of moments, we were back on the road. Not long after, Jerry dropped us off at our respective destinations.

For a few days, I kept an eye on the paper, half-expecting to see a story about an "Ann Arbor Arsonist." Thankfully, none popped up.

Undeterred by our experience, we showed up that evening at the bar again, where Steve was regaling everyone with the tale of the party, the bus, and the flares.

Somewhere in the chatter, I chimed, "And I may have burned a letter."



About the Author: Michael Rushlow spent the late '70s knocking around the burgeoning Detroit independent music scene, playing in such bands as The Pigs, The Boners and Rushlow-King Combo. He is currently working on a memoir, "Trouble Again", based on his time as a young punk-rocker.

If I Could Touch You

By Kevin P. McKenna

If you could only understand,
all that's rushing through my brain...
If I could just reach out: and grab you,
then, touch you, deeply inside,
past the boyhood ethnic hymns,
beyond the teenage tribal beats,
to show you in detail, the stark truth:
as God himself, might just comprehend it...

But, I'm only a child, who writes of flesh and blood,
the laughter, and tears, memories of a time:
That I alone, must live and die with,
as I struggle to describe, to you,
the end of my twisted tale...

I'm simply a man, who's been staring at the stars,
seeking to sing the melody of madness,
striving to hum the harmony of nonsense,
while lost in the lunacy of a pipedream...

If I could merely make you feel: touch you,
and craft you a puzzling creation,
only understood, by the person,
who truly can, interpret himself...



About the Author: Kevin McKenna has been involved with the arts and sciences since early childhood. He's worked as a filmmaker, magazine editor and newspaper columnist. Today he's very busy finishing a novel.

Mash-Up!

By Art Holcomb

I love a good mash-up story. . .

You know the type, where the author has taken two or more genres or storylines and has crushed them together in a way that they, while still familiar, seem strangely unique.

They are a blast to write, not only because the writer gets to go deep into different genres, but because this kind of writing always stretches the imagination to produce possibilities and directions that hadn't thus far been considered. While television and the movies have had a long love affair with mash-ups, there are a number of novels out in recent years that have sparked renewed interest in the approach.

Typically, mash-ups fall into one of two of categories:

CLASSIC MASH: This combines a pre-existing text, such as a classic work of fiction, with a certain popular genre.

Consider a few of the following recent efforts.

- *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (by Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith)
- *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* (Grahame-Smith)
- *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* (Austen and Winters)
- *The Eerie Adventure of the Lycanthrope Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe, Lovecraft and Peter Clines)

NEW MASH: Sometimes a mash-up uses a classic story, but it needn't be that way. It can be just two or more genres set in counterpoint to each other.

In my career, I have created such stories as:

- FINAL DOWN – an NFL/disaster film

- 4EVER – a religious afterlife/thriller set in a tech future
- THE AMBASSADOR – a Sci-Fi/Mobster story
- FRANKI & JONNI – a Frankenstein myth/high school drama
- OLIVER AND THE FOUR-PIECE REGENCY-STYLE BEDROOM SET OF DEATH – a YA mystery/comedy.

...Although, I admit, that last one may have gone too far.

RE-IMAGININGS: Another fun approach to

"What was Captain Ahab like as a boy? What was Phillip Marlowe like as an old man? What was Tom Sawyer's world like at the turn of the century?"

stretch your writing horizons is to re-imagine an earlier story or set of characters in a completely new or updated way.

- The BBC recently did this with *Sherlock*, a re-telling of the classic Sherlock Holmes stories – but set in modern-day London.
- *Wicked* is the wholly recognizable story of THE WIZARD OF OZ, but told as a parallel novel from the perspective of the Wicked Witch of the West. Old story – new viewpoint. New possibilities.

RETELLINGS: are all about drawing the inspiration and flavor of the source material and making it live

again.

- The movie *O Brother Where Art Thou?* is a retelling of *Homer's Odyssey*.
- Certainly, many of the Disney stories are, in fact, retellings of classic fairy tales.

PREQUELS, SEQUELS and the CONTINUUM OF STORY: A subset of re-imaginings really, this is the most available of all mash-up possibilities, and perhaps the most freeing. Here, a writer will take a piece of work, character or setting and imagine it years previous to or years after the time of the originally piece. What was Captain Ahab like as a boy? What was Phillip Marlowe like as an old man? What was Tom Sawyer's world like at the turn of the century?

A good example of this was the television show **The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles**.

This type of story allows you to just find a character you like and trace them back to their suspected beginning and their possible ends to see what excites you.

Now, it's your turn...

Why not try to make up some mash-ups of your own?

Here is a list of genres, tropes, and categories to choose from. Mix and match to your heart's content using some of the exercises below.

LITERARY GENRES:

Action/Adventure, Advice, Adult, Animal, Arts, Biographical, Children's, Circus, Comedy, Contest, Crime/Gangster, Cultural, Dark, Death, Detective, Drama, Educational, Emotional, Entertainment, Environmental, Erotica, Experiential, Family, Fan Fiction, Fantasy, Fashion, Finance, Folklore, Food/Cooking, Foreign, Friendship, Gay/Lesbian, Genealogy, Ghost, Gossip, Gothic, Health, History, Hobby/Craft, Holiday, Home/Garden, Horror/Scary, How-To/Advice, Inspirational, Internet/Web, Legal, Magic, Medical, Melodrama, Men's, Military, Music, Mystery, Mythology, Nature, News, Nonsense, Occult, Parenting, Personal, Pets, Philosophy, Political, Psychology, Regional, Relationship, Religious, Research, Romance/Love, Satire, Sci-fi, Scientific, Self Help, Spiritual, Sports, Suburbia, Supernatural, Technology, Teen, Thriller/Suspense, Tragedy, Transportation, Travel, Tribute, War, Western,

Women's, Writing Skills, Young Adult.

CLASSIC STORIES:

Don Quixote, Pilgrim's Progress, Allan Quartermane, Gulliver's Travels, Frankenstein, The Count of Monte Cristo, David Copperfield, The Man in the Iron Mask, The Three Musketeers, Wuthering Heights, Jane Eyre, Captain Nemo, The Scarlet Letter, Moby-Dick, Alice in Wonderland, Doctor Moreau, Fu Manchu, Huckleberry Finn, Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, The Great Gatsby, The Big Sleep

TROPES (Genre Mainstays)

Horror

Vampires, Aliens, Werewolves, Ghosts, Monsters, Disaster, Psycho, Nightmare, Serial Killers, Torture, Satanism, Demons, Cannibals, Haunted Houses, Zombies.

Science Fiction

Alternate Universe, Aliens, ESP, Time travels, Spacecraft, Robots, Cyborgs, Space Travel, AI, Steampunk, Space Opera, Superheroes

Fantasy

Dark Lord, Magic, Quest, Medievalism, the Ancient World, Dragons, Witches, Other Races, Creatures, Barbarians, Damsels, Swords, Rings, Prophecy

Oh... Give it a try!

Exercise Number 1: "Name & Job": Pick a character and a genre/trope at random and see what this new combination stirs in your imagination. Possibilities could go something like:

- "Ask Frankenstein, Advice Columnist" (Frankenstein/Advice)
- "Donkey Ote, Knight Burro" (Don Quixote/ Medieval)
- "Captain Ahab, Spokesman for PETA" (Moby Dick/Animal)
- "I was a Vampire for the FBI" (Vampire/Crime)

While such mash-ups often create comedic or farcical characters, I'm often surprised what people come up with. A film columnist that I highly respect writes under the moniker **FILM CRITIC HULK!**

Exercise Number 2: “Fill in the Blanks”: This is a tool screenwriters use to create and pitch new ideas for shows. Just take any two of the genres or tropes and plug them into the sentence below:

“_____ meets _____”. Television especially loves this one, as in:

- Serial Killer meets Family = Dexter
- Detective meets Magician = The Mentalist
- Writing Skills meet Crime = Castle
- Alternate Universe meets Scientific meets Detective = Fringe
- Vampire meets Soap Opera = Dark Shadows
- Vampires, werewolves and ghosts meet Suburbia = BBC’s Being Human
- Vampire Cop = Forever Knight

Just off the top of my head as I was writing this, the following possibilities came to mind:

- (1) Fantasy Detective
- (2) Alien Soap Opera
- (3) Gothic Time Travel
- (4) Haunted Circus
- (5) Zombie Fairy Tales
- (6) DIY Haunted House Repair
- (7) Questing Mobster
- (8) Lawyers for Aliens

Not all winners to be sure, but I took a shot at fleshing out a couple of them as illustrations of where you could go:

“Once Upon a Crime Spree” – Grendel Jones was born in the shadow of the great castle, rumored to be the son of a witch and an ensorcelled prince. He was raised on the hard streets of a fairytale land, content to help solve his neighbor’s little problems until the day he was asked to trade his magic and skills as a detective for a chance to learn the secrets of a past he never knew he had. (Fantasy Detective)

“Asta” – Harrison Quell, Esq., is a bitter and disillusioned attorney who stumbles across the case of a thousand lifetimes: a chance to represent an alien who has been living among us for 100 years. Can Quell keep

the creature alive and safe – from the military, the press and a mysterious secret organization that has been hunting the visitor for generations – just long enough for it to talk to the President of the United States before it’s too late? (Lawyers for Aliens)

“1-800-Got Creepy?” – Deke and “Big Tommy” Perez have a successful TV show built around their reputation as Haunted House Flippers – taking spooky wrecks and turning them into profitable rentals. The network has given them their biggest challenge yet for Sweeps Week: turn a two-hundred-year-old terror around in a week. But is this nightmare – with its eerie glow and forbidding past – more than they bargained for? (DIY Haunted House Repair)

Now it’s your turn!

Give it a shot yourself. The more story notions you come up with, the more keepers you might find.

I think you’ll find this to be a great way to keep your creativity and imagination in tune.



About the Author: Art Holcomb is a screenwriter whose work has appeared on the SHOWTIME Channel and a comic book author of such comics as Marvel’s X-MEN and Acclaim’s Eternal Warriors. He teaches screenwriting and graphic novel writing at the University of California Riverside Extension Writer’s Program, and is a regular contributor to Storyfix.com. He will be teaching at the Screenwriter’s World Conference in Los Angeles in October 2012. He lives in Southern California.

“New knowledge is the most valuable commodity on earth.

The more truth we have to work with, the richer we become.”

-Kurt Vonnegut

The Dog Named Elvis

By Javier Chagolla

My last relationship started out with a drinking binge so it's no surprise it ended a disaster. We moved way too fast from our first date to moving in. The next thing I knew, Diane had set the toaster on fire and was screaming at me that it was my fault. To say she was high strung was putting it mildly; her life was a roller coaster of emotions. Her entire family was dysfunctional so I should have known better. I felt a twinge of guilt as I packed my stuff, with her threatening suicide in the bathroom. As I closed the front door behind me, she sat on the living room crying and tearing up the few photos she could find of us. Because I live in downtown Albuquerque, there was always the risk of running across her or her relatives on the street, so I avoided going out much for a while. Eventually I went on a few dates, but my heart wasn't in it; I preferred my recently-found peace. I didn't date at all for three years. Then the loneliness got to me. I realized I may have been a bit hasty when I swore myself to a life of solitude. It was getting harder and harder to go to a restaurant and eat surrounded by couples and families. If I ate at home it was even worse. After spending the entire day working from home, I preferred being around people. I was wedged between peaceful isolation and loneliness.

I still don't know why she became interested in me. The only thing you can say I have going for me is height. I'm tall, but not particularly good-looking. Nor am I any kind of genius. In my late thirties I was already developing a paunch. My only exercise was my work softball team, and, win or lose, our games were always followed by a few beers and Mexican egg rolls.

So when friends told me Becky had agreed to a date with me, I was wondering if it was a practical joke. She knew what I looked like because she had come as a spectator to a few of our games, during one of which I'd

hit my only home run, my greatest sports moment. Likely she didn't remember it. For me it was easy -- with her button nose and expressive eyes, I thought she was beautiful. She was also curvy in all the right places.

Things went alright the first date, and, despite my lack of charm, Becky agreed to a second date. I loved the quiet way she sat and listened, staring straight and deep into my eyes as I spoke, never interrupting. I was amazed to discover I genuinely had her full attention, even though I knew my stories weren't that interesting.

While trying to make small talk, I edged into the subject of past relationships. She didn't say anything at first and I instantly regretted bringing it up. It was touch-and-go there for a while even when I tried to change the topic. Her expression darkened, the brightness of her eyes dimmed. I had struck a nerve. I could tell she was deliberating whether or not to leave. Eventually, she replied that she didn't talk much about her past. She alluded to having been in an abusive relationship for years. From then on I avoided the topic.

Things got serious when she invited me to her parents' Thanksgiving dinner. I was a little apprehensive. The last Thanksgiving dinner I had gone to, at Diane's mom's house, had ended in a fight between two of her brothers. The police had been called. My parents live on the East Coast, so the last few years had seen me eating alone.

At noon, Becky picked me up at my apartment. Her smiling face was more radiant, even though I could see she was closer to my age without as much make-up. I was beginning to feel like a kid again; I actually had butterflies in my stomach. It felt like we were moving to the more honest phase of dating, where you begin to reveal some of your imperfections and hope for the best. Nothing was stated but I could feel her becoming more

comfortable around me. On the other hand, I was becoming more uncomfortable at the thought of her parents' judgment.

She had previously mentioned keeping a dog, and had told me that today was the day I'd get to meet him. Just to note: I'm not a pet person. I don't even keep fish. I got over cleaning out fish tanks as a kid. I've always seen pets as expensive and time consuming. Maybe a psychologist would say it had something to do with my favorite dog dying when I was nine. I never got a good explanation as to what happened. I came home from school one day to my parents saying Snoopy was gone. My parents weren't particularly expressive and they frowned upon me showing emotion. They were serious people. So when I walked out to Becky's hatchback on that Thanksgiving Day and saw the black miniature dachshund sitting in the front seat, I was rather neutral, obliging if anything.

I'm sure she expected me to gush all over the dog, whose name was Elvis. Elvis eyed me suspiciously. I give him credit for not barking, but with a name like Elvis I don't think he expected to be taken too seriously.

Becky greeted the dog as if she hadn't seen him for two days, hugging and kissing him while I watched from a comfortable distance. I could swear the dog looked at me sideways as she put him in the back seat. He didn't impress me with his long floppy ears, little pointy nose and expressive eyes. He planted his long-but-compact body in the seat behind Becky. He stared at me the whole time like he was studying me. He didn't make a sound but made me feel a little uneasy: every time I glanced at him, he was staring at me.

Driving to her parents' house, Becky told me all about her family. Despite my awkwardness, meeting her parents went well. They had their own miniature dachshund, what they refer to as a red-coated one. It got along with Elvis once they'd broken the ice with some introductory butt-smelling. This dog, which went by Cinnamon, did not like me very much and would occasionally lunge at my shoe. Becky's mom scolded it until it (mostly) left me alone. At dinner I felt it bite my shoe under the table. Elvis was sitting behind Becky and saw the whole thing. I could swear he was smiling.

Things went so well with Becky that we started spending the night together. In one of those cosmic time-warp tricks, I'd suddenly moved into her condo, in a nice suburb called The Heights. I was done with my

cramped, dreary apartment, little comparison to her well-lit condo with the small yard. Behind the neighborhood rolled some pretty hills where you could occasionally see deer or other wildlife mixed in with the cattle.

Elvis put up with the inconvenience of having my stuff moved in. I set up my office in the corner of the living room. I provided tech support and supervised a team from my home office, so I needed a quiet space during the day. The only disadvantage to my job had always been occasional boredom and not being connected to the office grapevine. Now I had a new office mate: Elvis's lair was across from me. When not patrolling the premises, a job involving much unnecessary barking, he would sit on his throne and watch me. Unfortunately, Elvis took his job very seriously and barked at all threats, including the ones only he could hear.

Despite having to put up with the dog, I knew I had made the right decision in living with Becky. There are those times in life when you know there's nowhere else in the world you'd rather be. For me, that was being with Becky. We had fun reorganizing the condo. We bought a king sized bed. I brought my newer refrigerator and big screen. We cooked dinner for each other and set time aside each week to watch our favorite TV show together. Neither one of us is an outdoors type. Everything fell into place.

As soon as I got comfortable in the condo, trouble started with Elvis. Because Becky worked regular hours, she was gone a lot of the day, often when Elvis had his accidents. Her patience for my antics didn't compare to the well of patience for those of that little weenie dog.

For some reason, the dog went through a stage of notorious gassy episodes. I sometimes had to run outside and air out the house. I suggested changing his dog food to the more expensive stuff. The worst was stepping on a wet spot on the carpet, early in the morning. Elvis would sit in his bed looking a little embarrassed and watch me get on my hands and knees to clean it up. On really cold days he would leave me a different kind of "gift" either right inside or outside the front door. Luckily I never stepped in it.

On slow work days I would notice Elvis eyeing me from across the room. I'd wonder he was thinking. Was he trying to figure out what I was doing or was he judging me? A couple of times I questioned my own sanity when I started having conversations with him. I would ask him what his problem was and then be insulted by

his sardonic stare as he tilted his face sideways, trying to understand me.

Most of the time, I was on the phone literally from the start to finish. Unfortunately, one day a crew was working on the phone lines right across the fence. They were up in the lines the entire week. I found out that Elvis hates work crews. He went nuts barking at the men. He would run out the door and bark at them for ten minutes, then run back in and bark from inside for a while, making it hard for me to take calls. I had no choice but to take my laptop and cell phone down to the local coffee shop, which had its own distractions and nuisances.

Becky agreed to let me lock Elvis out on busy days, even though she had never before considered buying a locking doggie door. The problem was getting Elvis out once he realized I was locking him out all day. For a half-hour between barks he banged on the door. This wasn't much better than having him inside.

When Becky found out about his distress, she made me agree to let him in periodically throughout the day so he would "feel loved." The situation was creating tension between us. I could see she was torn between taking care of Elvis and accommodating my work. He was more like a child to her. This was a difficult concept for me, since my family had always kept dogs outside. My parents had used them for security, and we'd fed them table scraps. Becky tried to explain to me that Elvis had helped her through some difficult days, when she was at her lowest point. She said he'd helped her rediscover her innocence, whatever that meant.

The following week, the crew moved to the next pole. Unfortunately, Elvis was still threatened, and so continued the nonstop bark-fits. It came to a head on my monthly regional manager's conference call. My company does not publicize the fact that some employees work from home. It's an unwritten expectation, then, that it appear we are working from an office instead of our living room. I had no choice but to lock Elvis out for those two hours and keep my phone on mute most of the time, except for when I had to provide input, for which I'd run into the bathroom and shut the door. Being a guy prone to sharing many opinions, I was irritated.

Elvis banged and barked throughout. I know they heard the barking a couple of times during the call, but no one said anything.

I seriously considered moving out. The tension over the dog became unbearable. We both had our feelings hurt. I was jealous that she was picking the dog over me, strange as that may sound. I didn't expect her to get rid of Elvis; I just wanted him quiet and potty trained. On the other hand, I remembered how I had lived in peace and quiet on my own. I'd had no one to be accountable to and didn't have to worry about anyone's feelings.

After the construction crew left, Elvis went back to sitting quietly. It didn't last long, though. Usually in the middle of one of my calls, he would start a barking fit for no apparent reason. Why don't you hug him? Becky asked. Driving me nuts was not good hugging motivation, though.

Becky mentioned it might be a good idea for us to walk Elvis in the evenings. She asked in such a way that I couldn't refuse her request without being a jerk. Already I was feeling like an evil stepfather to her son.

“So when friends told me Becky had agreed to a date with me, I was wondering if it was a practical joke.”

So she put his special non-restrictive collar on him and we set out on the inaugural walk. Elvis had a special little prance that drew lots of attention, him ambling about on his little legs.

“Isn't this nice?” she said, as we walked along. Becky had her hair down, the back braided. I liked it like that. I had to admit it was a nice evening, and Elvis was behaving, until he spied another dog and gave futile chase. Becky calmed him with a hug. Elvis to her was more than just a pet, he was her cause. Not everything is about me, I thought.

Breathing heavily, Elvis regarded me with watery innocence. Just being a daschund, said those eyes.

Then I saw it. The coyote, about fifty yards away. Eyes on Elvis. Becky gasped. I picked up a rock and threw it at the creature. I took Elvis in my arms, deep morbid humor compelling me to toss him at the coyote for an easy meal. Needless to say, it was easy to resist such a twisted urge.

This particular day was a turning point. I realized I couldn't go back to my old way of life. I would find a

way to live with Elvis. I have to admit, once I opened up to the idea, it got easier to deal with. Less absurdly impossible. I petted him more, which kept him calmer. When I was working he started hanging around by my feet.

As soon as I got comfortable in the condo, trouble started with Elvis.”

Later that year, after coming out of a movie, I noticed with greater appreciation Becky’s bare ring finger. I thought on it for a week, then went shopping. A female friend helped me pick out a nice ring set.

We weren’t very social people, so we didn’t have many friends, and we both came from small families. My parents were already in their forties when they had me, and by now they were both too frail to travel so they were not able to attend the wedding. We had it filmed for them. Becky’s sister to come in from out of state. The ceremony took place at Becky’s parents’ house, Quite generously, they also paid for the catering and arrangements.

When I saw Becky in her dress for the first time, there was no mistaking who the leading lady was: she was radiant, her beautiful curls framing her face. My only regret was having taken so long to propose. I’d met a couple of her work friends and was surprised to see she worked with some handsome single guys. I’m still not sure what she saw in me.

With Becky unable to have children, and me not being a kids’ person anyway, Elvis filled the role. As time went on, he got slower and blessedly quieter. He

turned into an old man before my eyes. He started turning grey. His fur got a little thinner and stragglier. He moved slower and more indifferent, and barked less and less.

By this time, Becky was working as a medical technician. My company had changed names a couple times, though my job pretty much remained the same. To my surprise, I was named regional manager. This was just before Elvis took his last breath.

The king had left the building. Becky knew this was coming, but had trouble. She had a minor breakdown and for a while was depressed. I encouraged her to move on, maybe get a new dog, but she didn’t want to. Shortly after Elvis passed, I took a personal day and jumped in my car and started driving. Instinctively, I headed to the mountains. I came to a forested area where the road ended. I walked around the forest, taking in the fresh air, noticing the birds. I came across some deer. From my many memories Elvis peered out at me.

The sun was turning auburn when I found a large rock. I sat down and gave myself permission to cry. As I felt the tears stream down my face I was both surprised and embarrassed. Somehow Elvis had become an old friend, but I had not known this before today.



About the Author: Javier Chagolla lives in the San Gabriel Valley. He is a manager at a large insurance company, and is currently working on two novels and a series of short stories.

Title Page by Mike Robinson



Mannequin Madness

By Barry Dale Gilfry

Invented...
a concept in someone's head.
That's how you make
me feel.

Did you know that yesterday
I walked through fresh snow
in the park, knelt
on spindly legs
and fed breadcrumbs to a
wren; shy
normally, but
emboldened.

Hungry from winter's dearth?

Or
did she sense
absolutely
nothing to fear
from me... And
why should she
fear me?

Let
me tell you
how it made my
heart beat
as she prodded
gently at my fixed hand
with her little beak
for another morsel.

Oh!
to be needed
like that again.

If a million children
begged you for magic
would you stand before them
with your book of physics
and dash their dreams upon
the rocks of your common sense?

Who would be served
by such a senseless
act of cruelty?

Pinocchio lived because
Geppetto loved him; does
a story need more detail
than that?

Fine. End it.

Dream over;
mannequin madness
subsides with the
heat of the display window.

What a funny ending
it would be
if you walked by and
saw a department store
dummy with tears
in her eyes.

Yet,
you would believe only this:

Mannequins don't cry.
It's just that the roof
was leaking.



About the Author: Barry Dale Gilfry, www.barrygilfry.com, writes novels, short stories and poetry, and develops his own material for his standup comedy routine. Weekday afternoons, you'll find him tutoring at 826LA, teaching writing skills to children aged 8 to 18 years. His collection Fiction by the Numbers contains stories of exactly 100 words, 200 words, and so on up to 600 words; he has penned a super-short called "The Doctor Who Changed History" that contains a scant 9 words.

Vancouver Fog

By Eric J. Guignard



The Vancouver fog quietly rolls in, and I think of Laura.

I think of her laughing. I think of her dancing in the forest, darting amongst the trees. Her smile was so brilliant and she laughed and skipped, the spirit of a carefree girl living still in her limbs. She teased me to catch her. I did, and we rolled amongst the leaves and flowers, and I promised that I would never leave her.

I think of us lying in bed as I combed her hair. She laughed so wonderfully as I ran the brush through her glassy raven locks. Such a small act, but she adored it. She delighted in my attention, and I delighted to hear her laugh.

I think of the Vancouver fog that quietly rolled in the night Laura was killed. Because of me, she died, never to dance in the forest again. We had argued that evening as I drove down the highway, fog closing in on my speeding car. I was upset. I turned to her and cursed, and her eyes widened. She saw what I did not, and I drove us off the road. The car did not dart amongst the trees as Laura had, but collided instead with the largest one.

I awoke to her silent corpse. I wailed and wept throughout that night. The fog thickened, great pools that we slowly sank into. I cradled Laura's head and pleaded for her to laugh again.

In the morning, as the mirage of the moon faded,

I carried her body in my arms. I carried my love up the road for miles and miles, walking stricken, until our home appeared over a dark rise, materializing from the fog.

I laid her in bed and kissed her lips and whispered to her. I beseeched her for forgiveness, never to leave me. I yearned for her laugh. I combed her hair.

I combed long, loving strokes, brushing gently. I combed to bring out the shine she adored so much, the brilliant gloss.

Her hair began to fall out, but I combed still.

Laura's features melted, a sigh of the wind and the world turned. I combed her hair and the Vancouver fog quietly rolled in.

I now hold her loose hair wrapped in one hand, so that it does not spill away.

Laura's eyes, once sparkling with life, have retreated into hollow black caverns. Her lips, once a rosy bloom, have withered into a hard ivory edge, dainty teeth clenched tight.

I tell her of our love, and she laughs again. I promise I will never leave her, and she laughs. I reminisce of dancing through the forest.

She laughs, a cruel haunting jag, tormenting my ears. I'm so sorry, I say, begging her never to leave me. She laughs, shrieking, howling, echoes stabbing my soul like the shards of burst glass from a car wrecked in the forest.

I lay my head upon her ribs and dream that the fog has lifted.



About the Author: Eric J. Guignard writes dark fiction from his office in southern California. He's a member of the Horror Writer's Association and the Greater Los Angeles Writer's Society. Although his passion is for fiction, he's also a published essayist and editor, having edited this year's acclaimed collection, *Dark Tales of Lost Civilizations*. Look for the next anthology, *After Death...*, to be released in Spring 2013. Visit Eric at www.ericjguignard.com.

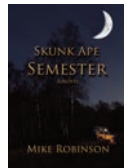
Now Available From GLAWS Authors!



Just One More Day – A Dog Lovers Guide to Quality of Life and Healing from Pet Loss by Geoffrey Bain is an award-winning compilation of warm and loving remembrances dealing with the loss of our canine friends, with counseling from professionals in the field of Veterinary science, psychology and education. It provides assistance to those in need of comfort during a most difficult time. “A wonderful book and a tribute to the amazing human-animal bond.” – Dr. Alice Villalobos DVM, President, Society for Veterinary Medical Ethics.

www.justonemoredaythebook.com

Skunk Ape Semester by Mike Robinson. Prompted by a health scare and an academic shake-up, zoologist and amateur Bigfoot researcher Dr. Jeremy Fishleder goes on sabbatical and plans a road trip to places of strange repute. Three students decide to join him and, as they travel the shadowed roads of the country, scouring for Bigfoot, the Chupacabra, Lake Monsters and more, they uncover secrets hidden in outer as well as inner nature. “On the Road meets The X-Files!” – Marla Miller. Finalist in the 2012 Next Generation Indie Book Awards.



www.skunkapesemester.com



Bob Marley and the Golden Age of Reggae. Kim Gottlieb-Walker's personal, revealing photos behind the scenes with Bob Marley: at his home in Jamaica, backstage, during interviews and in performance as well as other reggae greats of the mid 1970s, with commentary and introductions by Cameron Crowe, Roger Steffens and Jeff Walker. Titan Books (UK)/Random House (USA). Also available through Amazon and Barnes & Noble. "The best book of reggae photographs ever published" – United Reggae.

He can hear a whisper a block away... and can't remember why. ***Shadowed*** by Ken Hughes is a paranormal thriller about a man living in hiding, struggling to control preternatural senses from which no secret is safe, and certain that nobody suspects he exists. Now, he must risk everything to protect the family he left and face enemies more ruthless than his worst fears. *Shadowed* is available from Amazon, Smashwords, www.kenhughesauthor.com, and on order at any bookstore.



Someone wrote Santa that Logan McLain is naughty, and should get underpants stuffed in his stocking. But Santa knows that Logan is usually good, so he sends sneaky Pecky Peeper and her twinkly team to hide in Logan's Christmas tree. Will they solve the bully mystery? ***The Tale of Pecky Peeper*** by Lorraine Holnback Brodek is a rhyming story that teaches children about kindness. It comes with an explanation of Pecky Peeper's game and amusing cutouts, so your family can share some Christmas fun. See more at www.LorraineBrodek.com

Great Los Angeles Writers at the West Hollywood Book Fair In Person! September 30th 2012



Karl Alexander is the author of *Time-Crossed Lovers*, a science fiction thriller love story; *Jaelyn the Ripper*, a science fiction thriller; *Papa and Fidel*, an action-adventure historical thriller; *The Curse of the Vampire*, a Gothic psychological horror; and *Time After Time*, a science fiction thriller, and others.



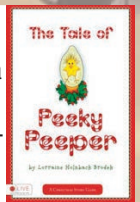
Geoff Bain is the author of *Just One More Day*, which provides expert guidance in the field of Veterinary Science, Psychology, and Education. The inspiration came from an uncertainty as to when was the right time to say good-bye to Abby, an Australian Shepherd who had been diagnosed with Bone cancer.



The Hungry by **Steven W. Booth** and Harry Shannon is the first hit book in the Sheriff Penny Miller Series. Miller is sworn to serve. She has no idea that only a few miles away from her quiet home town the U.S. Government is conducting dangerous experiments to create supersoldiers.



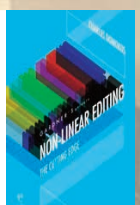
The Tale of Pecky Peeper is a rhyming story by **Lorraine Holback Brodek** that teaches children about kindness. Imagine a magical world ... where tiny and amusing light peepers keep watch for good deeds before Santa's visit. It comes with an explanation of the game and amusing cutouts, so your family can share some holiday fun.



Shanghaied is based on a true story lived by **David Paul Collins** as a merchant seaman. The events he survives, the compelling characters in the crew are woven into reality and authenticity by a skilled storyteller. As a teenager, he set out to sea on his own, working aboard merchant ships.



Charles Domokos has taught post-production classes at U.S.C. School of Cinema & TV and at the U.S.C. Summer Production Workshop. *Non-linear Editing: The Cutting Edge* provides the foundation for the college-level media student to make the leap into the world of film and HD-based professional post-production.



Neo Edmund was a creative development executive at Platinum Studios, who later went freelance and began writing as a gun for hire for many projects for film, television, feature animation, and comics. *Red Riding Hood - Rise Of The Alpha Huntress* is an action-packed novel with twist on the classic Grimm Fairytale.



B. R. Fleming is the author of *Summertime Blues*, which chronicles the coming-of-age of Peter Bennings as he weaves through school and the storm and drang of the teenage years. The novel traces the... emergence of the relatively new genre of music, Rock and Roll, and its impact on Peter's journey of discovery.



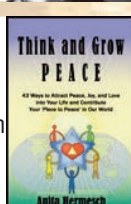
Kim Gottlieb-Walker is the author and photographer of *Bob Marley And The Golden Age of Reggae* a testament in rare, previously unpublished portraits, performance and personal shots of some of the greatest years of Bob Marley's career, and the history of reggae and dub music.



S. P. Hendrick is the author of two acclaimed fantasy series, *The Glastonbury Chronicles* and *Tales Of The Dear-Sidhe* which have five books in publication with release dates for another four this year and next. A third companion series to those two, *The Glastonbury Archives* is in the works.



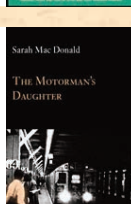
Aneta ThinkOfAll's career spans 25 years in the corporate world where she worked, in the telecom industry as well as information technology, financial services, and biotech. *Think and Grow Peace* focuses on the importance of treating one another respectfully while we each live our lives professionally, personally, and socially.



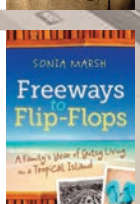
Ken Hughes has worked as a technical writer in Los Angeles at positions from medical research to online gaming to mission proposals for a flight to Mars. He is the author of *Shadowed*, a man who can hear a whisper a block away... and can't remember why.



Sarah Mac Donald is the author of *The Motorman's Daughter*, a collection of poems with many surprising and secret stops, giving us an opportunity to experience the resilience of a determined human being to overcome difficulty and loss. She is a graduate of Oberlin College and Columbia University.



Sonia Marsh is a "Gutsy" woman and a motivational speaker who inspires her audiences to get out of their comfort zone and take a risk. *Freeways to Flip-Flops: A Family's Year of Gutsy Living on a Tropical Island*, is about chucking it all and uprooting her family to reconnect on an island in Belize.



Learn more about these and other fine authors at www.glaws.org/weho/2012/



THE GREATER LOS ANGELES WRITERS SOCIETY

WRITERS MENTORING WRITERS OF ALL DISCIPLINES

Great Los Angeles Writers at the West Hollywood Book Fair

In Person! September 30th 2012



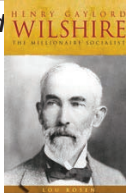
Leslie Ann Moore is the author of *Griffin's Daughter*, her debut novel and the first in her romantic fantasy **Griffin's Daughter** trilogy, was named 2008 IBPA Ben Franklin Award Winner for Best First Fiction. *Griffin's Shadow*, the second book in the series, has been officially endorsed by Publisher's Weekly and The Library Journal.



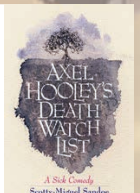
Robin Morris is the author of *Mama*. As the Conover family drives from L.A. to Chicago, increasingly strange things begin to happen. Mama has found the Conovers and is using them as a lesson for her children. There is nothing like the memory of family road trips no matter what your destination holds.



Louis Rosen is the author of *Henry Gaylor Wilshire: The Millionaire Socialist*. The name brings to mind Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles, a street familiar to millions of people, yet few know anything about Henry Gaylor Wilshire, the man who developed a 35-acre barley field into one of the most famous streets in the world.



Scotty-Miguel's first novel, *Axel Hoo-ley's Death Watch List*, is a comedy of (mostly) fiction which was inspired by events set in motion one chemotherapy-infused Christmas when he awoke with a 104° fever, wearing only his underpants, in the branches of a tree, in Beverly Hills.



Maggie Secara has combined an outstanding knowledge of history and theatre into an urban fantasy worthy of Charles de Lint. In *The Dragon Ring*, Reality TV host Ben Harper has a problem: he owes the king of Faerie a favor. So now he has to track down the three parts of a Viking arm-ring, and return them to their place in time.



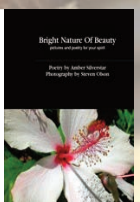
Leaving the Hall Light On by **Madeline Sharples**, is about living after loss: first and foremost how she chose to live and go on with life and take care of herself as a woman, wife, mother, writer. And the steps she took in living with the loss of her son, including diversions to help ease her grief and the milestones she met toward living a full life without him.



GAME WITH VARIATIONS, Love Poems by **Nancy Shiffrin**, reveals the dimensions of a mature woman's erotic life. Ms. Shiffrin plays, dances, grapples with harsh realities and shares her dream life. Her work has appeared in many periodicals, including the Los Angeles Times and The Journal of Anais Nin Studies.



Amber Silverstaf is the writer, poet and designer of the self-help book series, **Destiny Bright Lifestyles** including a coffee table book *Bright Nature Of Beauty*, a poetry book, *Bright Mystic Moments*, and two pocket-size gift books called *Bright Affirmations And Love Affirmations*.



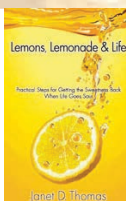
Ann Stalcup is the author of fifteen published children's books and a part-time elementary school teacher. Her published nonfiction work includes *On The Home Front, Growing Up In Wartime England*, an autobiographical account of her childhood experiences during World War II.



Elizabeth Squires is a native of Trinidad & Tobago, and now lives in Los Angeles. Her new fictional novel, *Seasons*, was inspired by the stories of the many she has encountered through her counseling sessions as well as her tendency to always have a shoulder for others to cry on.



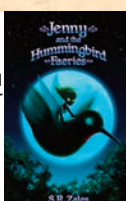
Janet D. Thomas is the author of *Lemons, Lemonade & Life - Practical Steps for Getting the Sweetness Back When Life Goes Sour*. This self-help book will gently guide you through a unique process of discovering how you can turn your non-preferred situations into resources for launching yourself upward.



Bid Whist at Midnight is a romance novel by **Marva Washington** grounded in the 1960s social change. In the turbulent 1960s, Sardis, Grace, Dorcus and Taletha became fast friends attending college at South Carolina State. But the solace they feel in their supportive and fun-loving group is rocked when tragedy strikes.



S.R. Zales is the author of *Jenny and the Hummingbird Faeries*, the story of Jenny Mirland, a 'runt' of a tomboy, who is chosen by the Hummingbird Faeries to defend their ancient home hidden in the hills of Catalina Island. In her amazing quest she is aided by her shaggy pet cat, Ms. Po, who instructs her in the ways of magic.



Learn more about these and other fine authors at www.glaws.org/weho/2012/

Download and Read FREE Issues of Literary Landscapes at www.glaws.org/LL/



THE GREATER LOS ANGELES WRITERS SOCIETY
WRITERS MENTORING WRITERS OF ALL DISCIPLINES