



The INKSLINGER

Sail On



HIGH DESERT BRANCH CWC
Inspiring a Community of Writers

DECEMBER 2022

THE HIGH DESERT BRANCH OF THE CALIFORNIA WRITER'S CLUB WELCOMES YOU TO OUR CHRISTMAS EXTRAVAGANZA!

When the old song proclaims, "It's the most wonderful time of the year," I have to agree. This is a festive time, one which runs deep within our souls. We have many cultural traditions but none quite as profound as the joy of Christmas. It seems to be in our DNA.

Now, you may question this, saying that not all hold the same reverence for the baby in the manger, the one for whom the angels sang. You may recognize other traditions—Hanukkah and Kwanzaa, for instance). But Christmas—with the desire for good cheer, its fanciful stories like Santa, the Grinch, and, my favorite, Scrooge (although I do have a soft spot for Elf) is unique in our calendar. Christmas is a time when it seems like the whole world wants to celebrate. We put lights and trees up, eat special foods, give presents, sing Christmas songs, and have parties in honor this special time and all it represents. Christmas means smiles.

It's in this spirit that we celebrate Christmas at our next club meeting on Saturday, December 10, from 10:00-12:00. We will begin our festivities with the wonderful talent of the Apple Valley High School singers, led by their teacher, Mr. Naim. They will be followed by our own Bill Lopez, who will sing and lead us in some holiday carols. After a break for snacks, a surprise guest will lead us in more festive music. We will end the meeting with a bring one/take one gift exchange. All who bring a gift will receive one. Try to spend no more than ten dollars on your gift—no white elephants. If your gift is gender specific—which it seems fewer things are these days—then make sure you write for a man or for a woman on the outside. Or, if you're Jim Greyson, just write "Vampire."

But the celebration doesn't end at noon. After the meeting, everyone is invited to the W-Spoon Asian Buffet at 14689 Valley Center Drive, Suite C, in Victorville. If you haven't been there before, it's north of Costco, just before LaPaz, next to the World Gym. As our Christmas gift to everyone who attends our meeting—members and guests—a ticket good for \$10 to help pay for their meal will be handed out at the meeting. All you have to do is give your ticket to Dwight Norris at the door of the restaurant in exchange for \$10 in cash. With the club's \$10, each diner's out-of-pocket expense for the meal will be under \$10. And seniors get a 10% discount if they ask.

So, everyone, come ready to give and receive good cheer. Let's celebrate this festive time of year together. Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night. God bless us everyone! 🎄



Photos by Susan Osborne—Hesperia



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dwight Norris

From the logs of Dwight Norris, in all honesty and authenticity, on a recent Christmas day!

I'm sitting in the back of my house watching a ball game. My team is well ahead and time is running short, but I want to see every play. The time is perhaps 7:00 PM, a few days before Christmas. The street is shrouded in fog and darkness envelops the house, save for the several lights inside.

Suddenly, the piercing sound of my doorbell. I am immediately riled. First, because my ball game is interrupted. Second, because it's dark and I don't like strangers coming to my door under cover of night. Third, you know this is an unnecessary intrusion. I will dispatch in a hurry and return to my game.

I walk through the house aggressively to see through the front window an adult standing in my driveway holding a flashlight. My chagrin is overwrought. Though the doorbell is at my front door, I never receive guests that way. I walk through the house and raise the garage entrance. I'm walking towards the adult with the light, ready to offer a piece of my mind.

Before I can approach, two children around eight, a boy and a girl, step toward me from my left. Both children are well-groomed and nicely dressed. The girl carries something in her hands, held out in front. A candle? I don't remember. If so, not lit. The boy carries a cardboard box of generous size filled with large sprigs of mistletoe, each tied with golden ribbon and a modest red bow.

"Sir, would you like to buy some mistletoe so we could buy some Christmas presents?"

My mouth drops. No chocolate. No solar. No magazine subscription. But two respectful youngsters full of good will and Christmas cheer, selling mistletoe so they can give to others!

"You know," I say. "I came to the door grumpy, but how could I stay grumpy with you? Let me go inside and find some money. How much is it?"

"Two dollars."

I shuffle through my cash, setting aside some singles. *Ah, there it is.* Returning to the children, I say, "I couldn't find two dollars, but would you accept this five?"

With a sweet smile, "Yes," they say.

Handing over the best of their mistletoe, "Merry Christmas, kind sir!" the boy says.

"Merry Christmas," I say.

Waving adieu and rejoining Mom, into the night they stride. 🎄



TATTERED

By fumi-tome ohta

It's a beautiful day. The weather is just perfect with the sun so warm.

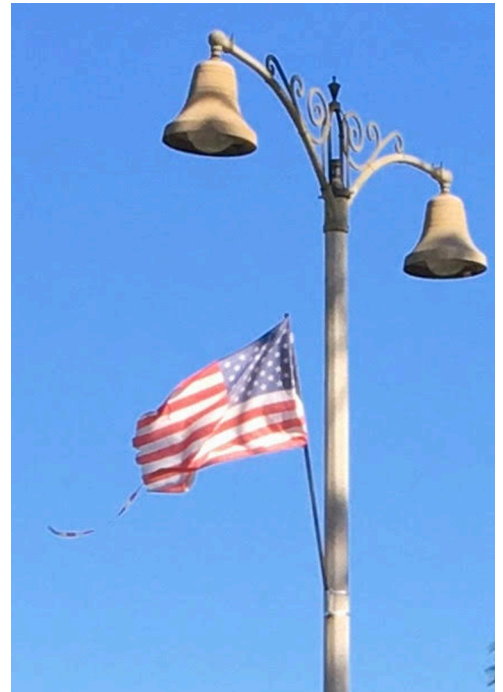
Birds are singing happily in the trees that line the street before me. I search the trees but the birds are too small to be readily seen amongst the foliage. I scan each limb but the birds are very smart. They sense my eyes seeking them out. They elbow each other, "Shh, be quiet or she'll find us," they giggle and snort under their wings.

But wait! Something catches my eyes. There, a worn and tattered American flag waving in the breeze. I can't believe what I'm seeing. I crane my neck and stare hard. The flag is faded, worn, torn badly, with threads and bindings whipping in the wind. The flag is disheveled, yet I sense a proud and stately flag, not angry or agitated but waving and greeting all who pass beneath her as she is placed on a street lamppost for the purpose of a city event, along with other flags decorated throughout the city. Since the flag was in such a condition, she was reported to the authorities. I am certain other citizens had reported the condition of the flag because its condition was quite noticeable and jarring.

Today, I am running errands when I happen to notice an American flag in a similar condition to the flag I saw on Sunday. As I drive along, I see another flag, then another. I count 8 flags! It is true that we have had some severe weather lately, with winds blowing violently, but the days have passed. I'd like to believe that men and equipment have been dispatched. Tradition and protocol must surely be in place with regard to the care and standing operating procedure of our flag.

As I write, I reflect on the month of November. We recently commemorated Veteran's Day, November 11; President John F Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, and tomorrow we will pay homage to the spirit of the first Thanksgiving. Our flag, the American flag, is not just a flag but the spirit and symbol of our citizens and our country.

The United States of America. 🇺🇸



LITERARY REVIEW CONGRATULATIONS

Two of our HDCWC members made it in to the 2022 Fall edition of the CWC Literary Review.

Mike Apodaca was published with his humorous story, "*Werewolf Versus Banana*" and Mary Langer Thompson had her poem, "*Readers Are Still Waiting*" published also.



Congratulations to our talented writers for this achievement. 🇺🇸





FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT

By Mike Apodaca

NO DRAMA

Last month marked my third year in leadership with the HDCWC. Along with being the vice president and sitting in on all the board meetings and working on projects, I took a year to edit and write *The Inkslinger*. Through it all, I've received an education into the workings of our CWC branch.

One of the things I like best about our group is that there is very little, if any, drama. I mean it. You would have to look hard to find any controversy or ill will.

This affords us many benefits. It allows us to focus on projects and ways to promote quality writing among our members. When any organization is weighed down with drama, or members who are always pushing to get their way, then the board, and the club, loses focus. The leaders become so busy putting out fires (and believe me, once they start, they never end), that they have no time or energy for much of anything else.

Not being dominated by any one member or group of members in our club affords us the ability to consider good ideas that come from all different quarters. Whether it's Debbie Rubio and the AIMS project, or Mary Thompson and the special classes our club offers at libraries and elsewhere, or Bob Isbill and the On-Topic Speakers bureau, or Dwight Norris and the Scholastic program (I know I have failed to mention many of the wonderful things going on in our club, as well as the individuals who are making a difference—please forgive me for this). By allowing all voices to be heard, many fantastic ideas bubble up to the top. When you have an oppressive few who dominate, then members feel that since they are not part of the power base, they have no right to make suggestions—even good ones. Or, sometimes good ideas get killed by the powerful members who don't like them.

Our club has always had a healthy support and respect for all. We want each member to reach their potential and for their work to receive the recognition it deserves. Even our most talented writers and editors treat every member as an equal, showing real interest in their work and their goals. As Dwight Norris has pointed out, no one feels they are lessoned by anyone else's success. This feeling of support and camaraderie is only fostered in an organization that does not allow a person or cadre of persons to elevate themselves above the rest.

When I was a pastor, I sometimes found myself in a place where someone disagreed with something I was doing or allowing to happen in the church. There were times where they would become indignant and threaten to leave the church. When this would happen, I would tell them that I would be very sorry to see them go, but that I could not stop them from leaving. But I refused to bend the church around their will—especially in the face of a threat. I am glad to see our branch working under the same spirit. If Dwight, or I, or anyone else threatened to leave because we didn't get our way, the board would make sure we knew where the door was. Rightfully so.

One last thing. Just because we respect each other doesn't mean we always agree or that we have the same opinions about everything. Not at all. There are members of the club that I completely disagree with on certain issues, especially politics and/or religion. But these differences have not separated us (as they have too many in our society). If anything, they have made our discussions more fruitful, more interesting. I've always sought to be with people I didn't necessarily agree with. How else could I know that my views would hold up to scrutiny? How else can I grow to understand others—an essential requirement for being a good writer?

So, thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I appreciate all of you and the way you have embraced me, whether you agree with me about everything or not. It is this spirit of acceptance and good will that makes our branch the beautiful place that it is. 🍷



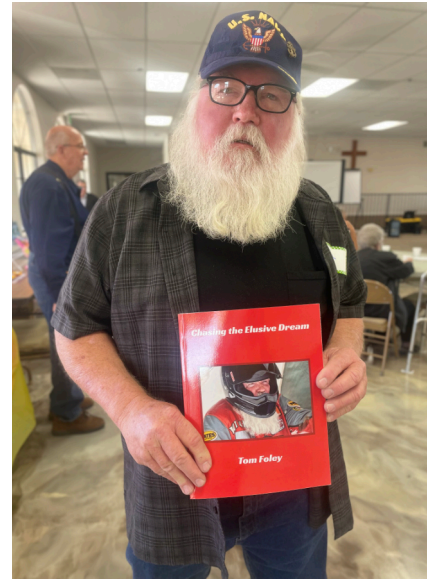
CHASING THE ELUSIVE DREAM

By Bob Isbill

It's not something that happens every day. That very first time you complete writing a book and go through the process of editing, knowing you have done your very best, and then to hold it in your hand. That's an elusive dream. But not an impossible feat.

Tom Foley is the most recent of our members to do this, and he proudly held up a copy of the first book of its kind. One by him. An empathizing audience celebrated with him and applauded his efforts.

Our November meeting was a time for our members to recite things they have written and, time allowing, talk about their accomplishments this year. Readers scheduled were Robert Young, Anita Holmes, Aileen Rochester, Ann Miner, Debbie Rubio, Peg Ross Pawlak, Lorelie Kay, Linda Cooper, Kimberly Wonders, Bob Isbill, Mike Apodaca, Judith Pfeffer, Mary Langer Thompson, June Langer, Jenny Margotta, Diana Del Toro, Jenna De Santis, and Dwight Norris. Most, but not all, read excerpts they had written for the soon-to-be-published *Women of the Bible* book of poems coordinated by Mary Langer Thompson.



A festive fall table of refreshments was hosted and decorated by Sally Ortiz and Rita Wells. Forty-five people were in attendance, including five first-time visitors. 🍷



WRITERS ARE READERS

BOOK REVIEWS by Mary Langer Thompson

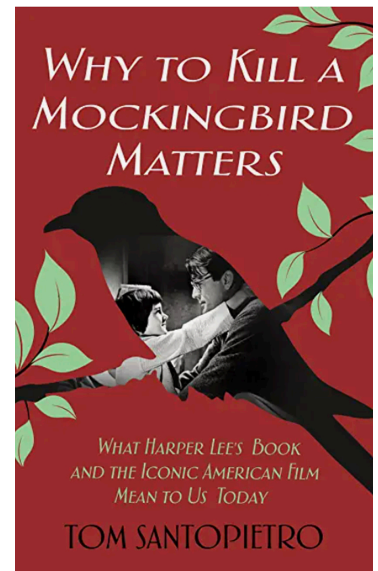


WHY *To Kill a Mockingbird* MATTERS

Tom Santopietro traces the writing of the iconic Pulitzer Prize winning *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the 1962 film and the controversial publication of *Go Set a Watchman* which several High Desert California Writers Club members celebrated at Barnes and Noble with readings of *TKAM* in 2015. Santopietro takes us back to Monroeville, Alabama, the town where Nelle Harper Lee was born on April 28, 1926. Nelle was not a rule follower, had tomboy instincts, and was a child of the Depression. Like Scout, she was often left to her own devices. Published in 1960, the semi-autobiographical “new-style Southern novel” was “traditional on the outside, subversive at its core” with its “interracial sex, rape, murder, and economic inequality.”

Lee held up a mirror to the past and encouraged the discussion about race in the South. Across America, the book was a hit. There was some controversy as the left claimed it was patronizing to Blacks and the right thought it portrayed a false portrait of the South. Even though Nelle won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, it was quickly earning a place on the banned book list in the U.S. ,along with *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Many accepted the novel because it was set in the 1930s, with those in the 1960s rationalizing that things are better now. But intentional or not, *TKAM* became a symbol of the civil rights movement. People began comparing Scout to Huck Finn. “Mockingbird, it turns out, remains a potent reminder that we are all a mass of contractions.” Adolescents loved the book because “understand ourselves and we can begin to understand others.” The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a fan of *TKAM*. In 2007, after a stroke, Lee received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President George W. Bush. Lee shifted the national conversation about race.

Find out how Gregory Peck came to play Atticus Finch and a Hollywood “Dream Team” was assembled. The Monroeville courthouse was photographed and reproduced for the studio, but the rest of Harper’s Lee childhood world was physically gone. Chavez Ravine near Los Angeles, however, had abandoned clapboard houses soon to be demolished, so were acquired for \$5,000. All of Maycomb (Monroeville) was built on fifteen acres of Universal Studios for the small sum of \$225,000. It was filmed in black and white to evoke the feel of a memory piece. The premier costumes associated with the film? Scout’s overalls and Atticus’s white suit. Gregory Peck himself dropped into Nelle’s real hometown and caused a great deal of excitement. Harper Lee personally escorted him to the courthouse. Peck said, “I put everything I had into it—all my feelings and everything I’d learned in 46 years of living, about family life and fathers and children. And my feelings about racial justice and inequality and opportunity.” He even invited nine-year-old Mary Badham, who played Scout to spend weekends playing with his own children. In adulthood, Mary said, “Always that warmth, that smile, that deep marvelous laugh. It makes you feel so secure . . . He’s just Atticus.” He became the very popular winner of Best Actor with *TKAM*.



Did you know that even before the film opened in L.A. on Christmas Day of 1962 (60 years ago!), there was a specially arranged screening for members of Congress and the nine justices of the United States Supreme Court? Harper Lee herself said, “I think it’s one of the best translations of a book to film ever made.” She was thrilled with Hollywood.

Why, after fifty-five years of silence, did Harper Lee publish her second novel, *Go Set a Watchman*, with its darker picture of Maycomb? Atticus is seventy-two and Scout returns to Maycomb as an adult and finds the home she thought she had no longer exists. Atticus actually espouses racist views. Both Harper Lee and Atticus break our hearts with this second book.

Again, why does the original *TKAM* matter? The novel depicts a sense of community missing today. Atticus was a man who did the right thing no matter how hard. We learn that although our world is often unjust and even cruel, there are still moments of great beauty. Atticus is exactly as readers want him to be. *TKAM* continues a national dialogue, and it all still matters. 🏠





BELIEVE IN THE MAGIC

“Momma? When’s Santa comin? Three-year-old Lissy started pestering her mother about Christmas well before Thanksgiving. “I want a dolly that closes her eyes . . . an’ a pony . . . an’ a set of jacks . . . an’ . . .” The list went on and on, incrementally longer with each passing day.

At long last, Christmas Eve arrived. The tree had been decorated and the pile of wrapped presents seemed to have grown every time Lissy looked at them. Like most kids, she strongly objected to going to bed that night and, again like most kids, she woke early on Christmas day, followed by her older brother and sister. They all ran into their parents’ bedroom, shouting, “Get up!

H u r r y , hurry!” Not waiting for an answer, the three children ran downstairs and into the living room. There they waited impatiently, still in their PJs, so excited they could hardly set still.

“One present at a time,” Lissy’s mother admonished.

This was greeted with unanimous protests of “Aw, Mom.”

Smiling at Lissy’s older brother, her father surprised everyone by saying, “Randy, you’re old enough this year. How about you hand out all the presents?”

“You know how we do it, Randy,” Lissy’s mom reminded him. “We take turns—one person at a time so we can all watch and enjoy what we receive.”

Of course the children had already been eyeing all the unwrapped gifts Santa had left for them. This year Lissy was old enough to be puzzled by them. She knew the story—Santa comes in a sleigh, lands on the roof, slides down the chimney, and leaves the presents. Only they didn’t have a chimney. Well, they did, but it led straight to the coal furnace, not a fireplace. If Santa had come—and obviously, he had, because the gifts were under the tree—then how come he didn’t get all burned up?

Stopping in the middle of unwrapping one of her gifts, Lissy asked her dad about this puzzle. He just smiled and said, “It’s magic. When there’s no chimney for Santa to slide down, why he just lays his finger aside of his nose, gives a nod and . . . a chimney magically appears. Once he’s put all the presents under the tree, well, up the chimney he goes again. Then he touches his nose, gives a nod, and that ol’ chimney just disappears like it never was.”

Lissy heard her brother snickering behind her, but she paid no attention. Her dad’s explanation made a lot of sense to her, so she happily went back to the joy of finding out just what Santa and everyone else had picked for her from her long list.

Years passed. She never did get her pony, and gifts of dolls and roller skates and board games gave way to radios and records and new clothes. Then came years when they all took a special vacation rather than stay home. And finally, there were years of “Can’t come, Mom, Sandy and me are going skiing,” or “Sorry, Dad, David’s asked me to go to his folks for Christmas.”

More years sped by, and her parents passed away, her brother and sister both married and moved to the East Coast, and eventually, the gift giving stopped altogether.

“It’s just too hard to know what to get everyone,” Lissy’s sister complained. “And once I do think of something, it costs more to mail it than I spent on the gift.”

“Here’s a check. Just buy yourself something,” Randy offered.

More years passed, and suddenly, Lissy was the only one left in her family. She had been the youngest, but now she was the only one remaining of her generation. She’d never married or had children, and all her nieces and nephews had long since lost touch with her. Lissy had tried, year after year, to keep Christmas alive. She always put up a tree, decorated the house, put out lights, and made pan after pan of mouth-watering goodies. But inevitably, the year came when all of it was just too much for her. She didn’t decorate, she didn’t bake any treats, and she didn’t even bother with a tree. After all, there were no gifts to put under it, so why put one up that would just remind her that the floor beneath it would be empty on Christmas morning.

On Christmas Eve, Lissy heated up a can of soup, watched TV for a few hours, and crawled into bed early. As she was drifting off to sleep, she thought about all the wonderful times she’d had with her family when she was little. Her last coherent thought was, *Too bad the magic had to end. I wish it could have been real.*

Lissy woke up early on Christmas morning. As she lay in bed, she realized she was cold. That was strange, because she was never cold. She lived in San Diego, where the average temperature in December was in the low 60’s. It wasn’t at all unusual for the temperature to reach 80 on Christmas Day. She often joked that just about the only way to tell summer from winter in San Diego was by noticing that different flowers were in bloom.

Climbing out of bed, Lissy slipped into a robe and pulled aside the curtains. Snow—a good six inches! Impossible! She was so startled that she started laughing. What in the world was going on?

(Continued on page 7)



(Continued from page 6)

MAGIC

Lissy hurried headed for the kitchen to start the coffee and stopped in her tracks. There, right in front of her picture window in the living room, stood a huge Christmas tree. The angel ornament decorating the top brushed the ceiling, and the branches were covered with lights and tinsel and so many ornaments that many of the branches bent under their weight.

Looking more closely, she caught her breath. There, on that branch, that was the glass angel her mother had given her in 1953. And there, on that other branch, was a shiny silver skate key—she'd lost a key just like it when she was eleven, only hers had been all rusted and bent. Looking more closely, Lissy realized all of the ornaments were familiar. How could that be? Most had been thrown away when the family home had been sold after her parents died. The few she'd kept for herself she'd either broken or lost through the years. But here they all were, shining brightly in all their glory.

And even more incredible, under the tree were dozens of gifts. Most were wrapped in a colorful assortment of paper and ribbons, but there were several unwrapped ones, too. And taped to the largest of the unwrapped gifts was a piece of wide-lined, beige-colored paper, just like Lissy had used when learning to print and write longhand in grade school.

Bending near, she read the following:

Merry Christmas, Lissy. I couldn't find your chimney, so I just laid my finger aside of my nose, gave a nod, and a magical chimney appeared.

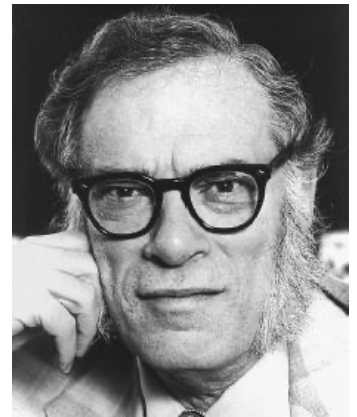
I took the liberty of reviewing all the lists you'd sent me over the years, and I picked the best of the items I wasn't able to give you before. I hope you like them.

Christmas is magic, don't ever forget. If you believe, I will come.

Love, Santa 🧑🏻‍🎅



*"Writing, to me, is simply
thinking through my
fingers."*



Issac Asimov





Midori was a tall mulberry tree. Midori means green in Japanese, which is a perfect name for her because she is a happy, bright green tree with a soft reddish-brown trunk. One morning, a pigeon perched on one of her branches. The pigeon's name was Richard. Richard was feeling like an out-of-place pigeon. What made him feel out of place was the flare of white feathers spreading out from his feet. His pigeon friends did not have feathers on their feet so when Richard moved, he made swooshing sounds. All the pigeons stopped what they were doing and stared at Richard's feet and made fun of him. Swooshing sounds and white feathers started to make Richard unhappy, but being unhappy was not Richard.

"What's the matter?" asked Midori.

"My friends don't like me making swooshing sounds when I walk," he answered.

"Does it bother you to make swooshing sounds?"

"I don't even notice it, but when the other pigeons notice then I notice."

"And, the white feathers, do they bother you?" asked Midori.

"I love my white feathers!" shot Richard.

Just then, a pigeon flew onto a neighboring branch. Richard noticed that she had tail feathers that fanned up and out like a peacock.

"My, what beautiful tail feathers you have," complimented Midori.

"Thank you, I'm a fantail pigeon." she answered.

The pigeon noticed Richard staring. "You don't like my fantail?" she asked.

"Actually, I think they're the most beautiful tail feathers I've ever seen," he said.

"My friends think it's the ugliest of ugly but I don't care what they say. I love my fantail!"

"What's your name?" asked Richard.

"My name is Sensu."

"Sensu? What does Sensu mean?" asked Richard.

"In Japan, a folding fan used in Japanese dance is called a sensu. Does my beautiful fantail look like an open Japanese fan," preened Sensu proudly.

Just then, a flock of pigeons flew into Midori's tree. The pigeons were of a mottled color or a variation of whites, browns, two-toned and dark-toned colors. The new arrivals found Midori's tree bright, refreshing and cheerful. They noticed too, that doves and hummingbirds lived in her tree. As they complimented her, she realized that this was a way to explain to Richard that being different is not about making fun of people but a way to communicate and to learn about each other because to know of each other's uniqueness they become better friends.

As Richard was taking in a visual note of Midori's community, he felt a tapping to his wing.

"Excused me, what's your name?" asked a black Phoebe bird.

Richard looked around, then down where he saw a smiling little bird looking up at him.

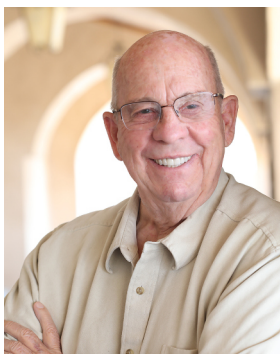
Taken aback but delighted at the intrusion, "My name is Richard," he answered.

"My name is Phelene...can we be friends?" 🐦



THE VALUE OF VOLUNTEERISM

By Bob Isbill, CWC Vice President /Director of Publicity and Public Relations



Experts generally agree that the best way to succeed is to surround yourself with great people.

How best can we do that?

You may think you know someone at the office (whatever “office” may mean in this context) or in your branch of the California Writers Club. Whether you are considering forming a business partnership, developing a professional project, or just contemplating the thought of hanging out together more often, one way to find out more about people is to volunteer with them. Immersing yourself in a temporary project can reveal flaws as well as talents you otherwise would never encounter in a relationship. The simple act of working together to complete a goal can be beneficial in many ways. We bond (or not) in a more meaningful way with the mutual joy of accomplishment. When I have related with others to achieve something together, I have been astounded several times to discover they knew something or knew how to do something that I otherwise would never have been aware. Discovering the abilities of others is just one byproduct of volunteering. Another obvious reason to “show up” is for our own personal development. It is a safe way to explore your own abilities. Giving time to do something for the general good of a project can be fulfilling in many ways.

I remember a dozen years ago when our High Desert CWC had enormous growth. We went from 14 to 100 members in 26 months. The reasons? Determination not to fail but to excel was one reason. Another was not caring about who got the credit. Another key factor was establishing to visitors that we were looking for members, not dues payers. We expected them to contribute to our growth and achievement. It was something of a rite of passage. Newbies were expected to join in our success story by sharing their talents and abilities. The outcome was outstanding relationship building. Even today, years later, the close bonding that took place through massive volunteering is present now. Friendships formed are solid and growing stronger. And our branch is still thriving.

One of the things I love about the CWC is the concept of Jack London Awards. They are something of a barometer of how well a branch is doing. For example, if there is a year where no Jack London is given, it is a red flag that either nobody is doing anything or that people are doing a lot without recognition. The Jack London is awarded only once per lifetime, but have you noticed that JL Award winners just keep doing exceptional things over and over again? I recently contacted one of our former members who was a Jack London Award winner. I was not surprised to learn that years later, while working for an internationally famous company, she was awarded that organization’s equivalent to our Jack London Award. She knows the value of volunteering and it has paid off all her life.

I find myself writing this on the anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, who is famous for his challenge, “Ask not what your country can do for you but ask what you can do for your country.”

Find a need in your branch and fill it.

You will discover the value of volunteerism. 🚩



LONGING FOR THE OLDEN DAYS & SOMETIME IN 1964

By Ann Miner

On my way home from San Diego today, when I stopped at Starbucks in Temecula to get a cuppa to keep me awake, I realized that I am too old for this world. I normally order a simple cup of coffee, small. The menu these days says "Cafe Americano," which means a cup of coffee, plain. But this menu only said "Grande," so I figured that's all I could get—a bigger cup. No problem.

I ordered a Cafe Americano, iced, with cream, Grande. My usual simple order. "Do you want half and half?" Uh, okay. The bill showed that they charged 80 cents for the half-and-half. I

questioned this and was given the option of about 5 different kinds of milk instead so I just took the half-and-half. Then I was asked if I

wanted water in it. "Beg your pardon. Water? Why?" Because some

people want it that way, otherwise it's just espresso." I said no. Then the kid says, "We're out of grande cups," so he fills one smaller cup and puts a few ounces of the elixir in another one to make it a Grande. I leave there shaking my head. Now I have two cups to juggle in the car.

And, although the coffee is very white, it definitely has the strength of espresso.



I wanna go back to the olden days! 🚢

SOMETIME IN 1964 - A MEMORY

Everyone was seated when we arrived a few minutes late. The church fellowship hall was packed. We hung up our coats by the door and served ourselves from the nearby food table. The occasion must have been special, because the mayor of San Diego was the guest of honor.

All chairs were full, and the overflow seating was placed on the stage. We made our way there, took our chairs, and began to eat. At that moment, the pastor gave the blessing, greeted everyone, and said he expected the people on the stage to perform an act later on. Then he began to dismiss the first row of tables to go serve their plates, but not until the mayor had gone first!

That's when we realized that the large serving dishes we had dug into had not been touched, and no one else had been served when we helped ourselves.

The embarrassment cannot be described. I suggested that we on the stage had already performed our act, albeit one not in the script. 🚢

HDCWC DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

DECEMBER 9 MARILYN RAMIREZ (KING)

DECEMBER 18 LORELEI KAY

DECEMBER 19 AVALYNN MORSE

DECEMBER 25 PATRICK NEE



TOWNS END BOOK SALES



Having a fun time signing their books at the club's venue at Towns End was Freddi Gold whose cross-genre books combine a thriller aspect with unfolding mystery, sci-fi, and romantic suspense. On the right, Dawn Keiser offered her new book, *Nameless*. Her stories fall into fantasy and a mix of adventure sprinkled with dark fairytale vibes and characters in search of redemption. 🚢

CHRISTMAS GLOW

By Lorelei Kay

Dad's frosty breath hangs
in the air, his fingers gripping
the frigid steering wheel of our
old black Plymouth.

The heater blasts, working hard
to add warmth as my small hands
snuggle deep into pockets
of my mom-made Santa suit.

Strains of "Winter Wonderland,"
"Away in a Manger," and
"O Holy Night," crackle through
the car's radio. It's after midnight

as the car finally shivers to a stop.
Hefting my bag of gifts, Dad I creep
through new-fallen snow, up icy steps,
and knock crisply on a friend's

front door. As it opens wide, their
faces
show little surprise at my bulging
bag or my jolly "Ho Ho Ho!"



Had Christmas elves
forewarned them? Surely Dad
wouldn't have spilled the secret
of our visit—our family's annual
tradition—but they are up very late.

As they silently watch, I slide
our gaily-wrapped presents beneath
their lighted tree. Then like
Dancer and Prancer, we're off!

Though half a century has since
flown by, that memory still
swirls sweetly through my mind—
the carols serenading us

from the car's radio, me shivering
next to Dad, cold car, cold night,
and the heart-felt glow of Christmas
warming us deep inside. 🚢





THE MOST FAMOUS AUTHORS OF ALL TIME

By Michael Raff

CHARLES DICKENS

Charles John Huffam Dickens was born in 1812, in Portsmouth, England, the second of eight children. He grew into a passionate reader, and *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Arabian Nights* proved inspirational. He possessed an excellent memory, which helped in his writing. He had to leave school at twelve to pay off debts when his father was sent to debtors' prison. He earned a whopping six shillings a week pasting labels on pots. The deplorable working conditions made a lasting impression on him, which he used in his writings. After three years working in the factory, he attended the Wellington House Academy before starting his career as a writer. He became a gifted mimic, dabbled in acting, and attended theaters frequently.

In 1833, Dickens published a story in London's *Monthly Magazine*, worked as a political journalist, and traveled through England covering elections. His first collection of pieces *Sketches by Boz*, was published in 1836, and he also contributed to and edited journals. His *Pickwick Papers* was published in installments. When it was novelized, John Sutherland called it, "the most important single novel of the Victorian era." When Dickens finished *Pickwick Papers* in 1836, he began working on instalments of *Oliver Twist*, completing about 90 pages a month.

During 1836, Dickens married Catherine Thomson Hogarth, the daughter of the editor of the *Evening Chronicle*. The first of their ten children was born a year later.

Oliver Twist proved a huge success. Dickens integrated his fictional writings with political and social statements and became an advocate for the poor. Dickens quite possibly became the most successful lecturer of his time. He traveled to America and discovered that his works were being pirated. He started an unsuccessful petition to have Congress take action, but the American press undermined him, stating he should be grateful for his success and not complain about his work being pirated.

After returning to England, Dickens began working on a series of Christmas stories, including *A Christmas Carol*, in 1843. The inspiration came from observing the working conditions in Manchester, striking, "a sledge hammer blow," for the poor. He became so engrossed in his book that he "wept and laughed, and wept again."

During this period, Dickens traveled to Italy and Switzerland and began working on *Dombey and Son*, followed by *David Copperfield*, his personal favorite and the most autobiographical of his writings. Both books are more serious in tone than his previous efforts.

After writing *Little Dorrit* in 1856, he indulged in acting. He hired actress Ellen Ternan for one of his plays, and fell in love with her. He separated from Catherine in 1858 but never divorced, as such dealings were considered extremely scandalous in Victorian England, especially for a celebrity. He would remain in a relationship with Ellen for the remainder of his life.



As time progressed, Dickens scheduled numerous reading tours, one lasting nearly a year with 129 readings in 49 towns.

A short time later, he penned two of his most famous works, *A Tale of Two Cities*, (1859) and *Great Expectations*, (1861). *A Tale of Two Cities* has been named one of the best-selling novels of all time. *Great Expectations'* themes include poverty, wealth, love, rejection, and the triumph of good over evil.

Dickens was involved in a railroad derailment but wasn't hurt. He used the incident when he penned his short story, "The Signal Man," and remained terrified of trains for the rest of his life. His health deteriorated as he engaged in more grueling reading tours. He had a stroke in 1869, suffered another in 1870, and died in June of that year. Dickens was buried in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey. He was 58. 🚩

FUN FACTS ABOUT DICKENS

The term "Dickensian" refers to something that's similar to Dickens' writing, such as themes featuring working and social conditions.



In his eulogy, Dean Stanley said, "even in dealing with the darkest scenes and the most degraded characters, (Dickens') genius could still be clean, and mirth could be innocent."

Dickens became interested in the paranormal and was one of the first members of "The Ghost Club."

A Tale of Two Cities has perhaps the most famous opening sentence: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

My short story, "Scare Tactics," was inspired by *A Christmas Carol*.

Until next month, keep reading, writing, and for some holiday cheer, give *A Christmas Carol* a try.



After an interruption by Covid, you're invited to the

Fifth Annual Christmas Salon

Tuesday, December 13, 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

17959 Juniper St., Hesperia

Hosted by Lorelei Kay

To reserve a spot, e-mail LoreleiKay7@gmail.com

**Everyone please bring
a short piece of writing of your choice to share.
Feel free to bring a favorite Christmas goodie.**

**"A salon is a gathering of people under the roof of an inspiring host,
held partly to amuse one another and partly to refine the taste and increase
the knowledge of the participants through conversation."**

**Limited to 12 people - be sure to sign up soon!
Must be a Writers Club member to attend**

HO HO HO - Come and share the fun!



HIGH DESERT BRANCH OF THE
CALIFORNIA WRITERS CLUB
BOARD OF DIRECTORS



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QUOTE OF THE MONTH

By Michael Raff

“When I get a little money I buy books; and if any is left, I buy food and clothes.”

- Desiderius Erasmus, philosopher, humanist, and theologian.

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