



Founded in 1909

The INKSLINGER

Sail On



Founded in 1990

High Desert Branch CWC
INSPIRING A COMMUNITY OF WRITERS
March 2024

In Praise of Mentors

By Mike Apodaca



The world is changing. New technologies, attitudes, and behaviors are supplanting the American culture that many of us grew up with. As a result, important things are being lost. I feel it is the time that those of us with some life experience encourage the architects of this new world to not throw out things that reinforce the fabric of our society and help to make us strong—indispensable things.

One of the ways we can keep this connection between novices and experts is mentorship. We can see from ancient times that people with expertise and wisdom have taken it upon themselves to train those who were just beginning their life journey. Think of the model of discipleship demonstrated by Jesus, the Academy of Athens, and Jewish synagogues. It seems that there have always been masters who took promising apprentices and trained them. Whereas this may go against the grain of our youth-oriented culture, where the elderly are considered out of touch, we seniors need to stand up and share the things it has taken us a lifetime to learn.

Mentors have also been a staple in literature. Think of the archetype of the sage in the *Hero's Journey*. Consider Gandalf, Yoda, Dumbledore, Merlin, and many more. The message: Heroes are made, not born. They need to be trained.

For the last ten years, I've been mentoring a young man (not that young anymore). I've seen him through his high and low points. I've been there for him to help him navigate the crazy maze of young manhood. I've shared with him my thoughts, experiences, and problems. I've tried to be an example.

Our branch of the HDCWC is blessed with a large group of expert writers who have spent years developing their craft. I am often amazed when I hear a member explain his/her long experience with writing and publishing. If you haven't heard

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Mary Ruth Hughes's tale of putting together her book tour through Oklahoma, you have missed out. And she has not stopped. Mary is writing as much now as she ever has.

I appreciate all our experienced writers who have taken it upon themselves to shepherd newer writers. Some do it in critique groups, some in salons and in our informal social meetings (like Anita with our Wednesday morning group). Some do it person-to-person, always being available to answer a question or give encouragement. Some help by sharing their expertise with articles in *The Inkslinger*. I am thankful for all these efforts. They make us stronger.

When you are in our next meeting and you meet a new writer, talk with them. Find out what they're doing and see if they need any guidance. You may discover someone you can help to navigate this amazing, and often confusing, world of writing. Who knows? You may be their Gandalf.



2024 Writers Conference of Los Angeles

By J.P. Garner



The [2024 Writing Conference of Los Angeles](https://writingconferenceoflosangeles.com/) is coming up fast on Saturday, May 4, 2024, at the Embassy Suites Los Angeles Airport North. Join us! The event is a one-day writer's conference with classes as well as 14 literary agents and editors in attendance meeting writers one-on-one:

<https://writingconferenceoflosangeles.com/>

This L. A.-area one-day-writers conference (9:30 am - 5:00 pm, May 4, 2024) is a chance to enjoy instructional classes and also hear advice directly from our [14 attending literary agents & editors](#). The WCLA was an in-person event prior to COVID and the organizers are pleased to once again bring it live to attendees. If you're instead interested in an **online** conference, we coordinate one of those each month. Each has 30-40 attending agents, and you can see the full event list here: <http://www.writingdayworkshops.com/event-locations--dates.html> (The next online event is the [Colorado Writing Workshop](#) on March 8-9, 2024.)

A Word From Our Vice President

Joan Rudder-Ward



WANTED: Adults to Engage in Reflective Journaling on Instagram!

Are you passionate about fostering positive change and empowering young minds? Join me in a mission to combat unrealistic beauty standards that plague today's society and impact the mental well-being of our youth.

I'm working with classes of high school students on a project titled Let's Reframe Beauty. A part of the project involves the students delving into the realm of self-discovery and self-love through journaling. I've set up a dedicated Instagram page where students can access daily

prompts designed to spark introspection and personal growth.

How it works:

Students visit the Instagram page for the daily prompts.

Students then answer the prompts by writing in their writing journal or notebook.

They do not answer on the Instagram post.

They don't even have to follow the page. They just visit it to get the daily prompt.

What I'm looking for are adults who are willing to share their own thoughts on the journal prompts. Your participation serves as mentorship for these young minds, offering them valuable perspectives and guidance. It's an opportunity to contribute to a meaningful dialogue and support the next generation in their journey towards self-acceptance and resilience.

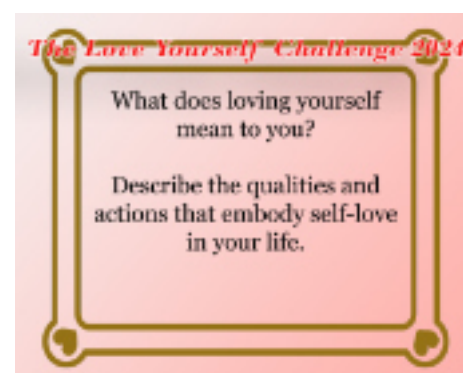
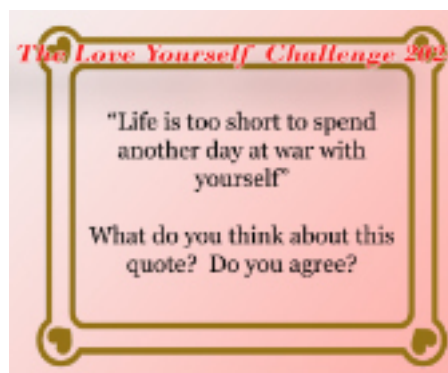
To participate you do have to have an Instagram account. It's relatively easy to set up your own account, but I can help you if you need assistance.

If you're already on Instagram, please follow [@journaltomovemountains](https://www.instagram.com/journaltomovemountains).

Feel free to contact me with your questions and comments!

This initiative is just the beginning of what we can envision for youth empowerment through writing.

Together, we can move mountains through the power of words.



The Big Test

By J. P. Garner



I've been thinking a lot about what kind of writer I am. Am I a one-book wonder or a many-book author? I'm bent at the knees by this soul-searching inquiry because of Jenny Margotta. She told me the truth. Damn her! Just kidding. I actually asked for it and being the good friend she is, she obliged. After finishing Book One of a two-book romance, I entrusted it to her keen eye and, after some effort, she informed me, "I like the new stuff but the old stuff I've seen too many times."

The old stuff? I had to think about what that comprised. It then came to me that the "old stuff" is the story I started writing when I first joined the club ten years ago and attempted to share with the world in four memoirs whose only difference was their titles. For example, I brazenly thought that, because I had enjoyed the movie *The Secret Life of Bees*, I should change my book's title from *That Comeback Season*, to *The Secret of Sunlight*. Really? *The Secret of Sunlight*? What a BIG DUH moment that was!

But Jenny's gift of the truth was the best I've ever received as a writer. It made me aware of something that, because of my focus, I think my friends were hesitant to tell me: I was like Ahab in the book *Moby Dick*, and my story was my white whale. I need to kill if I was to ever write something else.

The thing is, I write a lot. Poems, short stories, newspaper articles, and political commentary on a Facebook page called Barstow Citizens. I'm always writing when I'm not sleeping, eating or vegging. I enjoy it all, but in knowing the truth, I was able to change my story with fiction. I was able to make the old stuff good stuff. Or, so I hope.

To determine if I have, I decided to not let Jenny or any of my friends—or family—read the rewrite. I can no longer impose upon their kindness or expect them to grant me the forgiveness of a priest. So, taking a lesson from Richard Spencer, I submitted my book to a contest. The Georgia Romance Writers contest. I will compete with writers in my genre and my work will be judged by people who don't know me.

The perfect test. The BIG TEST.

When I clicked on the "SEND" button that transmitted my prologue, three scenes, and a synopsis to the administrator, two powerful emotions instantly erupted within me: terror and excitement. The one was in my head, the other in my heart. I vacillated between the two. I wanted my book evaluated . . . and I didn't. The one might set me free while the other would restore me to where I have been all these years: at the beginning.



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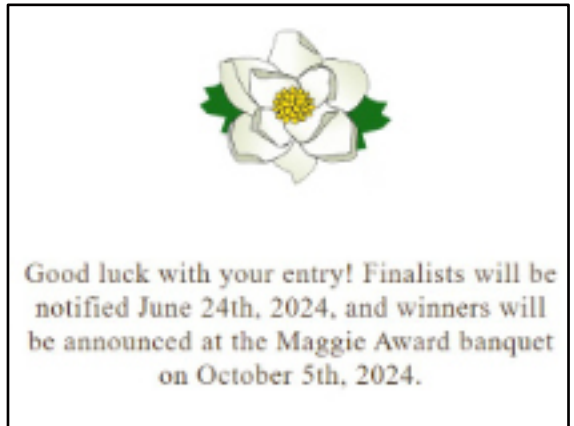
But, as if that imagining were not enough, Fate would add to my anxiety when the administrator noticed an error in my submission. She suggested I correct it, which Jenny kindly and quickly did. I then went to the “Submission” page of their website to switch out the documents and was not granted access. This resulted in several emails between me and the chairperson over two days in which my attempts to make the switch failed. When I didn’t hear back from her on President’s Day, I was absolutely certain I had become a troublesome applicant.

On Tuesday, while at Richard’s preparing for the Salon, I shared my story with him. He laughed, which wasn’t the reaction I was expecting. He said that I had no idea what she might be going through. So, be patient, he suggested. When I thought about it, I had no other choice.

And, then, ten minutes after he advised me to chill, the same Fate who had caused the Earth to shift and me to lose my grip on reason gifted me with a solution. I received an email from the Chairperson. She switched out the documents, deleted the error message, and sent me a notice of acceptance.

I stared at it for a few seconds. The terror I had felt subsided, and so did the excitement. It was as if both had coalesced into a single thought. I realized that this was a BIG step. Not just the BIG TEST, but I had changed lanes. From the slow lane on the right to that on the far left. I had dislodged myself from the comfortable place where not knowing sometimes is more easily accepted than daring to know—than taking a chance.

Writing a book is one thing. But the BIG TEST is something else entirely. I have no idea what will come of it. But having done it, I now know that no dream is achieved without risk. It’s scary, for sure, but it’s the next step and that alone makes it good. I encourage everyone in our club to take that step.



The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.

-F. Scott Fitzgerald



From an Editors Desk

By Jenny Mangotta



Women's History Month and Women Who Made History

Women's History Month was officially established in the United States in 1987. In honor of all women, I thought it would be interesting to track the progress of women's rights and those women who were the first to serve in various government positions or became a notable "first" in education.

Most of us know that Kamala Harris made history when she was sworn in as the 49th US vice president on January 2021. Not only is she the first woman to hold this office, she is also the first Black American and the first Asian American to do so. However, her right to hold such an office did not come easily or quickly. The first recorded female ruler in the world is believed to be Kubaba of Sumer, who, about 2400 BC, was the first woman to rule in her own right and not just as queen consort (the king's wife). About 69 BC, Cleopatra ruled in Egypt. Wu Zetian ruled in China beginning in 690. Moving forward nearly a thousand years, Queen Elizabeth I ruled over the British Empire from 1558 to 1603. And Queen Elizabeth II is the long ruling monarch of any country to date, ruling from 1952 until her death in 2022.

Against such notable history, the US is sadly lacking. Although the US gained its independence in 1776, it took another 62 years before women began to gain some voting rights.

1838: Kentucky passed the first statewide woman's suffrage law. It allowed female heads of household in rural areas to vote on matters of taxes and local school boards.

1840: Catherine Brewer became the first woman to earn a bachelor's degree when she graduated from Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia.

1849: Elizabeth Blackwell became the first woman to graduate from medical school, graduating at the top of her class at Geneva Medical School in Geneva, New York.

1869: The territory of Wyoming granted unrestricted suffrage to women.

1869: Arabella Mansfield became the first female lawyer in the United States when she was admitted to the bar in Iowa.

1879: Belva Lockwood became the first woman admitted to the Bar of the Supreme Court.

1909: Carolyn B. Shelton was the first woman to act as governor—for one weekend. She served as Acting Governor of Oregon from 9 a.m. Saturday, February 27, 1909, to 10 a.m. Monday, March 1, 1909.

1911: California granted women the right to vote.

1916: Jeannette Rankin of Montana was the first woman elected to the U S House of Representatives. Incidentally, she was the only member of Congress to vote against US involvement in both World Wars, stating, "As a woman, I can't go to war and I refuse to send anyone else."

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1919: Edith Wilson is known as “The First Lady who became an acting president—without being elected.” From October 1919 to March 1921, Edith Wilson oversaw President Woodrow Wilson’s presidential affairs while he recovered from a stroke.

1920: The Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution granted nationwide universal suffrage to women.

1923: Nellie Tayloe Ross of Wyoming was the first woman to assume the office of governor, doing so after a special election when her husband, the current governor, died in office.

1933: Frances Perkins became the first woman to serve in the president’s cabinet when FDR appointed her as his secretary of labor.

1981: Sandra Day O’Connor was the first woman to serve as an associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. She served from 1981 to 2006.

2005: Condoleezza Rice was appointed secretary of state under George W. Bush. It made her the highest-ranked woman among cabinet secretaries to that date. (The secretary of state is fourth in the presidential line of succession.)

2007: Nancy Pelosi was elected as the first female speaker of the House (making her second in the line to the presidency).

2021: Kamala Harris was elected as the first female vice president (making her first in the presidential line of succession).

What’s next for the coming generation of women?

Did You Know?

According to the Guinness World Records, the Pan-American Highway is the world’s longest “motorable road,” extending through North America, Central America, and South America for nearly 19,000 miles. It is not, however, the longest continuous road, due to a 60-mile gap across the border between Panama and Colombia.

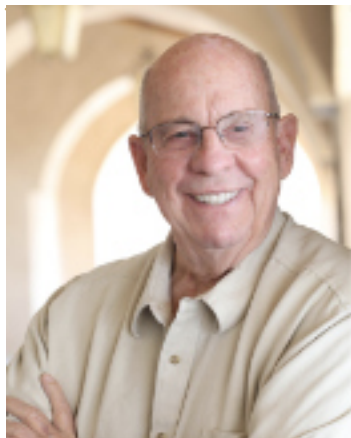
The world’s longest continuous highway is Australia’s Highway 1. The 9,010-mile-long road, nicknamed the “Big Lap,” follows the Australia coastline and connects all of Australia’s major cities. One section runs in a perfectly straight line for 90 miles.

By comparison, the longest continuous road in the United States is only 3,365 miles long. US Route 20 begins in Boston at Route 2 and runs through to an intersection with US 101 in Newport, Oregon.



Writers Are Readers - Book Reviews

By Mary Langer Thompson — Bob Isbill - Guest Reviewer



Power Up Your Fiction

125 Tips and Techniques for Next-Level Writing

Are you looking for a book on the craft of writing? There are hundreds out there, many of which are written by an author named James Scott Bell. In fact, Mr. Bell has been one of the most popular teachers of writing books for many years. Many of you will remember that he was a guest speaker at our 2013 Howling at the Moon writing conference. We also had him speak to us on how to make a living as a writer at one of our popular ACT II Zoom meetings. The book I recommend by Mr. Bell is no exception: it is called *Power Up Your Fiction, 125*

Tips and Techniques for Next-Level Writing.

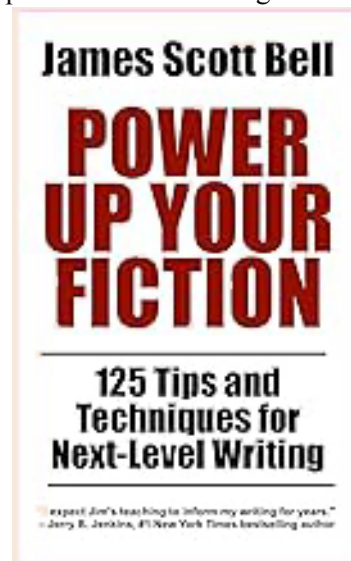
How would you like to begin by seeking out a practicing attorney who gave up the law because he fell in love with writing? You would probably think he would be good at taking notes, sorting out the pros and cons, and coming up with the best techniques for getting the job done at a high standard of quality. What actually happened in the life of James Scott Bell is that in the mid-1980s, he and his wife went to see a movie called *Moonstruck*. Remember that great one? Who wouldn't fall in love with the movie? But what happened to James Scott Bell was that he walked out of that movie determined to be a writer. So he began a career that has lasted over 30 years so far. And along the way, we are fortunate because he did a lot of reading and note-taking of what worked and what did not work with many other successful writers. He applied this to his own writing and discovered ways to improve and, by doing so, how to make his hobby pay off in real dollars. He learned how to sell his writing.

Power Up Your Fiction is one of the best books I have read on the craft of writing. Mr. Bell gently guides us through with a sense of humor and a friendly style that avoids being judgmental or adamant. It is an easy-going read with valuable tips and techniques learned over his 30-year career. He actually kept a notebook, and he pulls out those tips and techniques from the notes he wrote and passes along to us fortunate student writers his insights on everything from writers' block, to the opening line, to second-act pitfalls, to creative endings. James Scott Bell provides a book full of wonderful insights that are easily applicable to one's writing.



Occasionally, he quotes from his other books, such as *Write Your Story from the Middle*, and that is just frosting on the cake.

Whether you are writing historical, Christian, or just plain commercial genre, this book is one you should strongly consider adding to your reference library and taking advantage of the many, many tips and techniques provided by this thoroughly experienced writer.



Revisiting a Rich Past: *Howling at the Moon*

By Mike Apodaca

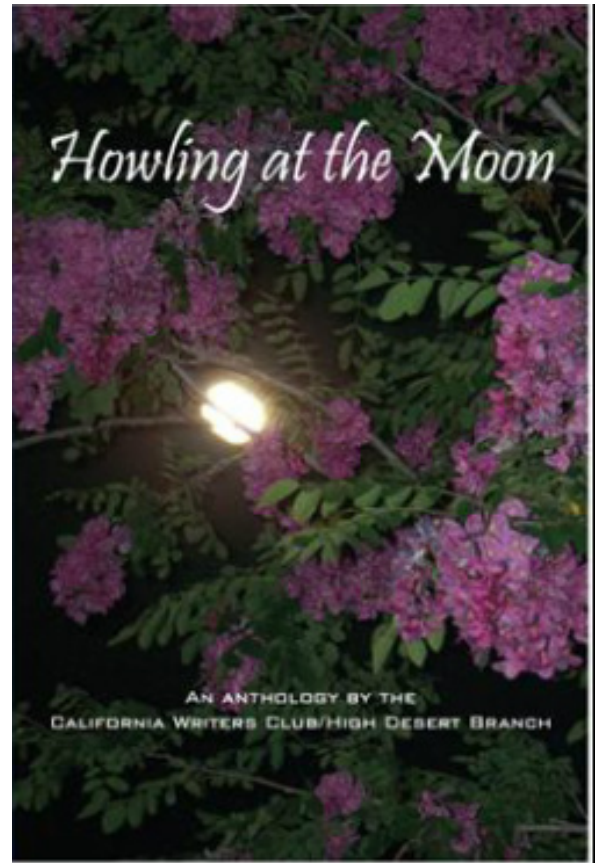
When a group of talented, driven people got together to create a wonderful writing community, they birthed a writers conference called Howl at the Moon. The explosion of creativity that came from this gathering became a branch anthology with a similar name.

The anthology reflects this burst of creativity. The stories are an emotional roller coaster. Whether its Roberta Smith's disturbing story "The Miracle" or Suzanne Holbrook-Brumbaugh's gut-wrenching story "Patches". Bob Isbill has two clever, well-told stories inside "The Knock-off" and "Potboiler". Some of these pieces are heartwarming, like Penny Jenkin's, "The Magic Spinning Wheel," "My One-Time Mother-in-Law" by Hazel Sterns, and "The Letter" by Marilyn Ramirez.

I could go on and on—there are so many good stories in this book. Let me just say that if you haven't already read these wonderful stories, you are missing out. They display quality writing and clever storytelling. The variety is a testament to the unique vision of each author.

As I have always said, we are building a club on the shoulders of giants. Thanks to all who gave us such a stable, enduring foundation.

By the way, if you haven't done so already, check out the new pages Roberta Smith has added to our website (HDCWC.com). The new HDCWC History Scrapbook pages show hundreds of images from our branch's past. It is delightful. Please give Roberta a well-deserved pat on the back when you see her.



HDCWC Member Birthdays

Joan Rudder Ward March 14

Linda Cooper March 24

Elizabeth Aguilar March 24

Diana Meyer March 28



The Most Famous Authors of All Time

By Michael Raff



William Somerset Maugham

In January 1874, W. Somerset Maugham was born into a family of lawyers. Although British, he was born in Paris. His mother died of

tuberculosis in January 1882 “A wound,” he said, “that never entirely healed.” He kept a photo of her at his bedside even into his old age. When his father died two and a half years later, Maugham was sent to live with his aunt and uncle. He was reserved as a child and stuttered. He realized he was a homosexual, which only made him more introverted and secretive. He became an atheist while in his teens.

Maugham studied at The King’s School in Canterbury and, later, Heidelberg University, where he wrote his first book, which was not published. He worked as an accountant in London and studied medicine at St. Thomas’s Hospital Medical School, where he worked with the poor. “I saw how men died. I saw how they bore pain. I saw what hope looked like, fear and relief; I saw the dark lines that despair drew on a face.” While studying for his medical degree, he wrote nightly and published his first novel, *Liza of Lambeth*, which was based on his obstetric experiences in London’s slums. The novel received mixed reviews but was successful with readers. The reviews did not deter Maugham. Although he graduated as a physician, he left medicine and pursued a writing career. “I took to it as a duck takes to water.”

Maugham traveled before the completion of his next book, *The Making of a Saint* in 1898, a historical novel. Although it didn’t do well, in the next five years he wrote two more

novels and a collection of short stories. He tried his hand at writing plays, many of which were successful. He became famous by 1914, having penned eight novels and thirteen plays.

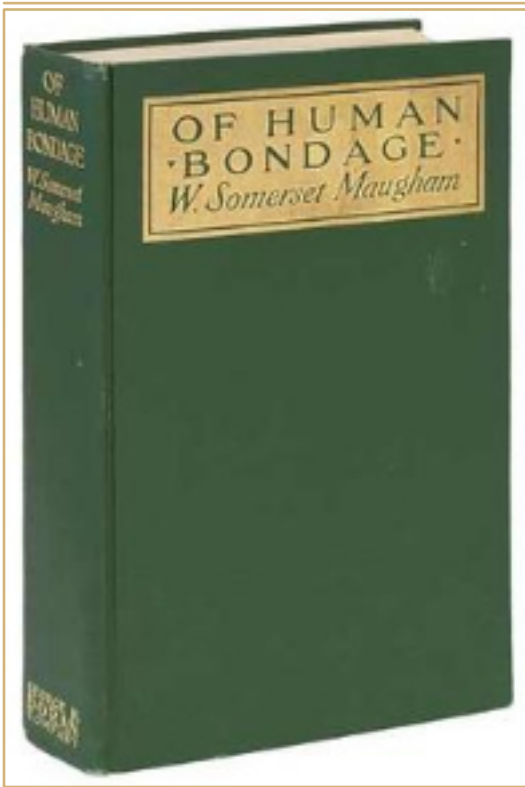
Although Maugham for the most part was homosexual, he started an affair with Syrie Wellcome, who was separated from her husband, a pharmaceutical magnate. During this time he completed perhaps his greatest novel, *Of Human Bondage*.

When World War I broke out, Maugham was too old to serve, but volunteered as an ambulance driver for the British Red Cross. In 1915 Syrie became pregnant, and while Maugham was on leave with her, she gave birth to Mary Elizabeth, (Liza). Maugham and Syrie were married in 1917, after her divorce. However, his primary partner was a young man, Gerald Haxton, a gregarious extrovert, who traveled with him as an assistant.



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When Maugham moved to Switzerland, he became an agent for the British Secret Service. His job was to coordinate the results of British agents who operated in enemy territory and send their intelligence to London—a violation of Switzerland’s neutrality laws. By November 1916, Maugham was sent to Samoa to send reports concerning the island’s radio transmitter and the German naval forces in the area.

After the South Seas experience, Maugham traveled to the United States and was joined by his wife, but they quickly grew apart. She returned to England and, as a secret agent, Maugham was sent to Russia to counter German propaganda and to encourage their newly established government to keep fighting. However, the Bolsheviks took over, eliminating Russia as a British ally.

Maugham became ill with tuberculosis, returned to England, and spent three months in a Scottish sanatorium. But he continued writing. In 1919, he published *The Moon and Sixpence*, one of his best novels. After his

recovery, Maugham spent some time with his wife, but they proved incompatible, and he ended up traveling with Haxton for at least six months. Then in 1920, he and Haxton traveled to such places as Hollywood, San Francisco, Honolulu, Australia, Singapore, and the Malay Peninsula. There were other trips as well. Meanwhile, Syrie became a successful interior designer and had extramarital affairs of her own. By 1929, they were divorced.

During the 1920s, Maugham wrote one novel, three works of short stories, a travel book, and seven plays, including, *East of Suez*, *The Constant Wife*, and *The Letter*. By the early 1930s, Maugham had grown weary of writing plays. “I grew conscious that I was no longer in touch with the public that patronizes the theatre.” The time had come for a change.

To be continued next month. In the meantime, keep writing and keep reading.

No act of kindness, no matter
how small, is ever wasted.

—Aesop



I Saw a Little Boy

By fumi-tome ohta



I saw a little boy
He had the cutest face
He spoke not a word
but kept looking back at me
with soft, curious eyes
Sometimes he'll look at me
then turn a sideways glance
My friend doesn't speak
Nor jump and down
Hmm, that's strange
He was here a moment ago
Oh, there he is
sitting on a leaf
my elusive, charming friend
Do you see him?
There, upon a butterfly wing



More than one Hundred Members

By Mike Apodaca



Milestones should be celebrated. Graduations, weddings, and winning sports competitions all need to be recognized and honored. It is no small benchmark that the HDCWC has just passed one hundred members. This is something to celebrate.

So how did this happen? I can tell you, it was not an accident or something that happened by itself. We have passed one hundred members because of the hard, joyful work of many members of our club. They all need to share in this wonderful accomplishment.

First, I credit our excellent board. Anyone who has attended a board meeting will attest that our board members mean business. We meet for two hours each month. In our meetings we scrutinize every meeting and program in our club. We talk about upcoming events and solve problems. In short, we get the job done. Best of all, we work well together. Everyone gives their view freely and yet we all are looking for the best idea—no matter where it comes from. The board meetings are actually fun.

Then there is our membership chair, Mike Raff. Mike emails every new member and helps them assimilate into our club. He and Linda Boruff also supervise the critique groups, one of the most important things we do in our club.

Next I credit Bob Isbill, who works tirelessly finding excellent speakers for us and securing them to come to our meetings. We have people like Anita Holmes, Richard Zone, Jim Grayson, and John Garner, who host special social meetings for our members. These meetings tie us together and give us real community.

We passed one hundred because of Judith Pfeffer getting the word out on social media and Bill Lopez creating an awesome public service announcement (which I finally was able to hear on my way to the last salon). Bill did such a great job! And I have to tip my hat to Richard Zone, who produces our excellent newsletter each month.

There are also those who take on regular responsibilities during our meetings (like Mike Raff, Jenny Margotta, Freddi Gold, and Rita Wells and her crew). Along with this crew is everyone at every meeting who greets another with a smile, introduces themselves to a new member, or gently shares their own expertise in the writing craft.

I saw something wonderful last month when I could not attend our meeting because of COVID. I was there on Zoom, thanks to Anita. I saw a healthy club where members stepped up and made sure everything ran smoothly.

My point is that passing one hundred is our milestone, our accomplishment. We should feel that each of us has a piece in this accomplishment because together we are creating something healthy and powerful, something we all want to be a part of.

Thank you for all you do.

Love Is A Pink Shirt

By Diana Davidson-Del Toro



Pink is for girls.
Everyone knows
you don't dress a boy
in little girls' clothes.

There was horror on my father's face
(he'd just been stabbed, you'd think)
when out of the washer came
my brother's gym shirt—pink.

In the closet hung the pink dress shirt
my mother bought him years and years ago.
Why? He'd never ever wear it.
She had to know.

Or would he?

In the hospital bed, dying perhaps,
my mother lay—
brain bleed they said.
Not a word did he say.

But early next morning,
so dapper and pert,
he appeared at her bedside
in that pink dress shirt.

Meow Mama

By Kimberly G Wonder



In 1981, a year after we relocated from Chicago to Los Angeles, my mama had taken a job working for a place called Decasser, located in L. A. between Crenshaw and Imperial. This area was kinda on the shady side. My father had dropped her that morning, and I was to pick her up later that day.

It was a beautiful day; the sun was shining, the sky was picturesque blue and there was a warm breeze blowing. I thought to myself, this is a great day to run errands. So, I started out to accomplish as much as I could before I had to pick up my mama. As the day went on, I finally completed all of my errands.

As I headed back to the other side of town to pick her up, I thought to myself “it sure would be nice to get my hubby a gift of some kind.” While driving I was thinking, Hmmm, what to get, what to get? No sooner than the second hmmm left my mouth I saw a pet store!

“I also do impulse shopping.”

I was giddy at the thought of surprising my hubby with a kitten. The pet store was located near Hawthorne not too far from the South Bay Galleria Mall.

I drove onto the parking lot and parked the car. I was thinking, I really don’t know what breed of kitten to get. As I got out of the car, I checked to make sure I had keys in hand, then locked the car. I excitedly walked into the medium size pet store and began to slowly look at the animals that were strategically placed right in the front window.

I was running out of time, so I went directly to the front desk and said, “Hi, how are you I’m in a hurry, I’m looking for kittens Do you have any?”

The young high school girl’s name tag read Jackie. Jackie said, “Good afternoon, Yes, we do.” She pointed straight ahead. “They’re on isle four.”

I thanked her and quickly started walking in that direction.

There they were, several kittens of mixed breeds just waiting for someone to love on them. I tapped on the window to get their attention. A gray and white short-haired kitten pounced over to me and placed its paw on the glass. How adorable it was. I didn’t need to look any further, it had won my heart.

I walked back up to the front desk and told Jackie that I had found the one I wanted and asked could she help me. Jackie smiled and said, “I’ll be right with you.”

As she was removing the kitten from its cage, I asked Jackie could she tell me if the kitten was a male or female. Jackie picked up the kitten and inspected it and said it’s a female. She then took the kitten to the front and gently placed her in what I call “a Happy Meal box.” I paid for the kitten and left the store. Kitty and I got in the car and off we went to our last stop before I went home to surprise my husband with his new kitten.

The kitten didn’t utter one peep all the way to our destination.

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We finally got to my mama's job, and I parked right in front of a big empty lot. It looked creepy to me, sandy colored loose dirt and not a soul in sight.

I arrived at her job about 5 minutes to 5:00. Mama always got off work at 5:00 p.m. and she would come out the door about 5:01 p.m. I turned on the radio, sat back to relax as I waited for her to walk out the door soon.

I looked at my watch and noticed that it was 5:15 p.m. I become a little concerned because she's always on time. I'm thinking what could be taking her so long. Suddenly, I hear a faint voice in the distance saying "Kimm, Kimm."

I quickly turned the radio down and I heard it again, "Kimm, Kimm," The voice sounded far away like it was in a closed container of some kind. I then stuck my head out the window and shouted. "Mama! Where are you mama! Where are you! I'm coming!" I don't know why I said that, because I wasn't sure where her voice was coming from.

I heard the faint voice again, "Kimm, Kimm." By this time my heart was racing, and I jumped out of the car and began to look for her up and down the street, making sure to not go too far from the car and from where I heard the voice. I pictured my mama tied up and lying in that empty field I parked in front of. I imagined her somehow able to free her mouth from the rag they tied her with and her crying out for me to come get her.

I slowly walked back to the car, listening for her to call out again so I could figure out what direction to go in. I opened the door and placed my hands on the steering wheel, not knowing what to do.

I saw that it would be dark soon; do I go for help, do I go out and look for her again, what to do!?

I heard the sound again, "Kimm, Kimm." I slowly turned around and leaned my head in the direction I thought the voice was coming from. I listened very carefully, and I realized the voice I thought was my mama's was coming from the Happy Meal box on the floor. It was the kitten! Meowing, but it sounded just like was saying my name! Are you kidding me?

What a sigh of relief to know that my mother was not tied up somewhere on that vacant land, calling out my name while being tortured.

I laughed uncontrollably! I could hardly contain myself. I couldn't wait to tell Mama what I thought happened to her.

I turned around in my seat and looked down at the box with just a little bit of comical disbelief that I allowed my imagination to get the best of me.

I looked up and saw Mama finally walking down the street towards me. She opened the door and got in the car, I said to her, "You're never going to believe what just happened!"

I told her the whole story and we laughed until we cried, tears falling down our bright red cheeks, almost all the way home.



An April Salon!

The Art of Listening

Often in fiction there is disagreement between characters which creates misunderstanding, anger, hurt feelings, animosity, verbal or physical fights. The end result is resentment and sometimes the end of a relationship. In real life it happens all too often as well.

These are tempestuous times and learning how to have a “balanced” argument with someone who has a different perspective than us is a good way to understand your characters in greater depth and how listening effectively becomes a make-or-break issue—one which we may not even realize is the problem.

This salon will involve interaction and fun, role play, self-analysis and, hopefully, enhance your characters’s roles as well. Freddi Gold will set the scene for rip-roaring fun and learning.



The salon will be held on March 19th at 3:00 p.m. at Richard Zone’s home. Come learn and share insights into “The Art of Listening”

To reserve a seat, please contact Richard Zone

at: refiredzone@gmail.com

or call at 909-222-8812

Space is limited so don't delay!

Are you listening?

Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone - we find it with another.

-Thomas Merton

Magic Memories of Wandering Through France

By Ann Miner



Once upon a summer, my three grown children and I were traveling in France. Our accommodation late in June was a chateau in the wine-and-castle country of Bordeaux, near the little village of Azay le Rideau.

The chateau, Le Gerfaut, which means the falcon, was in a lovely, wooded area with one of those romantic, tree-lined roads leading in and out of the estate.

When we arrived, we climbed the stairs of the wide entrance, and Madame Chenerilles greeted us in broken English. She explained that the Marquis, her husband, was out of town for three days and could speak much better English. After giving us a tour of the manor, she showed us to our rooms. My sons would be on the fourth floor and my daughter and I on the third. Both rooms looked out over the dog kennels where the hunting dogs had lived in earlier days. The rooms were luxurious, and we truly felt the air of old royalty.

Breakfast the first morning, served by the Madame, was fresh croissants, crisp toast, jellies made from fruit of the surroundings. Our hostess gave us brochures of interesting sights, including several castles – one being Villandry—and explained their high points.



Chateau du Gerfaut du Azay le Rideau, Loire Valley, France

Continued from previous page)

We learned of Sache, a town 7 kilometers away, where Honoré de Balzac, the French novelist and playwright, had lived. Of course, we made that a destination.

The Marquis arrived at the chateau ready to host us. He and his son, a Count, had bought some land in Bordeaux and now were fighting to keep a lake from being put on the land and taking away many trees.

He told us much about the history of the house. It seems the castle at Villandry was owned by Jerome Bonapart, brother of Napoleon.

Jerome was deep in debt with the bank owned by Madame Chenerilles' grandfather. Jerome couldn't pay, so he gave the castle, furniture, and land all to the grandfather, who later built this chateau in 1909 on part of the property for his friends to come to visit.

During WWII, the Germans were coming and the family fled. When they returned, they found the German soldiers occupying the chateau. They housed the family in the barns in the back. The family noticed whenever there was a change in command in the house. They convinced each new man in charge that they had been promised space inside the home, and each time, they moved back in, little by little, until they had the entire 2nd floor back for their own living quarters.

The German soldiers showed little respect to the home, and there were still large nail marks where they had hung their rifles on the mantle.

In the stairwell there were many trophies of animals hanging on the walls. One was the head of a stag with a cross carved in it. The story goes that there was a group of people out on a pheasant hunt, of which one was the aforementioned grandfather. They warned that, if a stag came near, to be cautious, because the stags didn't like men and might hurt or kill them. The grandfather was sitting in the forest alone when he heard a stag behind him. He turned and shot, and the stag seemed to go away. Later, he learned that he had killed it, and the head was sent to him by the king. The cross signifies St. Herbert, protector of all hunters. St. Herbert was walking into danger of wild animals when he heard a voice telling him not to go there. The voice was God's, and Herbert became a believer, and the protector. He was a German, (a good one), and this story is told throughout Europe.



*Never be afraid to trust an unknown
future to a known God.*

What I Learned During of the Big Rainstorm in February 2024

by Mary Waters

I live along the southern edge of the San Fernando Valley. After receiving nearly fifteen inches of rain in two days, the building that I live in lost electricity. One building across the street also lost power. It was not a widespread outage. Only the two buildings.

I found my battery-powered lanterns and replaced the batteries. One lantern has a USB port so I was able to charge my smartphone. Eight fresh D batteries might have charged my phone for one day if I hadn't used it to attend the Wednesday morning Zoom check-in. I didn't use my battery-operated radio much because the cell towers were unaffected.

The next morning, after the power company had spent eight hours trying to restore our electricity, the DWP workers caused a power surge. My smartphone was sitting on top of the lantern with the USB port, which was on the floor next to my bed. All the lights came on for a few seconds and a lot of sparks or lights blanketed the floor of my bedroom. It was a little scary. I grabbed my phone before the sparkly lights stopped and I was unharmed. Once again, there was no electricity in the two buildings. My bedroom was smokey and smelled of an electrical fire. My carpet now has smoke/singe marks.

The two surge protectors on the floor in my bedroom had shorted out. They'd sacrificed themselves to protect the things that had been plugged into them. The GFI sockets tripped and one had to be replaced. The GFI sockets protected the appliances that were plugged into them.

The power surge shorted out the hot water boilers for both buildings. They had to be replaced. It also ruined random appliances throughout the two buildings. Washing machines and dryers were particularly affected. Much of the lighting for the common areas has still not been repaired. I lost my desktop computer and printer. I also lost a freezer chest, a rice cooker and a few other items.

I'd had almost everything plugged into surge protectors. Only the surge protectors that I bought from Costco actually worked. My many other surge protectors (mostly purchased from Home Depot both before and after those purchased from Costco) failed to do their job.

My electric stove seemed to work but it caught fire soon after I turned it on. The fire seemed to come from below the burner pan and not from the heating element. The fire stopped a little while after I turned the burner off. During that little while, I tried to smother the fire with an inverted pan but that didn't work. I'd just pulled the pin of a fire extinguisher when it died out. I still don't know why, and I won't turn it on again.

What I learned:

If there is a power outage that lasts any length of time; especially if the outage is specific to your location and not widespread:

1. Don't rely on surge protectors.
2. Unplug everything. That includes your hot water heater, washing machine and dryer. Perhaps, switch all your circuit breakers to the off position.
3. Have battery-operated radios, flashlights, lanterns and USB ports on hand.
4. Stockpile a lot of fresh batteries.
5. Keep a fire extinguisher handy. If you've never used one before, the instructions on it made sense to me in the emergency.
6. Be prepared.



Nicola Harrison Featured at February 10 Meeting

By Bob Isbill



The February 10 meeting of the HDCWC featured a dynamic writer who came across as experienced, entertaining, interesting, and very professional. Nicola Harrison spoke to us on writing your story scene by scene.

Nicola Harrison is the author of three historical fiction novels, *Montauk*, *The Show Girl* and *Hotel Laguna*. Born and raised in England, she moved with her family to Southern California when she was 14. She is a graduate of UCLA and received her MFA from Stony Brook University. Prior to writing novels, she worked as a fashion journalist in New York City, where she lived for 17 years. Now she resides in Manhattan Beach, California,

One of the things she told us when asked about how she self-promotes her books is that she rarely says no. She has found that by saying yes she adds to her contact list and meets new people with new interests that can usually become valuable. She acquired her agent simply by submitting a script to her after she read a book published through that

agent called *Gone Girl*. Harrison's book was similar but also very different, and she thought she would just take a chance. Normally, agents do not accept manuscripts, but this one did, and she wrote back that she really liked Nicola's book and she was going to finish it over the weekend. This began a relationship that has been in play to this day.



(Continued on following page)



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Does Nicola still study the craft of writing? She said she did that intensely while earning her MFA and still does a lot of reading but does not actively study the craft too much. She did say that she uses a book on writing screenplays, called *Save the Cat*, by Blake Snyder. It describes certain beats that all stories should have, so she finds it useful in helping her outline a plot.

Hotel Laguna is a story about Rosie, the riveter-type girl, who finds herself unemployed. It takes place in the 1940s, shortly after World War II, when the men came, and took over the existing jobs that women had been doing during the war. It also features the days when the Laguna Art Festival began and includes a lot of the history surrounding that familiar event.

Nicola also gave our club a special discount on two of her books. Another surprising and pleasurable moment in the meeting came when we got three new members joining, bringing our membership total to 101.



"Some cause happiness wherever they go; others, whenever they go."

-Oscar Wilde

Upcoming World Book Day

By Mary Langer Thompson

APRIL'S UPCOMING WORLD BOOK DAY HAPPY BIRTHDAY SHAKESPEARE AND CERVANTES!



In honor of World Book Day, April 23, the birthday of Cervantes and Shakespeare, the High Desert California Writers Club, for the 13th year, needs one of your books if you are an author to give to our community. The recipient of adult and children's books in several

genres for 2024 will be revealed after the date, but tradition dictates we give to a venue that does not usually have access to books. We have given to urgent cares, rescue missions, veterans' homes, the federal prison and other places. We will take the first 20 books donated. The purpose of World Book Night is to spread the joy of reading.

Please bring a signed copy of your book to donate to the March 9th meeting. If you would like to help distribute, please let me know or email me at mh_thompson@hotmail.com.

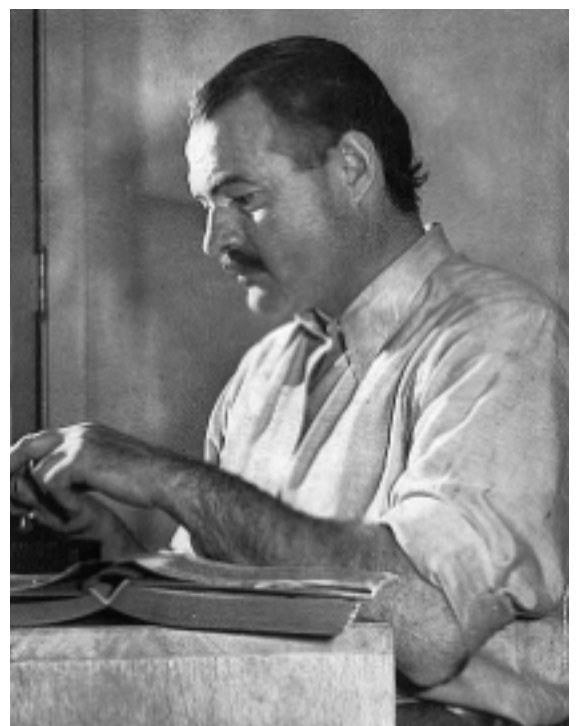


"On the whole, human beings want

to be good, but not

too good, and not quite all the time."

-Hernest Hemingway



A Slice Of Life: The Window Washer

By J. P. Garner



I had gone to Corky's on Monday to interview its general manager for an article for National Women's Month in March. The interview was scheduled for 6:30 a.m., when the restaurant opens, but I arrived at 6:00 a.m.

I purchased a large McCafé from the McDonald's next door and parked in the semi-dark parking lot of the restaurant. I settled into the driver's seat, turned on my Bluetooth, and tuned it to my selection of Andrea Bocelli songs. Not too loud, just at a soothing level. For some reason, opera made more sense than Alice in Chains.

As I sat there, a man showed up carrying a large bucket and some strange tools whose function I didn't immediately recognize until he approached the window at the far end of the building. The purpose of the tools quickly became apparent. He was a window washer. By the time he cleaned the second window, I saw he had a routine.

He'd apply cleanser to the window in two vertical strokes of an applicator then he used the same number of strokes to squeegee it off. The applicator and squeegee fit the window perfectly. He then wiped the excess liquid from the window's frame with four quick strokes of a clean rag and, afterward, removed any streaks from the glass.

Based on the speed with which he performed this routine, it was clear he was no rookie. He had done this many times before and had perfected the process. As I watched him, his movements seemed to be in rhythm with the music as if he were the central figure in some kind of odd ballet.

I thought about what my dad said that we become what we do. The window washer was definitely what he did. He was casual and proficient, and I envied him that he could come to work dressed as he might for an early morning run at the beach: in shorts and a hooded sweatshirt. He appeared to have no care in the world as he went about his work. I wondered what a window washer sees beyond the glass he cleans. If he ever sees any stories there to be told?

Or does he even care? Just get it done.



Plugging Away for 90 Days

By Mike Apodaca



I am on Day 14 of the 90-Day Memoir project laid out by Alan Watt in the book with the same name. I am on track to finish all the exercises and my rough draft by the time we meet with Alan again in June. To be on track, I have to do 15 exercises a month for six months. One month down, five to go.

Here are my observations thus far:

1) This process isn't easy. In order to get the exercises done the way they are laid out without cheating requires a real commitment. But doing the project correctly produces dividends. I've found that I am better at getting these writing pieces done in the morning—although there have been times when that was not possible and I had to do them later in the day.

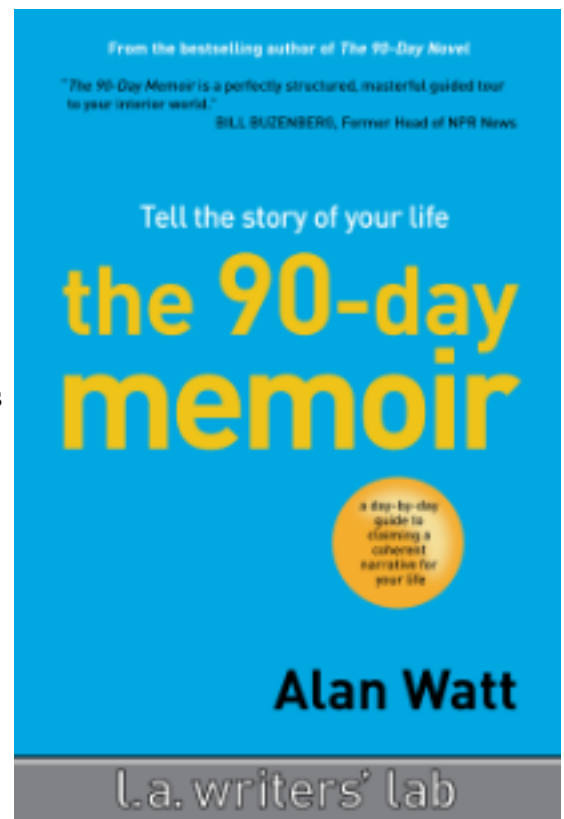
2) The process is meant to help us dig deeply into our own stories, to see things that may have been invisible to us up to this point. Most of us simply live our lives; we rarely reflect on it objectively. We rarely ask ourselves probing questions. It was Aristotle who said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." I think he was onto something. Although I have considered myself a person who knew myself, I have discovered that there is so much more to my own story that has escaped my notice. By doing the exercises, I see more.

3) What begins to emerge with this process is a basic theme of your life. By reflecting on the events of your life and your responses, you begin to see patterns, beats, which will speak to you and help you understand things that you have not been willing or able to see about your patterns. You may even discover (as I have) where those patterns came from and why they are so deeply seated in your personality. It is a rare thing to discover so much about yourself.

4) The best part of doing this work is that it is affecting my choices and behavior now. I have found myself much more honest with myself, willing to laugh when I see my old pattern emerging and being willing and able to stand against it and forge a new path. This has truly been freeing.

I believe in the end anyone who continues this process to the end will have a memoir that not only tells their story but also tells it in a way that will help others find their own liberation. If you haven't started the program, or if you began and stopped, you still have time to do it. (Actually, you could do it at any time.)

We will meet with Alan Watt again in June. My hope is that many of us have a memoir in hand and can talk with him about our many discoveries and thank him for paving the way for this journey.



Sing Your Way To Success

By J.P. Garner



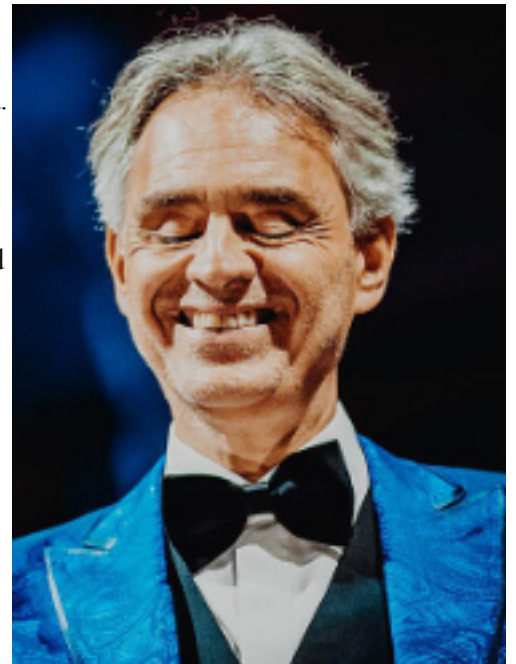
Mike Apodaca is like a genius. I mean that seriously. I've already copied his notebook idea and feel really important now just carrying it wherever I go. So, now I'm borrowing from him once again.

We were seated at Corky's, ruminating about the written word and expressing our frustrations with critique groups that do not allow for the reading of submissions. It was a suggestion I had made at the salon which I had borrowed from Nicola, the best-selling author who pitched us but then Jenny Margotta reminded me that way back when Michael Raff, she and I formed a group, we read our stuff aloud.

We did. And it was great!

You could hear where your "flow" went astray, or as Mike Apodaca put it, the story stopped "singing." What an awesome concept! That stories sing to a reader. And when they don't is when most readers will set it aside. That is, stop reading. With this in mind, I wish to form a group of singers. Three or four at most. How it's organized can be sorted out by the participants, but essentially, there's a reader and two or three listeners who comment on the submission's "flow." Where it sings and where it doesn't.

Knowing that could make each of us not only better writers but also better storytellers. There's a difference. And it's a lot less work. If you're interested, email me at: oksooner92311@gmail.com. We can start singing in March.



"In writing. Don't use adjectives which merely tell us how you want us to feel about the thing you are describing. I mean, instead of telling us a thing was "terrible," describe it so that we'll be terrified. Don't say it was "delightful"; make us say "delightful" when we've read the description. You see, all those words (horrifying, wonderful, hideous, exquisite) are only like saying to your readers, "Please will you do my job for me."

— C.S. Lewis



You Tube Gold

By Mike Apodaca

Have you checked out the YouTube channel lately? We have a library of resources for our writers there. Nearly every meeting we have ends up on YouTube—Thank you, Joan Rudder-Ward. Go to YouTube and type in HDCWC, then subscribe to our page for updates.

Writing:

- [2016 TE Watson Writing Books for Children](#)
- [2016 Greg Fournier Writing True Crime](#)
- [2017 Mary Vensel White: Tools and Techniques for Self-editing](#)
- [2017 Christina Hamlett What is the Best Vehicle for your Story?](#)
- [2017 Harry Cauley The Writer's Life](#)
- [2018 Christina Hoag Writing Outside Your Comfort Zone](#)
- [2018 Cherie Kephart Healing Through Writing](#)
- [2018 Gary McPherson A Writer's Journey](#)
- [2019 Coração de Cowboy film A Cowboy's Heart](#)
- [2019 Dave Berg Writing Biography](#)
- [2019 Tensie J. Taylor Bullying Victim](#)
- [2019 Frank Girardot Murder Investigation](#)
- [2019 Glen Hirshberg A Writer's Journey](#)
- [2019 Panel Discussion: You are Never Too Old or Young](#)
- [2021 Griz Drylie Writing History](#)
- [2021 Maggie Downs How to Write a Memorable Memoir](#)
- [2021 Jules Horn Method Writing and Writing for Audio Books](#)
- [2021 Marilyn King Organizing for Better Storytelling](#)
- [2021 Anthology Readings](#)
- [2021 Chris Vogler, The Writer's Journey](#)
- [2021 A Conversation with Dara Marks on Writing](#)
- [2021 Children's Writers Panel](#)
- [2022 Table Meeting Various Speakers](#)
- [2022 Chris Vogler on Archetypes](#)
- [2022 A Conversation with Dean Koontz](#)
- [2023 The Future of News Reporting](#)
- [2023 Diane Fanning, Doing Research](#)
- [2023 Poetri on Poetry](#)
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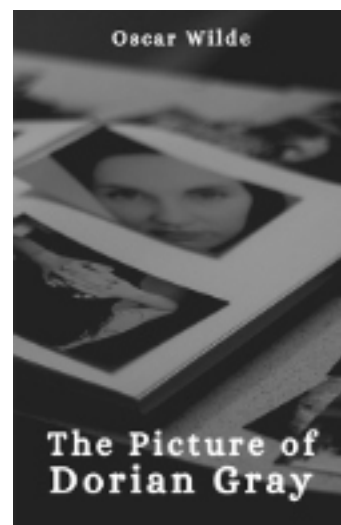
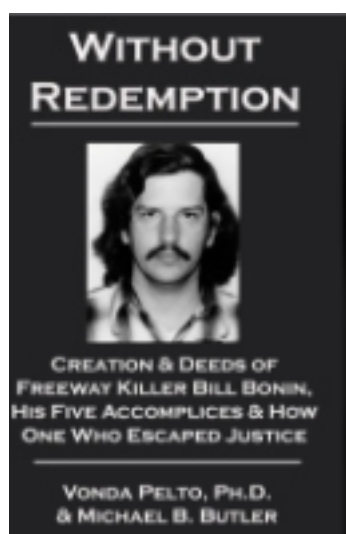
Publishing and Marketing:

- [2018 Anna-Marie Abell Marketing Basics for Authors](#)
- [2018 Ken Rotcop Pitching Your Story Perfectly](#)
- [2018 L. J. Gambone Press Releases: The Marketing Tool That Can Make or Break You](#)
- [2018 Panel Discussion: Selling Your Books](#)
- [2020 LeAnne Krusemark Writing Irresistible Query Letters](#)
- [2020 Paul Levine Legal Aspects of Writing](#)
- [2020 Paul Levine Copyright](#)
- [2020 Mike O'Mary Book Promotion](#)
- [2020 Fred Dodsworth Taking Control of Your Writing Success](#)
- [2021 Bernadette Lockett The Key That Opens a Million Doors](#)
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- [2023 Navigating the Amazon](#)
- [2023 Lucienne Driver, Literary Agent](#)
- [2022 Tim O'Neal, Publishing Short Stories](#)
- [2022 On Topic Speakers](#)

February Salon Judging a Book by Its Cover



With 20 club members in attendance, the February salon was a great success. The group discussed the pros and cons of book cover design. A comprehensive list of considerations to ponder regarding graphics, type fonts, colors, etc. was also shared by most of the attendees. Everyone shared book cover examples that ranged from the ridiculous to the sublime.



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Quote of the Month

By Michael Raff

"Nothing in the world is permanent, and we're foolish when we ask anything to last, but surely we're still more foolish not to take delight in it while we have it."

—W. Somerset Maugham

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