



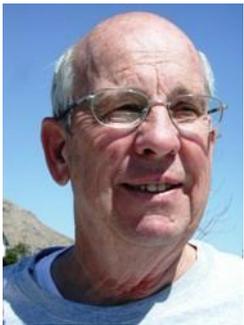
# INKSLINGER

HIGH DESERT BRANCH CWC

SAIL ON

Vol. 25, No.12,-

The California Writer's Club (CWC) shall foster professionalism in writing, promote networking of writers with the writing community, mentor new writers, and provide the literary support for writers and the writing community as is appropriate through education and leadership



The  
President's

**POV**

**Bob Isbill**

During the Christmas season, my wife and I got trapped near the exit door of a local store, and we were cornered by an enthusiastic 10 year old boy with a sales pitch.

He was blond and eager to show us the valuable coupon book worth hundreds of dollars. His enthusiasm was catchy, and his appearance was wild. I recognized him right away as one of our species. However, the spiked hair looking like controlled chaos made him resemble an excited porcupine with freckles. He was unstoppable.

When I said no thanks, his older, taller buddy muttered, "God bless" and started to walk away.

But not Mister Zeal. If he had any plans to move from his target, it wasn't showing. He went on chirping, consulting the coupon book in disbelief over its obvious value.

"You can actually save \$350.00 with this book! Look, you can eat here. Really good food. You can buy clothes here, cheap. You can...."

By then, his buddy was shifting from foot to foot in self-conscious discomfort, but nobody could be bored with his friend's youthful fervor. The boy went on while honing in on us, his victims, with ruthless candor. He was evidently unaware of any nuances of rejection, oblivious to my sales resistance because he'd probably never before known it.

This odd quartet stood there trapped together in a moment of time. The boy and his friend, I and my wife, all of us in a state of paralysis until this child would stubbornly finish what he had begun.

With a lifetime of business behind me, I found my mind seeking out old clichés: "The sale begins when the customer says no" or "I love to hear no because it gets me that much closer to yes" or "Someone out there is looking for your product so go find him". This kid was all of that and none of it. He was fresh, unique and determined.

Finally, he paused, held out the little book of tickets, and said just one word. It came not only from his heart, but from the bottom of his feet. His eyebrows warped and his face contorted, almost in pain. His beseeching voice carried his petition home to my spirit of generosity.

"Please!" he concluded.

And then he stopped. No more pleas, no more talk, no more movement.

This kid was good.

There was the weight of silence. I felt obligated to break its heaviness, but, being older and much smarter, and aware of these sales techniques, I knew that good closers know when to shut up. The first one to say one word loses. I knew all that. Finally, the silence was broken.

"How much?" I asked.

He knew he had me.

"Ten dollars."

"I'll take it," I said.

I was left thinking that nobody will ever believe in you more than you do.

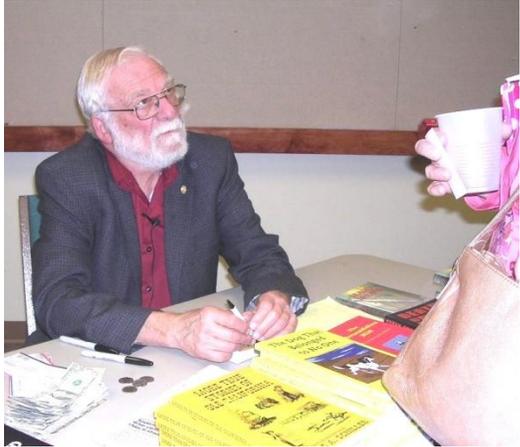
The kid showed us.

Sometimes it's just better to be childlike in our desire to be a writer, no matter who tells you that you simply can't do it!

**GERALD SCHILLER**  
**Author, Magician & Teacher**  
2/12/2012

By Frances Smith Savage

"I'm wired for sound." Gerald Schiller said as he walked to the podium for a down to earth talk about writing. "Mary suggested me to Bob, and that started the sequence to get me here." He spent the night at Bob Isbill's house, had dinner, a room, bath of his own, and then breakfast. "I've never been to Apple Valley before. It is absolutely beautiful here."



I do a lot of these presentations, and I would like to give you information about myself, and talk about my books, and the evolution of getting published." Schiller was a high school teacher for thirty years, and retired in 1991. "An auspicious year in my life, retirement is when you get so good at something they pay you to go away. The truth is they hire someone else about half of your salary, and hope you die."

He held our attention as he gave us many ideas about writing. He said he feels uncomfortable if a day goes by and he hasn't written anything. One of his first paying writing jobs was for a home developer. They gave him brochures, he never even saw the development and they wanted him to write 'elegant' several times in one script. They criticized him constantly, but he said he is extremely resilient to people who criticize him.

He enjoyed being a teacher because he got the summers off. He taught about structuring and rewriting, and how to work with actors. They often wanted to change the words he wrote for them. "Sometimes the line they wrote was better than mine." He said, and he didn't object to changing it.

"So many possibilities, everything you read has been written by somebody." His short pieces started to sell, and he suggested that we write what we know and what we can find out. "Get a copy of

Writers Market, and see what's out there. The advice is very good, and it tells who to send your pieces to."

Fedco hired him to write about California's history. Each piece had to fit into a certain spot in their magazine, and he wrote them in an hour or two, and earned about \$150 per article. He kept badgering them to put the pieces into a book. Later after Target bought Fedco and the CEO retired he wrote his own book about the History of California.

When at first he decided to write a book, he wanted to find out what sold in the book market. He studied Best Seller lists, and found that mysteries sell best, so he decided to write mysteries. He said he went into a large bookstore sat on the floor and wrote all the small publishers names and addresses, about fifteen or twenty. Then he sent a query letter, and found a few.

He takes his ideas from many different sources. He heard a story about a dog in the 1880's in San Diego that the whole town adopted. He expanded the original true story and included other materials of the history of San Diego. He sent a copy of the completed book to the Historical Society and they bought books by the carload. He has written other books about different places in the United States, and events picking out actual happenings and including them in historical fiction.

He goes to every event he can, pays \$900 for a booth at the L.A. Times. This year it will be at the USC campus. They expect 100,000 book buyers. He compiles lists of every human he knows, and sends them a notice "Be the first on your block to buy my book." He suggests that when we go to the post office we carry a copy of our book under our arm.

He had other advice for us, some we've heard many times from other speakers, and he cautioned us to be aware of any agent who wants a reading fee. "Ignore them or tell them where to go. If an agent is interested, it's Gold! Publishers trust established agencies."

After the question and answer period he favored us with a few magic tricks. His *tricks* about writing helped those of us who claim to be *writers*. For those in our club who don't attend each meeting, you missed a speaker who gave us many suggestions to follow his lead.

Perhaps no place in any community is so totally democratic as the town library. The only entrance requirement is interest. *Lady Bird Johnson*

## **HDCWC'S OWN DR. FREDDI GOLD**

By Frances Smith Savage

Selling yourself and your story with public speaking and PowerPoint was the theme of Dr. Freddi Gold's speech at the Hesperia Library, January 29, 2011. The well-attended meeting gave us great ideas for when it will be our turn to stand before a crowd and do the one thing most people dread.

"Promoting yourself -if you write a book or an article, you have to promote yourself," Freddi said. "Public speaking is a way of making your ideas public while you try to influence your audience. Public speaking is not going anywhere in this age. Nothing beats face to face communication.

"Seventy-nine percent of all speakers have some kind of nervousness. It is natural - however, your nervousness, most of the time, is not visible to your audience. Smile, take a breath, and let it out. A pause is okay. Get a good night's sleep, and don't worry about it if you don't.

"Public speaking is highly structured. It takes planning and preparation. Your language should be more formal. Slang and bad grammar are not appropriate. Avoid words like 'like' or 'you know.' "Get through the introduction; make eye contact with the audience. Picturing the audience naked does not work, and looking over their heads doesn't either. Look at every person in the audience, and concentrate on them not on your nervousness.

"Prepare, prepare, prepare." Freddi suggests that we should prepare our speech by making an outline, the introduction, body, and the conclusion. She writes hers out in longhand first, does the necessary research, then types it up and prints out several copies. She also uses large index cards because they are easier to handle than pieces of paper. She suggests that we know our audience. "You may be speaking to people who come from a different background." She warns us not to be distracted by how they look or dress.

"You will be talking about your book. How you wrote it, had it published, or found an agent, tell a story. Check out the room ahead of time, the physical setting, microphone, video coverage, lighting, ventilation, and seating.

"Practice, practice, practice. You will be talking about what you care about. Think positive, be enthusiastic, and have a backup when things don't go as planned. Practice, speak up, and time yourself. After the introduction, have an attention getter, make it interesting. Reveal your topic, preview speech briefly, and relate to your audience

face to face. Startle them, arouse their curiosity, and use humor, but no dirty jokes."

What to wear? Freddi advised us to dress appropriately for all occasions, but don't overdress, and don't be too casual. Dress a little bit better than normal, and don't have a charm that makes noise, or stand with your hands in your pockets or behind your back.



She left us with these words: "Don't give handouts before your speech. Leave with a bang not a whimper. Consider all options you have, public speaking is one way to get yourself out there. Speak with conviction, and maintain your composure."

Visit her website [www.ClearTransitions.com](http://www.ClearTransitions.com).

### **Save These Dates!**

Be sure to save the dates of Saturday, March 26, 2011 and June 4, 2011 to support our two members who will be giving special presentations on behalf of our HD CWC Branch at the Hesperia Library from 10 a.m. to noon. Holly La Pat (aka Sierra Donovan) will teach a Romance Writing class on March 26 and Mary Langer Thompson will present a Poetry workshop on June 4<sup>th</sup>.

We are proud of the special gifts of our membership, and their willingness to share their talents with the community of writers in the High Desert. Please plan to attend those events and support our members and our branch.

### **NOMINATING COMMITTEE SELECTED**

It's time for HDCWC elections. The current term of office is up in June and it's necessary to start thinking ahead.

A Nominating Committee, chaired by Anne Fowler (who will not be running for re-election) has been selected and includes Mary Scott, Marilyn Ramirez, Freddi Gold and Tisa Garrison. If you are able and willing to help guide the HDCWC Branch thru the coming 12 month term, please contact one of the above to let the Committee know you would like to run.



**FORMER HD CWC  
MEMBER SPEAKS TO  
LOCAL BRANCH  
MARCH 12, 2011**

**WILLMA GORE** is a former member of High Desert CWC, participating monthly here in the early 1990s when she lived in Crestline and founded her High Hopes Writer Workshop there.

Willma was raised on a small dairy ranch in the Owens Valley of California at the foot of Mt. Whitney. From childhood she dreamed of being a published writer and met this goal for the first time at age 19 with her brief profile of a local Native American who daily ordered a “manilla” ice cream cone from her, the drug store’s “soda jerk.” The piece was published in *Westways Magazine* which subsequently published many of her travel articles. Her long career has included articles, poetry, profiles, photography and fiction published in more than 90 national and regional journals and in eight anthologies, to date. Nineteen children’s books, a humorous adult novel and three nonfiction titles bear her byline. The latest is her memoir, *Iron Grip*, which will be the principle focus of her talk when she visits High Desert on March 12. It begins in 1945 when her young Lieutenant husband suffered the loss of both hands in an explosion at the chemical warfare base in Alabama. The Memoir takes the couple through a marriage-long adventure with tears and laughter as they make her two hands serve as four until he masters the use of his hooks and becomes a model of amputee competence, finishing college as well as becoming an excellent breadwinner for the family that includes their three sons.

*Iron Grip* is published by Create Space, a branch of Amazon which Willma highly recommends and will share this adventure in publishing with our group at the March meeting.

*Have you read my blog today?*  
[www.willmagore.com/blog/](http://www.willmagore.com/blog/)

## JACK LONDON AWARD 2011

The Jack London Service Award is given to one recipient, if nominated by their branch, every other year for outstanding service to the California Writers Club. There can be only one award per lifetime of each receiver.

This is not a writing award, but a recognition for outstanding service to the branch and to the California Writers Club. Since the foundation of the High Desert Branch in 1990, there have been eight such honorees:

- 1993 Ruth Theodos**
- 1995 J’Amy Pacheco**
- 1997 Carol Bachofner**
- 1998 Wilma Willis Gore**
- 1999 Liz Pinto**
- 2003 George Gracyk**
- 2009 Robert Isbill**

If you would like to nominate a recipient who you believe has done outstanding work for the years 2010 and 2011, please email the name and reason why you are nominating that person.

A person can only win the award once in a lifetime. Therefore, anyone on the above list is ineligible to be nominated.

Send your nomination to [vvmediator@aol.com](mailto:vvmediator@aol.com) on or before March 21, 2011. The one to receive the award will be announced in April of 2011.

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## LATEST ANTHOLOGY UPDATE

The published anthology, “Howling At The Moon”, has been reviewed to see that the table of contents is added and the formatting glitches have been resolved. The large, prepaid order has been placed and mid to late march is a reasonable estimate of when they will be received.

You will be notified when they are in, and arrangements have been made for distribution of your anthologies.

The shipping charges come to \$.86 (eighty-six cents) per copy and is payable upon pickup.

Thank you all for your considerable patience.



## FOR ALL 2011 CONFERENCE VOLUNTEERS

We have arranged for a walk-through tour of the Lewis Center for Educational Research *and* Academic Excellence, the setting chosen for our 2011 writers' conference, at 12:30 pm on Saturday, March 12, 2011. This will be immediately following our regular monthly membership meeting.

We are requesting that all of you who MAY be interested in volunteering either at the event or to be on the planning committee take this opportunity to see the facilities so that you may help make important choices for a conference format.

The address is 17500 Mana Road, Apple Valley 92307. Go South on Apple Valley Road from Hwy 18 and turn right (West) on Tuscola Road. Then right on Mana. The facilities are at the end of Mana Road.

Because this is a school, other opportunities to walk through the place will be scarce, so please make every effort to join us for a brief and informative tour of the conference facilities.

### MY LOVE

I will always love you  
even if you hurt me.  
I will always love you  
even when you break my heart.  
I will always love you  
even if you leave.  
I will always love you  
even if you make me cry.  
I will always love you  
even if you hate me.  
I will always love you  
because you're always there  
--by Alyssa Schultz

### NEW HDCWC MEMBERS COME ON BOARD

We are delighted to welcome three new members to the Branch as of February 12!

These include **Jason Graham, Joan Shartle and Deborah Weltin**. We hope you will enjoy your participation in the HD CWC, and look forward to seeing your work in the *Inkslinger!* Have fun and "Write On"!

## E-MAIL TRACKER PROGRAMS --VERY INTERESTING AND A MUST READ!

The man that sent this information is a computer tech. He spends a lot of time clearing the junk off computers for people and listens to complaints about speed. All forwards are not bad, just some. Be sure you read the very last paragraph. He wrote: By now, I suspect everyone is familiar with \_snopes.com\_ (<http://snopes.com/>) and/or \_truthorfiction.com\_ (<http://truthorfiction.com/>) for determining whether information received via email is just that: true/false or fact/fiction. Both are excellent sites. Advice from \_snopes.com\_ (<http://snopes.com/>) VERY IMPORTANT!!

- 1) Any time you see an email that says "forward this on to '10' (or however many) of your friends", "sign this petition", or "you'll get bad luck" or "you'll get good luck" or "you'll see something funny on your screen after you send it" or whatever --- it almost always has an email tracker program attached that tracks the cookies and emails of those folks you forward to.
- 2) The host sender is getting a copy each time it gets forwarded and then is able to get lists of 'active' email addresses to use in SPAM emails or sell to other spammers. Even when you get emails that demand you send the email on if you're not ashamed of God/Jesus --- that is email tracking, and they are playing on our conscience. These people don't care how they get your email addresses - just as long as they get them. Also, emails that talk about a missing child or a child with an incurable disease "how would you feel if that was your child" --- email tracking. Ignore them and don't participate! Almost all emails that ask you to add your name and forward on to others are similar to that mass letter years ago that asked people to send business cards to the little kid in Florida who wanted to break the Guinness Book of Records for the most cards. All it was, and all any of this type of email is, is a way to get names and 'cookie' tracking information for telemarketers and spammers -- to validate active email accounts for their own profitable purposes. You can do your Friends and Family members a GREAT favor by sending this information to them. You will be providing a service to your

friends. And you will be rewarded by not getting thousands of spam emails in the future!

Do yourself a favor and STOP adding your name(s) to those types of listing regardless how inviting they might sound! Or make you feel guilty if you don't! It's all about getting email addresses and nothing more. You may think you are supporting a GREAT cause, but you are NOT! Instead, you will be getting tons of junk mail later and very possibly a virus attached! Plus, we are helping the spammers get rich! Let's not make it easy for them! ALSO: Email petitions are NOT acceptable to Congress or any other organization - i.e. social security, etc. To be acceptable, petitions must have a "signed signature" and full address of the person signing the petition, so his is a waste of time and you are just helping the email trackers.

W

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*(Now, let's see what some of our members are thinking and writing about - )*

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### **THE SWEEPER** by Thomas Kier

He shuffled slowly along with his push-broom, this ancient man who had long ago stopped caring if he got everything picked up in the first pass. It was a long way to the other end of the space he must clean and tend to, and it was a wide space that would require walking up and down as many times as it took to reach the other side; nothing mattered except walking and sweeping. And long before he was done, his clean space would again be cluttered with the debris blown in by the world's wind; the wind that blew without rest, just as he must work without rest, and had for longer than he could remember. When he had had enough energy to think about it, he assumed he once had been a young man; wasn't that the way it worked? Didn't one grow from a child into an adult, then grow old, then finally die and enter into one's well-earned rest? So what had happened here? Did he not deserve all that he had coming to him? Or was this what he had coming; did he at some point fail to learn some vital lesson in life, or perform some unremembered atrocity that doomed him to this fate, or simply get forgotten by a greater power who had found the ideal candidate for what

used to be a kind of temporary purgatory before an eternal reward? The only answer he could find, when he had the energy to look for an answer, was that he didn't know. He had been over it enough times to realize he would probably never know. He no longer thought about it; it was too depressing. Besides, he was saving his strength for his work. He had once had a name, as any onlooker could guess; but we as observers are as ignorant of his identity as he is ignorant of any past or future. He knows only the present, which never changes; and we know only that he is the sweeper, whose job it is to clean up the debris of the world. And the debris is as plentiful now as it was when there were still human lives upon it. He was here then, and had already passed the point of thought or caring; which made it that much easier for him to sweep up the billions upon billions of fragile human body parts that blew his way after we had infected these weak and mewling people with our unintended virus--humans whose dead bodies couldn't even remain in one piece as we blew their lifeless forms from the earth. Of course it was unintentional, don't let anyone tell you otherwise; our ancestors had no idea that AIDS, for which we had once needed an inoculation, but are now naturally immune to from birth, would affect the humans like it did. For us, it was something like a 72-hour flu; uncomfortable, but leaving us no worse off than a few lingering scars in places we were unable to stop scratching. Too bad it wiped out the entire human race. But it did leave us with a fairly nice planet to move to, even if a bit cluttered. So my great-great-great grandparents, along with the other travelers at that time turned up the fans and blew the dust into this place occupied only by this one old man and his broom. He didn't care about the bodies then; he doesn't care about the litter now. And, yes, we have our own litter which blows into this place. And this ancient man sweeps it up for us. Do I care for him? No, not at all. Will I remember him after this assigned essay, or at all past first grade? No, I hope not. Second grade will be much better; I hear we start learning quantum physics, even though it will be review for me. Don't tell anyone else I peeked ahead. And don't worry, it's easy.

Don't forget to visit Dr. Freddi Gold's website:  
[www.cleartransitions.com](http://www.cleartransitions.com)

## INFORMATION FROM JIM ELSTAD

I'm interested in forming a critique group with the following criteria:

1. Interested in submitting 5,000 words every other week.
2. Action/Adventure (would consider mixing genre if that's what it took to get it off the ground).
3. If possible I'd like to see if there's enough interest to have a HDCWC group in Barstow (we can meet at my house). If that's not possible I'll continue to travel to the VV area.

Jim

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## CAROL CONTINUES TO TRAVEL by Carol Warren

Readers may remember my vacation to Texas and the challenge that became when I accidentally left my cell phone in my car. Now another exciting adventure when I went to Delaware for Thanksgiving to spend with my daughter and her family.

I had been there almost two weeks so was definitely ready to come back home to my own routine again. When it's time to come home, I am almost as excited as I was to make the trip, so the day of return, anticipation was high.

The suitcases were loaded, the sandwiches packed for the trip, and the good-byes were spoken. At the last minute, my daughter decided to take the children to school so we wouldn't need to wait for the bus and could get started to the airport. Turn the key and hear that dreaded sound of near dead battery. Someone had left an interior light on and drained the battery. My daughter tends to panic easily and this was no exception. She was nearly in tears when I asked her, "You have jumper cables, right?"

She agreed she had cables, "but I don't know how to use them."

I responded, "Shame on me for neglecting your education. Every military wife should know how to use jumper cables."

She got them out, but then again expressed concern, "This won't help because you have to have another vehicle close enough to connect to and you can't get Mike's truck in here".

I told her we would push her minivan close enough to connect. She was incredulous and

insisted we weren't strong enough to do this but I assured her we could and instructed her to get in the car and put it in neutral and steer it. In just a few minutes the minivan was close enough to her husband's truck and the cables could reach.

When I opened the hood on Mike's truck to connect the cables, the battery was so dirty, I couldn't tell which was the positive and which one the negative (now called "neutral"). I scrubbed off the connections and put the cables on.

The next challenge was we couldn't figure out where the hood release was for her van. She refers to the manual and we finally locate the lever and were soon on the road.

We dropped the children off at school and still felt we would be fine, so long as we didn't hit heavy traffic. We arrived at the Philadelphia airport with just over an hour to spare, I thought.

This was the first time I had been through security with the stricter guidelines so instead of taking about fifteen minutes to get through the check point, it took over forty-five minutes. I took off for my gate as fast as I am able to walk but was definitely more briskly than I usually walk. There were sixteen B gates and mine was number 13.

Passengers were already boarding but I still had a leeway of almost 20 minutes before take-off; when I had a big sigh of relief.

I thought I was "home free" when I landed in Las Vegas and went to the baggage claim. Only one of my suitcases had made it there. Somehow, the other one went to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Not sure how that happens. The airlines assured me when it was located, it would be sent to my home by Fed-EX.

I took the shuttle back to my hotel where I had left my car and they couldn't find my keys for awhile. The attendant finally asked when I had left my car and when he had that information he was able to locate my keys right away. I guess the more long term parking, the keys are filed in a different way.

I drove back to Apple Valley in just under three hours and home never looked so good. I didn't want to go off the place for at least a week.

## TREE OF LIFE

By Liz Paine

Tree of Life  
Something solid to hang onto,  
A big friend to shield me.  
Leaves that whisper to me in the afternoon.  
My willow tree.

**SPRING ROMANCE**  
*(From the Other Side of the Desk)*

by Emily Pomeroy

Spring was late that year. When the first buds were on the trees and the warm sun helped dismiss all the winter's cold wet weather, the fifth graders started awakening as well. Yes, there we were with love in bloom.

Kids were carefully sending messages, when they thought I wasn't looking. I did pick up a few. They seemed pretty safe: "Let's talk after lunch. Meet me at the swings." That was about it. After a few days I began to realize that the messages usually concerned two of the top students in the class, really nice kids, straight A's and all that. My interest grew. They were becoming boyfriend and girlfriend in fifth grade.

My own first personal interest in boys didn't happen until sixth grade. And my parents had to deal with the fact a boy asked me to go steady in seventh grade. But, as I thought more about the situation, I remembered a boy and girl in my own fifth grade class who became boy and girl friends and their friendship lasted to my knowledge through high school. They always had a date for any dance. They always had a best friend. I'm sure they are still friends today. So, a bit of relief set in, and I figured this probably would last a few days, or perhaps they would be lucky enough to have this friendship for years to come. We went on with the classwork.

The next week all was well. The letters in class seemed to have stopped. No one was upset. In fact all the kids seemed to be in a good mood that Wednesday. We had a productive morning and I was looking forward to a nice relaxing lunch. As we lined up for lunch I did notice one girl carrying a book and a bathrobe. I asked her if she needed to take that to the playground. She said yes because they were going to be doing a play. Well, she was always such a sweetie, so smart and so friendly, I figured they probably did pick her for a big role in their production. And it was a gorgeous spring day.

I grabbed my lunch and decided to eat in the patio area, away from all noise, just to enjoy the day.

That's until the final bell rang to line up for the afternoon class. As I was making my way to the door a proctor was making her way to me, along with the girl in the bathrobe and the two who had become boyfriend, girlfriend. None of the kids looked upset. The proctor seemed disturbed.

She started in and wouldn't let anyone speak, including me, until she got the whole thing out in the open. She explained that the girl in the robe was officiating at a marriage ceremony on the playground and the other two were getting married. All the class was there to witness this. The book, which she then handed to me, was the sweetie's Bible.

I tried to keep a straight face. I thanked her for telling me and told her I would take care of the situation and that it wouldn't happen again. She was still upset, claimed nothing like this had ever happened and why didn't I stop it. I told her I thought they were having a play rehearsal after lunch. Once again, I assured her there would be no more plays to be rehearsed at lunch time.

Then I turned my attention to the three actors, still assuming this was a play rehearsal.

"What play are you doing?"

The bride quickly corrected me. "No, no, no. We wanted to get married in front of all our friends."

The groom said nothing.

"So, this was really a wedding ceremony?" I asked.

"Of course, Mary brought her Bible," the bride replied. "We wanted to do it right." Mary nodded. The groom said nothing.

"I think this is all very nice of you to want a wedding and a marriage, and very good of Mary to bring her robe and Bible. Did you have a speech prepared for all of this?" I asked.

"Yes," this time Mary answered, "I wrote down all the stuff I needed to say and to ask them. Here it is. And I read from the Bible too."

I took the paper. She had written a ceremony that included things like "do you take Karen and do you take Tom?"

"OK, but I have to tell you that in California you're too young to get married." The groom sort of looked like he agreed with me on that point. "May I suggest that you use this occasion to perhaps recognize your friendship?"

We all walked away from the discussion with that agreement. However, after school the kids who were at the ceremony gathered around them as they walked to the bus.

There was a faculty meeting that afternoon. All the teachers were aware of the incident on the playground and giving me congratulations for being the first fifth grade teacher to have students married on the playground. It was funny until one teacher said, "You don't think they actually believe they're married?"

That night I called both the bride and groom's parents to set the record straight and to tell them I had no idea about their plans for the lunch recess. The parents were not even prepared to know about the girlfriend/boyfriend thing, let alone have someone tell them that their bright, precocious children might think they got married on the playground.

I hope today they are still friends. I'm sure their fifth grade wedding is the topic of most family gatherings.

And the little sweetie with the robe and the Bible died several years ago. I have visited her grave and told her what a special kid she will always be to me.

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## **ECHOES OF A COLORFUL WORLD: THE DEVASTATION OF MACULAR DEGENERATION**

By Jenny Margotta

I am a color-oriented person. I define my world in terms of color. My favorite is purple, deep, lush, vibrant, creamy satin purple, spilling over my hands and tumbling around me in pools of luxury and passion. There are the positive tones – turquoises, greens and blues – the colors I denote for happiness, laughter, exotic places and life. Not to be discounted are the browns, greys, yellows – the colors of duty and responsibility and yes, life, too.

I simply delight in the colorful world I find myself in. My heart warms at the sight of the hills aglow in the bright, warm shades of the trees in the full glory of an East Coast autumn - brilliant yellows, glowing oranges, and deep, blood reds. Or the way the sun creates tiny, golden stars all along the many, many shades of green found in the wet, glistening leaves of our back garden in the early morning hours after the sprinklers have done their job. The turquoises, blues, teals and greens of the water in the Caribbean can bring tears to my eyes. "Caribbean Blue." You all know the color, I'm sure, that soft, turquoise-blue, shallows-just-off-the-beach, ocean color you see in all the travel ads for the Caribbean. Someday, I vow, I'm going to experience that particular color in person. I can - and do - stand awestruck at the brilliant burning shades of a summer sunset, the arctic-white hues of winter or even the rich blush of a ripe peach.

Life without color would be so... well, so monochrome. That's why my heart goes out to my husband, John. He has been an artist and writer all his life, and was a professional photographer for

nearly 60 years. He used to draw and make the most beautiful mosaics, and his photos were amazing. He always had an eye for the ladies, loved to read, loved to cook, and just loved being out in the world every day. "How can I settle for a life spent in an office," he once remarked, "when the whole world is out there, changing every day, just waiting to show me something new, something I've missed until now." In short, John lived. He grabbed it with both hands and danced a succession of jitterbugs, waltzes, and tangos with Lady Life.

How terribly tragic then is the advanced macular degeneration he's now fighting. Now legally blind, his world has dissolved into a blurry, out-of-focus, grey landscape. Some days it's an effort just to get him to leave the house. "I no longer know just what you look like," he lamented one evening. He gently cupped my face in his hands and ran his thumbs over my cheeks. Turning away, he continued. "I no longer see faces at all. If I met you or my best friend in a store or at the park, I would not know you. How can I describe what it's like to never see a straight line? To realize I'll never again be able to see anything sharply and clearly? Every waking hour of every day, my life is just one, continual, out-of-focus blur."

How do I console him when his words tear at my heart?

How could God... if there is a God... take away the one thing that has, if not controlled, at least greatly influenced John's life choices? Losing his hearing or being confined in a wheelchair, while certainly not good things, would have been much less devastating to John, the artist, than losing his eyesight. I wonder that he can still get up each morning, knowing his world has faded to the indistinct shapes found in a small, 1600 square foot house.

These days, John can no longer distinguish shades of green, and blues are fast becoming a memory of the past, as well. He still sees reds and some of the brighter yellows, but mostly it's shades of black and grey. However, his mind echoes and re-echoes with the kaleidoscope of colors that surrounded him for most of his 85 years. So long as he has his memories, he says, he'll never be totally blind.

***-----I found I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn't say any other way... things I had no words for."***

***Georgia O'Keefe***

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