



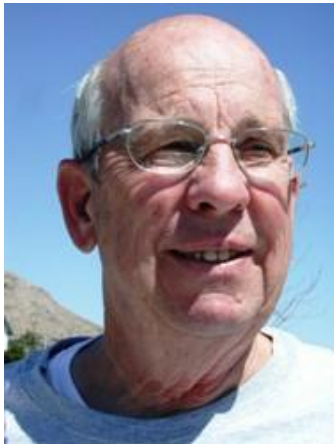
INKSLINGER

HIGH DESERT BRANCH CWC

SAIL ON

Vol. 23. No. 10 –

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

In the Deep South during a certain era, if you complimented your host on the dinner, and raved that you could stay forever, and then put your cloth napkin on your plate, everyone would know you would not be there for the next meal. It was a signal to the maid, the cook, the host and hostess that no preparations would be necessary to feed you again that visit.

Conversely, if you said that you simply must get on with your journey and believed you would have to leave first thing in the morning, and then you folded your napkin and put it next to your plate, all would know that they would see you again for bacon and eggs the next day.

It was the culture of the times.

Civilizations have cultures; workplaces have cultures, and so do clubs. You just need to be privy to what is done and what is not done.

For example, we do not offer members’ books for sale at our conferences and regular meetings. Why not? It seems like it would be a good place to make contacts and sell our works. The reason is that we invite people to speak to our club, and they usually have a service or product to publicize and sell. They provide us an educational and/or entertaining experience, and we make

available an audience of potential consumers of what they have to offer. Even though their product may not compete at all with our members’ works, the available dollars struggle one against the other. So we just abstain.

We pay our guest speakers a small honorarium, and sometimes a bit more when we consider the distance they travel or the information we’re liable to gain. But we don’t pay our own members to speak to the group; we just figure that’s part of being a member of the HD CWC.

Religion and politics don’t mix these days any more than they ever have, so we refrain from getting guest speakers whose resume suggests those subjects will be a big part of the menu. This is a writers’ club. It’s not a synagogue, a mosque, or a church. Those topics, for the most part, don’t line up well with our Mission Statement. Aside from that, the CWC bylaws require separation of church and state to stay within the guidelines of the non-profit 501(c) 3 status.

Same goes for the newsletter, emails, anthology, and our web site.

It’s not that there’s anything wrong with writing stories containing faith, prayer, or voting. There’s a whole bunch of great stories containing these values. The thing we avoid, as a club, is telling others how to vote or who and how to worship.

Discourtesy, as you know, is a turn-off. I once attended a club where those in the audience, oblivious to the speaker, carried on their own conversations. It was rude and distracting. I gave it one more chance and things had not changed so I never went back.

Once in awhile, anyone is going to be late. However, once the meeting has begun, we expect those entering or exiting the room to do so as quietly as possible, and certainly not distract others by having chitchats while someone is at the lectern.

We don't even have to talk about cell phones. But I will. If you absolutely must be in contact with those not present, there's a vibrate mode that shouldn't disturb the meeting.

I didn't mean to go down a list of "do's and don'ts" here. But we're a friendly group and as friends, we should know our boundaries and do our best to mind them.

It's part of what makes it so enjoyable to attend our great meetings!

WRITERS READ IN SUN CITY IN NOVEMBER

by Mary Langer Thompson

Several California Writer's Club published authors read from their works at a new venue for us, the Mariposa Lodge in Sun City in Apple Valley, on Wednesday, November 10, 2010. Mary Scott, Club member, organized the event which was open to the public.

The well-attended evening began with Carol Warren, past President, giving some history of the CWC, High Desert Branch and then introducing Emily Pomeroy as Master of Ceremonies. Emily updated us about the award winning, World Full of Nothing, an independent film on teen suicide for which her son, Jesse Pomeroy won Best Feature Director. Madeline Gornell drove all the way from Newberry Springs to read from her latest, a Route 66 mystery, Reticence of Ravens. Sierra Donovan (AKA Holly La Pat) read from one of her tantalizing yet tasteful Avon romance novels. Christian author, Fran Savage, read from the sure page-turner, The Serial Killer, My Son: Jessica, A Time for Faith, and Denny Stanz whetted our appetites with Food Stories, which includes recipes for single men. Roberta Smith read from her first book and paranormal novel, The Secret of Lucianne Dove. Vic McCain Buzzelli discussed his children's book series and introduced his illustrator. Evelyn Blocker read about what it was like to be a teacher in a rural

school. Mary Scott concluded the event with an excerpt from her Spirit Driven Events.

After the readings, authors autographed and sold their books. For the holidays, my son will be receiving Food Stories; my five year old nephew, Vic Buzzelli's, The Adventures of Molly and Mikey: Womb Mates Book #1; a friend, Life is Basically Tragic, But Not Mine, by Evelyn Blocker; and I will be relaxing with The Secret of Lucianne Dove.

Thank you, Mary Scott and readers. We hope this is the first of more reading festivals to come.

PAUL S. LEVINE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY ATTORNEY & LITERARY AGENT

By Fran Savage

What we expected from Paul S. Levin's speech was a peek at the entertainment industry. What we got was an open door into the Publishing Industry. For thirty years he has represented writers, after Law School at USC and in the beginning three clients shaped his future when he went solo.

He got our attention with his first statement. "How book authors actually make money. You think in some way dollars appear in your bank account? Actually there are four ways authors make money from publishers."

ADVANCES: An advance is against Royalties. There are five major publishers, and 46,000 smaller publishers in the United States. An agent will deal with only 20% to 30% of them. Usually half is paid on signing, half on acceptance of manuscript, or 1/3 on signing, 1/3 on acceptance, and 1/3 on publishing.

"They play games, and they sit on a contract for weeks and weeks. They stall for time, such as asking who signs the contract you or you and the publisher."



ROYALTIES: Three types

Hard Cover Books pay 10% for the first 5,000 books sold, 12 ½% for the next 5,000 books, and 15% for all above 10,000.

Trade Paperbacks 8% to 12% up to 150,000; 10% over 150,000.

Paperbacks Books that sell for \$14.95 to \$20.00. Author receives 6% to 10% or as low as 4%.

“How business acts at retail? All books in the bookstore are on consignment. Only time the book dealer sends in a check is when the book sells. A book that sells for \$30.00, the dealer sends in \$15.00 to the publisher regardless how much the dealer discounts the original thirty dollars. An author needs to have a good Literary Agent, one who knows the Publishing Industry.

“Book stores cannot return print on demand books.” He warned that not all self publishing firms are honest. “You may need to have them audited, and that should be included in the contract. If you find that they have cheated you, then they should pay for the audit.”

SALE OF SUBSIDERARY RIGHTS –

Copyright law

“Ownership of the entire pie exists in your work at the moment of creation. There are certain advantages to registering your work. When you enter into an agreement with a publisher, you are licensing the publisher the rights to publish your book.”

RIGHTS Medium, Term and Territory

Medium-- All rights in all media now known or otherwise created or hereafter devised.

Territory-- Throughout the city, state, nation or worldwide.

Term -- i.e. publishing hard copy book in the USA for one year.

“You always own the copyright in your work, but you are granting the rights to your publishers.”

TERM -- Life of writer plus seventy years, thanks to Disney the Supreme Court changed the term from fifty years.

BEST SELLER BONUS For each week your book is on the New York Top Best Seller List, the publisher may pay you \$5,000 for each week up to a maximum of \$50,000. “Quick Story: Tuesdays with Morrie was on the list for 293 weeks, \$10,000 per week, and someone forgot to put on a cap. That editor *is* no longer.”

Other interesting facts:

Books that sell for \$1.00 no one gets any money

Work for hire must be agreed in advance, not after the fact.

Just for Dummies, idiots are all work for hire deals. No more money

“If in doubt, check copyrights (of others). Copyright problems on life rights, if a person is dead you can write what you want. If that character is still alive it gets complicated. If it couldn't be anyone else but me you have two issues.

“Public disclosure of private facts for instance forty years ago if Bob did something not so nice you need permission in order to write about him.

“Life defamation, if you accuse him of something he didn't do it is a false statement. If Bob is a serial killer, and he wasn't convicted of crimes you have a problem if Bob recognizes himself.

“Historical fiction you can do what you want as long as you label it as historical fiction.

“No problem quoting on book or magazine, get permission and give them credit.

“Don't quote lyrics from a song, Music is tough.

“When your book is published the publisher will give you a form and ask you to get the appropriate permission for anything that is not yours. No matter what it is, all quotes must be given permission. Do a copyright search.”

Other interesting facts: 75% of all books sold are non-fiction.

70% of all fiction is romance novels.

80% of all book sold are purchased by women.

75% of all books are sold between November 15th and December 26th and special holidays like birthdays, Mother's Day and Father's Day, and vacation.

Book stores have no cost for inventory. They can sell the book for any amount, but still have to pay half of the original price of the book.

“Publisher's contracts often include the statement: Will set forth all royalties (in 8 point) if we sell the book at other than our usual and customary discounts we will cut your royalty in half. You need a lawyer who understands publishers, and the tricks they play. The statement should read: If we sell the book at less than 45% we will cut your royalty by a like amount. (Not in half.)”

Because of the volume of books they sell Costco or Wal Mart don't pay normal discount so author's pay will be less.

Amazon pays 47% of price instead of 50%.

Mr. Levine finished by answering questions from those who self publish.

2011 PREDICTIONS AND PROJECTIONS

I recently sent out a survey to find out the interest and the readiness of our members to start producing an anthology for 2011. Thanks to all of you who responded.

The results, so far, are generally this: There is high interest, but a target date of 90 days is too soon. Still, it looks like a projected anthology for next year is a thing we will be doing, so please continue to write and we will be asking for your best submissions in the Spring. More details will follow. The guidelines will be similar to the 2010 anthology with 2500 words or less for a short story, 750 maximum for poetry, and a limit of five or less submissions per author.

Even though our 2010 project, "Howling at the Moon", has taken longer than we expected, there will be several authors included in the book who, by the time it is printed, will have been published in less than a year of HD CWC membership.

Another projection for 2011 is a major writers' conference. We have established as a date, the first weekend in October 2011, so when making your personal plans, save that date. We look forward to topping our excellent September 25, 2010 event.

I'd also like each of you to prepare a "10 Minute Tips & Techniques" presentation. This isn't Toastmasters, so nobody is required to come to the lectern and do a speech. However, this is a network of writers who have learned different techniques from their unique personal writing experiences. Sharing these tips with the other members is not only valuable information that we can't get elsewhere, it's a program "in the bank" when our scheduled speaker fails to show up! Please keep that in mind for 2011. The only requirement is that you keep it to 10 minutes or less.

And if any of you have an educational talk about any phase of writing, publishing or marketing, let me know so that we can work you in as one of our guest speakers.



READERS' PANEL SETS OFF ON FIRST TRIAL

The Readers' Panel has begun. Following is a synopsis of the book available for reading at this time. We need one more reader for this book. If interested, please contact the Readers' Panel coordinator:

Curt James: cdj5326@yahoo.com

The purpose of the Readers' Panel is to determine whether the Reader liked the material, if he or she would recommend it to a friend, if it was interesting, boring or fascinating. Grammar and spelling are secondary. Any HD CWC member can be a Reader. Only HD CWC members are eligible to request a Readers' Panel.

READERS' PANEL SUBMISSION

November 13, 2010

SHAPING KATE

Shaping Kate is a coming-of-age novel set in the early 1950s.

Kate is a young adventurous girl who wishes she could ride the river, skip baths, and have no boss, like her hero, Huck Finn. She wants to shave tough whiskers like her dad and fly planes like Amelia Earhart.

Motivated by her insatiable curiosity, and undaunted by rules, Kate creatively entertains herself in a world without television. She plots a robbery, skids across maggots in search of bones, and vaccinates boys with locust thorns. She joins a weekly UFO watch, takes her dad's boom truck without knowing how to drive, and eavesdrops on her uncle and his friends to learn about sex.

Kate makes her mom explain shock treatments, vagina, and falsies. She questions religion and the makers of rules. She reads books and body language and learns about murder and decapitation. Forced by nightmares, she breaks her promise and reveals a horrific secret that saves a friend.

Skeptical after listening to traveling hell-and-damnation preachers, disturbed about a friend who was molested, and puzzled over mixed feelings when she wrestles with her first boyfriend, Kate enters her teens, uncertain about the church and God, and confused about life and love.

Kate will bring tears to your eyes, laughs to your belly, and warmth to your heart.



KAROL AND KAROLINA: AN HISTORICAL FANTASY AND HOLIDAY RECIPE

By Judith Pfeffer, member, HDCWC

Long before ever we were born, there lived a lively young man in a small town in Poland. He was as bright as he was kind, and he loved progressive social causes, books and theater. Although he was Roman Catholic as are most Poles, his heart was big enough to care for all kinds of people. The name of this thoughtful young man was Karol.

His best friend – and, eventually much more than a friend – had a similar name, Karolina. She came from the nearby Jewish village and was as bright and kind as he. Her family owned a delightful bakery whose products were enjoyed equally by Catholics and Jews. Most popular, perhaps surprisingly, was the gingerbread, a favorite Hanukkah treat. Few people know that Jews can bake gingerbread, but bake it Karolina's family did. In fact, Karol and Karolina often dreamed of a gigantic gingerbread wedding cake for a Hanukkah-time wedding, although its creation seemed an easier project than telling their respective families about a mixed marriage.

Alas, they never were able to attempt either goal. For all too soon in those very dark days in the coldest winter in memory, the evil soldiers came to take away Karolina, her family and all the Jewish villagers, take them away forever, despite Karol's valiant efforts to prevent it. Before they were torn apart, Karolina begged her secret love to keep alive her family's most famous recipe and to return it to them, someday, somehow. And, of course he promised to do so.

Broken-hearted at this tragic turn of events, Karol swore that he would never love another and that he was done altogether and forever with the realm of romance. He then chose another path to try to help the world, slowly, steadily and eventually rising to the very top of the hierarchy and becoming known to all the world by a name that I hardly need mention. He continued his activism, public speaking and writing, inspiring all nations to their souls' best effort.

Throughout his career, he kept a special place in his heart for the Jewish people and did much to make peace between his faith and theirs. And he never forgot his promise to Karolina. For years, nay, decades he tried to locate her descendants, if any there might still be, to no avail.

Finally, as an old man, realizing his strength was failing him and his days on this plane were numbered, he bade his assistants use the latest computer technology to make good on the promise. Thus they created a website intended to attract one person only, just before Hanukkah this year. Only Karolina's true heir would be able to enter and read the recipe, by employing as username that of Karolina's village and as password the name of the bakery.

It is only now that I am ready to assume the solemn honor of presenting the gingerbread baked from that recipe, which heretofore had been unknown for 67 years. For Karolina was my mother's mother's mother. It can now be told that the family and the recipe miraculously have survived to the 21st century. It is my humble pleasure to share the pope's Jewish gingerbread.

Adapted from "High-Altitude Gingerbread" in The Joy of Cooking, 1964 edition

Important Note: This recipe makes a cake-like gingerbread (not gingerbread people or gingerbread buildings).

In addition to the ingredients themselves, you will need a flour sifter, one small bowl, two large bowls, measuring cups, measuring spoons, fork, spoon, spatula and several toothpicks.

2 and 1/3 cups sifted all-purpose white flour
¾ teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon ground dried ginger
½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon each of these ground dry spices:

- Allspice
- Black pepper
- Cinnamon
- Cloves
- Nutmeg
- Dried orange zest
- Chinese Five-Spice Powder which itself consists of the following dried spices:
 - Cinnamon
 - Cloves
 - Ginger
 - Fennel
 - Licorice
 - Szechuan peppercorn
 - Star anise
 - White pepper
 -

½ cup softened butter
Two eggs, well beaten
½ cup molasses
½ cup sugar
¼ cup honey
2/3 cup boiling water

Sift dry ingredients together three times and set aside in one of the large bowls. Beat eggs in a small bowl. In the second large bowl, cream butter and sugar thoroughly, then add the beaten eggs, molasses, honey and water. Add this mixture gradually to dry ingredients and mix thoroughly. Pour into well-greased pan (9 by 9 by 2 inches) or any size muffin cups and bake at 350 degrees

Fahrenheit until a toothpick inserted in the center of each cake comes out clean.



TAKING A WRITING WORKSHOP

By Linda Bowden

This weekend I had the pleasure of taking a writing workshop. Our branch has been advertising for some time in our own newsletter. The workshop was put on by our sister branch, South Bay Writers.

The workshop was led by the prize winning memoir author, Linda Joy Myers. She called the workshop, "Truth or Lie: Writing on the Cusp of Memoir and Fiction."

Before the workshop began, continental breakfast was served along with friendly conversation. "Where are you from?" asked our tablemates. "What kinds of things do you write?" Lovely people, just like you and me, writing, anxious to tell their stories to the world.

Linda gave us great information about memoir writing, the do's and don'ts of memoir writing and whether or not our subjects are on the cusp of fiction. She came prepared with hand outs to remind of us of what we did in the workshop as well as information on her own memoir books and websites. Linda is the founder of The National Memoir Writers Association which you can find more information on the website www.namw.org.

As the workshop developed, we were given opportunity to write scenes that may or may not be used in our own memoirs. I was one of the brave souls who read to the crowd. She graciously gave me an A on my scene and she genuinely praised all who were brave enough to read.

Her information given regarding timelines, turning points, themes and characters are tools that can only reinforce our natural talents. One of the statements that really stuck in my mind was, "When we're writing, we're artists, painting a picture with our words. This is a picture that others can enter into". This statement reminded me of the endless pleasures I've received in my lifetime when I'm able to totally lose myself in a book, to imagine the scenery, the characters and their lives.

It's a great country we live in, with the freedom to read and write anything we want to. Opportunities are abundant and it's a shame that we as writers don't take more advantage of the opportunities afforded to us.

We're all writers, but this writer knows, if she is to succeed she must take the time to invest in her craft and learn, learn, learn.

Good information, good writing, good food, and good sharing with others who also love to write.

A CHRISTMAS STORY by Emily Pomeroy

It was Christmas time in Paris and my husband and I, along with our son, walked over to Notre Dame Cathedral in the sleet of an early evening storm. Our umbrellas were being blown in every direction. It was a miserable slosh. Then, turning a corner, we could see the flying buttresses ahead and warm light through the stained glass windows. The cathedral appeared as a haven in the storm.

A long line of folks with soggy rain gear were winding their way into the church. We looked at one another trying to decide whether to come back on a better day. It was a quiet line and soon it became evident to us that the people were from many countries and probably many different religious persuasions. The line was moving so we stayed.

We all entered the vestibule which was lined with mat like carpeting to absorb the moisture and began closing the umbrellas, removing heavy hats and coats. It was all very orderly and there was no conversation. It suddenly occurred to us that a Mass was in progress in

the church; someone was singing a Christmas carol accompanied by organ music. Our line kept moving.

Once inside the cavernous church the three of us stopped and backed out of the way simply overcome by the beauty of this sanctuary. We've been in lovely cathedrals and church buildings in many countries, but this was different. This place on that night was warm and inviting to all who would gather there. The church service was for the local parish. It seemed strange to consider that Notre Dame in the middle of Paris does have a local church membership. It's a working church.

We lit candles and then followed as everyone silently walked from one small chapel to the next often lighting candles. The structure itself was beautiful, but the warmth that evening was coming from the thousands of candles that had been lit around the church by people from every faith and nation and the prayers that must have been said with each candle.

CHRISTMAS AT OUR HOUSE

By Hazel Stearns

Drinks in tall glasses
that sparkle and ring
Roasts and stuffing
potatoes and beans

Candies and cookies
pies and cakes
Firsts and seconds
till stomachs ached

Gifts ripped open
and food consumed
Laughter and carols
from every room

Teens liked hard rock
the men liked games
Women gabbed
'bout fashion and fame

Lively preteens
skated and fought
Grandmaw fidgeted

directed and bossed
The family squabbled
common each year
Part of living
with those held dear
Big hugs and kisses
spread all around
Best wishes for all
in New Year abound
The clan's all gone
the house is thrashed
The dishes scraped
some glasses smashed
No deaths or births
a good year in site
Another year passes
to all—Good Night!

MAMA'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT

By James R. Elstad

"George, I can't take it anymore, come and get her!"

As I grabbed my car keys and headed out the door, I put my cell under my chin and tucked my shirt in. "Sissie, I'll be over in ten minutes. Anything new? Or is it the usual?"

Mary sobbed into her phone, "The usual, I know it's only been two days, but do you mind?"

Steeling myself for what I knew would happen when I arrived, I said, "Not at all, it's what we agreed isn't it?"

As I drove the two blocks to Mary's house, I shuddered to think of what I'd have to do. But it's Christmas and Mary deserves to have time with her new family. I ran up the steps and opened the door. "Mama, I'm home, time to get your things. I want you to visit me. Are you ready?"

Mary, visibly shaking, came out of Mama's room with her suitcase. "Oh thank you for coming so quickly."

I hugged Mary and whispered, "Here're my keys put it in the trunk." I took Mama's hand and looked at the shell of the woman I used to know as Mama. With a smile on my face, I cried inside.

Without a word, Mary took my keys, left the room, and I took Mama's hand. She stared into nowhere. "Time to water the plants, and feed the dog."

"Yes Mama, we'll water the plants and feed the dog. Come with me and we'll get started." I took her frail hand and tried to lead her to the front door.

"NO! Kitchen's this way! Time to water the plants, and feed the dog." Then she forced me with strength I hadn't felt in years. We entered the kitchen and she led me to the sink.

I pulled a pitcher from the shelf and filled it with water. "Oh look Mama, feel the soil in the pot. You already watered the plants and the dog has food. Let's go for a ride."

As we reached the back door, Mama grabbed the doorjamb with her hands and hung on. "No, I won't go! You hurt me!"

Patiently I took a deep breath. "Mama, I've never hurt you. Let's go for a ride now."

Twenty minutes later, I was sweating and gritting my teeth as we walked into my house. Every step was a challenge. How much longer will this go on? How much longer can we do this? I don't know how much longer I can keep this up.

Then I noticed that Mama's face had softened and she smiled. "Oh look, George you have the nicest Christmas tree. That's so sweet for you to have it decorated just for my last Christmas. I know what you and Mary are doing for me. I love you for it. I don't know when I'll lose control again so remember I love you no matter what this disease tells you. When it happens I have no control."

Tears started coming down my face and I hugged Mama. Her body stiffened. "Get away from me! I hate you! I don't like it here I want to go home."

Last Christmas
by Thomas Kier

Christmas again! You know, I've always loved it: the lights, the tree, the warmth of friends

and loved ones when it's cold outside. As I grew up, I found myself wanting to give gifts as much as I once wanted to get them. And, of course, having children of your own adds a whole new dimension to it. You get to watch the magic happen with them, and remember how it was for you. Believing in it all over again through them more than makes up for all the nights you spent trying to get them to burp after a bottle, the days you sat with them and imagined the worst while waiting for the fever to break, the tears you didn't cry (barely) as you left them with the Kindergarten teacher, the firm hand you had to apply to a wayward bottom to teach them to obey and to respect authority--and yes, it really does hurt the parent more.

So the days are even shorter and the weather even colder than melancholy October, but in this gray and dreary reminder of the limits of our time in life is the sparkling jewel that is Christmas. It feels like new life, it feels like gifts that could take an eternity to understand and appreciate, it feels like love that will never end.

I watch silently as my children, one girl and one boy, burst noisily through the door, flinging their backpacks who-cares-where, and run to the tree. They have helped decorate it, but I try to add a few more touches each day while they are at school; I never let on it's me, and maybe that adds a little to the magic as well. They search with shining eyes, noting everything, but seem a little disappointed today. Why can't they see what I've done? It's right there-- Where is it? I know I put a new angel just there, and I scattered some more snowflakes up near the top! I can't find them! What's going on?

My wife finally convinces me to forego drinking Pepsi out of the can while I'm at home. She always gets a glass, puts in ice, and uses the stuff from the bottle; though I'm lazy, I should do the same, and save the cans to take to work. I find the ice in the freezer in a solid chunk, and sigh as I search for the icepick. Now slivers of ice are flying; I need to be more careful . . .

"Surprise!" I call from the corner of the living room behind the door. I have come home early from work to spend more time with my family; I know this paycheck will suffer a little, but we have to realize what is important in life, and caring for the kids is crucial to us. I can't wait to see the look in their eyes!

"Um . . . Surprise!" I call out louder; apparently they didn't hear me the first time. They look into each other's eyes, and now I can see the

looks on their precious faces. I don't see the magic of Christmas; I see only a profound sadness. What's the deal?

"Guys, what do you think?" I hope they can see my improvements on the tree; my eyes must be more tired than I thought. They turn only when my wife trudges slowly through the door; her eyes are puffy and red. I go to her; she definitely needs a hug. I hold her tight, but she stands there with no response.

"Time to change your clothes," she says quietly and sadly to the two waiting children. "We have a viewing to go to."

"Mommy, I don't think I can go," says Karen. "I don't want to see him like that." Her tears run swiftly off her cheeks. Edgar simply stands there with his fists in his eyes; his shoulders are shaking, but there is no sound.

"What's wrong with you guys? You act like somebody died," I joke, probably inappropriately, but it just slips out.

They all disappear slowly toward their respective bedrooms.

I am impatient with the mess in the freezer, and really attack the ball of ice with the pick; there are slivers flying everywhere. Some of them are undoubtedly sharp; my mind utters a warning to slow down, but my hand has not yet gotten the message. Now a sliver of ice flies toward my eye, and I blink, but not fast enough . . .

When my wife asked whose turn it was to sit in the front seat, neither kid volunteered; usually that's enough to start an argument. I slip silently into the seat and am ignored; I know now this is a dream, and I want to see where it takes me.

There is silence in the van; not even the radio breaks it. We drive to the funeral home. This is what I have feared, but I have to see which one of my parents has died. I follow my family down the main aisle, but hold back when the children do; I am as nervous as they are, but I'm not supposed to show it. Now we look toward the open box.

Water: the building block of life. We can't live without it. So how can such a small thing in the form of a sliver of ice hurt so much? It stings terribly, and I clap my hand over my eye. There is something I've forgotten, though. I'm still holding the ice pick . . .

Someone bearing a remarkable resemblance to my father is lying in an open coffin, surrounded by weeping family. I hug my wife and children, trying to comfort them; they need all my support right now. But they are ignoring me, and I

cannot feel the physical contact with them. I am strangely unmoved by the person in the box.

I look one more time, and realize it is a face I have seen in my mirror. Curious . . . I realize why my family doesn't respond to me at all, and I must accept my fate.

"Goodbye, my precious family! I will love you forever! Merry Christm--"

Blackness.

MY SKINNY SANTA CLAUS

by Diane Neil

We who grew up during World War II celebrated Christmas in a simpler way than today's children. My generation hung stockings and lined up to tell a chubby department store Santa our wishes. Even in those lean times there was much to celebrate -- food, faith and family.

The eldest of three children, I relished holidays spent with Grandpa and Grandma Clark. Daddy was their only child, and those loving people spoiled us as rotten as their modest means permitted.

Grandma was nice and plump, but Grandpa was the skinniest man I ever knew. On his own since twelve, he was a jack of all trades -- jockey, soldier, sailor, house painter, paper-hanger. In his spare time he made whatnot shelves in the garage. I think he never slowed down enough for any fat to settle in.

Every Christmas Eve Daddy, Mama and we kids would kidnap Grandma for a ride to look at everybody's Christmas trees while Grandpa stayed home to wait for Santa's arrival. We'd drive all over Elmhurst looking at the decorations. On the way back we'd buy big puffy glazed potato doughnuts, the kind that were so full of air you could squeeze them almost flat. Back at my grandparents' we came in the back door. We couldn't go in the living room because Santa Claus was in there and Grandpa was the only one who could help him.

While we were having hot chocolate and doughnuts in the kitchen we could hear Santa rustling and stomping around out in the living room, and then we'd hear his sleigh bells and Grandpa hollering "Goodbye! Merry Christmas!" to him. Then Grandpa told us we could come and see what Santa brought us.

No matter how quick we were we never got a glimpse of Santa! But what we really cared about were the presents under the tree. While the adults laughed and applauded, we three spoiled brats tore into our gifts. EVERY year we each got our special

gift from Santa -- dolls, books, games, and simple wooden toys that looked a lot like the furniture Grandpa made. One year I got my very own varnished pine desk!

Although I was a precocious child who guessed there was no stork or Easter Bunny, I believed in Santa Claus until I was eleven. That was the year my skinny Santa was taken from us. Not a Christmas goes by that I don't remember him. In my child's heart I can see him up in Santa's workshop teaching the elves to make all those wooden toys.

THE END

"POOR OR RICH SHARING THE JOY"

By Linda Bowden

This was one of those years where financially everything was difficult. I had been sick with Rheumatic Fever, my sister was ill with a bone infection and my dad was out of work for several weeks with foot surgery. December 25th comes despite financial problems.

When I think back on the event, I can see how much my parents wanted everything to seem as right as rain for us. I can see why they kept us from the problems of the day and scooped us up into the magical world of commercial Christmas. In doing so, they taught us an important lesson which has followed me all of my adult life, the joy of sharing. One by one, during the Christmas Vacation from school, my mother unfolded her Christmas agenda. I didn't realize then how important this would be to me later in life. Together, we baked the usual Christmas treats, sugar cookies, peanut butter candy and fudge. She always made sure we had fudge. She shared the Christmas treats with neighbors or family who would come by, always saving some for our own Christmas Eve celebration.

One day during the week we would visit the local Santa Claus. In those days they didn't try to sell you pictures, they just let the children wait in long lines for a chance to sit on Santa's lap and to whisper in his ear what you were dreaming of for Christmas. When I see people in the mall shopping

today, I notice that they are doing their shopping right under the noses of their children. My mother never shopped when we were with her. She worked retail and could probably do plenty of that on lunch or after work. She loved catalogue shopping and to this day always looks at the Sears or Penny's catalogues.

With those two events out of the way, came the tree trimming. We seldom got real trees, because we're all allergic to them and my sister had asthma. This year she got out the aluminum tree, silver. She had red bulbs and a few special bulbs that we always placed on the tree. You know the ones, the ones her children had made for her, or some friend or family member had given to you for a Christmas gift. Tree trimming was a family event, no TV during tree trimming, just family.

Christmas Eve was so exciting. We would have other family over to the house for dinner and after sharing a meal the kids would be allowed to open a present. One present, and one present only would be opened. Family would retreat to their own homes and we'd go to bed with the warning, "Don't get up too early and if you hear Santa, don't peek." As if we'd listen as we kept our eyes open until the last possible moment.

What made this Christmas special? I'll never forget going into the living room that morning and seeing a covered wagon on the floor. Right before our eyes we saw a covered wagon, a real covered wagon, the kind you saw on "Wagon Train". For you young ones, "Wagon Train", happened to be a popular show then. On the tag attached to the handle were the words, Share, To Chris and Linda. There was also a large box under the tree. The tag read, To Chris and Linda. Inside was an organ, complete with color key chart and a song book. Of course there were the usual things, underwear, socks etc. Those two presents stand out in my mind because they were for both of us and we were forced to share them.

We had the best time Christmas day, wheeling each other up and down the street in our covered wagon. We played Wagon Train, Roy Rogers and Dale Evans and when night fell we took turns playing songs on the organ or least pretending we were actually turning out a real tune.

That year we were poor, but richly blessed and finances did not over shadow our joy! The Christmas Spirit was all around us, like a blanket of happiness.

THE YEAR SANTA CLAUS MISSED CHRISTMAS.

Few people know that Christmas of 1953 is the only year that Santa missed half the world. Why? Theories abound... Santa broke his leg, his reindeer were sick, the elves went on strike... None of these theories even comes close.

Here's the true story.

Santa had just completed Japan, China and the Pacific Rim far ahead of schedule. Skies were clear and they were making good time. Even Blitzen, who always went about his job grumbling and complaining about the weather, the moon in his eyes, smoke from chimneys making him sneeze... even Blitzen was running easily.

Humming his favorite song, 'Jingle Bells,' Santa opened his thermos and poured a cup of coffee. Yum, Mrs. Claus knew how to make coffee - black, strong and super hot. All was right in his world.

Little did he know what was in store. Santa's staff tried to keep current on world politics, but they failed to understand how tense things had become between the the U.S. and Russia. They certainly didn't advise Santa on a strange new policy called restricted air space. Blissfully ignorant, Santa crossed the Chinese/Siberian border.

His sled was quickly tagged by Russian radar and two Mig fighters were dispersed to deal with the unidentified intruder. A quick burst of machine gun fire across Santa's bow caused the reindeer to panic, but Santa's cool head prevented a terrible crash.

Later, Yuri Glasnovich, one of the fighter pilots, stated: "It was very strange sight. Flying sled pulled by some animal-shaped mechanisms, piloted by man in red uniform. I put burst of fire across his bow and made hand signals for him to follow me. He did."

Santa landed at a secret Siberian military air base, was quickly surrounded and taken into custody.

"Don't you touch my reindeer," he shouted, as he was escorted to Colonel Novotnovich, the base commander.

By now, Santa was having a hard time holding his temper, which was a new experience for the perpetually jolly man. "What is the meaning of this?" he shouted. "Do you know who I am?"

"No, why don't you tell me," Novotnovich replied.

"I am Santa Claus!"

"Hmm-mm-m".

"Don't you believe me?"

"No, I don't. I don't know who or what you are. What is that red uniform? What country do you represent? Why are you spying on us?"

"Spying, SPYING..." sputtered Santa. "I'm not spying, I'm bringing toys to children the world over."

A likely story," sneered Colonel Novotnovich.

He picked up a telephone and proceeded to recount the story to the person on the other end. Then he listened for a moment before murmuring, "Yes sir, I'll do that immediately."

Hanging up, he gestured to one of the soldiers standing by the door. "Get Barinskaya. Tell him to empty all the bags in the sled and dismantle it. Be careful, it could be booby trapped."

Turning to Santa, he continued. "This is a wonderful ploy, but does the United States think we are fools?"

"This is no ploy. I am Santa Claus."

The Colonel laughed sarcastically, "When I was seven, my parents straightened me out. There is no Santa Claus."

"So you stopped believing, right? That's why I stopped coming. I only visit those who still believe in me."

"Let's just wait to see what my men find," the Colonel replied coldly.

While they waited, the ticking of the clock tracked the passing hours. Almost two hours had passed since Santa had been forced down. He was way behind schedule and worried he'd never catch up. He still had all of Europe, Africa and Scandinavia to

visit, then across to South America, then North America all the way into Canada and Alaska before heading home. He worried he'd lose the darkness. Santa couldn't fly during daylight, of course. Mostly, he worried about the children. How could he disappoint them?

Finally, Sgt. Barinskaya returned. "Sir, we found no explosives, but we did find these." He placed three items on the desk: a G.I. Joe doll, a model of a Sherman tank and a small, toy Sabrejet airplane.

"This is incredible," gasped the Colonel. "The United States has perfected troop and weapons miniaturization. I must inform the Kremlin." Picking up the red telephone, he blurted out the story of the miniature men, planes and tanks.

Hanging up and turning to Santa, he said. "I have orders to send you to Moscow for interrogation."

After ten days of intense questioning, Moscow became convinced Santa Claus was just another nut. Picking up his reindeer and dismantled sled along the way, they dropped him on an Arctic ice floe. From there, he made his way home to Mrs. Claus and his elated elves.

Did the Russians come to believe the strange man really was Santa Claus? No one knows, but they have never again scrambled jet fighters on Christmas Eve when they detect a strange flying object high over Siberia.

John Margotta writing as John Ferrara

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ONE TIME ONLY!

By your not so jolly editor....

Well, Fellow Inkslingers, we have a little over a year's experience with our newsletter behind us. I can almost hear the muttering in the room as you see some of them are well over the prescribed length, this time - guess you could call that my Holiday Gift to you. After all, enough of you stepped up and produced a most interesting array and variety of holiday stories. They were too good to pick and choose among them so I'm running all of them. And you deserve to see it all in print at least once. I still find it interesting, and frustrating, that

many of you aren't the least bit concerned with the format – you know, Arial, 11 pt font, single spaced. One actually came in in 18 point bold font! Come on, friends, when you start sending these items off to real publishers, there will be no exemptions from the established format used by the recipients – how

about a New Year's resolution to start working on that now!
And to each of you, a most Happy Holiday season and publishing New Year and thanks for remembering the *INKSLINGER* as you write. See, I'm not always a Grinch! CHEERS!!!



STOP THE PRESS!

We've just learned that sample copies of the "Howling at the Moon" 2010 High Desert Branch volume should be available for viewing at our December meeting. After review of the actual publication, our prepaid authors' price orders will be submitted to Outskirts Press.

Copies are now available for purchase by the public at a good discount at <http://outskirtspress.com/store.php>

The "Howl at the Moon" website is located <http://outskirtspress.com/hatmanthology>

BY THE WAY.....

Our December 11, 2010 meeting will consist of anthology excerpts read by Curt James, Naomi Ward, Marilyn Ramirez, Mary Thompson, Linda Bowden, and Holly La Pat.