

The Gabriel Writer

For The San Gabriel Writers' League
www.SGWL.net

December 2011

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Christmas Party, December 1

The **SGWL Christmas Party** will be held Thursday,
December 1, at the **Berry Creek Country Club**.

6:00 p.m.:

Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres: (one free drink of wine or beer included) and a Cash bar

6:30 p.m.:

Dinner (roasted turkey, trimmings, and dessert)

Followed

by Gift Book Exchange, Games, and Conversation

Final Count and Final Signup

Members who sign up by or on **November 21** will receive \$5.00 off the \$25.00 meal price. Guests are \$25.00 each.

No reservations for dinner will be taken after November 21.

Checks can be mailed to
SGWL,
181 Young Ranch Rd,
Georgetown TX 78633

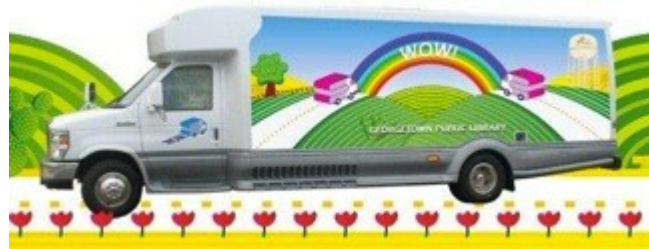
Reserved Places can be paid for
at the door when you arrive.

Money Tree for Georgetown Public Library Book Mobile

The library always supports us in so many ways—and this is an easy, inexpensive way to offer support in return.

When you pin a few dollars on the Money Tree we tell the folks at the library that SGWL supports the Book Mobile. After all, the library always supports us in so many ways—this is an easy, inexpensive way to offer support in return.

Sylvia Dickey Smith



Minutes for November 2011 meeting

The **November 3, 2011** meeting of the **San Gabriel Writers' League** was called to order by **President Sam Holland** at 7:01 PM.

Sam welcomed guests **Fran Samuelson, Marty Shelton, Pam Heller, Laraine Brown, and Patti Scott**.

The **Treasurer's Report** was given by **Kayla Marnach**.

Carol "Send-me-your-words!" Menchu encouraged the membership to send in articles for the **Newsletter**.

Old Business:

The **SGWL Christmas Party** will be held Thursday, **December 1st**, at the **Berry Creek Country Club**. Attendees should arrive at 6:00 PM for cocktails (one free drink of wine or beer included) and hors d'oeuvres, followed by dinner (roasted turkey, trimmings, and dessert) beginning at 6:30 PM. League Members who signed up at the November SGWL Meeting received \$5.00 off the \$25.00 meal price. This special price for Members has been extended through November 15th. Attendees were reminded to bring a gift-wrapped book for exchange. Also on the planned activity list is a "concentration" game that involves remembering and matching terms under numbered panels for a special prize.

"**SGWL Day at Square Books**" (**Hill Country Bookstore**) will be held **December 10th** beginning at 10:00 AM. Books from **League** writers will be displayed in one area. Interested authors should contact **Sylvia Dickey Smith** or **David Ciambrone**.

Christmas Stroll Parade: Sam asked the **Membership** whether or not they were interested in the event. Because there was no show of hands, this year's **SGWL** official participation in the walk was cancelled.

SGWL Poetry Competition (Cowboy / Western Theme). The proposed competition in honor of **Neil Greene** has been rescinded. However, a decision was made by the Board to authorize the Georgetown Library to purchase several books with the \$200 donated by Hill Country Writers and place plaques inside the covers in memory of **Neil Greene**.

SGWL Workshop 2012 (September?): Purpose is to educate existing (especially **SGWL Members**) and aspiring writers in the George-

town/Austin area, grow **SGWL** membership, and increase exposure for speakers. The Board is considering the Georgetown Library and other venues. The full-day's activities will include a keynote kickoff plus two sets of breakout sessions in both the morning and the afternoon. The two tracks will be for *existing* authors and for *aspiring* authors. Please give some thought to desired session topics. To volunteer to assist on the **Workshop Committee**, contact **Dave Ciambrone, DJ Heinrich, Kayla Marnach, or Joy Nord**.

New Business:

Officer nomination and election for 2012: Sam announced the officer candidates, queried the **Membership** for additional nominees, and then conducted the election.

The following officers were subsequently approved by the **Membership**:

DJ Heinrich - President;
Dave Ciambrone - Vice President;
Kayla Marnach - Treasurer;
Janet Kilgore - Secretary/
Historian.
Sylvia Dickey Smith - Program
Coordinator,
Carol Menchu - Membership/
Newsletter;
Jaime Roton - Webmistress;

Sam Holland continued his contest tradition, "Win the President's Stuff," by giving away two of his personal books, *Odd Thomas* by Dean Koontz and a short story anthology by William Gibson.

Announcements and Successes:

Ann Bell mentioned that the recent young author writing competition "Making Good Choices" was a huge success and thanked **Kayla Marnach** for her hard work. Fifty-one students participated. **Ann** also announced that on Saturday, November 19th, the Centex Chapter will host multi-published author Elizabeth Ludwig for "Writing a Killer Proposal." The seminar will be from 9 AM - 3 PM in the **Lane House** on the campus of **First Baptist Church** in **Round Rock**. More information can be found at www.centexacfw.com.

Wayne Dawson announced the success of the first shooting of interviews of successful local authors. The program series is entitled "Getting Between the Covers." The first interview was with **Joan Hall**. The second will feature **Ann Bell**. A 30-second trailer

(featuring **Joan Hall**) can be viewed at www.waynedawson.com.

Jeanell Bolton recently won First Place in a romance writing contest, for the second year in a row! She also shared a funny story about a fire alarm incident at the hotel in New Jersey while she was there to be recognized.

Joan Hall has been working with her editor on-line to get her new book *Dream Shifters* ready for release. Her book is a futuristic mystery and will be out soon.

Sam Holland took several minutes to thank the Membership and to share how much he has enjoyed serving as **President** for the past two years.

Program:

Sylvia Dickey Smith introduced guest speaker **Earl Staggs**, Derringer Award-winning author, who spoke about setting up and selling your own e-books. Earl served as Managing Editor of *Futures Mystery Magazine* and as President of the Short Mystery Fiction Society. His novel *Memory of a Murder* earned thirteen Five Star reviews on Amazon.com and BN.com. He also had two of his books, *Memory of a Murder* and *Short Stories of Earl Staggs* on hand for purchase.

Respectfully submitted,
Durwood "DJ" Heinrich, secretary



**Our Local
Authors = US**

C. Wayne Dawson and Ann Bell with the help of Roger and Addie Busfield are putting a TV pilot together called "Getting Between the Covers With C. Wayne". The goal of the show is to give little-known Texas authors the public exposure they deserve for their talent.

This is an unusual interview show utilizing special effects and re-enactments of scenes found in an author's book.

You can support this effort with just a few keystrokes. Go to

www.waynedawson.com

and click on the "Getting Between the Covers With C. Wayne" where you will find a brief trailer of the show. By leaving a short, or a long comment you will lend a hand to building traffic for the site. Support your local author!

DIRECTIONS and you can Google “Berry Creek Country Club for actual map

Via Hwy 195

I-35 to Hwy 195

Left (North) on 195 to Berry Creek Dr (also continuation of Airport Rd)
Left on Berry Creek Dr crossing Airport Rd/Briar Crest Drive
Country Club is on the right just after long right curve and across from bridge.

Via Hwy Lakeway Drive

West on Williams Drive from I-35 to Lakeway Drive
Right on Lakeway Drive to Hwy to Airport Road
Left on Airport Road to Berry Creek Drive
Left on Berry Creek Drive to Country Club on the right just after long right curve.

Via Hwy Shell Road

West on Williams Drive from I-35 to Shell Road.
Right on Shell Road to Hwy 195.
Right on Hwy 195 to Berry Creek Dr (also continuation of Airport Rd)
Left on Berry Creek Dr crossing Airport Rd/Briar Crest Drive
Country Club is on the right just after long right curve and across from bridge.

Via Shell Road Cutoff

West on Williams Drive from I-35 to Shell Road.
Right on Shell Road Cutoff to Logan Ranch Rd
Left on Logan Ranch Rd to LaQuinta Drive
Left on LaQuinta Dr to Oak Tree Drive to Saw Grass Trail—shortcut
Right on Saw Grass Trail to Oak Tree Dr
Oak Tree Dr to Country Club just across the bridge.

Via Sun City Blvd

Sun City Blvd to Hwy 195
South on Hwy 195 to Berry Creek Dr (also continuation of Airport Rd)
Right on Berry Creek Dr crossing Airport Rd/Briar Crest Drive
Country Club is on the right just after long right curve and across from bridge.



Bring a  **all**  **pretty**
old or new
for the "surprise" book exchange
and your

thinking
cap
for



a
Joy Nord
game

A Short Story from Dave Ciambrone

It's a cold day in the small Nevada town of Pumphandle and Streets are deserted. Times are tough, everybody is in debt, and everybody is living on credit.

A Traveler comes to town and lays a \$100 bill on the hotel desk saying he wants to inspect the rooms upstairs to pick one for the night.

As soon as he walks upstairs, the hotel owner grabs the bill and runs next door to pay his debt to the butcher.

The butcher takes the \$100 and runs down the street to retire his debt to the pig farmer.

The pig farmer takes the \$100 and heads off to pay his bill to his supplier, the Co-op.

The guy at the Co-op takes the \$100 and runs to pay his

debt to the local prostitute, who has also been facing hard times and has had to offer her "services" on credit.

The hooker rushes to the hotel and pays off her room bill with the hotel owner.

The hotel proprietor then places the \$100 back on the counter so the traveler will not suspect anything.

At that moment the traveler comes down the stairs, states that the rooms are not satisfactory, picks up the \$100 bill and leaves.

No one produced anything. No one earned anything...

However, the whole town is now out of debt and now looks to the future with a lot more optimism.



If I Could . . . by Jane Thompson

If I could spend one day with someone now, it would be my mother. All five of us kids lived a good distance from our parents, and our father was not communicative.

She had, for years, called me every Sunday to find out how I was and that had stopped. I guess that should have been the first clue.

By the time we figured it out, my mother was over the edge with Alzheimer's Disease. We could no longer talk with her in a meaningful way.

She thought that I was her sister, because I looked like her side of the family.



And I, I couldn't thank her for all she had done for me, or ask her how she felt, or make plans with her for the future.

My regret at letting her slip through my hands, and my passive watching of her fade away was one of the hardest things I ever had to do.

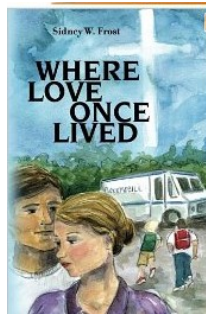
There was so much left unsaid.

If only I could talk to her again.

Where Love Once Lived from Sid Frost

While reading Jan Karon's books, I fell in love with Mitford, a fictitious small town in North Carolina with a large number of interesting characters. I created a database of the characters while reading the second book in the series and tried to keep it up to date as I read one book after another. I finally gave up when the number of characters got into the hundreds, primarily because stopping to make notes was taking away from the enjoyment of reading. If you look on Jan Karon's website you'll find someone has made a list of characters in several of the books.

My first novel, *Where Love Once Lived* is set in Austin, Texas with a 2008 population of more than 750,000 people, while Holly Springs, North Carolina, the city some say Mitford is based on, had fewer than 10,000 citizens at the time Jan Karon was creating Mitford. The Austin from my memories had a population around 150,000 which is still much larger than Mitford.



The characters in *Where Love Once Lived* get outside the confines of the mobile library frequently, but when needed, I use the bookmobile to limit the size of the locale. Friends meet on the bookmobile, and many of the most serious conversations take place there. It's used to chauffeur the mayor in one scene. Children find the support of caring adults there. Adults get their dreams fulfilled. One of the highlights is when a young couple gets married on the bookmobile while parked at the base of Mount Bonnell. There's a chase scene involving the bulky vehicle which is more humorous than exciting, especially when it flies over Austin's traffic calmers. Books fall from the shelves, helping solve a crime. I call my book Mitford on wheels.

Once you've read the book, tell me what you think about this approach of using the bookmobile to make the surroundings smaller.

December by Tracey Skeen

Decking the Halls with

Expectation and Excitement

Christmas is coming and Santa Claus!

Evergreens and

Mistletoe, memories of long ago

Birth of Christ celebrated

Eve of Christmas and a New Year anticipated

Rejoicing with loved ones far and near!



A pencil beat a rapid tattoo on a desktop, feet shuffled and the low buzz of conversation filled the classroom. Had the University's building lay at a different angle, we may have gazed out across the busy highway to a spot that eight years hence would become the home of the Dallas Cowboys. An edifice would arise about which one team linebacker would quip, "The stadium with a hole in the roof so God could watch His favorite team." But on that Friday, the only vista was a crisp autumn day topped with blue skies that denied the horror to come.

The room, filled with students, waited for the instructor and wondered about his late arrival. The door suddenly flew open and a bespectacled face appeared. "Hey, guys, sorry we didn't get the word out sooner, but Professor Smith has gone to the Trade Mart." With that, the bearer of the news disappeared and twenty or so students filed out into the late morning sunshine.

With only two classes that day, one attended and the last one cancelled, I headed home looking forward to the weekend. I clicked on the TV then gazed into the fridge to see what it offered for lunch. Making a sandwich, I sat down to watch Bobbi Wygant's show. The popular Dallas hostess interviewed Hollywood celebrities as well as local VIPs. Her show, always entertaining, provided a respite from the week's grind.

Suddenly, Ms Wygant looked away from the cameras with a startled expression. She turned back to the screen and continued her program. In a few moments, she repeated her earlier action. This time she faced the camera with a shocked expression. She made a false start, and then announced that the President had been shot near Dealey Plaza as he rode in the motorcade through the streets of downtown Dallas. By his side sat his wife, Jacqueline. The front seat held Governor and Mrs. John Connally. In the car that followed rode Vice-President Lyndon Johnson and his wife, Lady Bird. The clock's hand stood at a few minutes past 12:30 p.m.

It seemed surreal to follow the drama that played out only a few miles away. I thought then of the people gathered at the Trade Mart, my professor among them, who waited in vain. I recalled the last time I saw the President on TV, a hand raised in greeting and his trademark smile that encompassed the waiting crowds.

The entertainment show gave way to hard news. I clicked through the channels and saw the familiar face of reporter Walter Cronkite, pale and grave as he told of the shooting. Both the President and Governor Connally had been hit. The cars sped away headed for Parkland Hospital. Before long, Mr. Cronkite looked at the newsroom clock then into the camera. With his voice breaking, he announced the time of death for John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States.

The weekend became a montage of photos. Mrs. Kennedy's pink suit spotted with her husband's blood, the welcoming bouquet of flowers forgotten on the back seat as she hurried behind her husband's gurney, the faces in the crowd frozen in horror as word spread to those gathered on the grassy knoll, the shots from every angle of the sixth floor of the Schoolbook Depository, and finally the chase and capture of Lee Harvey Oswald, a young man who in moments changed the face of history.

The events of the next few days rapidly unfolded as the assassin became the victim and another man made his mark that day. Numb, we watched the funeral cortege of the President followed by heads of state from all nations. The world witnessed the most touching moment of the ceremony when the President's small son stood to salute his father's casket as it passed by.

When the facts came to light, it shocked us to learn that the man who committed so

heinous a crime rented rooms in a neighborhood only a couple of miles away from our home in Irving. Oswald's Russian wife and two children were there when they learned their husband and father was the man who gunned down a President. I shivered as I thought of the history that surrounded us that day and the days that followed.

Without summons, families gathered at church that afternoon to pray for the President, his family, the wounded Governor and for the country. We shook our heads in disbelief, wondering how this unspeakable act could have taken place. We were linked now to the suffering of our neighboring city of Dallas, which would forever carry the stigma as the city where a young President died on a bright November day almost half a century ago.



Dec 10 is the Day !!!

We would love for all of you come by the Hill Country Bookstore on December 10 all day/ any time, and visit with your local authors and celebrate the bookstore's support of local authors!

There will be refreshments, readings, signings, etc.

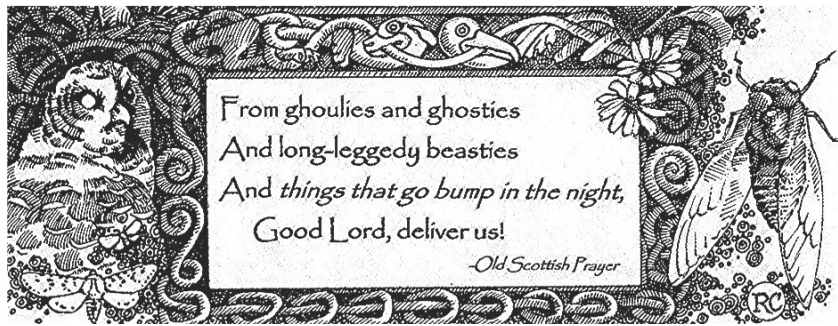
Dave Ciambrone and Sylvia Dickey Smith, co-chairs, will be there all day.

Schedule as of publication:—subject to change

10:00—11:00 a.m.—June Venable
11:00—12:00 noon—Joan Upton Hall
12:00noon 0 1:00 p.m.—Carol Menchu
1:00—2:00 p.m.—Sid Frost
2:00—3:00 p.m.—Helen Nardecchia
3:00—4:00 p.m.—Ann Bell
4:00—5:00 p.m.—Bill Russeth

Thud the Bumper part 2 of 2

By Ross Carnes



Concerning Knockturns:

The favorite past time of all Knockturns is disturbing the peace of any late evening or early morning, in enumerable ways depending on the preferences of the individual. They mimic the patriarch Enoch, their creator, in this activity. Enoch was known to the Egyptians by the name Thoth and appropriately his symbol was that of a baboon as well as the Ibis (a water bird) and the crescent moon. Baboons love to greet the rising sun with as much racket as they can produce.

Today Enoch's creatures are alive and well and they continue their humanitarian work in our modern world. There are many stories unfolding around us even as this is written. I will continue my translation of the ancient manuscripts and also record the stories continually being reported to me.

Yours in faithful accuracy, fun and fantasy,
Ross H. Carnes, Jr.
-Myth Keeper and Recycler of Tales

Continued

The moon shone bright and full when Thud left his roost above the garage. Oliver had long since eaten his dinner and been put to bed. His parents too, were asleep and the house was quiet. A cool breeze rustled the leaves of the oak tree; the only other sound was the crickets chirping in the backyard.

Thud hoped that his message had reached Pssst the Whisper. He climbed to the top-most branches of the tree and waited. The night was perfect for what he wanted to do. All he needed now was two things: the Brehan's blessing and the Host Oak Tree's permission. He felt the forces of earth, wood and stone were already with him.

Pssst appeared in the tree below. She whispered a greeting to him as she made her way higher, her cat-like paws silently stepping from branch to branch. "This is most unexpected," she said, perching nearby. "Something must be uniquely important for such unusual proceedings. Please tell me, Thud, what is it?"

He told his story and explained the situation. She was already aware of the basic problem of the household, but Thud elaborated. He knew that Pssst was especially sensitive to the problems of children and he finally won her over. Now they must convince the tree.

They positioned themselves in the tree very carefully, held each other's hand and with their free hands, reached for a branch. The circle was now complete, Thud, Pssst and the Master Oak connected in an ancient rite led by a Brehan. Stars twinkled brighter and the moon shown silvery. The crickets suddenly were quiet. Birds perched everywhere around them, silent as if asleep, but were somehow a part of the proceedings. Leaves rustled, the tree was aware and listening.

In a forgotten tongue Pssst chanted softly and swiftly. The tree swayed to and fro, creating a slow rhythm in synchronization with her chanting voice. The faces of the two Knockturns went solemn as they concentrated. Abruptly it was over and the swaying stopped. The breeze grew into a stiff wind and the circle was broken. Thud felt like laughing. Pssst squeezed his hand and smiled. "The tree agrees,"

she said and pointed to the top most branch.

It had swollen with a large sprout. She flew up, took it, and it broke away in her hand. In her grasp was a very precious material. It was Heartwood. Unremarkable in appearance, the form could have been mistaken for an odd knot hole, or small piece of driftwood roughly in the shape of a bird.

She examined it before giving it to Thud. "Keep it safely hidden until the time is right. Its power will be gone in a few days." She looked at Thud directly in his eyes. "The man must hold it close to his heart for the Heartwood to work its magic."

~*~

The next day was Saturday. Oliver awoke early. The dawn made everything pink and the house was quiet. He slowly got out of bed, knowing better than to wake his dad, and went to the window. There was no sign of Thud in the back yard. He wanted to talk to the little creature again. He told his mom about meeting Thud, but she still insisted that he was only just the neighbor's cat.

Oliver crept through the house to the kitchen. He took some cookies from the table and went out the back door to wait under the tree. It was not long before Thud found him.

"Hello boy," Thud called from above.

"Hi," Oliver said, not bothering to whisper this time.

"Want to play?"

"Sure I do," Thud dropped down to the sandy area near Oliver. "I have a present for you, too."

"Really? What is it?" Oliver could not contain his excitement. He almost danced with delight.

Thud frowned a little. THUNK THUD, he banged twice on a log with his hammer. "This is not a toy!" he said sternly. "It is for you to give to your father." He unwrapped the Heartwood carefully, now attached to a thin leather strap.

"Wow, it's a pretty bird necklace!" Oliver exclaimed as he took it. "Mommy will like it too."

THUNK THUD, the hammer struck the log again. "No. It is for your father," Thud said. "Do you understand?"

Oliver looked surprised, but nodded in agreement.

"OLIVER!" his mother yelled from the back door.

"Breakfast is ready."

Continued

Oliver looked surprised, but nodded in agreement.

"OLIVER!" his mother yelled from the back door.
"Breakfast is ready."

Thud was gone in a wink. The boy stuffed the necklace into his pajama pocket and ran to the house. He went through the door and let it slam behind him. Across the kitchen the coffee maker sputtered and his Dad was stirring his first cup for the day. He jumped at the noise, and spilled some hot coffee on his knee.

"Oliver!" he shouted, "Don't slam the door when you come in!"

The boy hung his head and then climbed onto a chair at the table. A bowl of cereal waited for him. He watched as his mom poured the milk over it.

"Thud gave me a present to give to you Dad."

His Mom looked at him in disbelief. "Not now Oliver. Daddy doesn't want to talk about that right now."

Ron looked up from his breakfast. "Talk about what?"

Katie sighed, "He has an imaginary friend. I think it's a way of dealing with all the changes."

"Great!" Ron let out a long breath. "What is this going to cost me? Another visit to a doctor? Can't you just discourage his stories and maybe he will stop."

"Thud is real Dad!" Oliver insisted, "He was talking to me yesterday. We talked a long time."

Ron looked at his wife and shook his head. "What did you talk about?" he asked Oliver.

"About me and mommy and you. He asked me if you talked about Amy."

Ron's face flushed a little red. He turned to Katie. "Is this your idea? Has one of your friends been talking to him about his feelings since Amy died?" He stood up and threw his coffee cup into the sink with a crash.

"No, Ron. It's not that at all. He just told me about this yesterday. He thought there was a monster in the yard at first."

Ron looked at Oliver and with a stern voice he said, "Stop making up stories!"

"I'm not Dad. He is real. He says you are angry because you don't remember Amy right."

Ron turned to Katie, "O k a y," he said slowly and louder this time. "Who told him that? I suppose he is making that up too?" He shook his head and repeated, "I don't remember my daughter 'right'? -RIGHT? What does that mean exactly? I don't remember her correctly? -And what gives anyone the authority to say that?" His face was red hot with anger and he sat back down.

Katie was bewildered and said nothing. She busied herself straightening the table and encouraged Oliver to eat his cereal. Ron picked up the newspaper and pretended to read it so he could cool down. Several minutes passed. Katie sipped her coffee and Oliver finished eating. He slipped out of his chair and stood beside his dad. He reached in and took out the Heartwood necklace from his pocket.

Oliver tapped his dad's knee. "Will you wear my present?" he asked.

Ron lowered the paper and took the necklace. He turned the lump of Heartwood over in his fingers. His face did not change expression and Katie thought that he might throw it into the sink, just as he had done with the coffee cup, but he stared at the wood and slowly put the loop over his head. The Heartwood dangled on his chest.

Katie stared, astonished at Ron's passive reaction.

"Thank you, son," he said. "I will wear it. Now go play for a while."

Happily, Oliver ran through the back door and outside.

Katie cleared the dishes as Ron went to the living room and his favorite chair. He sank into the plush upholstery and closed his eyes.

He quickly relaxed and felt warm, the tension released throughout his body. He thought of a summer, long ago, when he played under an old oak tree by a river. He considered it his own personal fishing spot and remembered the feelings of contentment when he spent hours pretending to be the "ruler" of this little one-tree kingdom. The sun always filtered down to the ground and dappled on everything. It was like a very real dream.

He found himself powerless to resist the visionary forces that lifted him up through the leafy branches. Memories, that were not his own, flooded into his consciousness. Memories of hundreds of sunny warm spring days and hot summer afternoons flashed interspersed with hundreds of sunrises and sunsets. He was remembering the life of a tree; as if he had been a tree. He was aware of thousands of living things, living and working together around him and in his fingers and arms and even down through his toes.

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He found pure joy in the breezes blowing through his hair with the coolness of autumn, the cold of winter, the freshness of spring and the warmth of summer. Birds sang and nested around him, hatching eggs of new life that thrived and joined other awakening sparks of living things that all grew old and then winked out leaving precious memories of their music. He felt a part of everything, everyone and everywhere, connected in the universal life-dance. There was greater meaning to life than just to exist.

Frustrations, his own feelings of helplessness and anger whirled in his chest for a moment and then with a huge rush flew out, leaving him with a feeling of complete relief. He sat up not wanting the vision to end. A sudden knowledge of himself and his part in the huge tapestry that is life on the planet filled him. He felt a peacefulness that was strange, yet so very welcome.

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Continued

~*~

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Folding his paper and dropping it to the floor he stood up and walked to the back door. Oliver sat playing under the tree in the yard. Ron opened the door and walked out.

The creaking door made Oliver turn around. "Hi dad.

Wanna play with me?"

Ron sat down on a large root of the old oak tree, right in front of Oliver, but he did not reply.

Oliver thought his dad might still be cross, so he said nothing more. He remembered what Thud said about how one day his dad might smile at him again. The reason for his dad's anger was something he did not understand, but he knew it had something to do with his sister and why she was not here.

He formulated an innocent question. He did not look up, but asked softly, "Will we ever see Amy again?"

There was silence as Ron looked down at the ground, his hands clasped, and he began to sob. His body shook slightly. Oliver was frightened. Was his dad crying? He could not see Ron's face.

Finally Ron looked up to face Oliver as tears trickled down one cheek; tears, no longer of anger or frustration, just tears of sorrow that were mixed with a bittersweet happiness.

"Yes, we will see her again," he said, and he smiled.

* * *

Dear Santa by Tracey Skeen

Remember us'n, Shorty an Thelma?

We's down the country road right past that there pole wit the hanging fish heads. Them's up all year, not to be mistaken for Christmas decor. We got that covered here at the park. We's the ones wit the lights on our trailor that stays on year round. Pa's real smart tha way, not like some folk who waste time taking em down after Christmas, just to put em all back up come next December. Some people, shees.

We're not the ones who hung the deer in the tree and strung the lights on him. Na sir, that there would be our cousin JJ but his ol lady made him take that stuff down this year.

Cousin Billy Bob, Jr. lives two trailor's down. He's the one with the Bud Light Christmas tree. But I guess you wont be a seein all that this year since yous lettin your Cousin Bubba Claus come instead.

Tell him we've gots him his RC and Moon Pie awaitin. We'd

give him pork rinds, but Betty Sue strung them on the tree. Looks real purty, too. Yes, sir!

Well, iffen you'd could tell Bubba that this year we'll be needin new overhalls, not them fancy stripeed kind, jus regular ones. Joe Bob Billy would like a new set of uppers since Cousin Kay took his when he brought a U-Hall to her ma's wake (even though he claims it was her brother Darrell.. I never knowd which Brother Darrell he was a speakin of though). He's horrid awful to listen to now.

Ma needs some new under garments 'cuz I'm tired of her using my drawers - there is no support in em and I'm afraid she jus might hurt her herself now that she's takin up jogging. She's already caused two wrecks. And Arnie needs some long sleeved shirts to cover up that misspelled tattoo. He had no ideal, poor boy. Well, I guess that's all.

Thank you!

Yours, Shorty



The Quirky Turkey By: Samantha Z. Shields

Here he comes now down the road
Knowing his days are numbered
The farmer's hatchet he has been told
Will send him to his very last slumber

As the farmer approaches with a steady hand
Turkey starts to do a quirky turkey dance
He shimmy and shakes till he almost breaks
The farmer threw his hatchet and away he ran



That ol turkey is still living till this very
day
Shimmying and shaking along his way
Never going to be someone's Thanks-
giving dinner
Cause all the shimmying and shaking
has made him much thinner!

Tis the Season By: Tracey Skeen

Tinsel shimmering in the light
Icicles hanging on so tight
Snow on the ground fresh and white
Trains with lonesome whistle call
Hustle and bustle at the mall
Evergreens, decking the hall
Santa and a hardy ho-ho-ho
Eating Christmas candy and Holiday feasts
Advent and Angels and the Christ child
Singing carols and spreading holiday cheer!
Opening gifts and attending celebration events
NOEL



The Saint and the Sinner by Tracey Skeen

Catholic churches always creep me out a little with all their bizarre rituals, pedophile priests, and statues and paintings with dead eyes that follow your every move. But I knew it gave her comfort, so I followed her inside and waited at the back while she went forward to do her thing. When I looked up and saw the byzantinesque virgin mother staring down at her child, I walked out glad to be back into the world.

I turned my collar up and leaned against the building before taking out my pack of smokes and lighting a cigarette. An old woman glared up at me as she passed by; I pretended not to notice.

Children were playing in the empty lot across the street. Christmas music played loudly from

someone's stereo. I flicked my ashes and took a deep breath; the air smelled like the snow the weatherman predicted for this evening. The heavy church door opened. Under the hood of her white cloak, Mary's cheeks were rosy and her blue eyes shone with contentment.

"Better?"

"Much. It lifts my spirits just being inside, smelling the old polished wood, Father White with his kind words and gentle ways, and the saints depicted throughout. It's like coming home, isn't it, Kevin?"

I nodded.

"I knew you felt the same way!" Mother was so wrong about him, Mary thought to herself as she reached for his hand.



Dear Dad . . . By Peggy Snyder

If only it would work he thought . . . Cyrus unfolded the letter one more time and as he lay in bed he read—

Dear Dad,

I know that life is not easy for you now and I know that I can't do much even though I'm not that far away, but hear me out—try to see things a different way. I just know it will help—I promise.

When you get up in the morning, lie for a minute in bed and stretch every muscle from the tips of your fingers to the curl of your toes. Remember when I was little you use to tell me that it's how I'd grow taller and my whole body would know it was time to get up and enjoy the beautiful day. . .and as you sit on the edge of the bed, smile—even if you don't feel like smiling. Mother used to say "as the corners of your mouth goes so goes your day".

I love you Dad.

When you get up, before you brush your teeth or turn on the water to wash your face or before you let any of the many sounds that will fill your day, begin to creep in—listen for the tiny bird outside the window singing his sweet song—so happy to be alive, even if he has to search for food and find a safe warm spot in a storm.

Brush your teeth and bathe every day. When you're clean, you'll feel better and wasn't it you that always said "cleanliness is next to godliness".

When you look out the window, look past the things you don't like to see—past the gate to where the trees and flowers are—remember how beautiful the blue bonnets are this time of year—remember you use to tell me God had laid out a blue carpet across the meadow. Let your mind travel on down the path beyond our old house to the little creek where you used to take Carrie Ann and me fishing—remember the day she tumbled head over heels down the bank and into the water trying to get the worm that fell off her hook—remember Dad—we laughed so hard I almost peed my pants. Try to remember that laughter Dad—even when you feel low.

Dad, when you go down to get your meals and they serve something you don't like—try to make believe it's Mother's pot roast—she cooked it with garlic and onions

slow all Sunday afternoon. Remember how the aroma would fill the house and we couldn't wait till dinner—pretend the mash potatoes with the butter melting and the gravy are steaming on the table—let the thought of those smells fill your mind and be thankful they cook meals.

When you walk in the court yard be friendly—say hello—pass your smile on to someone new—remember there are other people there as lonely and scared as you are...

Dad, remember I love you.

Join in and exercise if they'll let you. Try to stay strong and healthy—go to church services and other activities they offer.

Write Dad, you used to love to write. I'll bring you new writing paper on my next visit.

You used to always tell me to see the glass as half full instead of half empty and to see the sunny side of life—that every cloud has a silver lining.

I know it's tough Dad being there all alone and since Mother passed, it's even harder. I'll try to come and visit more often.

And when your day is done and you lay your weary head on the bed you don't find very comfortable, lay slowly so you can sink into the feathery cushion of the soft mattress and cloud-like pillow that you conjure in your mind.

Thank God for giving you another day—remember you used to tell me Dad, that sometimes life doesn't seem fair and the cross we have to bear is heavy. But we must overcome our adversities—think positive—and sometimes we have to make believe to just get us through.

Please try these things Dad...

And Dad, remember I love you and I'll see you soon.

Cyrus put down the letter...wiped the tear that rolled from the corner of his eye—stretched from the tips of his fingers to the curl of his toes—sat on the edge of the bed and tried to turn the corners of his mouth upward—walked slowly to the tiny window of his cell and tried to see past the bars....past the barbed-wire gates....down the path that led away from the prison....

And to his great surprise, somewhere off in the distance he heard the sweet morning song of a bird.



Boggled by Beginnings

Dear Doc Joan,

In one of your recent workshops, you told us the beginning lines of a story must ground the reader in time, place, and viewpoint. Does this paragraph do that?

Mazie knew something was wrong as she knotted the scarf under her chin, then braced for the next bump. She clung to the passenger's bucket seat up front next to Roy, her boyfriend. He usually drove carefully but seemed preoccupied. Since Mazie had slid inside the car, he'd hardly spoken to her.

Boggled by Beginnings, Mary Ann Stafford (Austin)

Dear Boggled,

Good job of showing the reader the situation through Mazie's viewpoint. As for time and place, you get a "yes and no." The scarf is a creative detail to let us know it's from an earlier time since women almost never tie scarves over their hair these days, but the reader may instantly picture her in a boat or plane, and the word "car" not only comes too late, but is generic. See what happens if you move up a



sentence imbedded deep in the second paragraph that shows what we need to know sooner:

Mazie knew something was wrong as she knotted the scarf under her chin, then braced for the next bump. Roy, her boyfriend, steered the '57 Chevy convertible over the uneven pavement, weav-

ing sharply to miss holes. She clung to the passenger's bucket seat next to him. He usually drove carefully, but ever since she had slid inside the car, he'd hardly spoken to her.

Moving that sentence instantly grounds the reader as to the "who, what, when, where," so she/he will be free to connect emotionally into the story. Also notice I cut out some unnecessary words. For example, "he seemed preoccupied" simply TELLS. "...he'd hardly spoken to her" SHOWS this skillfully.

You still "get an A" for making this reader want to know what Roy is upset about and what will come of his reckless driving.

Boggling begone!

Joan

Special Interest Groups

The Williamson County Coroners is a mystery/suspense group and participants must have novels in progress. The meetings are held at the 10:30 a.m. at the Red Poppy Café in the Georgetown Library. **And there is room for one more !!**

Last Writes Critique Group—Full

Meets (usually) at 7 PM, 2nd & 4th Wed. each month, at Oaks at Wildwood Clubhouse. Novels in progress, varied genres. Membership currently full. Contact: JmuHall@aol.com

Novel Crafters is Full right now, welcomes a Waiting List

Meets every other Thursday on the second floor of the Georgetown Library in a private room. Contact is Mary Stafford at marylynn@mstafford.net

Quixotic Quills critique group represents varied interests.

Our group writes historical novels, short stories and memoirs. Meetings are usually on the second and fourth Thursday of each month unless we reschedule because of holidays. We meet at 7:00 p.m. at the Monument Café. Contact is Sharon Lyle, 512-

639-1162, iwritecozies@gmail.com. Currently, we are closed to new members.

Bard Masters Critique Group The focus of the critique group is historical fiction and fantasy. Meeting Tuesdays, 6:00 PM at the Georgetown Library. Currently open to a new member with a serious work in progress. Contact: Ross Carnes graphicrex@hotmail.com

Tale Spinners, return with us to the days of yesteryear where we put some novel twists on old stories. Historical fiction's the name, publication's the fame. Join us now with your work in progress. We have an opening for one new member. We meet on alternate Mondays at 2:30 in the Georgetown Library. Contact Randall Best at R_best@yahoo.com

If you are interested in joining a critique group, contact Joan Upton Hall (jmuhall@aol.com) or Sylvia Dickey Smith (sds@suddenlink.com)

To all of you we do not see this season

Happy Holidays

Good Cheer

Love each other

Love your animals

Peace and Goodwill

And . . .

No fighting between siblings



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Demystifying Writers' Demons©

Quotation marks with commas & end marks

- **With comma or period** – Place these before quotation marks whether or not the words or phrases are part of the quote, as in:
She misspelled the word "memoir."
He said, "She misspelled the word 'memoir.' "
"Here," he said, "is a copy of Mindy's Memoirs."
- **With question or exclamation marks** – Do NOT enclose these in the closing quotation marks when a **word is used as a word**—only when it's part of the quote—same for phrases and quotes within quotes, as in:
I can't believe she misspelled the word "memoir!"
"Did you read her memoirs?" she asked.
"Did you read her memoirs?" she asked.
"Did she really say, 'Play it again, Sam'?"
He whispered, "Whatever you do, don't yell, 'Fire!' " (part of the quote here)

NOTICE: Single quotation marks for quotes within quotes. (American English convention; opposite for British English). Please notice how quotes within quotes are shown above.

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the
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is at the
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See page 3 for map
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We will miss those of you who can't come !!

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