



# The Write News

September 2024

A Monthly Newsletter  
Denis Hoye, Editor

## Mt. Diablo Branch

### General Meeting with Author, Chris Hennessy “Author Platform 101 & Create Your Book Buzz!”

#### Chris Hennessy



Chris’s upcoming memoir, *Touched by Hannah—A Man with Cancer* (Hennessy), his one-pound newborn, Hannah, and their fight for life, has already reached tens of thousands on social and news media. (completed in early 2025)

Filmmaker, author, and speaker Chris Hennessy serves on the Board of Directors at Sacramento Writers.

Chris recently wrote, produced, and directed four national award-winning films. His *Yolo YoYo’s* cable TV show took Best New TV Series, Sacramento Access TV 2019. The twelve episodes reached 125,000 fans on Facebook. *Yolo YoYo’s* also aired four segments on GoodDay Sacramento (CBS)

“The Prostate Cancer was diagnosed in 2009 and invaded my lungs in 2020. I’m living life as usual with stage four cancer, achieving my best work.”

#### Author Platform 101+ Create Book Buzz!

##### WE WILL BE SHOWN:

- How to write unique social media posts that get you known
- Writing video scripts
- What videos to create
- How to build an email list for Substack
- How to make your Substack unique and well-received
- Create results-getting visual media at little or no cost
- How, when, and where to produce, then post your video(s)
- Learn how I produced award-winning films and how. I use them to promote and market my writings
- Podcast tips

##### LOCATION

Zio Fraedo’s Restaurant  
611 Gregory Lane  
Pleasant Hill, California

##### COST

\$30 Members and \$35 Non-Members. Includes a buffet luncheon. Pay at the door or online with PayPal when registering. You do not need a PayPal account.

##### SCHEDULED for September 14th, 2024

- 10:30 am Door Registration Opens
- 11:15 am Writers Table
- 12:00 pm Buffet Luncheon
- 12:25 pm Business Meeting
- 1:00 pm Keynote Speaker

<https://cwcmt Diablo.org/meetogsd-and-workshops/>

## CWC Mt. Diablo Branch President's Message

We are at the start of another year for our branch of the California Writers Club. I hope you all enjoyed a good summer break and took some time to relax. I am excited by the program we have planned for this year's monthly meetings. However, I should remind everyone that our general meeting charge has increased by \$5.

I hope most members managed not to do what I did over the summer: catch my first bout of COVID-19.

Unfortunately, it was badly timed. I had just enjoyed five days of hiking in the Kenai Peninsula (Alaska) and was about to take the train to Denali. My wife and friends enjoyed spectacular views of Mt. Denali and wildlife while I moped around Anchorage—not the most exciting place to be stuck while isolating. I suppose the most irritating part of the episode was that my wife and friends enjoyed a great dinner, including a baked Alaska, to celebrate my 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, while I had to grab takeout and eat it alone in a quiet hotel room. Eventually, the covid tests returned to negative, and I recovered quickly. So, how was your summer?? If you had a worse incident, you have a great start for a new short story you can submit to the newsletter.

The one good thing about the summer break was that my mind has been feeling very creative. The story I've been working on has taken many unexpected turns, and I'm thoroughly enjoying the adventure. I think I know where this is leading me, but the paths that will lead me to that point are still unclear. I love the discoveries in writing and being a *Pantser*.

As I consider all that needs to be set in motion for this year's program, I am reminded of several items I should bring to your attention. One of them is that the Board is creating a new committee to organize the upcoming presentations and workshops for the general meetings. We felt that a committee would be better than a single person as it requires communication skills and flexibility when circumstances require quick decisions. So, are you a person who enjoys working with others and wants to see the club's programs be successful? If you are, please contact me or Michael Barrington. We'll be happy to discuss this opportunity. This would entail a commitment that should not affect your ability to work on your writing – that is your main priority.

Dust off that computer keyboard if it acquired a few cobwebs over the summer. Let that mind of yours dance through notions that sound exciting or interesting. It is time to be productive and re-engage as a CWC member. Keep writing, and I look forward to seeing old faces again and welcoming new ones.

Barry

## CWC Mt. Diablo Branch

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### Mt. Diablo Branch Mission

Educating writers of all levels of expertise in the craft of writing and in the marketing of their work.

## Upcoming Events

Sit in on a Zoom Board Meeting, Next meeting: September 13th, 3 pm

CWC Mt. Diablo General Meeting, September 14, 2024 11:00 AM - 2:00 PM

Chris Hennessy Author Platform 101 and Create Your Book Buzz!

OPEN MIC on Zoom, Wednesday, September 18th, from 7 pm to 9 pm

Writers Connection, Chicken Pie Shop, Wednesday, September 25th, Noon to 1:30

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## Writers Helping Writers Fund

CWC's motto is "Writers Helping Writers." We help in obvious ways, with professional speakers, critique groups, sharing what works and what doesn't, and other things. But we also know that a struggling writer needs a little more... practical help.

We want to help you with that, too.

Our branch has established this fund for any member who needs help with paying for a meeting or workshop, or with membership costs.

Just fill out the form below and our WHW committee will discreetly review your request. When approved, you will receive a coupon code to use when renewing your membership or registering for a meeting or workshop.

Your information is not shared anywhere. The Writers Helping Writers Fund relies only on donations for funding.

Donations are welcome at any time and are tax-deductible. CWC Mt. Diablo is a 501(c)3 charitable organization EIN: 94-6082827.

\*NOTE: When you click on the *Donate Button*, you will see a dropdown menu with two choices for donations: Young Writers Contest or Writers Helping Writers. Please choose Writers Helping Writers. This will help us direct your donation to the correct account. [Click here for assistance.](#)

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## Book Giveaways and Promos

Science Fiction Only Mid-August Giveaway - Ends Sept 14

<https://books.bookfunnel.com/sci-fi-free-books-mid-aug/xr3rh2fru2>

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## A Statement on the Political Arena of Today

### My Words, My Opinion by Suzy Orpin

Here is my brief statement about politics since I prefer to keep social media enjoyable: The practice of mocking, bullying, and criticizing a political figure or their followers is not okay in a public forum. Ask yourself if you would still find the joke funny or the post acceptable if it were about your candidate, friend, or yourself. I love sarcasm and humor, but this ugly hate speech is dividing us a country.

### Join the Fun with OPEN MIC on Zoom

Each reader has five minutes to introduce and read their piece then there are two minutes for questions and answers. Feedback is all positive; what you liked about the piece, what resonated, or what you enjoyed. It is a fun and exciting way to practice reading aloud and to hear some feedback.

The next gathering is: Wednesday, September 18th, from 7-8 pm.

To register to get the Zoom link: <https://cwcmtdiablo.org/cwc-mt-diablo-open-mic-events/>

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### CWC Membership Renewal Time

It's that time of year: time to renew your membership in CWC Mt. Diablo Branch.

- The renewal period is May 1st–September 30th.
- The renewal fee is \$45.00 for the 2024-2025 year.
- Click [HERE](#), fill out the form, and make your payment.
- Get ready for another exciting year with us!

Questions? Contact Dot Edwards at [membership@cwcmtdiablo.org](mailto:membership@cwcmtdiablo.org)

In any event, please renew your membership before September 30th. After that date, you will be required to rejoin and pay the additional \$20 initiation fee that Central CWC requires for membership.

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### Happy Birthday Kymberlie!

Hi all, as most of you know, we celebrated Kymberlie's birthday last month and we all miss her. Sheri Bradley and I visited Kymberlie's dad, Bill, and we sang happy birthday, lit some candles and ate cupcakes. It was a good evening.

Celebration of Life Update – we initially planned to have Kymberlie's celebration of life around her birthday but as I was reviewing our pre-marriage notes to each other I was reminded that she wished to have her celebration in late autumn or winter. And as it turns out, this is perfect timing. Many of us have participated in Kymberlie's annual Christmas toy drive for kids and families in need. 2024 would have been her 30th year organizing this annual event and we are going to make this milestone happen in Kymberlie's honor. The event will be a celebration of life and Christmas toy drive mashup – Kymberlie is smiling above and loving it, the toy drive was one of her biggest joys. The event is currently planned for November 30th at the Chicken Pie Shop in Walnut Creek (thank you Anne and Henry) where the toy drive has been held for the past several years. We will celebrate Kymberlie with a nod to her passions: writing and the writers clubs, comedy, broadcast radio and the toy drive. We are getting it all organized and will make announcements soon, stay tuned.

Happy Birthday Kymberlie, I love you. *Posted by Roger, Kymberlie's Husband*

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### Celebration of Life for Camille Minichino

For those who wish to participate, Camille Minichino's Celebration of Life will be on Sunday, September 22nd in the Fairway Room in the Creekside Clubhouse– 1010 Stanley Dollar Drive, Rossmoor.

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I am sorry for the lack of photos and graphics in this issue. I am in the process of rebuilding this newsletter after suffering computer malfunctions of all kinds this summer.

## Find or Create a Critique Group Program

Mt. Diablo's Critique Group benefit for members was revamped and relaunched on July 26, 2024.

Within three days, six members visited Mt. Diablo's website and filled out the form covering their individual critique needs. This information was reviewed and Mt. Diablo's first "introductory communication" was sent on July 29th to members who might be potential critique group partners.

And what an enthusiastic group it was! After a flurry of emails, this group will have their first meeting (for detailed planning) on September 10, 2024.

We wish them the very best!

If other Mt. Diablo members have writing critique group needs, please feel free to fill out the "Find or Create a Critique Group" form at:

<https://cwcmtdiablo.org/critique-groups/>

These brave souls are the first intrepid users. Congratulations go to the board for pulling together a group to help with your critique needs!

Bill Stong

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## An Article by Josephine (Jo) Mele

### Finding Time to Write

"You are so lucky to find the time to write," my neighbor said. "I could never fit it into my busy day."

Free time has been missing from my life since I became the primary caregiver for my husband, twenty years ago. I already had a full-time job at DVC running Emeritus College.

Suddenly, I had two full-time jobs. Luckily, I could complete the bulk of my job from home. I was a pioneer, now working remotely is routine.

I've always been a list maker. At first the lists were work and husband-centered: doctor appointments, work deadlines, and easy-to-swallow meal recipes. I hired a part-time caregiver which allowed me to add treats for myself: haircut, manicure, or an hour to write or submit.

I reviewed the short stories I'd written about my crazy Italian family, and turned a collection of family lore into a memoir of three generations, *The Odd Grandmothers*. I self-published on Amazon so my 96-year-old mother could have the first copy a month later. We didn't have time to wait for an agent to accept the work and start the long publishing process.

I wrote while my husband napped, or watched a movie. Sometimes I'd get in ten minutes, sometimes an hour. I kept writing in my head the rest of the day. I knew what the next chapter would reveal when I finally sat at my keyboard. I could see my characters and knew their back stories. I heard them talking to each other, saw their setting, and smelled the food they ate.

It was the same technique I'd used as a busy young mother. I loved watercolor. I'd sketch the idea, decide on the colors, lay out the brushes, and as soon as the baby took a nap, I went for it. If I was lucky I got a half hour to paint.

We all have the same twenty-four-hour day. Organizing the rest of my required 'to-do's' to make the time for my 'want to-do's,' takes planning, patience, and a sense of humor.

Writing should be fun.

P.S. I enjoy writing cozy mysteries where you can vent by knocking someone off.

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Josephine (Jo) Mele, has been a caregiver for 20 years. Her therapy is writing. Author of *The Travel Mystery Series* including: *Bullets in Bolivia*, *Homicide in Havana*, *Mystery in Monte Carlo*, *Bandits in Brussels*, *Sicilian Sanctuary*, *Incident in India*, and her soon to be published, *8 Days in Egypt*. She wrote *The Odd Grandmothers*, a memoir; and co-authored with her grandson Nick, "*ABC's of Asperger's Syndrome*," for Parents Magazine. Jo is a member of CWC and Sisters in Crime.

## **This United States list of Manuscript Publishers comes from Authors Publish 20 Manuscript Publishers With Geographic Limitations**

Most of the presses on this list accept work from writers with a specific geographic region or nationality, some have very strict limitations, and others are more lenient.

All of the publishers on this list primarily publish authors from the country they are based in by a wide margin, even if they don't have formal guidelines that states this. We created this list in 2019 as a reference point for writers, and have received a lot of positive feedback in terms of updating it.

This list is organized by region. If this article continues to do well, we will keep expanding the list and include more countries in the future.

Not all of the publishers on this list are currently open to un-agented submissions, but most are.

I've done basic research about the publishers, but I haven't done in-depth research as I do for a full review, so keep that in mind.

If you know of a press to add to this list, please send me an email at [support@authorspublish.com](mailto:support@authorspublish.com).

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### **United States**

#### **Red Adept Publishing**

This multi-genre small press has managed to end up with a number of books on the New York Times Bestseller list. They are only open to submissions by US-based writers.

#### **Epicenter Press**

Founded in Fairbanks, Alaska, in 1988, Epicenter Press, Inc. is a regional press publishing nonfiction books about Alaska and the Pacific Northwest.

#### **Chesapeake Press**

This small press that publishes books and podcasts for kids focused on promoting American democracy.

#### **Hub City Press**

A respected press with great distribution. They publish books of literary fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, regional nonfiction, nature, and art. They only publish work for adults. They accept non-agented submissions during 2-3 open reading periods a year. According to their website, "Hub City publishes writers living in or from the South. What's the South? A complicated issue, to say the least, but the short answer for our purposes: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia. At the same time, we're interested in boundaries, borders, and in-betweens, so if you want to make a case for a state not listed here, we'll take a look."

#### **Texas Review Press**

They have a number of reading periods a year, some are paid contests, some are free, some are focused on nonfiction (regional and otherwise) and others on poetry. Each year they read for the TRP Southern Poetry Breakthrough Series which highlights a first full-length collection by emerging authors from each state in the southern United States. There is no reading fee. The state rotates every year.

#### **June Road Press**

This small poetry press plans to eventually expand into literary fiction and creative nonfiction. They plan to reopen to submissions in the fall and in the past they were only open to submissions by US based authors.

#### **JackLeg Press**

This small press primarily focuses on publishing poetry and short story collections. They only consider queries from US based writers.

#### **University of Georgia Press**

They do not have strict geographic guidelines, but much of what they publish is about Georgia and the American South. Although they also publish on a number of other subjects.

#### **Heyday Press**

Heyday is an established independent and nonprofit publisher that focuses on California and the American

### [Amble Press](#)

This press which focuses on publishing work by queer writers of color, doesn't officially state on their website that they don't accept international submissions but several of our international subscribers have been informed otherwise, so I've added them to this list.

### [Sasquatch Books](#)

They publish "visual nonfiction by gifted writers, artists, chefs, naturalists, and thought leaders whose work reflects the adventurous, creative, DIY spirit of the PNW (the Pacific Northwest)". The Pacific Northwest unlike other regions involves both the US and Canada. They don't say anything about not allowing Canadians to submit as long as the work reflects the region. They have good distribution.

An imprint of Sasquatch books focused on publishing for children, the guidelines for submissions are on the same page, but further down.

### [Wayne State University Press](#)

According to their website they are currently actively "acquiring books in African American studies; fairy-tale studies; film, television, and media studies; health humanities; Jewish studies; labor studies; and regional studies: books about the state of Michigan, the city of Detroit, and the Great Lakes region. We also acquire books of short fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry written by Michigan authors in our Made in Michigan Writers Series."

### [Gray and Company](#)

They only publish nonfiction books about Cleveland, Northeast Ohio, and Ohio.

### [Forest Avenue Press](#)

This Portland based press publishes fiction and the occasional memoir. They don't have strict geographic limitations but they mostly publish authors based in the Pacific Northwest. They have one reading period per year.

### [The University of Arizona Press](#)

The premier publisher of academic, regional, and literary works in the state of Arizona is open to direct submissions. They are open to international authors but much of what they publish is focused on the region.

### [Bottom Dog Press](#)

A small press that mostly publishes working class literature and Appalachian Literature.

### [Ooligan Press](#)

This student run press publishes regionally significant works of literary, historical, and social value to the Pacific Northwest.

**Emily Harstone** is the author of many popular books, including [The Authors Publish Guide to Manuscript Submissions](#), [Submit, Publish, Repeat](#), and [The 2024 Guide to Manuscript Publishers](#).

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## My MUSE

### An Article by Michael Barrington

*(Edna O'Brien passed away on July 27, 2024, aged 93)*

As a teenager in a catholic boys' only boarding school, the highlight of the month occurred when a small group of senior prefects were allowed to enjoy a local village speaker series. Over the space of just a few years, I spoke with Kingsley Amis who wrote more than 20 novels. Lucky Jim was his first, followed by I like it here and Take A Girl like you, which Amis read from and with great humor. I was thrilled and inspired by his style and in your face prose but completely shocked at his character's causal approach to sex. It was a revelation. In a college where no sex before marriage was religiously preached, his writing revealed a world that I and my friends had no experience of but secretly hoped existed. It was exciting.

John Braine discussed his Room At the Top. One of my more daring friends had secreted a copy into our dorm and it was doing the rounds in lightning quick time. I devoured his unadorned use of everyday language that both shocked and excited me. For a group of young men with raging hormones, it was amazing, revealing and titillating material! Here was a writer with strong Irish Catholic roots describing male-female relationships that seemed to be so honest, natural, and real, but in a way that would bewilder any priest!

Alan Sillitoe left school at age 14 and never went to college, which made me wonder why my parents were spending so much money on my private education, and it was only while in hospital with tuberculosis that he became an avid reader of literature and started to write. He eventually wrote Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, influenced in part by the stripped-down prose of Ernest Hemingway. As with John Braine's bestseller, it was essentially a social protest, with daring sex scenes and female relationships that were a far cry from Pride and Prejudice, Wuthering Heights, Vanity Fair and even Tom Jones, our staple college literary diet. But when I heard him speak, he had also just published his short story collection, The Loneliness of the long-Distance Runner. I was smitten. Awestruck would be an understatement. I also learned, but didn't know it at the time, that reading a work and having it read to you can be a totally different and exhilarating experience. A charming man, he spoke to us (we were a small group of five) as if we were adults and answered our schoolboy questions as if they had been posed by a gaggle of eminent professors.

There was a memorable lecture by the Australian writer, Russel Braddon, his bestselling book, The Naked Island. As a Japanese prisoner of war, he was tormented by the fact he couldn't remember how to solve Pythagoras' theorem nor the second movement of the Bruch violin concerto. Ever ready to help, I quickly searched in my pocket for some paper and scribbled down the theorem. When we met for his autograph, I presented it to him.

"Sir," I remember saying politely, "I too want to write and just in case you haven't had time to catch up with your math, this might jog your memory; but I can't help you with the Bruch."

He looked at it quizzically, smiled, shook my hand, said thank you, carefully folded and placed the paper in his inside jacket pocket, then signed my autograph book.

Years later, I happened to hear him being interviewed by the BBC and he recounted this incident of when he met with a precocious or, as he put it, 'a snotty nosed schoolboy who wanted to be a writer!'

But in high school, I also discovered Edna O'Brien. I was on the short list to read the only clandestine copy of The Country Girls that was buzzing through the senior study hall. Wow! It was mind blowing.

As an established writer myself, I realized years ago how O'Brien's writing has influenced mine. Initially, I was simply attracted to her style, her voice, her word selection and her "tell it as it is" attitude, but was unaware of her own influences. Educated in the classics, I had read all of Dickens, Walter Scott, Jane Austen and all Shakespeare's play by the time I was seventeen. I have always felt that as a writer I related to an earlier period. Just as she was greatly influenced by Hemingway and especially Scott Fitzgerald, I, in turn, discovered those writers through her. They resonated with me the first time I read them.

O'Brien was my muse. For years, I carried around a copy of her short stories, Lantern Slides. I wanted to write like her. She stated she would never write her autobiography and yet also said that "Any book that is any good must be autobiographical." In the latter stages of her life, she broke her own

resistance and gave us another unmistakable read. “We all leave one another,” she said. “We die, we change - it's mostly change - we outgrow our best friends; but even if I do leave you, I will have passed on to you something of myself; you will be a different person because of knowing me; it's inescapable.” And that's the feeling I came away with after reading her “Country Girl.”

Her first novel, “The Country Girls” which she wrote in three weeks, was instantly acclaimed in the UK and US, but was banned and denounced by Catholic bishops and priests in Ireland, some even burning copies –I was captivated by her style and honesty of expression. Her biography has much of that feeling but also the tiredness of a writer who has seen and done it all.

I found the earlier part of the book to be more appealing and in many ways more self-disclosing. She writes affectionately of her childhood, but her entry into the world of publishing, books and writers came with marrying the novelist Ernest Gebler in her early twenties in Dublin. He realized O'Brien's talent and was paralyzed with jealousy and bitterness. She gave him two sons, but the publication and international success of her first novel spelled the end of her marriage.

The second part of the book read for me more like sections from a journal and, although interesting, lacked the simplicity and freshness of the early years. In the 1970s, she was known for dinner parties whose guests included Princess Margaret hosted in her six-bedroom house on London's Carlyle Square. Paul McCartney sees her home. Marlon Brando walks her home. (“We sat in the kitchen, where he drank milk, and I drank wine.”) She asks Jack Nicholson to see her home. Richard Burton rings the doorbell. Jackie Onassis invites her in. Prepped by Sean Connery, she drops acid with R. D. Laing, who was her psychiatrist. She attracted numerous famous studs, and makes some bedroom confessions, revealing a one-night stand with Robert Mitchum.

Country Girl is filled with many telling moments as O'Brien shares with us eight decades filled with honesty and vulnerability: unable to swim, unable to drive; the regrettable choices made, unreciprocated love and, always, a passion for words and literature. I am envious of her prose and feelings for the right word; it is always exquisite and makes it an excellent read.

She published more than 20 novels, 8 collections of short stories, 8 non-fiction and 4 children's books. She challenged Ireland's religious, sexual and gender boundaries by tackling issues of loneliness, sex, rebellion, and persecution. She had style, a command of language, and an incredibly fertile imagination. “Thinking is the enemy of feeling, and feeling...is the true language of the novel,” she said. “The emotions of love, hatred, desire or despair are the real, and the task of the writer is to access those emotions.” And she was my muse.

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## A Short Story by Stephanie Denman

### Oil and Vinegar

As my train pulls into Limoges, Monsieur Deschamps waits on the platform, smoking.

“Bienvenue,” he says, surveying me before reaching for my bag. I've been his kids' au pair for two months, but I'm still a stranger.

He hustles through the tiny station. “Ave you been to Limoges before?” he shouts over his shoulder.

“No,” I huff, scrambling to keep up. He chuckles.

“Ah. Well, 'ave you ever seen the film 'Deliverance'?”

“Um, a long time ago?”

We reach his butter-colored Citroen where he chucks my bag in the trunk and moves to his door.

“Well, it's like that here.” He grins and ducks into the car.

What's that supposed to mean? “Dueling Banjos” plays in my head. Nervously, I fasten my seatbelt. My heart pounds. We wind along a wooded road lined with leafless trees resembling witches' hands, long, gnarly fingers clawing to scratch a hole in the colorless sky. It seems like hours, but it's probably only 20 minutes before we pull into a clearing and park next to a large, transparent plastic tent.

“The men went hunting for sanglier,” says Monsieur Deschamps, making a squealing noise. “We meet here to eat zee pig.”

Steam rises from a nearby bog. It starts to drizzle. The tent windows are fogged. Peeling back the entry flap I choke on smoke from cigarettes and wood chips. It feels like entering the ThunderDome. People near the door stop talking and stare. Camouflage is the attire du jour. I close my black trench coat to cover my – perfect for Paris but ludicrous here – red turtleneck and charcoal herringbone slacks and cower behind Monsieur Deschamps until he spies a friend and bolts. Act like you belong.

I straighten up and step between long tables covered with checkered oilcloth. Potato chips, rillettes and salami spill over bowls into puddles of Beaujolais Nouveau, 1994. Plastic cups lay akimbo emptied of their mid-morning aperitif.

“C’est magnifique ce boar, non?” A hefty man elbows me, his wine sloshing as he points proudly to a boar splayed on a table. He sucks in his Galouises and exhales as he explains in French, “It took us an hour to corner him before we could finally kill him.” He licks his lips. The villagers stomp to keep warm. They look like bulls, ready to charge. I adjust my red top.

Fiona Deschamps, my employer, spies me and waves. She’s making a salad.

“Can I help?” I ask.

The women next to her gape. If I were a New Yorker I’d glare. But as a Californian I say, “Hey,” trying to be friendly.

“Yes, that would be lovely,” Fiona says in her comforting British accent. “Can you make the vinaigrette?”

Out of the corner of my eye, I see women nudge each other and realize this is my French aptitude test. Determined to conquer through condiments, I grab a bowl, shake red wine vinegar into it and hunt for oil.

Spying a bottle, I stumble in French, “Could you pass l’olivier?” The woman closest to it clucks and shakes her head “no.”

Sighing, I walk to the bottle. The woman clamps her hand around it. Must I arm wrestle her? A hush falls over the hall. Merrymakers slither toward our salad standoff. The woman releases her grasp and I swipe the bottle.

“Is that how you make vinaigrette in America?” scowls a bear-sized Frenchman in fatigues.

“Er...” I’m boiling.

A woman across from me scrunches her forehead and bites her lip. I look into the bowl and see my reflection swirling in the shiny liquid. Don’t let them see you sweat.

“Ce n’est pas possible,” the woman whispers disgusted. The vinegar is vexing her.

Restarting, I empty the bowl, add oil first, and then fresh vinegar. Fifty shoulders relax. Next, I raise a pepper grinder in slow motion. The crowd tenses. One grind. Heads nod. Another grind. On my third grind, a boy slides two fingers across his throat – ‘cut’ the peppering. Finished, I turn to leave.

“Tut,” someone utters.

“Quoi d’autre?” I squeak.

The group stands steadfast, silent. What else? A baby cries. Your salad days are supposed to be your best days, not your darkest hours. Desperate for clues, I finally spot a jar of Dijon. I grab it and raise it like the Statue of Liberty with her torch.

“Oui...oui!!!” cigarettes bob in unison. Scooping a heaping spoonful I double tap it, like the missing puzzle piece, into the mix. The mustard emulsifies the oil and vinegar. One last thing. Rotating my shoulders like a weightlifter preparing to clean and jerk a barbell, I pause before adding the final ingredient. New cigarettes are lit in anticipation. With a twirl of my fingers, I swoop up a saltshaker and shake three times. Applause.

Survived.

## A Short Story by Dita Basu

### One Stormy Night

Sleets slashed on the windshields. The wipers whirled with a ferocious speed. A foggy haze covered everything. I had heard about Tully fog that hits coastal California in the winter months, but I did not know how severe it was. Visibility dropped to a few feet as if I was in a tunnel of milk. Trying to run the defroster made things worse. The air conditioner started to run by mistake and that helped for a while, but I shivered in the cold.

The high beams of the cross traffic on the two-way lane of Saint Mary's road dazzled, blinding me. I pulled to turn on the high beams, but only the wipers went to the next faster speed and then - BOOM.

The car hit a boulder sinking in a ditch striking a tree.

I felt numb. Frozen. My heart thumped like a crazy drum. My cheeks were on fire, sweat beads formed on the forehead, while a terrible freezing cold shook my body. It took a few minutes to grasp what had happened.

After my breathing normalized, I prayed *everything would be fine*. The torrents slowed to a steady drizzle while the wind blew *hoo....hoo*. Water gushed, gurgling downstream like a babbling brook.

Covering my head with a scarf, I came out of the car and found that what I had hit was not a boulder; it was a deer. The headlights shone on its soft, pale green-yellow body. I bent down to scrutinize the damage on the car. The front bumper dented and then I saw her from close. The deer was panting. She stared at me.. *Strange eyes*.

My eyes welled up. *It's still alive!* Few feet away a baby fawn gazed at me - its ears pointed. As I straightened up, the kid skipped and disappeared inside the woods.

I returned to the car. The rain subsided, but the wind howled. The front tires of the car fell into the ditch. As I tried to pull it back onto the road, the front wheels whirred as if hydroplaning. After many trials, I reared back to the main road, and drove forward through the milky tunnel like a zombie on autopilot, keeping my eyes focused on the right side so that the glare of the cross traffic wouldn't blind me..

A fire truck from the other side waited to make a left. It was my right of the way, but I slowed to a stop. The fire truck, confused, took a few minutes, then took the left turn, entering a fire station. The sirens were off. It was retiring for the day, perhaps.

The garage door opened, but the truck didn't enter. The driver, in uniform, came to me. "You need help, Ma'am?" He asked.

I hugged the steering wheel with my arms resting my head on it. My back shook. My voice froze.

"You okay, Ma'am?" He asked.

"I killed a deer." I said.

"You killed a deer? Where?"

"Ten minutes from here, uphill. On Saint Mary's Road."

"Are you okay?" He emphasized on the word, you.

"The deer is probably not dead yet. She has a child." I broke down.

"We'll check it, but are YOU okay? Any neck pain? Back? We can take you to a hospital."

“I think I am fine. I could walk okay. Just nervous.” I said, and started shaking again.

The man asked for my driver’s license while paging someone. He returned me the papers and patted my shoulder. “An officer will escort you home.” He said.

Soon a police car arrived, and the officer followed me home.

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When I reached home and opened the garage door, my daughter rushed. She had seen the police car with a blinking light and her mom talking to the officer.

“What happened?” She asked with wide eyes.

I sank on the sofa, gesturing for a glass of water, and finished it in one shot. She helped me take off my coat and kneeled down to take off my wet boots. Very unusual but I let her take care of me today and embraced her. “I hit a deer. She had a baby.” I gasped.

“Is it dead- the mom?” She asked with her chin down eyes- up pose, backing off. *Like the baby deer.*

“No. She was still breathing. Panting....I couldn’t see her or where she came from.” I said.

She hugged me tight. “She’ll be fine, Ma. Besides, what could you do? I was so worried about you.” After a pause, she said, “I was so worried about you, but you came back. You are fine.”

She brought me a mug of hot cocoa and drew the curtains. The rain stopped.

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## A Short Story by Jennifer Granat

### Rough Day

It was half past one in the morning when David pushed open the heavy wooden door of the neighborhood pub holding an old, tattered briefcase and one semi-wilted, Black Caviar rose. His mature, handsome face was peppered with whiskers and blushed red from the cold outside. He wore an overcoat that hid all but a starched white collar, an unknotted, black silk bow tie, and a troubled countenance.

After meticulously situating his case and sagging rose onto the bar top, David summoned the bartender who was wiping down at the other end of the bar.

Eddie, the bartender, slowly shook his head. Now, he wouldn’t likely get out of the bar until well after two am.

Bullocks, he muttered under his breath as he approached the untimely patron sitting at the end of the bar near the door. Then, Eddie noticed the handsome late comer’s fashionable attire and weathered heirloom, black leather case topped with a kind of rose he’d never seen before. Okay, well, if this bloke is a good tipper, he thought, it might be worth the time.

Eddie stiffened for a moment but cordially asked,

“What can I get you mate? It’s last call so make it a good one.”

David looked up at Eddie, asked for a double Macallan, 12 year, neat, and went back to staring at the bottles shelved in front of the mirror that ran the length of the bar.

Eddie lifted one eyebrow, then turned to retrieve the bottle.

At that time, the only other guests in the pub included a piano player and a bass player.

Having finished their set for the night, the two men nursed their drinks as they relaxed at a table adjacent to the bar where David sat. They soon leaned into each other over the old, round, wooden, ring-stained table, and began to speak confidentially.

What David saw reflected in the mirror, he reasoned, was clearly about him. How could it not be?

Still, he could care less what it was. The tone was, after all, flat, with no melody. Images blurred and faded as David listened.

Eddie looked sideways at David and, eyes rolling, uncorked a fresh bottle and poured the drink. As soon as he placed the glass on a coaster and pushed it toward his guest, he and David locked eyes.

“Would you mind doing me a favor mate?”

“Depends on what it is,” replied Eddie,

“Would you be a sport and toss this all into the bin for me?”

David thrust the withered rose and time worn case toward Eddie.

Eddie, perplexed, shoved the case back and replied,

“Looks like you’ve had a rough day, mate. Not sure I can do that for you, though.” David looked down.

Eddie cocked his head, stood silent for a moment then went back to wiping down the bar. The musicians continued to vocalize, sotto voce, between sips of beer.

David thought, What an invigorating syncopation, here, there, and then, a steady rhythm! The sound of steady rain, wet tires on slick pavement just outside; whispers, rubbing, clinking glass; the rose, her smell...

The scene was intoxicating.

The musicians were ready to leave but they summoned Eddie to see if he’d prefer to have them stay a bit longer.

What exquisite counterpoint!

Eddie said he’d be fine and not to worry, so the musicians tipped him with some of the cash from their jar and got up to leave.

David, now enmeshed in the burgeoning scene, whipped around, slid off the bar stool to intercept the young musicians departure.

The two men stopped in their tracks. Eddie froze behind the bar.

After a tense moment, David forcefully pressed his case into the bass player’s chest,

“Take this, won’t you? Truly...”

The hastily fastened clasps of the case popped open on contact.

Soft, fragrant, blood-red rose petals scattered and fluttered around the three men.

David stared as sheet music cradled his elaborately adorned, meticulously balanced, conductor’s baton gently to the floor.

Several fat rolls of hundred-dollar bills soon followed.

Oh, Good Lord, David thought, this is the most gauche segue to a crime scene. Where’s the fucking...

Rolling timpani? The Cymbal crash?

Christ, there was no longing, feinting, angelic note lingering in the air! Only Silence.

Bravo! David downed his drink and left. Eddie closed the bar at 2:09 am.

## A Brief Message from your Newsletter Editor

The first half of this year has been one of the greatest bereavement for many of us within the CWC Mt. Diablo Branch and beyond. We have lost a number of members, writers, novelists, poets and dear family and friends. I would like to revisit some of those who I came to know only too briefly,

**Phyllis Houseman** — She said: “If you live long enough, you can do anything.”

Her writings included the following novels:

*Somewhere in the Silence* — A tale of 1960s South America.

*The Verdict is Love* — Jury duty means all sorts of problems for commercial artist, Kiri.

*Call Back Our Yesterdays* — Peace Corps training for a project in Ecuador.

*To Catch a Lorelei* — She's not just a pretty face; neither is Adam.

*There Is a Season* — Romance Writers of America Golden Heart Finalist.

*Another New Year's Eve* -- A true second chance at love.

She also wrote the following short stories and anthologies:

*Insight, Hindsight & Flights of Fancy*

Anthology Contributor — *Tuffy, Don Juan, and the Runaway Knight*

Curious Things: *A Compilation of Curiously Disturbing & Sometimes Horrifying Stories*

Anthology Contributor — *Tuffy*

*Colossus: Home Anthology*: Contributor-Tuffy's Home

**Kymerlie Ingalls** — A Friend for All Writers

I do not have a listing of her writings just now, but I have a single quote:

A sad tune susurrated in the silence —

‘She can kill with a smile, she can wound with her eyes...

She only reveals what she wants you to see...

She hides like a child, but she's always a woman to me.

**Camille Minichino**

She passed away May 6, 20224 after a brief illness. She spent 18 years as a Sister of Notre Dame teaching at Emmanuel College from Massachusetts. Later she earned a Ph.D in Physics at Fordham University in New York City. One of only three women in a department of nearly 80 students, she left the order of Nuns to move to California and start a 30 year career at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. Following this illustrious career, she authored almost 30 mystery novels and numerous short stories. Her first mystery series was *The Periodic Table Mysteries*. In addition to all of this, she also developed and taught writing classes and workshops at community colleges and through writer's organizations.

These fine ladies having passed this year have affected me deeply. Take a moment for them!