



January, 2014  
Volume 2, Issue 1

The Writers of Kern  
PO BOX 22335  
Bakersfield, CA

Regular meetings:  
The 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of each month,  
10 to noon. Registration, 9:45.  
Fee: \$10, members and guests.

Clarion Hotel  
3540 Rosedale Hwy.  
Hwy. 99 at Rosedale  
Bakersfield, CA  
[www.writersofkern.com](http://www.writersofkern.com)

### The Writers of Kern Executive Board

**President & Program:**  
Dana Martin  
[president@writersofkern.com](mailto:president@writersofkern.com)

**Vice President & Webmaster:**  
Dennis VanderWerff  
[webmaster@writersofkern.com](mailto:webmaster@writersofkern.com)

**Treasurer:** Joan Raymond  
[treasurer@writersofkern.com](mailto:treasurer@writersofkern.com)

**Secretary:** Janet Skibinski  
[secretary@writersofkern.com](mailto:secretary@writersofkern.com)

**Membership:** Patrick Kelly  
[membership@writersofkern.com](mailto:membership@writersofkern.com)

**Newsletter:** Annis Cassells,  
Terry Redman  
[newsletter@writersofkern.com](mailto:newsletter@writersofkern.com)

**CWC Representative:**  
Sandy Moffett

**Hospitality/Sunshine:**  
Annis Cassells  
[sunshine@writersofkern.com](mailto:sunshine@writersofkern.com)



## January Meeting Critiquing like a Champ Dana Martin, President

Are you in a critique group or have you always wanted to join one? Writers of Kern



is a great place to start. We have critique groups that meet different days of the week and times of the day to accommodate most schedules. And if we don't have one that fits your schedule, we open a new group.

At our January meeting, we will be discussing critique group guidelines and what it means to be a good critique partner. Often, writers consider themselves less talented than a person whose work they are critiquing and don't feel qualified to offer criticism. However, we are all readers first, writers second. I doubt any of us can say that we began as a writer and then started reading books later in life.

With that in mind, we hope to offer encouragement at the January meeting to anyone wanting to become an apt critique partner. Not everyone is a professional writer, but if you know what you like to read, then you are qualified to judge

good writing, too. A critique partner's job is to offer praise, sure, but an equally important task is to alert the writer of wordy sentences and unclear writing. You don't need to be a professional to know when you don't understand someone's intent or are confused by the storyline.

The January meeting will include critique group leaders describing their experiences—what has worked and not worked for them. We will also provide an overall understanding of the guidelines WOK prefers in critiquing someone's work. Our methods are a starting point for all new critique groups and are followed until each unique group morphs into its own style. This meeting will outline the WOK critique group style only.

Whether you are currently in a critique group or have thought about joining one, please attend the January meeting to learn more about being a good critique partner and to take part in the critique group discussion.



“Ideas are like rabbits. You get a couple and learn how to handle them, and pretty soon you have a dozen.”  
~ John Steinbeck

### President’s Column January 2014

Greetings and Happy New Year, friends! Another year I am blessed to be involved in this wonderful organization for writers. Thank you to those who’ve been so dedicated to furthering our club and in making us better. A BIG thank you to everyone who attends the monthly meetings, too. I love seeing your faces.



January symbolizes fresh beginnings for some – a new year, a new start. I hope that 2014 marks the year that everyone

re-dedicates themselves to their writing. Are you in a slump? Did the Muse skip town? I have some helpful hints below to get those creative juices flowing again.

**1. Attend Writers of Kern meetings.** Believe it or not, there is a correlation between attending meetings and writing. When we attend meetings, go to writers’

conferences, workshops, critique groups, etc., we surround ourselves with other writers and seem to absorb creativity by osmosis. Don’t believe me? Here’s a test for those of you who’ve stopped coming to meetings: How’s your writing coming along? Have you abandoned your craft, found other activities that keep you busy? It’s fine from time-to-time to take a break from meetings and/or writing, but a long absence seems to correlate to a long dry spell in writing, too.

**2. Reorganize your writing space.** Cluttered desk, cluttered mind. Take an hour and clear off that desk, clean and sanitize your writing surface until it shines. Light a candle and make the room smell different. Replace dusty plants and stacks of paper with items that inspire you to write. Whether you write science fiction, fantasy, romance, self-help, poetry or screenplays, your desk is where your eyes travel when your brain searches for words or ideas. Utilize a corner for reference books and clean printer paper. When it feels like your “space” is waiting for you to write, your brain seems to acknowledge the creativity, too.

**3. Join a critique group.** In our January meeting, we will be addressing critique groups—the dos and don’ts—and provide a general idea of what makes a successful critique group. Besides the social benefits of getting close to a small group of writers, critique groups seem to force us to keep working on a project, to keep moving forward. Because the nature of a critique group is that we must produce portions of our writing to be critiqued, we are *forced* to actually produce words on paper. Enough words on paper strung together week after week can actually produce a finished product! Next

thing you know, you’ve finished a writing project and made some terrific friends.

Congratulations to Jean Chapman for her winning entry “A Miracle in June.” Jean was awarded \$200 and a plaque at our December party for the essay she submitted in our Summer Writing Contest. Second place went to Annis Cassells and third place went to Sue Speake. Many other entries were outstanding, too, and deserved recognition.

Please keep writing and trying to get your stories published! My goal is for WOK to have the highest percentage of published writers over any other branch of the California Writers Club! Remember, it’s really difficult to get published if you aren’t submitting. Try to commit to submitting to a magazine or newspaper or compilation (such as Chicken Soup for the Soul) at least once per month. I want to see those rejections!

I also want to see your smiling faces. Remember—it’s only for two hours once per month. Reliably, it’s the third weekend of the month for just two hours. Won’t you please do your inner writer a favor by treating yourself to these two hours with your writing kinfolk? I hope you do.

Write on!  
Dana

“Write what should not be forgotten.”  
~ Isabel Allende

## 2013 Annual Winter Dinner

It may have been Friday, the 13<sup>th</sup>, but the stars were in alignment for a delightful evening for 44 of us at the WOK Winter Dinner. First, there was a troupe of the most creative writers in Kern County, along with their guests. Second, a legendary Hodel's buffet featuring some of the most delicious food served anywhere. Add in the camaraderie, shared readings, a book exchange, awards and recognition, and the event captured in photos by Dennis Van derWerff. Superstition flew out the window -- we had a winning combination.



Ten members entertained us throughout the evening. We laughed. We cried. We empathized. We related. Pieces ranged from childhood memories, poetry, Christmas tales, and short stories to excerpts from fiction and non-fiction works. Thank you to **Terry Redman, Nancy Clover, Patrick Kelly, Jean Chapman, Dan McGuire, Robert Hargreaves, Richard Meeks, Dennis Van derWerff, Annis Cassells, and Davyd Morris.**



After thirteen weeks of blood, sweat, and posts, the A-to-Z Blog Challenge ended. **Jason Brown, Annis Cassells, Donneé Harris-Padgett, Clarissa Kae, Jasmine Lowe, David Morris, Joan Raymond, and Anna Stewart** received snazzy Lucky Elephant bookmarks in recognition of their efforts.

Then came time for announcing the winners of the Writers of Kern Summer Writing Contest. A record number of entries, twenty-one in all, made hard work and difficult choices for the trio of judges. When commenting on the process, president **Dana Martin** said of the judges, "We had a reader, a writer, and a teacher." Then she announced the winners:



1<sup>st</sup> Place: **Jean Chapman**, "A Miracle in June"

2<sup>nd</sup> Place: **Annis Cassells**, "You Should Get Married"

3<sup>rd</sup> Place: **Sue Speake**, "Chester's Legacy"





Honorable Mention: **Ruth Smith**, "Home Maintenance Engineer"

Congratulations to all who submitted stories. This is the first year Writers of Kern has selected winners to third place and awarded monetary prizes for all three: 3<sup>rd</sup> Place, \$50; 2<sup>nd</sup> Place, \$75; and 1<sup>st</sup> Place, \$200. The December WOK Winter Dinner was a wonderful ending to another great year for Writers of Kern.

### *Winter Dinner Photos*

#### *Miles of Smiles from WOKians and Guests*



*Photos by Dennis Van derWerff*

*The Write Way* is published monthly in Bakersfield, California.

The deadline for submission of news articles is the first day of the month of publication. Send to [newsletter@writersofkern.com](mailto:newsletter@writersofkern.com)



The Writers of Kern website seeks and welcomes submissions of members' writing for the website blog. Prose, memoir, poetry, essays, and book reviews should be

## WOKians Getting Ink

Dana Martin: *Bakersfield Life*



*Magazine* asked me to contribute a column for their recent issue on a topic of my choosing that

related to Bakersfield and the month of January. I wrote on one of my favorite topics--parenting a baseball player. They call it "Last Word: Dreaming of 'the bigs'." You can find it online: <http://bit.ly/KtY67c>

**Joan Raymond:** Students in the English Master's program of Southern New Hampshire University listed me as editor for "Everyday Heroes", an anthology to benefit the students at Sandy Hook Elementary school. It was released December 23, 2013.

**Caroline Overlund Reid:** Go to [www.humorwriters.org](http://www.humorwriters.org) and see "Christmas Chaos," my latest adventure into the world of the Erma Bombeck blog.

## Calls for Submissions *Persimmon Tree; An Online Magazine of the Arts*

"*Persimmon Tree's* mission is to bring the creativity and talent of women over sixty to a wide audience of readers of all ages. We are looking for work that reveals rich experience and a variety of perspectives.... The magazine is published quarterly, in association with Mills College."

For the Spring, 2014 issue, they are looking for fiction and nonfiction pieces about politics and activism.

The deadline is February 21 - <http://www.persimmontree.org/v2/>

## Southern California Writers Showcase

This is the website of the Southern California Writers, a regional group of California Writers Club® branches. It is a place to showcase work by member authors: poems, essays, humor, short stories, fiction and memoir. Creative writing tips and writing ideas are shared to provide insight and inspiration. There is also news from various branches, interviews with published authors, and lists of local writing events and conferences.

Visit the website at <http://www.socalwritersshowcase.com/>

Submissions are under 500 words. Send them to [submissions@socalwritersshowcase.com](mailto:submissions@socalwritersshowcase.com) Provide your name, branch affiliation, and blog or website if you want it included at the end of your piece.

## Official WOK Email Addresses

Go to the website, or email to the following addresses. Thank you.

**Events:**

[events@writersofkern.com](mailto:events@writersofkern.com)

**Information:**

[information@writersofkern.com](mailto:information@writersofkern.com)

**Membership:**

[membership@writersofkern.com](mailto:membership@writersofkern.com)

**Newsletter:**

[newsletter@writersofkern.com](mailto:newsletter@writersofkern.com)

**President:**

[president@writersofkern.com](mailto:president@writersofkern.com)

**Submissions:**

[submissions@writersofkern.com](mailto:submissions@writersofkern.com)

**Sunshine Committee:**

[sunshine@writersofkern.com](mailto:sunshine@writersofkern.com)

**Treasurer:**

[treasurer@writersofkern.com](mailto:treasurer@writersofkern.com)

**Webmaster:**

[webmaster@writersofkern.com](mailto:webmaster@writersofkern.com)

## Member Profile Meet Ruth Smith



Born in St. Joseph, MO, I moved to Castle Rock, Colorado, as an infant and received my education in

Golden, Colorado. I married in December of 1953 to Ralph Smith, also of Golden. Our elder daughter was born in Denver. Then we moved to Bakersfield, California, in March of 1956. A son and daughter were born in Bakersfield.

For 20 years, I worked as the Mail Order and Retail Advertising Manager for the Ag. Division of Tenneco Oil.

My husband died in January of 2011 after fifty-seven years of marriage. We have three children, seven grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

I enjoy writing short stories, both fiction and non-fiction. I have been invited to read some of the stories on the radio. On *Sirius Radio* I read "The Last Time I Had a Fight in a Car." *The Storyteller Magazine* published "The Last Time I Saw Him" and "Madeline Goes Home." *Chicken Soup* has published "The New Refrigerator" in *Grandmothers* and "Two Again" in *Lemons to Lemonade*

Early this past December, Cyrus Webb of the radio program "Breakfast with Books" e-mailed me and asked if I would consent to an interview on air regarding my story "Two Again."

My interview was live at 7 AM on December 12. Since I didn't know the questions beforehand, during our 20-minute talk, I was trying to think fast without a lot of dead air, "uh's", and stammering. Cyrus asked how it felt to lose a spouse, how it felt to meet someone to share those experiences, and if writing about the loss made it easier.

Later that day I received a "thank you" from him with the site address so I could listen to the interview. To have my story recognized this way was quite a thrill.



## Reflections on Russo's

The closing of Russo's Books, Bakersfield's only independent bookstore, leaves a huge void in our community and in our hearts. Writers of Kern members recount their warm memories. "Russo's has always been friendly and supportive of Writers of Kern. I remember with fondness my first (and only) book signing there. I also appreciate the helpful staff they had and how willing they always were to find even the hardest to locate books. We will miss them." ~ *Caroline O. Reid*

"Russo's is not a bookstore; it is a place in time. As reader, employee and bookseller, the store always fit like an old shoe. Tony and Mike chose to run a friendly business. I worked there for a year, never quite mastering the cash register or finding a given book—the best job I ever failed at. I am richer for the experience. Mike and Tony, endless thanks and best wishes

**Calendar**

**January 18**  
Critique Workshop presented by Dana Martin and Panel

**February 15**  
Speaker pending

**March 15**  
Writers of Kern Annual Spring Conference

**April 19**  
Speaker pending

**May 17**  
Read the Book. Meet the Author Reggie Ridgway

**June 14 (2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday)**  
Summer Members Dinner Meeting



for your next chapter.” ~ **Terry Redman**

“When Harry Potter was all the rage, my youngest grandson entered a Harry Potter look-a-like contest and won. He was so excited, and a few years later we saw his picture displayed on a poster in the store. I will miss Russo's commitment to the Bakersfield community.”

~ **Janet Skibinski**

“There has been no greater friend to local writers and artists in promoting their works by sharing his resources in Bakersfield than Mike Russo. I have been privileged to read poetry and share the microphone many times at his invitation. His support and friendship have meant the world to me and countless others. An extraordinary host for the literary arts in our community, Mike Russo will be greatly missed.”

~ **Nancy Edwards**

"Russo's is not only a locally-owned-and-operated book store, but the owners are a writer's best friend. When the chain stores didn't have time for the little guy or gal, Mike Russo and his family bent over backward to help us promote our new publications. We will never be able to thank them enough for the exposure they have given us. Our prayers are for continued blessings for this family."

~ **Sandy Moffett**

“After taking a poetry writing class a few years ago, the instructor arranged for an open mic reading with Russo's for our

pieces. I got my courage up and read something. Nervous as hell, I got through it and heard applause. Thank you, Russo's for allowing amateurs to have a voice, too.” ~ **Janet Skibinski**

“For over fifteen years, poets have gathered at Russo's Bookstore. They offered their space for free. There was the annual National Poetry Month-Bakersfield, the monthly Poetry Open Mic.

I remember fondly, the poetry reading and discussion in 1988 with Ralph Vanderberg, Helen Shanley, and Claude Fountain. They discussed poetry and their pasts—WWII, Malibu. Those were wonderful times, possible because of the Russos. Thank you, Tony, Mike and Family.”

~ **Portia Choi-Chang**

“I went into Russo's to do research for a freelance assignment on the SATs. Mike pulled out every related book so I could browse through them and photograph the stack. We talked about trends among students. He introduced me to a young employee who had recently taken the SAT, and I interviewed him. Mike's interest, knowledge, and time helped make my article a success. I'll always be grateful for his kindness, support, and dedication.” ~ **Annis Cassells**

⌘⌘⌘⌘

The best portion  
of a good man's  
life is the little,  
nameless,  
unremembered  
acts of kindness  
and love. --  
William  
Wordsworth  
(1770-1850)  
English poet

⌘⌘⌘⌘

# Summer 2013 Writing Contest

## First Place Award-winning story by Jean Chapman



### A Miracle in June

My husband and I had been married for over forty years. Our relationship had become like a comfortable old slipper—we fit together just right. Larry was my lover, intimate friend, and my soul-mate. My only real anxiety was the fear that he would die before me one day and leave me alone.

And then after the midnight hour on June 5, 2007, something seemed to be pulling me from a deep place of slumber. As I slowly rose to the surface, I felt an ominous presence in our bedroom. What was it? I listened. No sound—no sound at all. In the darkness, I turned toward Larry. He wasn't breathing. I ran to my husband's side of the bed and turned on the light. Larry was dead! His face and neck were purple. His eyes stared through me, unseeing. In that terrible instant, all of my fears slammed into the moment. I screamed at him.

"Breathe, Larry, breathe! Oh, Jesus, help me! Breathe, Larry!"

Sheer instinct took over my responses. I could barely breathe as I picked up the phone to call 911. A calm voice answered.

"Help me," I yelled. "Please help me! My husband's not breathing."

"How old is he, Ma'am?"

"He's sixty-three years old. Please help me!"

"And what's happening, Ma'am?"

The voice on the phone began to give me instructions about getting Larry's body on the floor. He waited while I put my arms under my husband and lugged him to the edge of the bed and eased him onto the floor. When I picked up the phone, the man instructed me to let the paramedics in. "They're at your house now, Ma'am."

I ran up the stairs, yelling information over my shoulder, as the team of paramedics, firemen, and policemen followed me.

"He has asthma, no history of heart disease, normal EKGs and cholesterol." They entered the bedroom in a flurry of orchestrated motion and swarmed like bees around my husband's body. One paramedic jabbed a needle through Larry's chest wall directly into his heart; another started compressions, and another took what looked like two small paddles out of a case. One of the policemen took my arm in a firm grip and guided me out of the room and down the stairs.

I was in shock. With shaking hands I grabbed my phone and punched in familiar numbers feeling as though I was strangling. I called my son and my sister and our closest friends.

"Dad's not breathing. EMTs are here. Please come!"

"I'll call Annie," my son responded. "I'll be right there, Mom."

For the next half hour or so, I was in a blurry world of suspense and terror as I tried to absorb what was happening. The firemen and policemen blended into the dim light of my kitchen. I sensed their quiet sympathy.

I was vaguely aware that Scott arrived and then my daughter. We groped for each other and cried. Eventually firemen carried Larry down the stairs on a gurney and out the front door to the ambulance waiting on the curb. They wailed off into the night, and we followed them to the hospital.

We ran into the emergency entrance, and were ushered into a waiting room. A grief counselor met us. Friends arrived and hugged us. They had worked with Larry just yesterday. This was all impossible.

When the E.R. doctor came to fetch us, we followed Larry's bed through deathly quiet, corridors to the intensive care unit, a twilight zone of muted voices and dim lights. Hooked up to a wheezing respirator and monitors that beeped incessantly, we were told that specialists would see Larry in the morning.

Family members arrived and we hugged each other in the shock that shrouded our new reality. I sat on a chair by Larry's bed and rested my head against him, holding tightly to his hand. Overwhelming despair but also something else—a sense that maybe this wasn't the end of the story—vacillated back and forth within my heart.

The next morning specialists came to our bedside. The dapper, dark-haired cardiologist scanned the EMT's notes from the night before while the neurologist did some cursory tests for responses.



“Hmmm . . . no vital signs when they arrived. Unknown how many minutes without oxygen . . .” He looked at me and back at his notes. “And they shocked his heart thirteen times?!” His tone conveyed his amazement.

After a thorough examination, I finally heard a diagnosis of sorts.

“Your husband has suffered what we call SCD—sudden cardiac death. It’s almost always fatal. It’s as though an electrical storm ravaged its way through his heart and shut it down. His heart has been badly damaged and it’s barely pumping. We may need to consider a heart transplant. There is no neurological response. Since he’s in a coma, we’ll give him a 48-hour window to see if he wakes up.” And then they were gone.

I wanted to scream like some hysterical woman whose world is collapsing around her feet; I wanted to turn the clock back twelve hours and get in bed with Larry and wake up with him the next morning. These men were speaking gibberish, but I had to remain lucid and in control for my husband’s sake.

The next morning the ICU nurse assigned to Larry’s case interrupted my vigil. He was brutally honest.

“He won’t come out of his coma, you know. And even if he lives, he’ll be a vegetable the rest of his life. You’ll be a widow or a caregiver.”

His words should have chilled me to the bone, but I remembered a Psalm I’d read in my Bible that morning: “For you are great and perform great miracles. . . . your love for me is very great. You have rescued me from the depths of death.” In spite of the nurse’s dire pronouncement, I felt a shimmer of hope that a miracle could still happen.

My sister Joan entered our room an hour later. Placing her hand on my shoulder, she began singing an old hymn that Larry loved: “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus.” For a mere second, Larry’s eyes flew open and his lips twitched around the tube in his mouth as though he wanted to sing with her.

“Don’t stop singing, Joan,” I implored. “Keep singing!”

I continued to wait beside Larry, still in a coma, throughout the rest of the day. I held his hand, kissed him, talked to him, and prayed for him.

The next day the nurse came running into the waiting room to get me.

“Come quickly. He’s got his eyes open! He’s waking up!”

I raced into his room. My heart melted when Larry smiled at me. Oh, dear God! He was awake and he knew me! I was suspended in that moment of recognition.

On the third morning, they took Larry’s tube out. Would he talk? Was he brain- damaged?

Larry cleared his throat and spoke. “Where am I?”

“Honey, you’re in a hospital. You’ve been very sick” I told him.

He thought for a moment. “Well, can we afford it and does our insurance cover that?” I laughed. The euphoria I felt cannot be described.

Later in the week new tests revealed that Larry’s heart was now completely undamaged and that it was pumping full capacity; there was no brain damage. I had my husband back, and I could only thank God.

Through the crisis of those nights and days in June, I learned that God does work miracles: He brought Larry back to me from the depths of death. Only He numbers our days and now I relax in that knowledge.

*Our congratulations to Jean. ~Ed.*

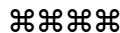
# THE BACK PAGE

## Editors' Inkwell

By Annis Cassells



Here we are, a brand-new year before us, and we've reached a milestone. When starting work on this edition of *The Write Way*, I realized it's the first issue of Volume 2. Terry Redman, Jasmine Lowe, and I are committed to putting out an appealing, informative publication, and with your help, we've been able to do so. Thanks to **Nancy Clover**, who volunteered to write the monthly meeting recap column, and to all WOK members who contributed their bios, articles, photos, successes, and ideas throughout the last half of 2013. It's been a great revival. I'm excited to see how we continue to develop and grow in 2014.




*Do you know of a WOK member who needs a little cheering up or note of congratulations?*

*If you do, contact the Sunshine Committee with details at [sunshine@writersofkern.com](mailto:sunshine@writersofkern.com)*

## “Scrivener: An Amazing Value for Writers”



“Professional or aspiring writers seeking a powerful, inexpensive application for producing prose, scripts, or research papers should consider Scrivener. Scrivener is software that allows you to organize a large writing project, so that you can easily switch between scenes, arrange scenes into chapters, store your research, sort, categorize, and search. Then when you're ready, you hit a button...” See the blog at the Writers of Kern website for the entire text of **Richard Meeks's** review at <http://writersofkern.com/archives/996>

## What Else You Can Do

- Show up at monthly WOK meetings. Even extend an invitation to your friends to visit.
- Step up and volunteer to work on a committee or take on a responsibility. In order to flourish, Writers of Kern needs you.
- Let us know when you GET INK at [newsletter@writersofkern.com](mailto:newsletter@writersofkern.com).
- Send your bio, with a headshot or other good photo, to [newsletter@writersofkern.com](mailto:newsletter@writersofkern.com).

*Have you checked out our VERY cool Writers of Kern website? Read the blog posts? Used the extensive list of Writers' Resources?*

*We not only want you to visit and partake and learn, we need YOU to compose and share your “writerly” articles and experiences, so other WOK members can be informed and delighted with your words.*

*Submit a 250-to-300-word gem to [submissions@writersofkern.com](mailto:submissions@writersofkern.com)*