



February, 2014  
Volume 2, Issue 2

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

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



Are you in a critique group or have always wanted to join one? Writers of Kern is a where you should be. 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 February 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. 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 February meeting to anyone wanting to become an apt critique partner. 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 February 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 how to improve your writing.

**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 sent to [submissions@writersofkern.com](mailto:submissions@writersofkern.com)**



*The letter from Mike Russo in response to our comments about Russo's closing*



Thank you for the nice email and for including the newsletter.

What a wonderful article (for that matter,

what a wonderful newsletter!). The Writers of Kern have really been at the heart of what we do ... community and books. If I were to sit down and list the many WOK authors we've hosted to signings over the past two decades ... well my memory isn't that good, but I know we've made a lot of friends, sold some books, and had a great time.

We take possession of our new office space tomorrow. My hope is that we will be able to host author readings and receptions -- these would probably be more of a "invited guests and their friends" type event rather than general public events (since we won't have the retail foot traffic to rely upon any longer). I'll keep you posted if we can make this happen.

When the news has asked me recently if I have "any final thoughts" I've been using the catchphrase "keep on reading" -- I will, however, amend that for WOK

..."Keep on Writing!"  
Mike Russo

**Writers of Kern** welcomes our newest member: *Sharon Miller*

*President's Column February 2014*



When I met with our WOK critique group leaders last month to hammer out the details of our upcoming meeting on critique

groups, I shared a story that I'd never told anyone else. It's private.

It's about writing—*my writing*. I had a terrible critique group experience that changed me, and I want to share it so that we will all understand why participation should be helpful, not damaging.

You know the damage I'm talking about. Our writers' egos are delicate little creatures of an unstable existence. One strong gust of criticism can wipe out a single project like a tornado sucking up a two-story house. Poof. Gone. Only the foundation left.

Several years ago I was writing an historic romance novel. My creative writing instructor had called it "literature," to which my ego answered, "Yes, of course!" believing that my writing was an incredible, grammatically sound piece of uncommon art. In truth, it really just had no sex scenes in it. Nonetheless, I took my confidence and my beautifully written tome to a romance writers group, where I met two lovely ladies who remain my friends today. They are both multi published writers in the historical romance genre—the bodice ripping, sex having, sword-wielding books that fill most of the bookstore shelves. I was grateful they were letting me into their critique group.

By the time I built up the courage to share my first novel chapter with them, I'd been participating several weeks. They were a little rough on each other, but nothing prepared me for how indelicate they would be with my piece.

"You can't DO THAT!" one said as she slammed her pencil to the table. "You'll never get published if you write like this," said the other in a calmer tone. "Say what you mean without all these extra words. Just get to the point."

"This just doesn't work," the first said with the disgust of someone trying to dress a dead rat. "You need to re-write this entire section."

They murdered my words, and with it, my confidence to write in that genre. I collected my battered pages and made the changes they wanted, despite the feedback I'd gotten from my college professor who'd called it literature. I made the changes, and do you know what happened? I hated it. I hated it so much I put it away in a cupboard and never looked at the 25 chapters again.

That was eight years ago. Then, this December, tired and ragged from marathon editing sessions for two patient clients who'd waited their turn behind my Halloween business, I accidentally bumped into my old manuscript. I was rooting around in a cupboard far over my head when my hand found the familiar pages. *Winds of Change*. There it was.

I flipped to the middle of the book and read it with the fresh eyes of an editor now. And I loved it. It's the best piece of fiction I've ever created, and I let it die because of an unfortunate experience with a critique group.

## The January Meeting

In president **Dana Martin's**



absence, vice president **Dennis VanderWerff** led the January meeting. Ten guests attended along with 27 members. Dennis provided

information on *Glimmer Train* and *Duotrope*, two websites of interest for writers who are searching for publication venues. A fiction magazine, *Glimmer Train* publishes short stories by established and new writers. There is a small reading fee per submission. For more information see [www.glimmertrain.com](http://www.glimmertrain.com)

*Duotrope* is a subscription service that costs \$5.00 per month or \$50 per year. Subscribers receive access to news and market updates, interviews with editors, and information on upcoming deadlines at [www.duotrope.com](http://www.duotrope.com)



As January's featured reader, **Nancy Clover** read her piece, "Homage to my Critique Sisterhood." This month's opportunity bag winner was **Phyllis Wachob**.

**Annis Cassells**, local writer and WOK member, presented her interactive workshop focusing on memoir and writing to heal, "Looking Back, Moving Forward." For writers of any age, memoir is a valuable genre. It allows us to gain

Maybe that's why I'm so passionate about making our critique groups work at WOK. And that's definitely why I spend time ensuring our critique groups understand how even criticism, when couched as "invitations to reconsider," can be delivered kindly and without the assumption that any one of us is qualified to murder a darling. We can suggest it; we can even be an accomplice if asked. But we cannot wield the knife.

## Chose the Wrong Guy, Gave Him the Wrong Finger

By **Beth Harbison**

Book Review by **Anna Stewart**



Quinn's wedding day is a disaster. Informed mere moments before the event that her groom has cheated on her, she makes a

dramatic exit and flees with the groom's brother. This is the opening scene to a book that, unfortunately, disappointed.

Ten years later, Quinn is still fixated on her unfaithful almost-husband and working as a seamstress to help other brides achieve their perfect wedding. When long-time friend (and the erstwhile groom's grandmother), Dottie, solicits Quinn to make the dress for her late-in-life wedding, Quinn has no choice but to face her former love and his brother once again.

The premise is rife with possibility but, sadly, the book failed to follow through. A great deal of the book is

focused on Quinn's shallow if obsessive fixation on the man she almost married, this to the detriment of the story itself. The introspection grows tedious in its simplicity while the more light-hearted (and arguably more interesting) sub-plot involving her friend's daily challenge to try something new gets short shrift.

But, most disappointing, the book failed to fully explore the possibilities put forth in its dramatic opener. The love triangle the author tries to construct is too heavily weighted in favor of the ex-fiancé with very little time or attention given to the brother or the, to my mind, more interesting idea that Quinn might choose neither.

Absent that build-up, that struggle, her choice (and I don't think it would have mattered which choice she made) fell flat.

### Calendar

**February 15**  
Critique Workshop  
presented by Dana Martin  
and Panel

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

**April 19**  
Speaker pending

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

**June 14 (2nd  
Saturday)**  
Summer Members Dinner  
Meeting

insight into ourselves, sort out our lives, make sense of the past, look toward the future, and make new goals.



Annis urged us to “be brave and write the tough stuff” so it doesn’t fester inside and haunt us. If we write all around difficult experiences,

they overshadow and control our writing; the result, dull prose. Going deep loosens those barriers, energizing our writing while freeing and healing ourselves.

It was truly an interactive workshop. After declaring the room “a sacred space,” Annis put us to work writing and sharing stories about our life journey. We came away with a new appreciation for memoir writing.



More photos will be posted on Facebook and [www.writersofkern.com](http://www.writersofkern.com).

-TWW

## That Memorable Valentine’s Day

- We were married on Valentine’s Day and I spent that night in ER on a diabetic overload. My wife had surprised me by covering her body in chocolate. **Bob Weiss** (Bob says this is non-fiction, TR)

- One Valentine's Day my husband got a babysitter and we spent the entire night kid free in a fabulous hotel. **Donnee P. Harris**
- One Valentine’s Day, I opened the door to see my brother holding a box of candy for me. I had no boyfriend that year. That’s a love that lasts. **Mary Morton**
- On a trip that was a retirement gift to myself. We celebrated Valentine's Day by having a drink at Darling Harbor in Sydney, Australia. ~ **Annis Cassells**
- Today is Valentine’s Day and I received wrapped in pink ribbon forty years of Valentine cards from my sweetheart now long gone from me. **Iola Reneau**
- A Valentine card of pink ribbon, lace and crayon hearts on construction paper the creator holds my heart forever. **Iola Reneau** (I kept both of these because they are related and tell a powerful story. TR)
- My favorite Valentine’s Day gift was a restaurant worthy steak dinner, prepared by my husband and relaxing afterward while he did the dishes. **Sandy Moffett**

## Getting Ink

Friends,  
I received a response from my book proposal. It was declined. Two out of three peer reviewers would not recommend publishing the proposed book. On the positive side, one of the reviewers was very constructive and the managing editor has encouraged me to resubmit - interesting process. This particular

publisher also provided the complete assessment documents from the reviewers so I know what needs work. Getting published the traditional way is hard work! Best regards and keep writing.  
**Patrick Kelly**

**Sandy Moffett** has published in *Hints for Heloise*.

**Official WOK Email Addresses**

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

**Events:**  
events@writersofkern.com

**Information:**  
information@writersofkern.com

**Membership:**  
membership@writersofkern.com

**Newsletter:**  
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**President:**  
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**Sunshine Committee:**  
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**Treasurer:**  
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**Webmaster:**  
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## *I* as in “Me, Myself and I.”

Clarissa Kae and her reporter



As a member of the Writers of Kern, I (and I pray I'm not the sole obedient one) have been asked to submit a quick biography. Proud as a peacock, I decided to enumerate my endless list of qualities and accomplishments. I even employed the SYBIC (Slam Your Butt In a Chair) tactic. Sort of a diabolical move. My eyes glazed over and my legs lost feeling before a word was written. Hope was lost until my author daughter asked why I was staring at the white screen. After assessing the situation (with the distinctive flair of an imaginative seven-year-old), she announced she would interview me.

**Daughter:** But you have to type because I'm the reporter now. I need to hold the pen and paper.

**Me:** Naturally.

**Daughter:** How long ago were you born? Grandma said it was important to presidents. Does that mean you knew Abraham Lincoln?

**Me:** I was born during Reagan's Inaugural Speech. January 20th, Inauguration Day.

**Daughter:** (Sighs) Oh, I thought something interesting happened that day.

**Me:** Well, Grandma had cancer and I was born in a cancer hospital.

**Daughter:** (She offered a blank look and kept going.) You have to tell the truth. Grandma said you liked school so much you kept going. But she also said you skipped school. Tell me the truth, cause I skip things I don't like. Like math. We should skip math every day.

**Me:** You're not getting out of math. But yes, I graduated high school early so I could go to college.

**Daughter:** (rolls eyes) Fine. Did you go to an author college?

**Me:** No. I graduated in Animal and Veterinary Science. Now I'm raising three monkeys.

**Daughter:** That's hilarious (She wasn't laughing).

**Me:** Ask me another question.

**Daughter:** Why did you adopt a sister?

**Me:** Grandma and Grandpa adopted my four brothers and sisters. Grandma couldn't have any more babies so they brought home foster brothers and sisters.

**Daughter:** They wanted more kids? Did you tell them they could have my sisters?

**Me:** We're not giving away your sisters.

**Daughter:** Fine. (eye roll) What's all this stuff? (Waves hand around the piles of first aid stuff).

**Me:** It's part of my service for the church. I help the women become self-reliant; financial and budgeting classes, food storage, coupon classes, health classes, and emergency prep. That's why I ordered all the first aid kits and medicine. I want everyone prepared and independent.

**Daughter:** Do you do anything interesting?

**Me:** Raising you is definitely interesting.

**Daughter:** (smiles) I am pretty interesting.

**Me:** One more question.

**Daughter:** Nice try. I'm the reporter. Where's all your medals?

**Me:** My running medals? They're in your sister's closet, or yours.

**Daughter:** No, the good ones. The ones from when you rode horses.

**Me:** They're hidden away. It makes me sad to look at them.

**Daughter:** Sad? I never get sad when I get medals. Something's wrong with you.

**Me:** I wasn't sad when I won them. I'm sad I no longer ride. I can't fit it into my life right now. I will later, hopefully. I'm too busy trying to get a Mom Medal. It takes a lot of work to get that one.

**Daughter:** (grins) I have a few ideas on how you could win a Mom Medal.

**Me:** You're not getting out of math.

**Daughter:** (frowns) I'm changing the name of your story. “*I* is for *impossible!*”

# THE BACK PAGE

## The Editors' Inkwell

Terry Redman



By the time you read this **Annis** will be in Mexico with **Dennis VanderWerff** attending the 9th Annual San Miguel Writers' Conference and Literary Festival. She assures me this is a wonderful conference so I'm going to ask them to tell us about it. The name says it all, but go to <http://sanmiguelwritersconference2014.org/> and prepare to be impressed -- impressed with the number and caliber of speakers and learning opportunities. It's one huge celebration at the "Creative Crossroads of the Americas." When is the last time you went to a conference? *Oh, do we have a deal for you!* In March we host our annual conference—you'll love it.

This month we have a bio from **Clarissa Kae**, our first done as an interview. Below you will find a teaser the pitch session she attended. I need another infusion of bios I only have one left in the folder. One of the most important points in the meeting is the break when we have a bagel and talk to one another. That's when we get energy from other writers and realize writing is not a solitary journey. What are your interests, background, genres you read and write? Why are you in WOK? Send in 200 to 300 words and a good head shot of yourself.

What kind of column would **you** like to see in *The Write Way*? You should write it. The world, two editors, and maybe your mother are waiting to see your ideas. Send us the idea and we'll see what we can do. And what else can you do for WOK? Bring a friend to the meeting, volunteer to be one of our featured readers, and let us know when you GET INK.

The WOK board is working hard to get high quality speakers for our meetings; details to follow. Contact either **Annis Cassells** or myself at [newsletter@writersofkern.com](mailto:newsletter@writersofkern.com).

## A Pitch Session

By Clarissa Kae

I'd flown 3,000 miles to New York City for one thing – **The Writer's Digest Pitch Slam**. For three minutes at a time, I would have an agent's undivided attention. I could pitch as many agents as the 90-minute session would allow. For weeks, I had devoured "how-to" books on publishing. I'd even spoken a few times with David Sterry, co-founder of The Book Doctors. He, like so many other resources, told me the fate of my novel and writing career lay in a 250-word script called.... (To read the rest of the pitch go to [www.writersofkern.com](http://www.writersofkern.com) . See the blog section.TR)

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)

 You can pay your WOK Meeting Fee online at [www.writersofkern.com](http://www.writersofkern.com)  
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January only  
OR  
January-March