



# California Writers Club, Sacramento Branch

www.CWCSacramentoWriters.org



## Write On!

### 2016 Short, Short Story Contest Issue

#### 2016 Short, Short Story Writing Contest

The California Writers Club, Sacramento Branch announced the 2016 Short, Short Story Writing Contest with entries due postmarked by April 1, 2016. The contest was open to all writers with the category fiction and length up to 750 words.

#### Awards and Recognition:

**First Place: \$100 ~ Second Place: \$50 ~ Third Place: \$25**

#### **Congratulations to the Winners!**

Winners of the 2016 Short, Short Story Contest were announced and awards were presented at the Luncheon Meeting on Saturday, June 18, 2016, held at Cattlemens, Rancho Cordova, CA 95670.



**First Place: Nanci Lee Woody** for “*Loss*”

**Second Place: Jenifer Rowe** for “*Fair Trade*”

**Third Place: Doug Fortier** for “*Today?*”

**Honorable Mention: Karen Holladay Durham** for “*Loyal*”

**Honorable Mention: Jessica A. Moore** for “*Bird Chasers*”

#### **Thanks and Appreciation!**

Thanks to the 2016 Writing Contest Judges! David George, Ginny McReynolds and Robert L. Miles.

Thanks to 2016 Writing Contest Chair! Jo Chandler.

Thanks to everyone who entered the contest! CWC members and other writers.

On behalf of California Writers Club, Sacramento Branch, thanks to all!

Enjoy the award-winning stories published in this special 2016 contest issue of the *Write On!* newsletter. Also, the winning stories are posted at: <http://www.cwcsacramentowriters.org/2016/short-short-story-writing-contest/>.

~Margie Yee Webb, President

## About 2016 Writing Contest Judges

**David George**, California Writers Club President, is an award-winning author of several dozen short stories, and has two longer fictional works in progress.

**Ginny McReynolds** is a longtime area writer and community college teacher and dean. Her blog, “Finally time for This: A Beginner’s Guide to the Second Act of Life,” can be found at <http://www.finallytimeforthis.com>.

**Robert L. Miles**, English professor emeritus at California State University, Sacramento, and currently teaches English at American River College.

## About 2016 Writing Contest Chair

**Jo Chandler** is an author, teacher and believer in the power of sharing story to change the world. Her award-winning young adult novel is *This Side of Forever* and her career included writing for a number of magazines and newspapers. She graduated from CSU Sacramento with a BA in English.

California Writers Club, Sacramento Branch  
2016 Short, Short Story Writing Contest

**First Place**

*Loss*

by Nanci Lee Woody

Pushing aside the tubes leading to bags of fluids, she climbed into the small, cool bed with him. She wrapped her arms around his pitifully thin body, whispered, "Davey, son. I love you so." Julie pulled him closer, whispered, "You can go now. Don't worry about us. I'll be right here with you." Within minutes, she felt his last breath. Her mother's tears flowed unceasingly onto his chest.

Brad arrived at the hospital shortly after, too late, aggrieved. Julie comforted him, made the arrangements for their only son's burial and memorial service.

Now, nearly two years later, the image of David, as white as the hospital sheets he lay on, never left Julie's mind. The numbness, gone, was replaced with a searing, ever-present ache that made it painful to be touched. She slept in the guest bedroom, her loss filling her consciousness.

Brad reached for Julie when his dreams were unbearable. He awakened with empty arms, bereft, his heart breaking nightly at the loss of his son and his wife.

Driving home after one of their weekly visits with a grief counselor, Brad pulled onto the country lane leading to their house, too big now. Without warning, he slammed his foot on the brakes and screeched to a stop, jerking Julie into the present. Her seatbelt tight against her chest, she spotted a doe as it leapt to the side of the road.

"Thank God you didn't hit her," she cried.

Brad accelerated, eager to be home, but again stepped hard on the brakes right before they felt the impact, heard a thud. Julie's scream pierced the cool night air.

She jerked open the door, ran to the front of the car, knelt, put her hands on the warm, furry neck. "She had a fawn, Brad. Look what you've done," she sobbed. Julie pressed her head to the fawn's chest, trying to find a heartbeat. "I think he's dead," she cried.

"I'm sorry, Julie . . . ," he began. "We hit him pretty hard. Come. Help me move him." They each grabbed a front leg and pulled, the fawn's neck flopping backwards, to the side of the road.

Julie spotted the doe they had barely missed earlier standing in an oak grove nearby. "Look, Brad. She's here. She knows." Tears streaming down her cheeks, she held out her hands to the doe, beckoning. "Don't worry about us," she said.

She felt Brad's hand on her arm. "Julie. Get control of yourself. I couldn't help it. Come on now."

She recoiled from his touch, knelt again. She noticed the fawn's leg twitch. "Did you see that?"

"I'm sure he's hurt bad, Julie. You stay here with him. I'll be right back."

“You’re going for your gun.”

“You don’t want him to suffer. Do you?”

“I don’t want him to die. That’s what I don’t want.”

“Okay. I’m going now. I’ll be right back.”

He pulled onto the lane, leaving Julie kneeling by the fawn, stroking his neck. Unwanted thoughts of loss filled her mind. Of David as a young boy, joyful, riding his new bike down this same lane. Of her mother, who died suddenly just months before her son. Her high school friend who, with no explanation, drove her car into the river. She saw herself, just nine years old, her arms tight around her collie’s neck, her face close to his, a bullet hole in his side. The neighbor boy who hanged himself when he was fifteen.

Julie focused again on the doe, venturing ever closer, watching, waiting. Brad’s headlights illuminated the fawn. He pulled to the side of the road, parked the car, reached for his gun.

Julie sat upright, whispered to the fawn. “You can go now.”

The fawn’s front legs jerked a little. He tried to raise his head, laid it down again, and then, with what seemed to Julie a valiant effort, he stood, wobbly, weak, then stronger, then stronger yet, until his mother was beside him, nudging him, and when she knew it was time, she leapt into the woods, her fawn close behind.

Brad dropped the gun, took Julie’s hands, helped her stand. She didn’t resist when he pulled her close, stroked her hair. Her heart poured out its grief onto his chest.

“How I’ve missed you,” he whispered.

Julie put her arms around her husband, clasped her hands behind his back, held him tight.

“Bittersweet as it is, Jule, we still have each other. Let’s go home now.”

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**Nanci Lee Woody** was a college professor, textbook author and Dean of Business before writing her first novel. *Tears and Trombones* recently won an Independent Publishers award for BEST FICTION IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC REGION. Nanci has published numerous short stories and poems in print anthologies and online.

**Congratulations to Nanci Lee Woody on winning  
First Place and \$100 for her story *Loss!***

California Writers Club, Sacramento Branch  
2016 Short, Short Story Writing Contest

**Second Place**

*Fair Trade*

by Jenifer Rowe

Irv lowers his shotgun when he sees a young girl, and not a stray dog, peering at him from behind his overturned trash can.

“Who are you? What are you doing prowling around my back yard?”

“Lookin’ for food.”

“Well then, go home and eat.”

“Old man, what planet you live on?”

“Get in here and wait while I call the authorities. Damn it. I hate people meddling in my affairs, coming into my home, expecting me to make statements or whatever. But I guess I ought to turn you in.”

“No you don’t got to, far as I’m concerned.” But she goes through the back door, since Irv is still holding the gun. On her way to the front room, she looks around and lets out a low whistle. “You got enough boxes in here to build you another house. Don’t you ever open none of your mail? This place smells like a dumpster. Lookit all them take-out bags.”

“How old are you, girl? And what is your name, so that I may properly address you?”

“I’m Taneesha, and I’m fourteen. But I seen plenty, so don’t go treating me like some kid.”

“All right, Taneesha. My name is Irving Gladstone, and I am a retired professor of history.”

“Well, whoopee for you. I bet you ain’t never scratched for a meal, huh, Irving? Looks like you hidin’ away in here and you don’t know shit about the outside world no more.” She glares at him as they both sit down.

“What was your last permanent address, Taneesha?” He takes a phonebook from the side table.

“I rather be dead than go back to that foster home. I get by okay turning tricks downtown. It feeds me better, and I don’t get beat up so often.” She looks around. “How many bedrooms you got here?”

“Since you are interested, this house includes three bedrooms, one and a half bathrooms, a kitchen and a front room. It is modest, I grant you, but more than sufficient for my needs.”

Irv starts thumbing through the phonebook. Taneesha watches him closely before speaking.

“Cool. So one bedroom for you, one for me, and one for whatever ghosts you got runnin’ around in your head. Or maybe for your junk.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m sayin’ I should stay here. I can do for you. I know how it is with you. You scared to go out. I had me a uncle like that when I was little. He nearly burnt his place down when a spark caught on the stove. He was right there to put it out, but all them newspapers and pizza boxes ‘most got past him.”

“Are you suggesting that you would like to room here? And why should I consider that proposal?”

“So here’s the plan: I do you a deal, see? You let me sleep here. I go where you don’t wanna go, an’ I bring back whatever you need. It works for both of us. You down with that?”

“Why should I think that if I give you money, you’ll come back here with anything?”

“Cause I wanna sleep with a roof over my head and a toilet to pee in and nobody messin’ with me, that’s why. All you gotta do is try me one time. If I run off with the grocery money, you ain’t losin’ much, way I see it. But I’m thinkin’ I be stupid to run off, since we got a chance at a good deal. And I ain’t stupid. What you think, old man?”

“I think you make great presumptions, young lass.”

“Yeah, whatever. So what you think, anyway?”

Someone knocks at the door. Taneesha ducks into the kitchen. Irv slowly gets up and makes his way the few short steps toward the front hall, taking his shotgun along. The knocking grows louder.

Irv clears his throat and yells, “Hold your horses. Give me a chance to get there.”

A young man Irv doesn’t recognize stands at the door. “Hi. I live next door. I thought I heard a gunshot. Is everything okay here?”

“Everything is just fine. I thought a stray dog was into my trash, but I was mistaken.” Irv closes the door in the man’s face, but gently so, or at least that was his intent. He turns to see Taneesha with a grin on her face.

“I didn’t think you was stupid neither, old man.”

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After graduating from UC Berkeley with a degree in biology, **Jenifer Rowe** followed careers in field biology, information technology and marketing. She is now retired and free to pursue her passion for writing. Jenifer is currently adding to a collection of short stories and has begun work on a novel.

**Congratulations to Jenifer Rowe on winning  
Second Place and \$50 for her story *Fair Trade!***

California Writers Club, Sacramento Branch  
2016 Short, Short Story Writing Contest

Third Place

*Today?*

by Doug Fortier

As I have each of these sixteen mornings since I brought Bareth home from the hospital, I open the nightstand drawer cradling the pistol to touch the cold steel and tell myself today is not the day.

“Today?” she whispers to my back.

My gut recoils with her acknowledgment of our lifelong agreement to die together, our love so great we didn’t want to live without one another. I’m surprised she’s awake after night-long bouts of breathlessness aided by oxygen pumped into her lungs.

In these sixteen days I’ve been trying to deny my promise regarding the last day. Bareth believed when her body finally broke from slow asphyxiation, and I called the ambulance to come, they’d find two dead.

The abrupt downturn of her health, then the hospital stay, forced me to denounce the romantic ending I’d defended, and to realize the toast honoring our love, “Together to the end,” had become a tribute to my death. Hand in hand at her hospital bedside, I slipped into a memory of late summer, seventy years ago, the moment I fell in love with Bareth. I’m fifteen and ignoring the crowd toting umbrellas and towels while I clear sand from the boardwalk in front of my parent’s soda shop. A pretty girl my age wearing a yellow dress doesn’t move as I sweep closer. She smiles and asks my name, then stands uncomfortably close, speaking softly, never moving her eyes from mine.

Clicks of plastic valves pushed the fleeting giddiness from my chest and returned me to the bright hospital room and the flowers I’d brought.

“I saw,” she breathed, “you smiling.”

“It was the day we met, but it could have been our wedding day, or your—”

She let her head fall back. “It makes. Me think. Too much.”

Our home meets her needs, yet it has taken longer each morning to move her from our bed to a bath that cannot renew her ebbing flesh, an intimacy eroding memories of her vigor and beauty.

Bareth smiles and points to my flannel pajamas on the hook. “Please?” I want to capture that smile as I have in hundreds of photographs filling our bedroom and the house. Instead, I wrap her warmly and slide her feet into woolly slippers.

She watches from the family room while I make breakfast in the kitchen, the oxygen pump cycling with the rhythm of her breathing. Unbidden anger roils inside me, feeding on fear of my impending end and regret that I’m still healthy with good years ahead of me. While I collect her pills, prune juice, and tea, I’m soothed by reminders of our long life together in pictures and pieces of art from our travels.

Bareth lies quietly for several hours in her reclining chair between the kitchen and the silent TV, with strength only for breathing. In a rare moment away from her, I close the bathroom door behind me and focus on myself in the mirror to connect with my creator on the other side. Ignoring my blotched and wrinkled skin, I stare beyond my eyes in the reflection and take a deep breath before I speak. “Please, Lord, return Bareth to me whole, and I’ll tell the world of your miracle. Take a year of my life and give it to my love.”

When I return to the chair by Bareth’s side, her breathing is raspier, and a few minutes later the gauge measuring her blood oxygen moves lower. Tears form in her eyes. An upwelling of grief clenches my chest, urging me to scream, yet I will not make this harder for her. Sharing her tears, I sit motionless in my anguish, resisting the unfolding reality.

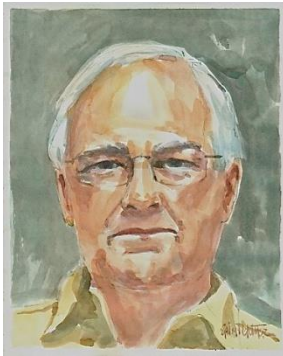
Lunchtime comes and goes, neither of us stirring from our vigil as Bareth’s skin becomes grayer. I lower the blinds when twilight overtakes the day, and she looks up when the oxygen monitor pings faintly. With her hand in mine, the closeness we’ve shared these years is a source of comfort.

The monitor’s alarm startles me awake, my skin to hers, Bareth is cold, and I’m plunged into sadness. Moving to hold her, cheek to cheek, I tremble as each part of me fills with grief.

After unplugging everything, I kiss my love one last time and dial the number I’ve memorized. Once the questions are answered, I draw myself to the nightstand and look at the gun one last time.

Today?

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Introduced to creativity in a programmer training class at BofA during the '60s, **Doug Fortier** crafted software during his career, ending in '97. He painted for six years, then found his passion in creative writing. As the four-year Mendocino Coast California Writers Club branch president, Doug won the Jack London Award in 2015.

**Congratulations to Doug Fortier on winning  
Third Place and \$25 for his story *Today?!***



California Writers Club, Sacramento Branch  
2016 Short, Short Story Writing Contest

**Honorable Mention**

*Loyal*

by Karen Holladay Durham

In the forests of Northern California, between narrow strips of uncut woods on a wide curve in the road, a dead raccoon ripens in the morning sun, releasing a rainbow of odors. Penelope sits on the dirt verge. When she was a pup she was tossed into a high creek to drown, but she was plucked from the water by a skinny woman, an orphan, who could barely care for herself, let alone her young brother.

Passing cars stir a soup of dust, cellophane cigarette wrappers, scraps of paper. Bits of rock and roadway shoot from under spinning tires, peppering Penelope. The shifting breeze is cool, almost cold.

Before dawn Penelope had walked with her mistress three miles to reach the highway. There, her owner had told her, "Stay!" and had gotten into a car alone because the man would take her, but not the dog, nearly all the way to where she needed to go.

In the county jail miles away, a young man not quite finished being a boy is combing his hair nervously, preparing to stand in front of a judge. The dog's owner had promised their mother to keep him safe.

The raccoon is already host to a party of ants and flies, who had arrived at dawn. A crow floats down, her long toes testing the pavement gingerly. She circles, head tilted; samples an eye; digs in with gusto. Another crow arrives and then the vulture, to whom the crows noisily yield.

The boy's first bad choice had been to smoke a joint with his girlfriend. "Just this once," he had said to his sister, who believed him.

Penelope shifts on the hard ground and begins to pant. A flesh colored Datsun drifts off the pavement and the birds flutter away like kites. Penelope springs up as the car slides past her. Warily she sits back down. Warily the crows return.

The boy's next bad choice was to steal his sister's savings and their mom's jewelry to buy drugs. "Never again," he had said to his sister. She wanted to believe him.

The vultures return to take their share of the raccoon. The crows pull frantically to free strings of flesh and carry them off to a safe distance. Another car drives by, then a truck. Penelope sits nervously, ready to jump again. Penelope in Greek myth is the godly embodiment of faithfulness.

The boy's final bad choice was to rob a gas station to pay his dealer. "Help me!" he had said. His sister had been unable to deny his error, even to herself. He went to jail.

Penelope lies down, finally, in the dust. The creek near the road calls, but she won't move. She drifts off to sleep to dream of chasing a rabbit, of drinking cool water from her bucket, of lying beside her mistress in front of the fire in the cool of evening. The sun shines on her skin through her thinning leonine coat. She looks as dead as the raccoon.

The boy's pride made him resist, at first, having his big sister, "save," him again. But as the date of his hearing approached, pride turned to shame in the part of him that was a man.

Shadows slip across the road. The raccoon is no longer an animal as bits and chunks are pulled and dragged by birds, and flattened by cars. Tomorrow, or next week, it will be left entirely to the ants and beetles; nature will take its course. Penelope wakes and rests her head on her paws, as patient as her namesake.

The dog's owner promised the judge to take her brother into her home and hold him to his promises. She can only pray both the judge and her brother believe her.

From around the wide curve comes another truck. It slows as it passes the dozing dog; a bearded driver looks out the window and pulls onto a turnout; a cloud of detritus blossoms. The truck idles; shoes crunch the gravel. Someone emerges from the brown fog. Hackles raised, the dog stiffens. Sniffs.

Then she's up, feet scrambling. She charges, flat to the ground, ears pinned in joy. She squirms, pushes deeper into the crouched embrace. Her owner's breath is hot in Penelope's ears. She doesn't understand the stream of words and sobs, but feels the joy, and throws herself higher onto her mistress, knocks her to the ground, helps her celebrate.

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**Karen Holladay Durham** lives and writes in Sacramento. Motto: J'écris Westcoast! Karen creates fiction of all lengths. She has studied poetry, fiction and creative non-fiction in Sacramento at Our Life Stories, SummerWords and Crocker Art Museum, and with WritingXWriters at Tomales Bay. Some of her work can be heard in the oral tradition at [writersontheair.com](http://writersontheair.com).

**Congratulations to Karen Holladay Durham on winning  
Honorable Mention for her story *Loyal!***

California Writers Club, Sacramento Branch  
2016 Short, Short Story Writing Contest

**Honorable Mention**

*Bird Chasers*

by Jessica A. Moore

Fergus played the statue in the sandbox. She gripped a plastic pail filled with earth in each hand. Stock-still, her skin changed to stone.

Granny bobbed in a rocking chair on the patio. Knitting needles clacked with every woven loop.

“What are you doing, Gus?”

Fergus didn't risk an answer. Surely, robins would swoop down and mistake the soil in her buckets for seed. She'd create a nest in the crook of her hands, and call a birdie her own. But talons never grazed Fergus' skin. She stomped out of the box, and learned about letting go.

Fergus grew up, filling her head with all the beautiful things she could hold. When her grandmother fell sick, the way grandmothers sometimes do, Fergus sat on the edge of the bed cradling Granny's hand. The elderly woman's bony chest strained under a cotton nightgown trimmed in lace. Moments ticked by, and Fergus couldn't catch them either.

“Have this, dear.” Granny's voice sounded like tires rolling over a gravel road. Her wrist shaking, she placed a clementine-sized seed in Fergus' palm.

“What is it?” The pit was chestnut brown, but for a red streak running the circumference of the sphere.

“My Gus, one day it will be all you need.” Granny's eyes closed for the foreverth time.

Alone in her room, confused by the gift, Fergus placed it in her jewelry box. A seed in repose, dormant for six and thirty years.

Time rushed. Fergus became a mother to Winifred, a wild, loud, and wonderful being that bounced when she talked.

One day at the park, Winifred whisper-screamed a dream to her mama, “I want to catch a bird!”

Fergus laughed at the tickle of breath on her earlobe as Winifred chased the birds pecking through the summergrass. But crows were smart and fast. The flock flitted from one chain-link post to the next. Teased by their harsh caws, the girl collapsed in a heap of grief.

Fergus gathered Winifred in her lap. “Shhh, my sweet.”

“I'll never catch a bird!” Winifred pounded her leg with a fist.

Fergus dried her daughter's wet cheeks. “I believe you will.”

“How, Mama?”

“Think.”

Winifred sat quiet, until a spark lit. Her grey-green eyes grew big, spine straightened with an idea. Excitement clipped the heel of each word, as the girl planned to weld together a birdhouse to the moon!

Winifred and her mama studied, and collected materials for weeks. With their headgear in place, they melted and conjoined cast iron bars. They built and climbed until the top of the aviary was as tall as the rooftop.

Winifred pulled her face mask off, dirt smudged her round cheeks.

“It’s missing something.”

“You’re right.” Fergus walked back through the house to her bedroom. She opened the jewelry box, and tangled among gold and silver chains, was the wooden pit with the red streak.

Back in the garden, Winifred skipped around the inside of the structure, kicking dirt clouds into the air.

“What’s that, Mama?”

“Your great-grandmother gave this to me.” Fergus wrapped her daughter’s miniature fingers around the offering. Stepping back, she regarded her daughter’s ornate design.

Winifred dug a hole, and plopped the seed inside.

“It belongs here.” She patted the soil back into place.

“It’s a part of what we made.” Fergus kneeled, hugging the young girl from behind. “Will the mean, old crows be happy here?”

“Yes, Mama.” Winifred picked the dirt from under her fingernails.

The pair cleaned up, filled their bellies, and fell asleep, quite exhausted by the work.

Winifred and Fergus woke to twittering. They met in the kitchen’s grey morning light, barefeet padding along chilled tiles. Winifred lifted the curtain covering the door window.

“Look, Mama!” On her tiptoes, she reached for the metal chain lock. With a swoosh and a clink, the little girl ran outside. Fergus followed.

The enclosure stretched toward the clouds, disappearing into the ether. In the center of the aviary, a scarlet tree arose. It’s trunk, thick and strong, like it had grown there for many years. Crimson branches extended, tipped with sparkling ruby leaves. Silver pomegranate-shaped fruits dropped from the limbs. Birds of all kinds crowded the aviary, squawking and pecking over the harvest. They flitted among the boughs.

Winifred kneeled next to the bole, and held out her forefinger. Crows, finches, bluebirds, robins, and cardinals fell into a line, waiting to perch upon the hand of the girl that built them a home.

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**Jessica A. Moore** lives in Sutter Creek, California, where she works as a full-time parent, occasional guest commentator for the local newspaper, and beta-reader. Jessica is a member of the Amador Fiction Writers Critique Group, where *Bird Chasers* and other works in progress have been cultivated.

**Congratulations to Jessica A. Moore on winning Honorable Mention for her story *Bird Chasers*!**

# California Writers Club, Sacramento Branch

www.CWCSacramentoWriters.org

## 2015-2016 Officers, Board of Directors and Committee Chairs

*To ensure that your email correspondence does not look like SPAM, include CWC in the subject line*

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**CWC NorCal Rep:**  
Margie Yee Webb

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**About California Writers Club, Sacramento Branch**

California Writers Club, Sacramento Branch—one of 21 CWC branches throughout California—serves the greater Sacramento region and welcomes all writers and related professions, offering monthly Luncheon Meetings, Writers Network meetings, and Open Mic For Writers. <http://www.cwcsacramentowriters.org/>

**About California Writers Club**

The California Writers Club is an educational nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation dedicated to educating writers of all levels of expertise in the craft of writing and in the marketing of their work. <http://calwriters.org/>