



DECEMBER 2025

FRESH INK

**INLAND EMPIRE
WRITING CLUB**

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Finally, it's the holidays!

I am staying home and relaxing over the holidays—after I host the Inland Empire CWC Holiday Party!

Mark your calendar for our annual **Holiday Social. Second Saturday December 13, 2025. Noon.**

My house address is 717 W 12th Street, Claremont. It's a potluck lunch. I will make a festive Persian rice dish. You bring whatever you want: salad, a side, a main dish, fruit, dessert or beverage. I have a small house with a large patio, so dress warmly if it is chilly. Bring a wrapped book for those who want to participate in a gift exchange. Text me 909-525-5559 with any questions.

Critique group location change. Second Saturday December 13, 2025. Like last year, we will host the 10 am critique group at my house in Claremont instead of at the Rancho Library. Bring your work and stay for our potluck luncheon. If you have never done it before, it's a chance to see how our critique group functions. RSVP via email to Constance: cassinelli100@hotmail.com

Our program through 2026 is shaping up as follows:

- **December 13th:** 10 am critique group at my house, 12 noon Holiday potluck lunch. Chez Judy 717 W 12th Street, Claremont
- **December 27:** no meeting. Enjoy the break.
- **January 24:** Author Panel. I am in the process of gathering actors, book titles and other publications.
- **February 28:** Tracey Wise is a local author who lives in Redlands. Ms. Wise recently published a historical novel based on the life of Vincent van Gogh. A reviewer wrote, "Wise's masterfully crafted novel is an intense, nuanced story that immerses the reader in the artist's strange, tormented, yet beautiful mindset through exceptional world-building and exquisite prose." Should be a good talk.
- **March 28:** We are going to change location and schedule shifts at our CWC booth at the Ontario Museum of History and Art for the Ontario Art Book Fair. Saturday from 11 AM – 5 PM. Authors, sell your books!
- **April 25:** Poetry Open mic



All good activities. In May, we shall elect new Board members. Many positions are up for grabs: President, Program Chair, Membership, Secretary, Treasurer and Webmaster. Please volunteer. The board is discussing ways to trim our program to make it manageable for fewer hands. We may eliminate the monthly speaker program to focus on quarterly socials and workshops. When you think about your writer's journey, what matters most to you? Give it some thought and let me know.

Happy Holidays, and I hope to see you bundled up at my house Saturday at noon, December 13th.

Regards,
Judy



EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue was edited using *Canva*

Hello, readers,

Welcome to the final issue of 2025—this year has truly flown by. Although I only joined halfway through, I'm incredibly grateful for all that we've been able to accomplish so far. I'm especially looking forward to attending Judy's Holiday Social and finally meeting you all in person. Despite being part of the club since August, I haven't yet had the chance to attend any meetings, and I definitely plan to change that.

I thoroughly enjoyed putting this issue together. For December, I focused on snowy landscapes, and the classic red-and-green Christmas motif woven throughout the pages.

The theme for this month is Winter Wonderland. The last month of the year always carries a magical, whimsical feel. Streets and stores glow with lights and festive decorations, and as the days grow darker and colder, these touches make the season even more joyful—especially as we enter the Christmas spirit. I wanted our newsletter to capture that same feeling.

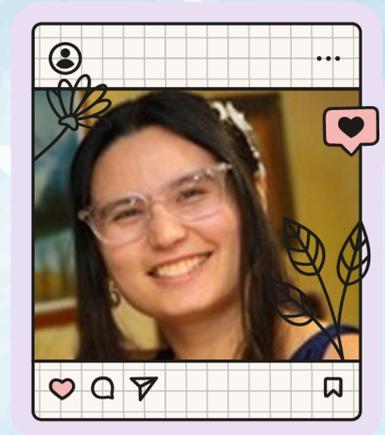
Our writers have created beautiful stories that reflect the magic of winter and Christmas, and I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I did.

Wishing you all a joyful Christmas and a wonderful New Year with your loved ones!

I look forward to creating many more wonderful issues together next year.

Ink to page, tales unveiled.

Anaïs Hamel



@globetrotteuse99

Litchi and Coco are wishing to all Merry Christmas and Happy New year!



OCTOBER 2025

MEETING REVIEW

Transparency in Word and Picture: Translating Abstract Imagery with an Expressive Tongue

Presented by Mia Bruce

Overview by Ben Alirez

Saturday, October 25, 2025, at 10:10 a.m.

Ovitt Family Community Library

215 E. C St., Ontario, CA 91764

Poets. Novelists. Essayists. Biographers and other such writing experts. You name it and the Inland Empire California Writers Club has probably featured speakers on these invaluable subjects over the course of its twenty-six-year history. But an *artist* and a *poet*? Seriously? And yet, that is exactly what eagerly awaited us on this promising Saturday morning.

Perfunctory announcements aside, President Judy Kohlen turned the microphone over to Sam Nichols for a proper introduction of our special guest. He began by explaining where he had initially met her—the Ontario Art Book Fair that occurred on March 29th earlier in the year. He further shared how impressed he was with her artistic endeavors, a considerable body of work for someone only twenty-two years of age. And then Mia Bruce strolled up to the podium with a smile born of youthful exuberance. A spirit commissioned with artistic expression and divine meaning. A passion unleashed with every thought-provoking brush stroke of her paintings and every accompanying poetic pronouncement. In her own words, she considers herself a visual artist. A creator who uses symbols, thoughts, and imagery to resonate with people.

It didn't always start that way, as she put it plainly. Growing up in a loving Christian household provided a certain stability and its share of blessings, but nothing could prepare her for the social media challenges that lie ahead. Artwork brought comfort and solace where teenaged angst and bitterness were rooted. By age thirteen, she began posting on Instagram, absorbed with 'fan art' and the 'fanbased' culture, but cyber bullies awaited. It led to bouts of depression. She felt if others hated her artwork, they naturally hated her. Images morphed into sunflowers and celebrities, things that were celebratory and accepted. She became an externally happy caricature for the benefit of others, but internally she was anything but happy. Teen trials followed. Trials that forced her to question and define who she was. Poor judgment and associations that prompted growth. It was also during this season of her life that she rededicated herself to Christ and the restorative power of the Word of God, particularly aspects that spoke to *creation* and *redemption* and *purpose*. It was life transforming. It virtually changed the way she executed her artwork. She realized that her purpose was to share her work, "works not reflective of the world but reflective of Him."



She cited Psalm 139:13-16 as the basis for many of her renderings. Where emphasis had been placed on pleasing others with earlier sketches, drawings, and illustrations, her new desire was that others examine her art pieces with intentionality and purpose. She viewed her paintings as a vehicle for analyzation. Images as symbols. Color schemes as ambiance. Brush strokes, a reminder we are all a work in progress.



The visiting lecturer discussed artistic components like abstraction, which, when used properly, could encapsulate emotion. Unveiling the first of three canvas paintings on an easel stand, she recited the accompanying poem, a piece called "Cattle to the Slaughter." The composition featured pencil, pastel, and charcoal, each medium exploring elements like personality, death, the value of Christ, and eternal peace. Images like a rat king, a swan, a fetus and other human body parts enhanced the symbolism. Pencil strokes represented the promise of Christ's return. Pastel colors conveyed the fragility of life. Charcoal depictions signified temptation.



A second art piece was presented, a work that began as a portrait but quickly morphed into something embodying morality, judgment, internal hunger, hope and surrender. She also explained the purpose of supplementary poetry, as so often renderings can be misinterpreted. As she so aptly put it, "Words can awaken a still picture. Words resonate in people. Words speak beyond definition. Words can edify or shatter someone." The power of words is a practice to be ever mindful of.



She further shared, it is often a word, a trigger that ignites her visualization. For example: Fear. What images are conjured by her imagination? How might she evoke the concept in greater depth and detail? Her last piece featured soft pastels to convey divine ambiguity. A dove, an eagle, a horse, and a lamb illuminated its canvas. Underlying truths like grace and trust were illustrated, including the fact that "fear need no longer cripple us." Another Bible passage that really ministered to her and her works was Ecclesiastes 3:1-11.



Our presenter finally opened the floor for questions and several members delivered. When asked what a 'zine' was, Mia said it was similar to a chapbook, it being a small, self-published booklet or magazine. When asked what, if any, role AI had in her works, she said the concept was in some of her pieces, but that she didn't use it personally. Primarily because she felt society has become too dependent upon it. When asked what printing service she uses for the publication of her zines, she disclosed that she uses Print Vie, a high-quality online printing service for books and other materials. Regarding training and education, Mia admittedly took some college courses on art, but her skills were largely self-taught. One member of the audience asked if she derived any influence from Vincent Van Gogh, to which she acknowledged in the affirmative. Also, from the famous French painter Claude Monet.



In addition to many of her zine offerings, Mia brought with her an eye-catching centerpiece worthy of gracing any coffee table. A compilation of the first fourteen of her printed zines, teeming with illustrations and poems. At least one club member availed themselves of its many rewards.



In closing, our invited speaker informed us that she would be participating in the Claremont Art Walk on November 1st, a form of marketing and promotion she participates in whenever possible.



I must say, as a writer and a reviewer, I was truly impressed with Mia Bruce. Rarely do we witness the kind of vulnerability and self-reflection, strength of character and spiritual maturity as we witnessed on this day from this truly exceptional visual artist and poet. Well done, Mia!

Benefits of IECWC

MEMBERSHIP



- ALL AGES are welcome!
- Entrance into monthly meetings
 - (in-person or remotely through Zoom)
- Access to monthly speakers on topics related to the craft
- Exposure & practice by submitting to our monthly literary newsletter, FRESH INK
- Network with other club members
 - (various levels of expertise, mentors)
- Participation in Critique Groups
 - (in-person or remotely through Zoom)
- Your OWN PAGE on our Club website at no additional cost
 - Highlight your bio, photo, website, social media, and published books
- Opportunities to serve on the board or on committees of our branch
- Camaraderie among other writers at all levels, all genres, and all ages!
- Partake, volunteer, and/or help plan our Spring and Fall Conferences which are provided at little (or sometimes no) cost to our members
- Annual opportunity to showcase your work at Open Mic events.
- Annual opportunity, each January, to attend/appear on our Panel of Authors
 - Members who were published the year before
 - Learn/share advice on the publication process, ask/answer questions, and buy/sell your books on site
- Annual opportunity to submit, read, and assist with judging the competitive Statewide CWC Literary Review, with readership of about 2,000 members and their readers and associates
- Simultaneous Co-Membership into California Writers Club
 - Our state-level parent organization at www.calwriters.org, with additional volunteer opportunities

- Read/advertise in the Tri-Annual CWC Bulletin available online, free of charge
 - Access to news from the other CWC Branches throughout California, gaining perspective about other serious, mostly published, writers, editors, Web designers, graphics experts, etc.
- Potential for your writing to be chosen to be displayed in the Southern California Writers Showcase at www.socalwritersshowcase.com
- A wonderful addition to your curriculum vitae or resume!
- Access to the monthly IECWC Blind Review Team
- Utilize our FACEBOOK PAGE to get your works word out to the public interested in writing

JOIN or RENEW at:

<https://iecwc.com/membership-meetings/>

Active
\$65

Supporting
\$65

Student
\$15
ages 8-22

Renewal of Membership
\$45

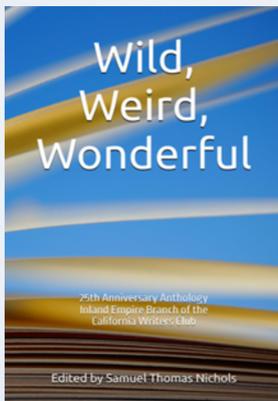
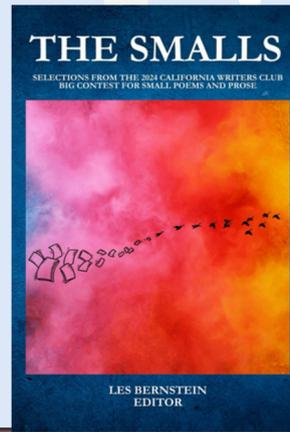
Renewal deadline September 30.
On October 1, CWC shall drop all delinquent members from the rolls.
If dropped, you must pay the new \$65 member enrollment fees.

C W C

THE SMALLS

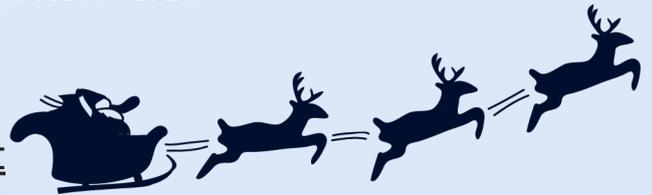
The Smalls includes selections from the California Writers Club 2024 "Big Contest for Small Poems and Prose." This is a vibrant collection of unique voices chosen from the contest entries.

<https://a.co/d/45iqsdm>



Wild, Weird, Wonderful: 25th Anniversary Anthology Inland Empire Branch of the California Writers Club

<https://a.co/d/0SVxuPT>



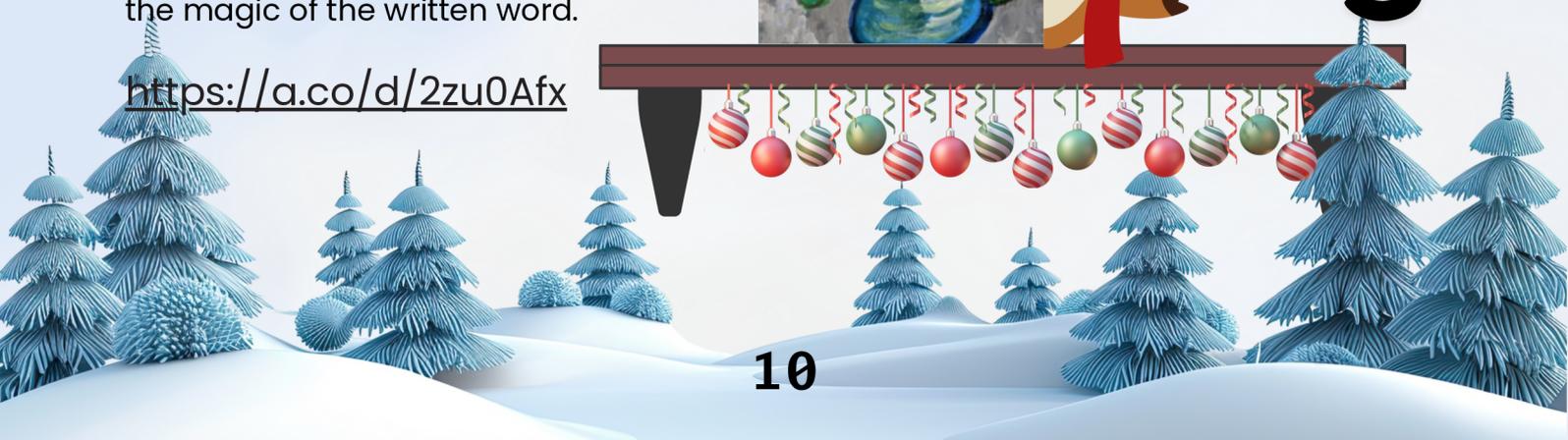
Vision & Verse: A Fusion of Art, Photography, Prose and Poetry

The multi-talented artists and writers featured within these pages have come together to create a dialogue between their respective mediums. This collection showcases the beauty of visual art married with the magic of the written word.

<https://a.co/d/2zu0Afx>



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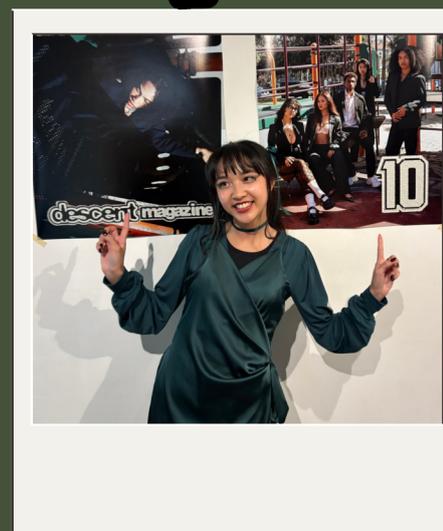
Kuddos Korner

Congratulations to Abigail Handojo for publishing her piece **“Daughter of Sacrificed”** in the Magazine *Descent* at USC. She worked closely with her Designer Grace Ban, who illustrated the dark green islands and folding fan outlines.

Come and check out her work here <https://www.descentusc.com/issues>

We’re proud to see Abigail continue in her writing journey while juggling university.

Keep up the great work !



Kuddos Korner

Congratulations to Sue Andrews on the release of her nonfiction piece, “*An Improbable, Chance Conversations*,” featured in the newly published book *Menagerie* by the Diamond Valley Writers Guild!

You can find it here: <https://www.dvwritersguild.org/post/menagerie>

Sue has also been hard at work preparing to publish her upcoming novel, *A Killing in the Keys*—the sequel to her earlier book *Jacksonville Judas*—with hopes of releasing it before Christmas. She worked with a famous local Key West artist to illustrate her cover.

Bravo on all your accomplishments, Sue!



Help Wanted

WE ARE LOOKING FOR PEOPLE TO FILL
IN THESE BOARD POSITIONS!

FOR MORE INFORMATIONS CONTACT:
SAM NICHOLS SAMUELTHOMASNICHOLS@GMAIL.COM

TREASURER

WEBMASTER

**PROGRAM
CHAIR**

SECRETARY

**CENTRAL
BOARD REP.**

A festive holiday social invitation with a green and white striped background. The design features a large green ribbon bow at the top center, a wreath below it, and a central title in red cursive. The event details are presented in a clean, sans-serif font, flanked by decorative horizontal lines. The entire invitation is framed by a green border with various holiday-themed illustrations including pine branches, red berries, green and red ornaments, and white snowflakes.

Holiday Social

FOOD | POTLUCK | MUSIC

SATURDAY

.....
DECEMBER
.....

13

.....
AT 12:00 PM
.....

717 W 12TH STREET, CLAREMONT 91711

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS TEXT:

(909) 535-5559

Deadlines

Submissions are due the 20th of every month



Content Limits

Submissions with the following will not be considered:

- Excessive or gratuitous violence (violence for violence sake)
- Excessive or gratuitous profanity
- Excessive or gratuitous sexual situations or pornography
- Political or religious agendas that are meant to persuade or denounce



FRESH INK

guidelines



Form

- Prose word count <1,200
- No line count on poetry

Send as an attachment
Google or Word document
Times New Roman
12pt font



Photos

Accompanying images are optional

We can only publish digital images that **do not violate copyright**

You are encouraged to submit photos you have taken



Email

iecwcfreshink@gmail.com

Check your email periodically for suggestions from the editor

Poetry Musings

By Samuel Thomas Nichols

Winter Wonderland

Coming of age alongside the south end of the Santa Monica Bay is not what the idiomatic expression *winter wonderland* conveys, as there is no treed blanket of color giving way to the unabashed whiteness of snow, but I knew what it meant - as did most of the northern hemisphere. The phrase first appeared in the 1934 penned song *Winter Wonderland* by the lyricist Richard B. Smith (1901-1935) and the composer Felix Bernard (1897-1944). The song originally concerned a young couple's winter romance and was first recorded by Richard Himber & His Ritz-Carlton Orchestra (1934). Since the original recording, over 200 additional artists have recorded the song, with Bing Crosby's 1962 version being a favorite of my parents. Bing's first verse:

Sleigh bells ring, are you listening? (Doo)
In the lane, snow is glistening
A beautiful sight, we're happy tonight
Walking in a winter wonderland
Gone away is the bluebird
Here to stay is a new bird (Ooh)
He sings a love song as we go along
Walking in a winter wonderland



And so, the sad (blue) old bird has gone away, leaving us a new bird to bring love and promise to our winter romance. *Winter Wonderland* has been part of the Christmas canon almost since its beginning, demonstrating how some things will soar well beyond their intent. We had a copy of Bing's 1955 Christmas Album, which did not have *Winter Wonderland*, but had 12 other Christmas favorites including *Silent Night* and *White Christmas*. It was that album my mother played while I was couch-bound with the measles that less-wonderful Christmas December of 1961, when my father took my older brother and younger sister to the Fox Theater in Hollywood to see the newly released *Babes in Toyland*, with Annette Funicello (1942-2013), which I haven't seen to this date.

The oft-repeated story of *Babes in Toyland* first premiered as an operetta in 1903. Glenn MacDonough (1870-1924) wrote the libretto, and Victor Herbert (1859-1924) composed the music. The operetta had an extensive musical score, with *Toyland* being one of the more popular songs that also made it into the Christmas canon, as well as into the 1961 film.

*Toyland. Toyland.
Little girl and boy land.
While you dwell within it,
You are ever happy then.
Childhood's joy-land.
Mystic merry Toyland,
Once you pass it's borders,
You can never return again.*



We frequently viewed Laurel and Hardy's 1934 film version of *Babes in Toyland*, which also featured the song *Toyland*, when I was still a child since it appeared on KTLA television every Christmas season along with my all-time favorite, the 1947 *Miracle on 34th Street* with a very young Natalie Wood (1938-1981), all set in a very different New York City winter wonderland.

Back in that three-room house in a sparsely developed part of the South Bay, we had little, but we had secondhand books. One was *A Book of Famous Poems*, volume XX (20) from the 1930 edition of the Young Folks' Library. In it was Clement Clarke Moore's (1779-1863) *A Visit from St. Nicholas*, which my mother read to us children each Christmas, which instilled in each of us our own versions of a *winter wonderland*. From Moore's poem:

*When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.
The moon, on the breast of the new-fallen snow,
Gave a lustre of mid-day to objects below;
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer,
With a little old driver, so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.*

In these modern times of ours, the poem's is often called *The Night Before Christmas*, among other variations, and *lawn* (in the first line above) was replaced by *roof*, among with other edits. For us writers, it's often amazing to see how punctuation has changed over time. The excerpt above is punctuated as per the 1930 volume cited above, which differs from the more modern publications, and differs slightly from the original 1864 publication - most notably in that rein-deer was a hyphenated word back then.

Several volumes of Dylan Thomas grace my bookshelves, and my favorite winter poem of his, *A Winter's Tale*, conjures a vision of a *winter wonderland*.

*It is a winter's tale
That the snow blind twilight ferries over the lakes
And floating fields from the farm in the cup of the vales,
Gliding windless through the hand folded flakes,
The pale breath of cattle at the stealthy sail,

And the stars falling cold,
And the smell of hay in the snow, and the far owl
Warning among the folds, and the frozen hold
Flocked with the sheep white smoke of the farm house cowl
In the river wended vales where the tale was told.*

... (skipped verses)

*The dancing perishes
On the white, no longer growing green, and, minstrel dead,
The singing breaks in the snow shoed villages of wishes
That once cut the figures of birds on the deep bread
And over the glazed lakes skated the shapes of fishes*

... (skipped verses)

*Bird, he was brought low,
Burning in the bride bed of love, in the whirl-
Pool at the wanting centre, in the folds
Of paradise, in the spun bud of the world.
And she rose with him flowering in her melting snow.*

It seems contrary that a Dylan Thomas poem should have a felicitous ending, but *A Winter's Tale* has one that, to me at least, evokes mental images of William Blake. Consider Blake's *To Winter*.

*O Winter! bar thine adamantine doors:
The north is thine; there hast thou built thy dark
Deep-founded habitation. Shake not thy roofs
Nor bend thy pillars with thine iron car.
He hears me not, but o'er the yawning deep
Rides heavy; his storms are unchain'd, sheathed
In ribbed steel; I dare not lift mine eyes;
For he hath rear'd his scepter o'er the world.
Lo! now the direful monster, whose skin clings
To his strong bones, strides o'er the groaning rocks:
He withers all in silence, and in his hand
Unclothes the earth, and freezes up frail life.
He takes his seat upon the cliffs, the mariner
Cries in vain. Poor little wretch! that deal'st
With storms; till heaven smiles, and the monster
Is driven yelling to his caves beneath Mount Hecla.*



Here, Blake imagines our *winter wonderland* as nothing less than a monster. Yes, it's still winter, and it's still wondrous, but ever terrifying when one is not prepared. Now, the romantic in me forgets the hardships of winter and fondly remembers our years in Running Springs with a fire blazing and watching the snow float gently to the ground, and it was indeed a *winter wonderland* as long as I was warm and safe inside.

Now, as we approach the end of another year, I wish you the joy of being immersed within your own version of a winter wonderland.

Happy holidays!



A SPINNING CHRISTMAS

By Shirley Petro-Timura

Christmas is not a tree,
She views another, an event feeling free
Instead it is a globe like Earth that spins
As a child joyfully wins.

She carries a bucket of snow.
The white ice owned a glistening glow
As her young body begins to speed the centrifugal force
Faster, faster, faster the body follows the ancient course.

Her eyes opens up to a blur of swirling white
The small feet turning tiny circles so tight,
Dizzy, head light, the balance faint
Her brain yelling to drop the bucket--a mind complaint

The body drops like one drunk, eyes open up to the gray sky
The head spun and spun till it firmed away from the fly
Her arms outstretch to form a snow angel
Then stumbles to the knees in a sleepy angle.

She stumbles to pick small fir twig, still bright green,
And lays it on the wing of angel sheen.
Turning with a smile
And murmuring "Merry Christmas" as she strides into her next mile.



The Christmas Boots

BY ANN CASAS



“Wow! I am so glad to be walking the streets of Los Angeles again after these four years!” exclaimed Fernando. He had been deployed in Iraq all that time and was now discharged, just in time for Christmas.

He had just arrived at the Los Angeles bus depot. After he’d traveled several days from the army military base Fort Benning in Georgia, he was waiting for the next bus to Norwalk. That’s where his family, including his parents and little sister, lived. They were waiting for him to get home so that they could begin celebrating the holidays.

Fernando was tired from the long bus ride, but he was anxious to walk downtown. Before his days as a soldier, he’d worked in the mailroom of the 1055 West Seventh building, so he was familiar with the area. He remembered the noisy city, the sounds and the sights of the cars and the pedestrians rushing to their destinations, and the smells of the car exhaust fumes intermingled with the asphalt.

As he turned the corner he began to smell another familiar scent, somewhat distasteful. It was the smell of old urine. He realized that he was in Skid Row.

“Too bad this place still exists,” Fernando mumbled to himself. He had seen so much suffering in combat, innocent civilians paying the price for the discontent of their governments. He wanted to get out of there as soon as he could.

At that moment a voice called out to Fernando. “Hey, soldier! Can you spare some change so I can get something to eat?” Fernando turned around and saw a man sitting on the sidewalk next to a mini market. The man was dirty, ragged, and smelled of days-old alcohol and body odor. He was shoeless. His desperate voice repeated the question.



“Brother! Please! I’m also a vet. I served in Nam. I could sure use some food right now!” the shabby man repeated.

Fernando felt sympathy for the displaced vet, but he also didn’t want to contribute to his addiction by giving him money. He decided to buy him something to eat instead.

“Hey, man, let’s go into the store together. I can buy you a sandwich and something to drink. What’s your name?” asked Fernando. He wanted to encourage the man but not seem condescending.

“The name’s Denny. Thanks, man!” Denny answered. He got up and followed Fernando into the store.

As they both passed through the doors to enter the store they were greeted with light and warmth. The smells of hotdogs roasting and fresh coffee brewing was so enticing.

“Get whatever you want to eat and drink,” Fernando told Denny. He wondered how Denny, a former member of the armed forces, could’ve wound up cold, shoeless and hungry on the streets at Christmas time, but he was afraid to ask too many questions. He didn’t want to pry and perhaps irritate Denny.

Denny chose to eat two hotdogs, a medium coffee, and a bag of cookies. He ate quickly, as if the food might disappear, and constantly wiped his nose as he was eating. As he finished he began to tell his story.

“I was stationed in Nam for four years, and spent a lot of the time fighting in the jungle, near Saigon. I seen so much fighting, blood, and death, but I was drafted, so I couldn’t get out until I served my duty. When I finally got out, I had some training to repair army vehicles. I managed to get some work as a mechanic, but as my night terrors invaded my daylight I turned to drink to drown them out. I eventually lost jobs as a result, and now I can’t get work. I get some money from the government, but it ain’t enough to get by,” Denny said as he wiped his nose.

Fernando felt sympathy for Denny. He understood how night terrors could haunt a vet, as he had them himself. As he listened to Denny’s story, he glanced at Denny’s feet.



Denny's feet were blue from the cold. They seemed misshapen from the blisters and calluses around his toes.

Fernando was shocked to see such sore feet. He thought about what he should do." I can't leave a vet like this!" he said to himself. "It wouldn't be right, especially during this time of year."

Fernando noticed a shoe store down the street that was open, so he said to Denny, "Denny. Let's get you some boots. Consider them a Christmas present from one vet to another."

"Hey, thanks, man! I could sure use some boots. Someone stole my shoes one morning when I was sleeping awhile back. My feet have been frozen since."

Fernando and Denny walked together to the shoe store. A clerk measured Denny's feet, and then chose some sturdy boots a size bigger to accommodate the blisters and the calluses. Fernando also bought Denny two pairs of thick socks.

"Hey, man, I can feel my feet! What a difference! Thanks again, and GOD BLESS YOU!" exclaimed Denny.

As Fernando left Denny with his new boots and a full stomach, he thought about how good he felt having helped a vet like himself have a better holiday with the little bit of comfort he provided. As he boarded the bus that would finally take him home, he felt much better returning to his old life, ready to appreciate his loving family that was eagerly waiting to see him.

Merry
Christmas



CHRISTMAS DRAMA MUSINGS

by Sue Andrews

Our dog, Wiley, continues to bring laughter into our home. He will be sixteen years old in January and I came across a story I wrote years ago before he became a “teenager.”

He was always a sneaky little Puggle, though I use the word “little” lightly. The only thing little about him are his legs which I sometimes find hard to believe they can still support his 30-pound frame. He’s only a foot and a half tall and a foot and a half long. His bark is ferocious and I’m happy about that because anyone who doesn’t know him and hears the bark from the other side of our door would think him much bigger dog.

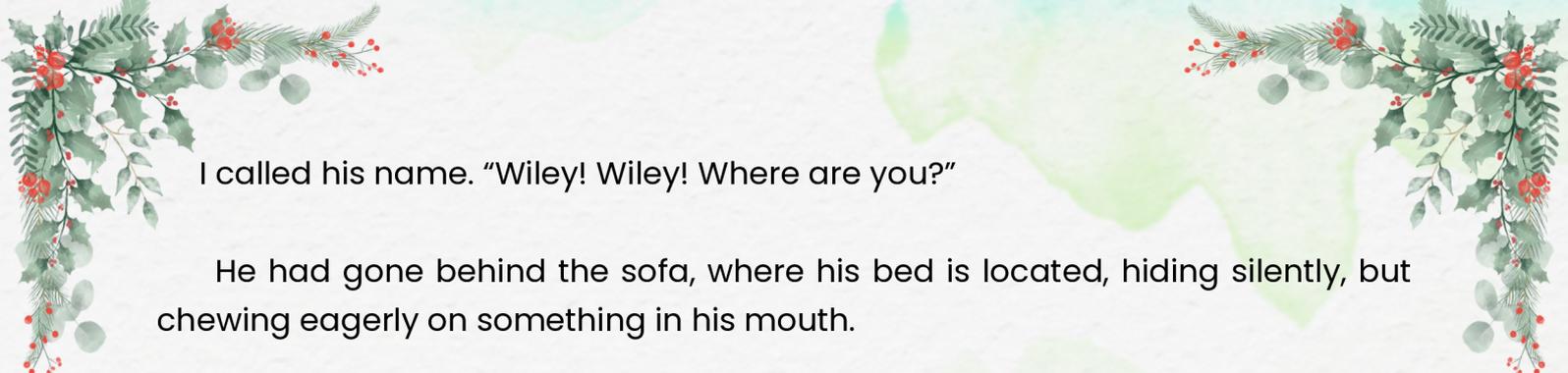
Wiley always had a unsatiable appetite and even though full, could scarf up anything that lands on the floor. We have always had to be careful when preparing food, so that he wouldn’t pick up something that wouldn’t agree with him.

Several years ago, over the holidays, a neighbor brought over some homemade fruitcake for me and my husband to enjoy. I looked forward to a relaxing day when the hurriedness of the season had gone, and I could enjoy the holiday cake with a cozy cup of hot tea by the fire. I savored that perfect day and time.

One day, after visiting friends, I came home and decided that the day had come. I ran up our stairs to change into some warm snuggly clothes. I called them “Wiley” clothes, and still do, because our dog can jump all over me, plus drool, paw, sneeze, or get as dirty as he wants while playing with me.

Before I’d gone upstairs, I’d moved the Ziploc bag of four fruitcake slices from the kitchen sink and moved them onto the center of the dining room table. I thought Wiley would not be able to reach it. When I returned downstairs, Wiley wasn’t waiting for me as usual by the dining/kitchen gate.





I called his name. "Wiley! Wiley! Where are you?"

He had gone behind the sofa, where his bed is located, hiding silently, but chewing eagerly on something in his mouth.

"Give me that!" I yelled at him. He growled back and with a grip as tight as steel. I knew it wasn't going to be easy to make him let it go, so I shamed him.

"You bad little boy!" I told him. "You're going to be on Santa's naughty list now!" I ran for a dog biscuit to throw on the floor. He always fell for the "exchange" trick. A cookie for whatever he had in his mouth.

The trick worked like a charm as always. However, all I got was what was left of the Ziplock bag which was the top of the plastic zip and a few crumbs. But all four pieces of bread- size fruitcake were gone!

A few days later while going for a walk with Wiley, I saw the neighbor who had baked the fruitcake for us.

"How was the fruitcake?" she asked.

"Well, Wiley loved it!" I said. "He ate the whole bag and he never got sick!"

"I'll bring you some more tomorrow," she said.

"Thanks," I said. "I promise not to share any with Wiley this time."





Theme for January
The Adventure
Begins