

**January
2026**

Fresh Ink



**Inland Empire
Writing Club**



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2026

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

What a joy it was to host the holiday party at my home this year! The party helped me set up Christmas decorations and step into a series of family and community events. It is truly heartwarming to see how our friendships have grown over time. A big thank-you to our regulars—and a special welcome to our newer members who keep us inspired, fresh, and open to additional writing adventures.

With the new year comes a return to our club's routine. Critique Group resumes January 10th at the Rancho Library. Our next general meeting will be held on the 4th Saturday, January 24th, featuring our Authors Panel. Please come out and support our members as they share and discuss the books they published last year—a celebration of creativity and accomplishment!

February's presentation continues our tradition of highlighting local authors. Tracey Wise, a Redlands resident, will present her historical novel inspired by the life of Vincent van Gogh. Prepare to be immersed in van Gogh's world through writing praised for its "exceptional world-building and exquisite prose."

Looking ahead, we have changes and opportunities. Many dedicated board members will be retiring after nearly a decade of service at the end of June. To continue our mission of mentoring writers—through workshops, speakers, critique groups, newsletters, and retreats—we need new members to step into leadership roles. The board is a wonderful, collaborative team, and I can't do this work alone. Open positions are listed in this issue, so please take a look and consider how you can shape the future of our club.

Together, we can keep this vibrant community thriving!

Happy New Year.

Judy Conibear Kohnen



EDITOR'S NOTE 2026

This issue was edited using *Canva*

Happy New Year Readers!

Welcome to the first issue of 2026. I hope you enjoyed a wonderful holiday season and are feeling refreshed as we step into the new year. I'm excited to start this journey with you all. As we open a new chapter together, I wanted the January newsletter to reflect the celebration and optimism when the adventure begins.

The design begins with a night-time background featuring fireworks and festive energy, then transitions into warm sunset golds and a clear blue sky to symbolize the start of a new day. Canva's firework and confetti graphics are sprinkled throughout the newsletter to enhance the celebratory atmosphere.

While I had hoped for a calmer start to the year, every adventure comes with unexpected turns. We may not always get to choose how things begin, but we can choose to keep moving forward—even through a rough start.

Wishing you all a joyful, successful, and fulfilling year ahead.

Ink to page, tales unveiled.

Anaïs Hamel

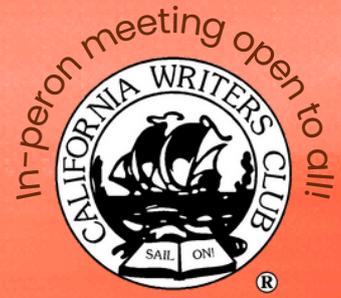


@globetrotteuse99





Saturday, January 23, 2026, at 10:00 am
Ovitt Family Library,
215 E C St, Ontario, CA 91764



The California Writers Club, Inland Empire Branch,
is hosting several authors who published books
(Poetry, Fiction, Non-fiction) in 2025.

JANUARY 2026 MEETING WHAT'S COMING UP



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.

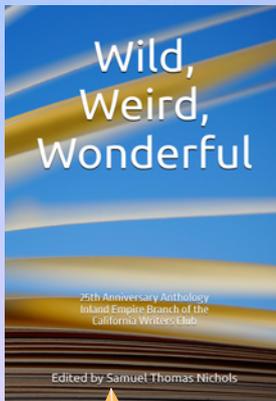
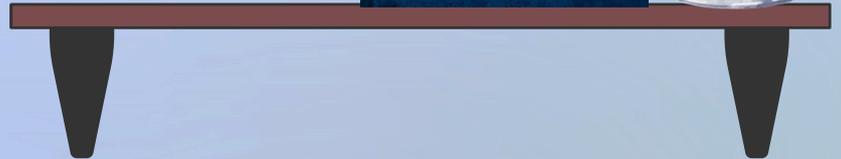
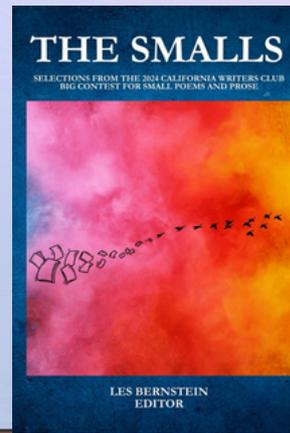




THE SMALLS

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>

This collection includes short stories, poetry, memoir, nonfiction, memoir, original drawings and photographs, and one novelette entitled *Murder in Huckleberry Heights*.

This anthology contains the varietal work of eighteen members of the Inland Empire Branch with several genres being represented.



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>



BOOKS



Help Wanted

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

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

TREASURER

WEBMASTER

**PROGRAM
CHAIR**

SECRETARY

**CENTRAL
BOARD REP.**



DIAMOND VALLEY WRITERS' GUILD

Steps to Self-Editing

Presented by

Jana S. Brown

Saturday, January 17, 2027, at 9:30 am
Hemet Public Library
300 E. Latham Avenue, Hemet.

Unable to attend in person?

Email DVWritersGuild@gmail.com for a Zoom invite.

You've finished writing your rough draft! Congratulations! Now what are you going to do? Before going out into the world, every manuscript needs a little love from its creator in the form of self-editing and revision. However, that can be a daunting task. Where do you begin?

Join author and editor, Jana S. Brown, at her virtual table and learn the Steps to Self-Editing. Smooth out structure, plotlines, character arcs, and continuity while eliminating grammatical mistakes and wordiness to make your manuscript shine.



Jana S. Brown entered the world of publishing in the mid-90s and has never looked back. She's worked as a journalist, fiction writer, technical writer, editor, presenter, author coach, course creator, conference committee member, and a host of other positions. She's assisted in the creation of bestselling and award-winning novels in the self-publishing space as well as working as an editor with small presses and as an acceptance editor for Book Cave, a book promotion company. She has over twenty books published across three pennames, as well as a host of newspaper articles (over 100 with the Deseret News alone!) and award-winning anthology tales. She runs Opal Kingdom Press, a small press and adores helping other creators reach their goals.

And don't forget to join us afterward for our monthly no-host networking luncheon at **Emilio's Mexican Restaurant & Cantina** at 2340 S. San Jacinto Avenue. We have a 12:00 noon reservation, so if you get there first, let them know you're with the Guild.

All writers welcome!
DVWG Membership not required to attend.
For more info visit us at DVWritersGuild.org

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



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



FRESH
INK

guidelines

Poetry Musings

By Samuel Thomas Nichols

The Adventure Begins

I cannot recall the first time I was told *life is an adventure*, but I'm sure it was during a saturnine period when this world of ours felt bleak and dank. Not unlike that moment while on contract with Northrop-Grumman, circa 2001, when I complained about something, now forgotten, and Tom said to me, *life sucks and then you die*. I recall that moment clearly, and it resurfaces during my darkest moments to help me face my latest challenge, not unlike a favorite quotation regarding life as an adventure: *Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all*, by Helen Keller. A truly amazing woman, but did you know she also wrote poetry?

Helen Keller's most well-known poem might just be *Autumn*, written in 1893 by the then thirteen-year-old, and dedicated to Dr. Bell (Alexander Graham Bell). The poem's first stanza begins with an optimistic outlook at what autumn brings:

*Oh, what a glory doth the world put on
These peerless, perfect autumn days
There is a beautiful spirit of gladness everywhere.
The wooded waysides are luminous with brightly painted leaves;
The forest-trees with royal grace have donned
Their gorgeous autumn tapestries;
And even the rocks and fences are broidered
With ferns, sumachs and brilliantly tinted ivies.
But so exquisitely blended are the lights and shades,
The golds, scarlets and purples, that no sense is wearied;
For God himself hath painted the landscape.*

Autumn, the bringer of winter and yet still the harbinger of the adventures waiting in the tomorrows that are yet to be. In 1910 she published *The Song of the Stone Wall*, a rather longish poem, with a dedication to the man she penned it for, Dr. Edward Everett Hale. In it, she writes of the history recorded metaphorically by the stone walls, ready to be interpreted by any with an inclination to do so, and of the builders who, while making history, went beyond and:

*They raised their hardened hands above the earth,
And beheld the walls that are not built of stone,
The portals opened by angels whose garments are of light;
And beyond the radiant walls of living stones
They dreamed vast meadows and hills of fadeless green..*

Ever is the adventure awaiting, be it in the vast meadows, the urban jungles, or, as in the words of Walt Whitman, always:

*Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,
Out of the mocking-bird's throat, the musical shuttle,
Out of the Ninth-month midnight,*

*Over the sterile sands and the fields beyond, where the child leaving his bed
wander'd alone, bareheaded, barefoot,
Down from the shower'd halo,
Up from the mystic play of shadows twining and twisting as if they were alive,*

Too soon, a new year will be thrust upon us - a year of hope, of promise, and of making memories in the adventures that will befall us as we weave haphazardly through the coming months. Soon, my wife and I will journey to see the Western Monarchs over-wintering on the California Coast and then settle down once again for the adventure of minding our nearly three-year-old grandson several days a week. Adventure can be high, or low, or just those day-to-day experiences that merely are, as Henry Van Dyke wrote:

*So let the way wind up the hill or down,
O'er rough or smooth, the journey will be joy:
Still seeking what I sought when but a boy,
New friendship, high adventure, and a crown,
My heart will keep the courage of the quest,
And hope the road's last turn will be the best.*



I have been told that the adventure we call life is about making memories, and that struck me as a pretty nice goal. Making memories adventuring with family and friends, making memories adventuring on the road, or making memories adventuring in line at the grocery store. The opportunities are always about us when we open ourselves to the spirit of adventure that we may store as memories, as described by Walt Whitman:

*IN a little house keep I pictures suspended, it is not a fix'd house,
It is round, it is only a few inches from one side to the other;
Yet behold, it has room for all the shows of the world, all memories?
Here the tableaux of life, and here the groupings of death;
Here, do you know this? this is cicerone himself,
With finger rais'd he points to the prodigal pictures.*

Geoff, a late friend of mine of Greek ancestry, enjoyed reading and sharing the poetry of the Greek poet Constantine P. Cavafy, who, in the poem *Morning Sea*, reminds us that the adventure is never further away than stopping within the moment.

*Let me stop here. Let me, too, look at nature awhile.
The brilliant blue of the morning sea, of the cloudless sky,
the yellow shore; all lovely,
all bathed in light.*

*Let me stand here. And let me pretend I see all this
(I really did see it for a minute when I first stopped)
and not my usual day-dreams here too,
my memories, those images of sensual pleasure.*

It is, after all, the culmination of all of those brief, oftentimes insignificant, moments that mesh together to fabricate this grand adventure we call life. There are many adventures still waiting to be taken across these lands and around this world of ours. Some of these journeys may be physical, some may be spiritual, and some may be exercises in cultural memory, such as Langston Hughes' *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*:

I've known rivers:

*I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood
in human veins.*

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

*I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New
Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.*

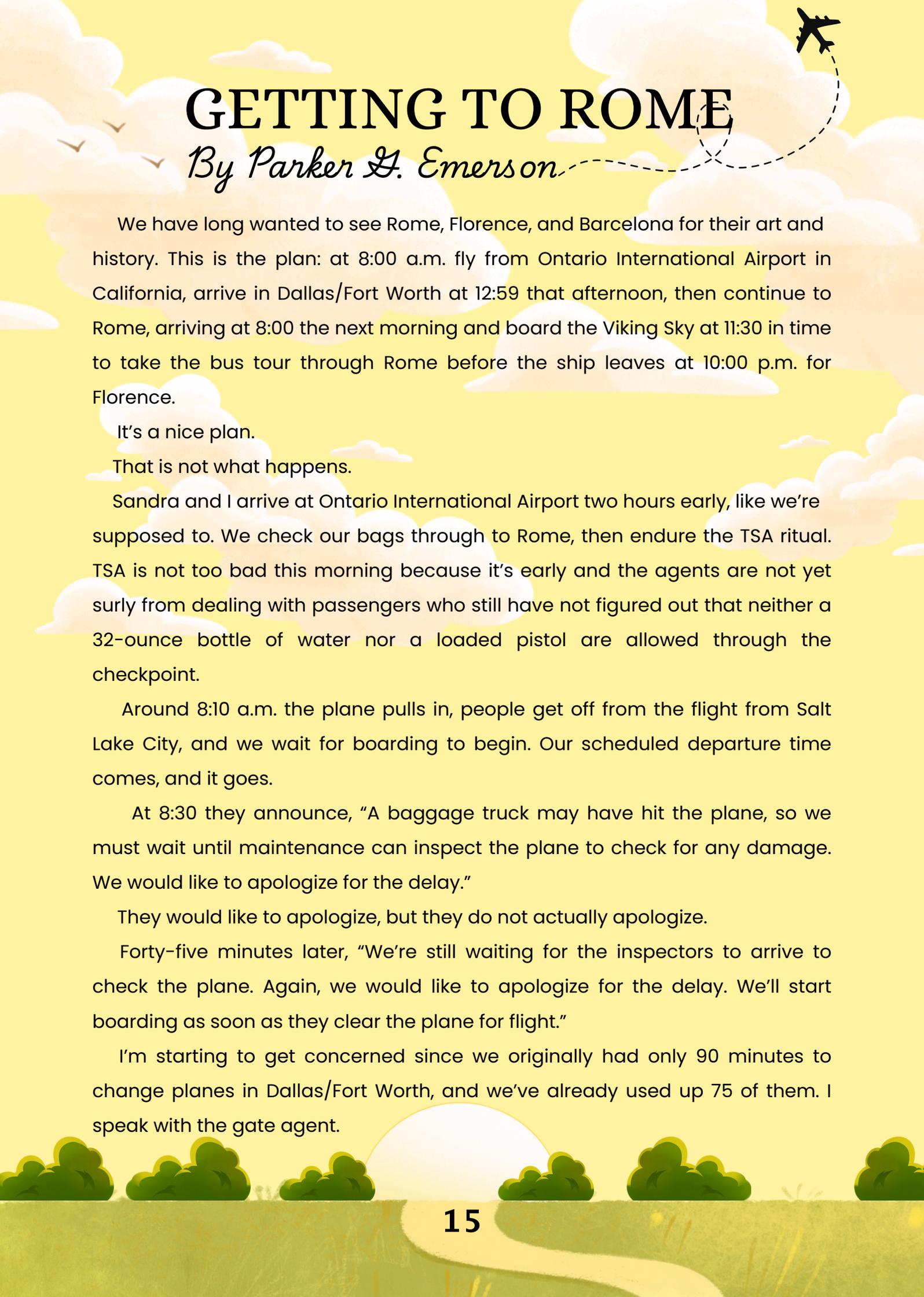
I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

For myself, I intend for this new year of ours to be one of embarking on the frequent adventures that arise within the terrene moments that accompany us throughout our days for, the truth of the matter is, we don't know how many more grand adventures we'll begin. May you find your new year blessed with adventures you will not soon forget.





GETTING TO ROME

By Parker G. Emerson

We have long wanted to see Rome, Florence, and Barcelona for their art and history. This is the plan: at 8:00 a.m. fly from Ontario International Airport in California, arrive in Dallas/Fort Worth at 12:59 that afternoon, then continue to Rome, arriving at 8:00 the next morning and board the Viking Sky at 11:30 in time to take the bus tour through Rome before the ship leaves at 10:00 p.m. for Florence.

It's a nice plan.

That is not what happens.

Sandra and I arrive at Ontario International Airport two hours early, like we're supposed to. We check our bags through to Rome, then endure the TSA ritual. TSA is not too bad this morning because it's early and the agents are not yet surly from dealing with passengers who still have not figured out that neither a 32-ounce bottle of water nor a loaded pistol are allowed through the checkpoint.

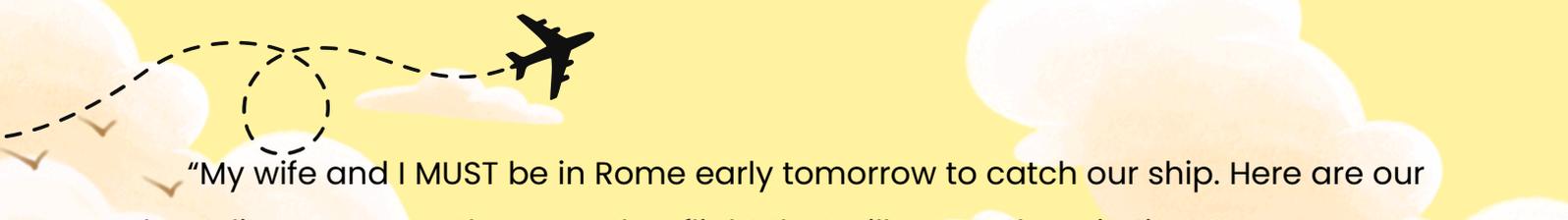
Around 8:10 a.m. the plane pulls in, people get off from the flight from Salt Lake City, and we wait for boarding to begin. Our scheduled departure time comes, and it goes.

At 8:30 they announce, "A baggage truck may have hit the plane, so we must wait until maintenance can inspect the plane to check for any damage. We would like to apologize for the delay."

They would like to apologize, but they do not actually apologize.

Forty-five minutes later, "We're still waiting for the inspectors to arrive to check the plane. Again, we would like to apologize for the delay. We'll start boarding as soon as they clear the plane for flight."

I'm starting to get concerned since we originally had only 90 minutes to change planes in Dallas/Fort Worth, and we've already used up 75 of them. I speak with the gate agent.



“My wife and I MUST be in Rome early tomorrow to catch our ship. Here are our boarding passes. Is there another flight that will get us there in time?”

“Let me see what we can do,” she replies and starts typing at her terminal.

“Our ship leaves Rome at 8:00 pm tomorrow, so we need to arrive no later than 6:00 pm to get to the ship,” I tell her.

“Uh, huh.”

She nods her head, and smiles as she prints out two new ticket sets for Sandra and me.

“I’ve rebooked your flights for you from LAX to Heathrow to Rome. Here you go.”

“Thanks, but how are we supposed to get to LAX from here? It’s 57 miles away.”

“Oh. Just a moment. I’ll get you a voucher for a taxi to LAX. No charge to you. Just bring it to the taxi stand outside and they’ll take you.”

In about five minutes our bags are delivered to us. We head out to the taxi stand, hand the driver the voucher, load our bags and us, and we’re off to LAX.

While we are en route, I call the Viking Travel Coordinator to let them know our flights have changed so they can meet us at the airport in Rome and take us to the ship.

“Hi. Our original flight got delayed so we won’t be able to take the flights you’ve scheduled for us. American Airlines rebooked us on different flights. Our new tickets are LAX to Heathrow to Rome” I give her the exact flight information.

She repeats the flight information I gave her, pauses, and says, “Well, that won’t work. That flight from Heathrow won’t arrive in Rome until 10:40 pm and the ship sails at 10:00. Let’s see what we can do.”

After a moment she replies, “Here are the flights you’ll need: LAX to Madrid to Rome on Iberia Airlines.”

Arriving at LAX, we head to the American Airlines ticket counter with our bags.

“Hi. Can you please help us? We were scheduled for a flight from Ontario, but a baggage truck dented the plane which delayed the flight so we wouldn’t be able to make our connections to Rome. The gate agent rebooked us on these flights.”



I handing her the tickets, I continue. "But these won't get us into Rome until after our ship has sailed. The cruise line agent says we need these flights instead." I hand her my notebook with the flights through Madrid.

"Why did you book these flights through Heathrow if they wouldn't get you to Rome in time?" she asks.

"Actually, I didn't. The gate agent in Ontario booked them."

The conversation is rapidly heading into a rabbit hole with Alice, so I call the Viking Travel Coordinator again and ask her to speak directly with the airline agent and work things out.

We are given new boarding passes but have to go to the Iberia Airlines counter to check our bags through to Rome.

There is no one at the Iberia counter. The flight is not due to depart until 5:55 p.m. and it's only 11:30 a.m.

At 3:00 staff arrive and start processing the people in line. We check our bags through to Rome and head to TSA for our second screening of the morning. I can't wait to take off my belt again, hoping my pants stay up.

My pants do stay up, but when I collect my bins, I notice that my computer has been set to one side behind a Plexiglass shield. This does not bode well. The agent who set it aside leaves the area. Agents walk past it without a glance. I guess that since they didn't put it there, they won't have to do anything with it.

I hang around the end of the security area waiting for someone to get to my bin and give me my computer. An agent approaches me, waving her hands in a "shoo" motion.

"Go on. Move along."

"But my bag is still there." I point to it behind the Plexiglas.

"We'll get to it. Just go over there and sit down."

"But it's been there for ten minutes, and no one has touched it or even looked at it."

"Don't you worry about it. We'll get to it. Just wait."

"How long do you think it will be? I do have a flight to catch."

"When we get to it, we get to it. Now get away from here."



She is clearly getting irritated at me, and I resist the urge to reciprocate, knowing that it would only extend an already slow process and possibly make it even worse. I would really like to avoid a strip search.

Ten minutes later an agent puts the bin on a counter, motions for me to come over but to stand five feet away, puts on latex gloves with a great show, and dumps everything out of the computer bag beside the computer before poking around through the papers, cables, pens, sleep mask, ear plugs, charger, and collapsable umbrella.

“OK,” he says and walks away.

“Can I take my stuff now?” I ask.

“Yeah.”

I carefully pack everything back into the computer bag in the appropriate pockets so I can find them later.

TSA should put a sign up over their stations: “YOUR VACATION MEMORIES START HERE.”





A Matter of Consensus

By Ann Casas



"Yvonne, I'm afraid I have some bad news. During the night Sara heard Mom yelling for help in the bathroom. When she opened the door, she found Mom sprawled on the floor. She had fallen and banged her head on the toilet bowl.

"Sara immediately called 911, and when they arrived, they examined her before they took her to the emergency. Brace yourself, sis – she probably suffered a severe stroke. Not sure of the outcome – I'm going now to the ER – I'll call you as soon as I get any news."

We three sisters, Sara, the youngest, Andie, the middle, and me, the oldest, Yvonne, have always been close to each other and to our 86 –year– old mother, Dora. After Andie and I got emancipated and left home, our baby sister Sara just stayed on to care for our parents, even when she eventually married. Her husband moved in with her. Their children were born there. Sara and her husband were both nurses, so this worked out for everyone, as mom and dad were overjoyed to have grandchildren to love and babysit.

But now it was mom who needed the extra care. She had been ailing since dad passed away several years ago. Sara cut back her work schedule to care for both of them as they aged, and her teenaged children helped out too, but now with Mom's fall, this would all change. I tried to calm myself as I entered the hospital, the cold draft of air hitting me as I walked inside.

We didn't have to wait too long for the ER doctor to inform us of her current condition. "It seems your mother had a severe stroke. She hasn't opened her eyes. We will be able to determine the full extent of her injuries after we get the results of her MRI and other tests." As soon as he left the room, I wanted to call to my sister Andie, who lived in another state. We decided to remain optimistic until we received the final diagnosis.



“Mom hasn’t made any progress.” Sara’s grim news greeted me as I entered the room in the ER. “She will be admitted to a nursing facility this afternoon. I’ve called Andie so that she can prepare to come down to be near Mom and be a part of the decisions we will have to make.” Sara’s voice mirrored the sadness that emanated from her being. She and her family had shouldered the burden of caring for our beloved parents, but now we three sisters would share it.

Mom was transferred to the nursing facility by ambulance. As Andie was due to arrive the next morning, I offered to stay with Mom overnight so Sara could tend to her family.

During the night, I talked to my mother, reminding her of how much I loved her. I shared childhood memories with her, such as all the times she made my dresses for the Christmas programs at school, and my Halloween costumes, and how I appreciated all the times she encouraged me, especially in my schoolwork. She had been a high school teacher, and she valued the importance of education.

I began to sing the songs that she would sing to me when I was small so that I would go to sleep. I didn’t know if she could hear me – I hoped that she could.

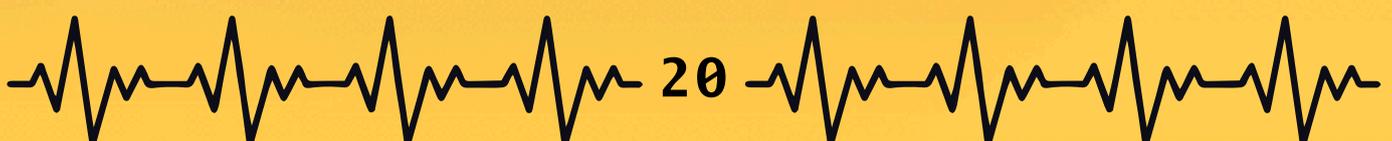
The next morning Andie arrived, just in time for the next doctor visit. Unfortunately, it was not good.

“I’m afraid that she has suffered a severe stroke that has paralyzed her left side. It’s affected her vision. Unfortunately, she’s also lost her ability to swallow.”

The three of us looked at each other as we struggled to process this terrible diagnosis. “What can we expect to happen?” said Andie, glancing at Sara, hoping that her medical knowledge could help her make sense of the outcome.

The doctor replied, “Because of her age, we don’t expect much improvement. We can put in a feeding tube to sustain her, but she’ll continue to decline. At best, we suggest hospice. You sisters need to discuss the options and then inform the nursing staff.”

“Thank you, doctor. If we have questions, can we contact you?” I asked.



“Of course! Also, the nursing staff here are a great resource. I’ll check back with you this afternoon.” He gave us a sympathetic smile as he left the room – no doubt he had to speak these same words often.

Sara, Andie and I gathered in the hospital lounge to talk. Since she had the most medical knowledge, Sara led the discussion.

“Mom isn’t going to get any better. At this point, we need to think about comfort care. That’s the kindest option, in my opinion,” she said.

“What does that mean?” asked Andie. Her face mirrored the strain of our emotional turbulence.

“That means that all efforts will be made to alleviate her pain and suffering. She will not be offered any food or drink as she can’t swallow. Hospice nurses will check on her regularly. The ability to resuscitate will be removed.”

“Does that mean she will starve to death?” I shouted. “How can this be a valid medical choice?”

“Why prolong someone’s life if it means living with a tube stuck in your throat? You know mom wouldn’t want this. She wouldn’t want to linger, and we wouldn’t want to see her deteriorate. When dad began to decline, both signed advanced directives that specified they would not be allowed to exist like this. I know it’s hard to understand, but do you really want mom to live this way? I’ve known patients who’ve lived several years in this state. It’s not recommended.” Sara looked at Andie and me as she said this, trying to make us understand why this choice was the best one.

We will be killing our mother! I felt this so strongly, yet I couldn’t voice the words aloud.

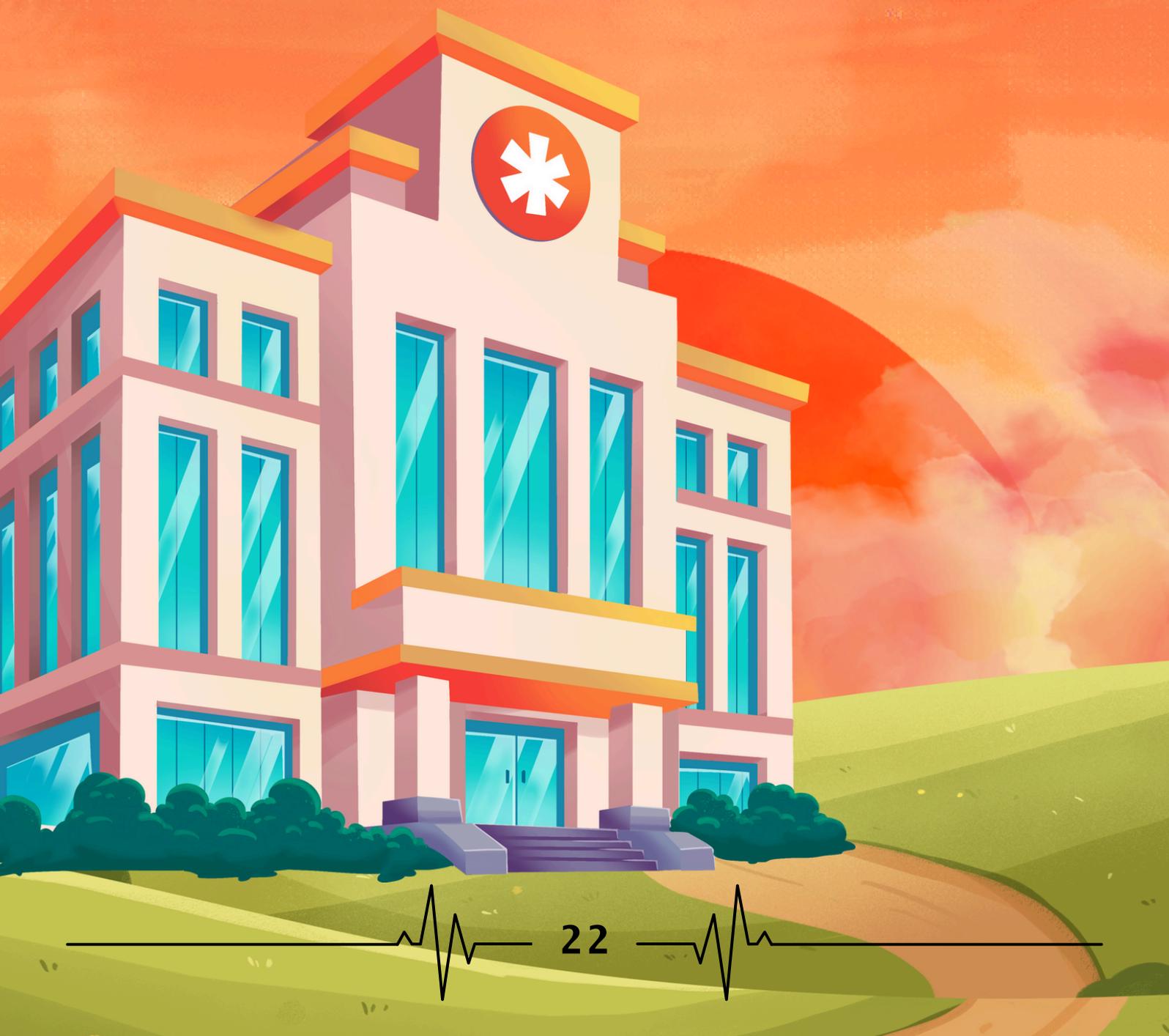
“How can we let her just die like this? Can’t we do anything else? How do you know she won’t get better?” Tears flooded Andie’s cheeks.

“Based on her age and the severity of her stroke, that is the medical diagnosis. Go to mom now and let the love you have for her help you make your choice.” Sara turned and went into Mom’s room. Andie and I followed her to Mom’s bedside.

Mom, I love you so much. I love you so much, that I can't bear for you to die. But is it selfish of me to want you to hang on in this miserable condition? You can't enjoy living! You can't eat the delicious foods you craved, hear beautiful music, visit with the family that you love. You can't even open your eyes!

The three of us silently gazed at Mom as we struggled with our thoughts. She was like a stone in the bed, an oxygen tank hooked up to help her breath. Her mouth was open, drooped to the left side. It didn't seem right to prolong her suffering.

Finally, Sara whispered, "Yvonne, Andie, it's time to say good-bye to Mom." We had to let her go. In turn, we three sisters knelt near her bed and kissed our mother. Then we slowly got up and left the room.



Theme for February

Longing

