

MARCH
2026

*Fresh
Ink*

INLAND EMPIRE
WRITING CLUB



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

For the past several months, Fresh Ink has been advertising five open board positions: Treasurer, Membership, Secretary, webmaster, Program Chair) (You can find more details listed in this issue of Fresh Ink.) We didn't hear back from anyone. I couldn't identify anyone with the skills or energy to fill the openings. I started to anticipate restructuring or even closing the branch. It felt like a broken heart, but maybe it was time to change. I accept the inevitable.

Prove me wrong, I said to the February attendees, prove me wrong.

And I was proven wrong. By the end of our meeting, and over lunch, I had tentative interest in four of the five positions.

Our members want to keep on going.

I will work to restructure and simplify our activities. Some ideas are to organize ourselves quarterly—quarterly newsletter, quarterly program planning. We would still meet monthly but host fewer speakers and use the 4th Saturday for more networking, socializing, writing exercises and critique groups.

My goal is to have everything solidified by the end of April, with the new board officially beginning their term in July.

Your voice matters in this transition. If you have ideas on how to make a quarterly format successful, or if you're ready to step into a new role, please reach out to me directly.

Thank you for proving me wrong and for choosing to keep our story going.

Springing into March,

Judy

EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue was edited using *Canva*

Hello Readers!

The month of March is upon us. The mountains and hills are vibrant green, and flowers such as goldfields and our state flower, the California poppy, are in full bloom—gracing the landscape with wonderful shades of gold and orange that beautifully complement the lush greenery. The temperatures remain cool enough that the vegetation hasn't yet begun to dry under the stronger heat to come.

With the state dressed in shades of green and gold, it feels especially fitting that March brings St. Patrick's Day. These colors, so present in nature around us, are also woven into the spirit of the celebration. Inspired by this seasonal beauty and festive energy, this month's newsletter centers on the theme of luck. I had so much fun creating this issue—sprinkling in lucky clovers and layering in cheerful shades of green, yellow, and orange throughout.

I also hope you enjoy the wonderful submissions from our writers, who explored not only the theme of luck but also the rich Celtic culture associated with St. Patrick's Day. I hope this issue brings a bit of brightness and good fortune your way.

Thank you for reading.

Ink to page, tales unveiled.

Anaïs Hamel



@globetrotteuse99



ONTARIO

Art Book Fair

Saturday, March 28

11 AM - 5 PM



The IECWC will be participating in the fair once again at the Ontario Museum of History & Art located at 225 S. Euclid Avenue, Ontario, CA 91762. Please plan on attending and/or volunteering at our outreach booth, which is in lieu of the March branch meeting.





JANUARY 2026 MEETING REVIEW

IECWC Author's Panel Overview by Ben Alirez

Saturday, January 24, 2026, at 10:10 a.m.
Ovitt Family Community Library
215 E. C St., Ontario, CA 91764

The month of January not only rang in a new year, it also served as a month of celebrating those authors who published in the 2025 calendar year. The annual event for the Inland Empire California Writers Club was comprised of six panelists, which included: Ben Alirez, Sue Andrews, Ann Casas, Parker G. Emerson, John McBrearty, and Diosa Xochiquetzalcoatl.

Typically moderated by Judy Kohlen (who suffered an unfortunate loss in the family), it was instead hosted by Sam Nichols, who stepped in at the last minute and performed the role with great poise. Introductions aside, Sam explained the format would follow a set of preprepared questions. Once the panelists had an opportunity to provide an answer, the audience was free to ask follow-up questions for added clarity.

The first question was centered around writing and publishing in 2025, followed by each person's motivation for writing. As witnessed before, answers were as wide-ranging and unique as the person providing them. For example, many write because they feel it is a calling. For others, it is therapy, especially for those who have experienced past hardships. Some find it a creative outlet and a form of expression, making it hard to sleep when not permitted the time to write. And still others intend their works for family and friends only, leaving a legacy of sorts.

Questions turned to the publishing process with members in the crowd inquiring about ISBN's and their purpose. What countries offer them and if they are required in every instance. The topic of book pricing drew strong reactions. Hardcopy versus paperback was debated, as was the expense of color versus black-and-white pages. The marketing process came next, one panelist making use of bookmarks as part of her advertising process. Amazon Ads were discussed as a marketing ploy.

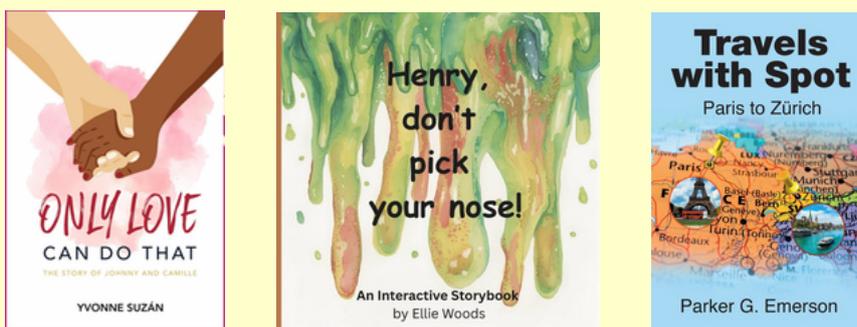


In one of the more entertaining moments, Sam asked the panelists for a thirty-second elevator pitch on their books. With a gamut of genres on hand, the pitches proved lively and dynamic. A great bit of advice had to do with the importance of networking and critique groups.

Research methods were raised, some authors preferring onsite trips (which can be expensed). In Sue Andrews' case, it meant personally experiencing Florida's Key West. The potential role of Artificial Intelligence to augment research was also broached, with many choosing to decline its virtues and describing it as 'soulless.' Other offerings included the Internet, Wikipedia, subject matter websites (e.g., Leonardo da Vinci), and personal journals.

The gist of it (from this writer's perspective) is there is no right and wrong way to have a productive writing experience from concept to creation. The key is finding what works best for you. Are you an outliner or a pantsier? Do you write 500 words a day or 5,000? You be the judge.

Note: Club member Monica Gibbs also published a book but was unable to attend.



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

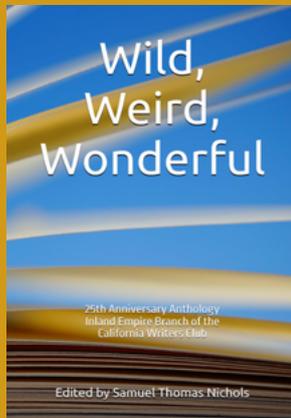
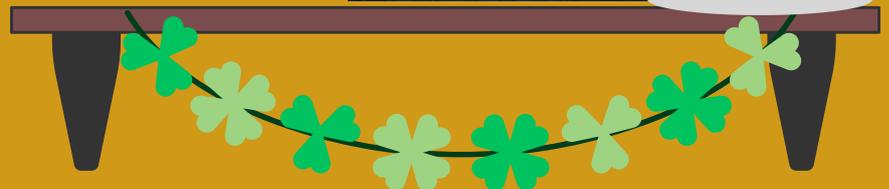
Renewal deadline September 30.
On October 1, CWC shall drop all delinquent members from the rolls.
If dropped, you must pay the new \$65 member enrollment fees.



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.

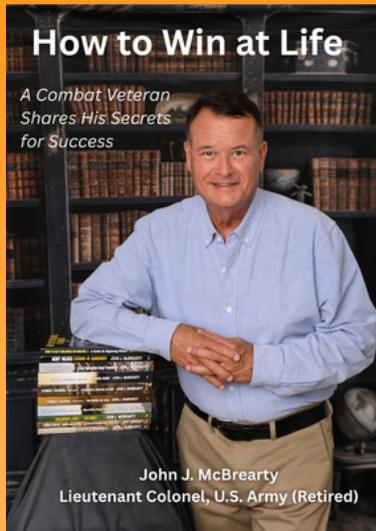
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BOOKS



KUDOS KORNER



Congratulations to **John McBrearty** on publishing *How to Win at Life* and *From Home to Hell*, releasing at the end of the month on Amazon. He was also a featured author at this year's **Veteran Breakfast Club** and continues to release new literary videos on YouTube, offering readers and aspiring writers even more insight and inspiration.

Check his chanel via the link here
<https://www.youtube.com/@JohnWritesHistory>

Upcoming Videos releases

2026-03-03

A Veteran's Quest for Fulfillment

<https://youtu.be/Qj-OY73Cyg4>

2026-03-09

Leadership Lessons from the Iraq War

<https://youtube.com/shorts/Jj7ZNeIJsU>

2026-03-16

Words After War

<https://youtu.be/pzJv8HquirE>

2026-03-17

Children's Golf Made Easy

<https://youtu.be/8heGWr0pbLw>

2026-03-27

Army Values

<https://youtube.com/shorts/dF5DPLqoyUk>

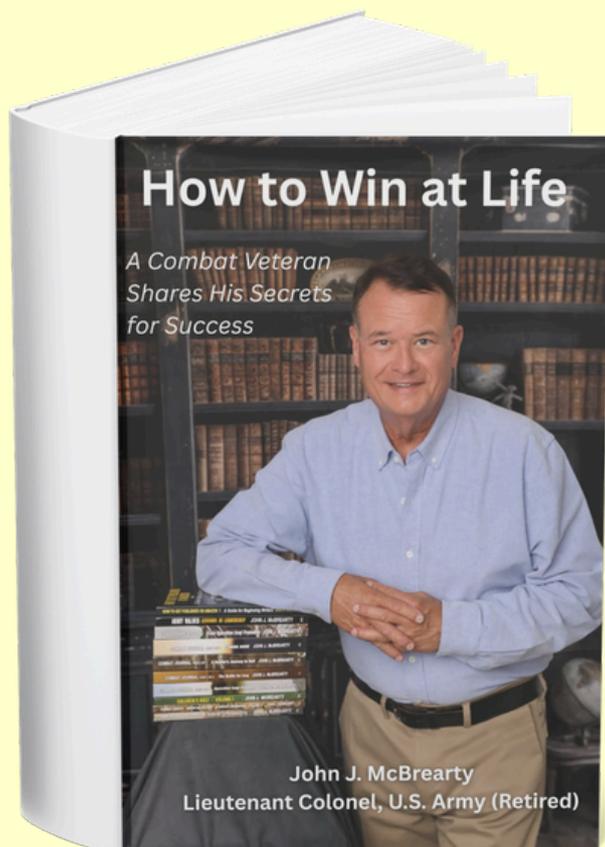
2026-03-29

Purpose, Passion, Publication

<https://youtu.be/t4vOclp0wzc>

PRESS RELEASE

**Amazon Book release
March 30th, 2026**



@JohnWritesHistory

How to Win at Life

**A Combat Veteran Shares His Secrets for
Success.**

By John J. McBrearty

LTC John J. McBrearty—known as “Colonel Mack”—offers more than just a book; he shares a mission. Told in a straightforward interview format, *How to Win at Life* provides a sincere and rare look into the heart and mind of a combat veteran who found healing through writing. From coping with grief and PTSD to mentoring young writers and fellow veterans, McBrearty speaks with humility, grace, and raw honesty.

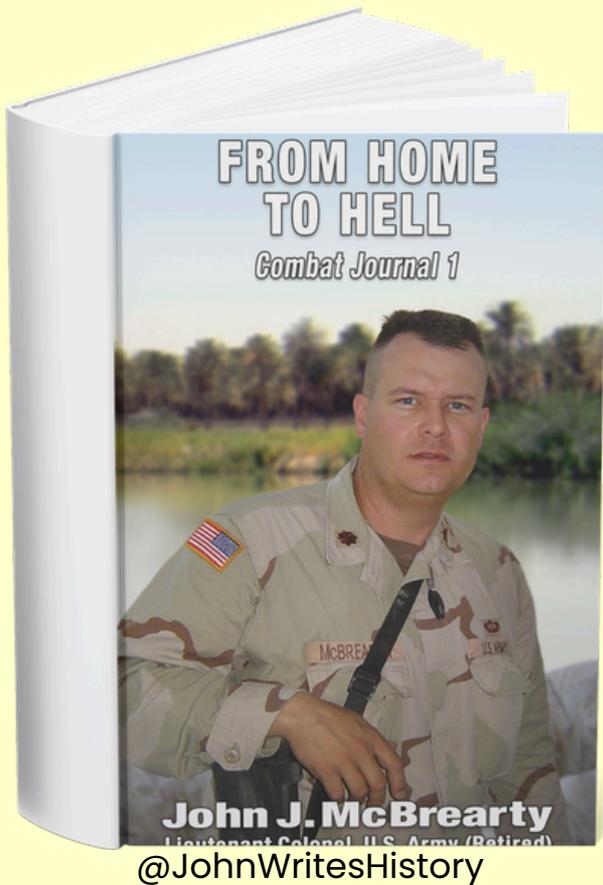
He writes for the soul—for his community, his fallen comrades, and those still fighting silent battles at home. Whether you’re a veteran, an aspiring writer, or someone seeking guidance, you’ll find comfort and courage in these pages.

To LTC Mack: Keep writing. Your story matters—and so do the stories you inspire others to share.

Derrick C. Darden, Ph.D., Veteran, Academic Professor, and Author

PRESS RELEASE

**Amazon Book release
March 30th, 2026**



From Home to Hell:

Combat Journal 1

By John J. McBrearty

**War begins long before the first shot is fired
—and follows us long after.**

From Home to Hell chronicles the earliest days of a National Guard battalion's deployment to Iraq—arrival, uncertainty, and the slow realization that nothing familiar applies anymore. Written in real time, these journal entries capture the psychological shift from civilian certainty to combat reality. This abridged edition introduces the raw, unpolished voice that defines the series and sets the foundation for what follows.

Lieutenant Colonel John J. McBrearty, U.S. Army (Retired), takes readers on an emotional rollercoaster as his main character, Major Darby Hillcrest, mobilizes, trains, and certifies his battalion of citizen soldiers for combat in Iraq. Find out whether these part-time soldiers can meet America's expectations. This is a military memoir you won't soon forget.

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.



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

Luck

Dumb luck, tough luck, good luck. Who can forget Ray Charles: "if it wasn't for bad luck ... I would have no luck at all," or the misquoted Clint Eastwood (as Inspector Harry Callahan) line: "Do you feel lucky, punk?"

Every February I fell a bit luckier than at other times of the year because it's a month when I lost two of my dearest friends. Chuck Crayne died on a February the 16th, which was his seventy-first birthday, after being anesthetized. Graham Weaver died fetally of lung cancer on a February the 24th - he was forty-years-old. Here I am, seventy-one and still going strong, with no reason not to think that lady luck has blessed me in unfathomable ways, and I wonder why.

Luck is not chance—
It's Toil—
Fortune's expensive smile
Is earned—
The Father of the Mine
Is that old-fashioned Coin
We spurned—



The sage, Emily Dickinson, suggests one must work to earn *Fortune's expensive smile*, and yet the reality is that I inherited a smattering of genetics that has served fortune upon me. Born lucky - is a phrase that suggests one's good luck is destined from birth, but in a universe of infinite possibilities, it's really nothing more than a probable subset of what's possible. Ah, but if it were as Milton mused:



Good luck befriend thee Son; for at thy birth
The Faery Ladies daunc't upon the hearth;
Thy drowsie Nurse hath sworn she did them spie
Come tripping to the Room where thou didst lie;
And sweetly singing round about thy Bed
Strew all their blessings on thy sleeping Head.

Though blessed, I am left sometimes feeling as if *I Made a Mistake*, fortune has abandoned me, and, like Charles Bukowski:

I drive around the streets
an inch away from weeping,
ashamed of my sentimentality and
possible love.
a confused old man driving in the rain
wondering where the good luck went.



I sometimes wonder what Lady Luck must look like and picture an angel divine
but then I look about and witness all who have not been blessed by her touch
and think, like Rudyard Kipling:



Good Luck she is never a lady
But the cursedest quean alive!
Tricksy, wincing and jady,
Kittle to lead or drive.
Greet her--she's hailing a stranger!
Meet her--she's busking to leave.
Let her alone for a shrew to the bone,
And the hussy comes plucking your sleeve!

And with her indifference to others, we might awaken in a little town like *Out-of-Luck, Massachusetts* (as observed by Mary Fell in her book *The Persistence of Memory*):

The town that couldn't be licked
gives up, sunk
between these hills. The sacred
heart beats fainter, blessing the poor
in spirit. Boarded-up
factories litter the river. It does no good,
town fathers knitting their brows,
there's not enough shoe leather left
to buy a meal. In company houses
the unemployed wear out
their welcome. Diminished
roads run east, west, anywhere
better than here.



Luck can simply be a matter of perspective. Consider the character Harry Witherspoon's observation from the 1988 musical *Lucky Stiff*:

Everything is fine
Everything is a-okay
I suppose that one might say
I'm lucky
Oh god-
Look at where I am
Think of how I made it through
All of this and all so new
I'm lucky

Or, you might consider the luck of Arlo Guthrie's *Last Guy* (from the intro to *The Pause of Mr. Claus*):

During these hard days and hard weeks, everybody always has it bad once in a while. You know, you have a bad time of it, and you always have a friend who says "Hey man, you ain't got it that bad. Look at that guy." And you look at that guy, and he's got it worse than you. And it makes you feel better that there's somebody that's got it worse than you.

But think of the last guy. For one minute, think of the last guy. Nobody's got it worse than that guy. Nobody in the whole world. That guy ... he's so alone in the world that he doesn't even have a street to lay in for a truck to run him over. He's out there with nothin.

But, if you ask me, I think the luckiest man in our poetic history was Parson Gray, as immortalized by Oliver Goldsmith:

A quiet home had Parson Gray,
Secluded in a vale;
His daughters all were feminine,
And all his sons were male.

How faithfully did Parson Gray
The bread of life dispense--
Well "posted" in theology,
And post and rail his fence.

'Gainst all the vices of the age
He manfully did battle;
His chickens were a biped breed,
And quadruped his cattle.

No clock more punctually went,
He ne'er delayed a minute--
Nor ever empty was his purse,
When he had money in it.





His piety was ne'er denied;
His truths hit saint and sinner;
At morn he always breakfasted;
He always dined at dinner.

He ne'er by any luck was grieved,
By any care perplexed--
No filcher he, though when he preached,
He always "took" a text.

As faithful characters he drew
As mortal ever saw;
But ah! poor parson! when he died,
His breath he could not draw!

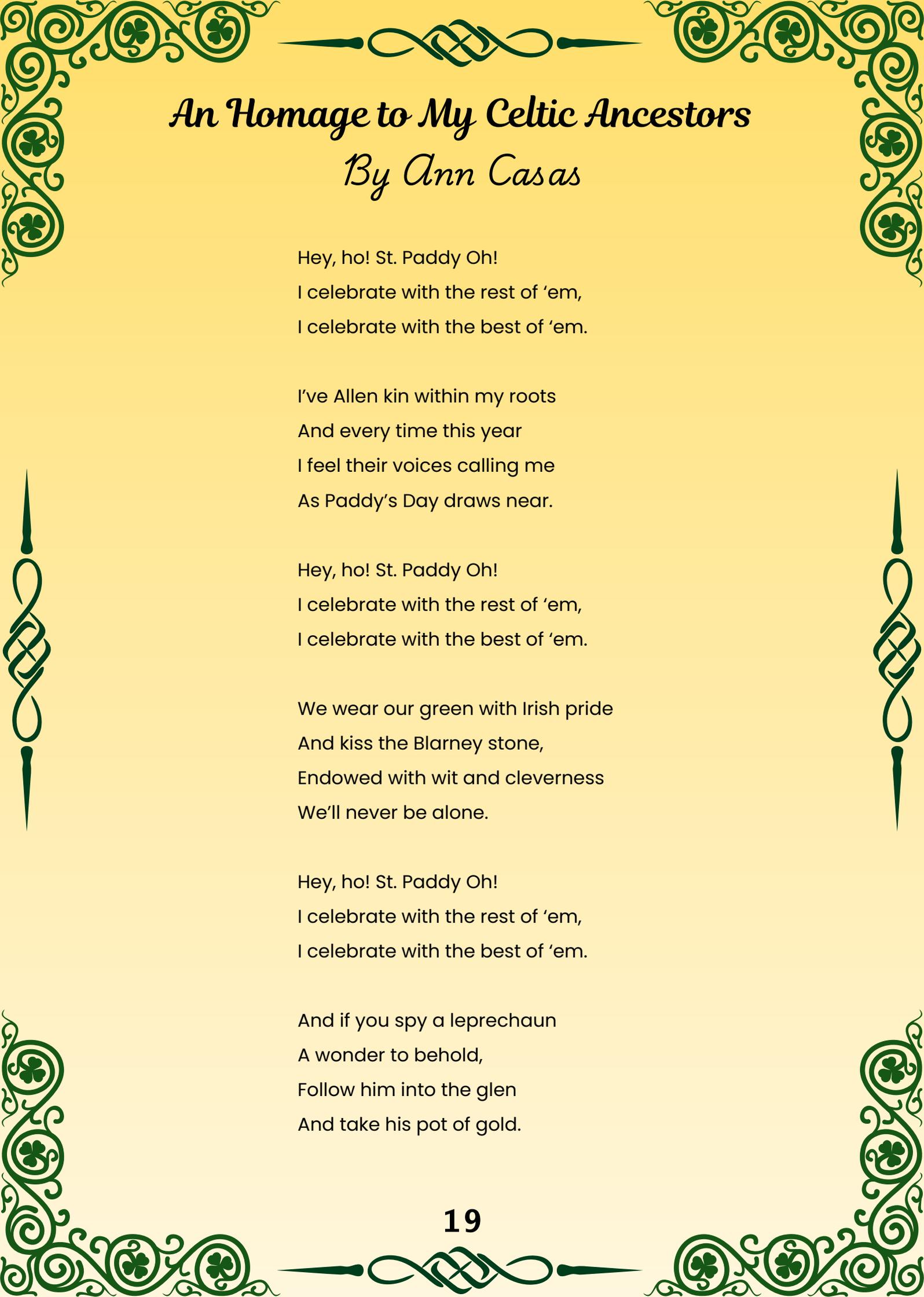
Robert W. Service, the English-born Scottish-Canadian Poet and Writer, ended his books of poetry with L'Envoi, a poem bearing a message to the readers of his book. The L'Envoi from *Ballads of a Bohemian* concludes with:

Of gutters, chimney-tops and stars,
Of apple-carts and motor-cars,
The sordid and sublime;
Of wealth and misery that meet
In every great and little street,
Of glory and of grime;
Of all the living tide that flows --
From princes down to puppet shows --
I'll make my humble rhyme.
So if you like the sort of thing
Of which I also like to sing,
Just give my stuff a look;
And if you don't, no harm is done --
In writing it I've had my fun;
Good luck to you and every one —



Luck, be a lady tonight.





An Homage to My Celtic Ancestors

By Ann Casas

Hey, ho! St. Paddy Oh!
I celebrate with the rest of 'em,
I celebrate with the best of 'em.

I've Allen kin within my roots
And every time this year
I feel their voices calling me
As Paddy's Day draws near.

Hey, ho! St. Paddy Oh!
I celebrate with the rest of 'em,
I celebrate with the best of 'em.

We wear our green with Irish pride
And kiss the Blarney stone,
Endowed with wit and cleverness
We'll never be alone.

Hey, ho! St. Paddy Oh!
I celebrate with the rest of 'em,
I celebrate with the best of 'em.

And if you spy a leprechaun
A wonder to behold,
Follow him into the glen
And take his pot of gold.



Hey, ho, St. Paddy Oh!
I celebrate with the rest of 'em,
I celebrate with the best of 'em.

Be sure to wear a shamrock dear
A holy thing for sure.
God in three the trinity
Sanctified and pure.

Hey, ho, St. Paddy Oh!
I celebrate with the rest of 'em,
I celebrate with the best of 'em.

So on that day all raise a glass
And toast the Irish way,
"Slainte" means good health to you
And fortune come what may.

Hey, ho! St. Paddy Oh!
I celebrate with the rest of 'em,
I celebrate with the best of 'em.



APRIL THEME



PRANKS

