



Logo of Café Libertalia, in  
San Diego's Hillcrest district

## Those glorious Doppelgangers (& other meditations about poetry & change)

**By Jack Webb**

*Director, Border Voices Poetry Project /  
San Diego rep, 100,000 poets for change*

No one wanted to go home after San Diego's "100,000 poets for change" reading on Oct. 15, at the Café Libertalia.

The ghostly doppelgangers of Muhammad Ali and Ronald Reagan were in the room, warily circling each other, along with the crème de la crème of San Diego's literary and revolutionary circles ...

Smiling grad students in fancy dress were doing high-fives with young ladies from Occupy San Diego, who had read poems about getting tackled by police the night before ...

As organizer of the event, I had to go onstage to remind everyone to clear out before 7 p.m., because the night's entertainment (members of a rock band) were muttering about starting their show, jiggling and twanging their instruments with mounting anger

"Hey, everyone! What a great event. Unfortunately, we have to hand over the stage to the rock band ... "

I then drew a roomful of startled looks as I indulged in my habit of meditating out loud about Life, the Universe and Everything. It's a habit that's gotten me in a lot of trouble, but that also has its rewards.

What I said, to the assembled artists, was: "Remember, whatever you read here tonight will be archived by Stanford University. It's your chance to be immortal."

I paused briefly.

"You know, I was meditating this morning. Immortality is a bit overrated. Everyone – almost everyone – I admire and respect is dead, and

most of them died badly. Jesus Christ, Giambattista Vico – you wouldn't know Vico ...”

One young artist got an amazed smile on her face, and glanced at famed poet Sandra Alcosser for insight / reaction. I went up to the young lady a few minutes later and said, “I loved that look on your face.”

She knew me as the founder of Border Voices, which sends poets into hundreds of K-12 classrooms to teach kids the art of verse. Border Voices also publishes annual anthologies (18 so far, plus a handful of special collections) and does weekly TV shows featuring famous poets from around the world.

“That thing about the relative unimportance of fame as a path to immortality – I really believe it. That's the reason I started Border Voices. The only immortality that's valuable is passing insights on to our kids, and teaching them how to find insight themselves.”

She nodded, as if she understood ... but if she did, I suspect the insight was soon drowned in the sea of intellectual mediocrity that surrounds us (oozing from our TV screens, for example, or gushing sluggishly through the halls of Congress).

The only thing that MIGHT work, I thought then, is a huge megaphone. Plato had it, as head of the sole Academy in mighty Athens. Giambattista Vico, the Italian scholar who was the greatest mind of the last 500 years (he turned history into a science, and discovered the geometry of wisdom) did NOT have the spotlight of fame, and his insights are generally unknown.

Let us hope that “100,000 poets for change” will turn into such a megaphone / spotlight, an instrument for good in a problematical world.

With that introduction ... here are some of the poems read at the San Diego “100,000 poets for change” event, along with reflections on same ... plus – as mentioned above – the ghost-like presence of Muhammad Ali and Ronald Reagan, as well as various Mafia thugs I dealt with in a long career as investigative reporter for a major newspaper.

You will find little stories about all those people below, including the bizarre-but-true tale of the night I was nearly killed by a CIA assassin, a Mafia lawyer, and a right-wing thug (that's known as a “tease,” a way to lure you deep into the following package of literary entertainment).

You'll also find charming poems by some really fine people, all of whom read at “100,000 poets for change” in San Diego.

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## Sandra Alcosser



**THE OFFICIAL BIO:** Sandra Alcosser has published seven books of poetry, including *A FISH TO FEED ALL HUNGER* and *EXCEPT BY NATURE*, which have been selected for the National Poetry Series, the Academy of American Poets James Laughlin Award, the Larry Levis Award, the Associated Writing Programs Award in Poetry, and the William Stafford Award from Pacific Northwest

Booksellers.

She is the National Endowment for the Arts' first Conservation Poet for the Wildlife Conservation Society and Poets House, New York, as well as Montana's first poet laureate and recipient of the Merriam Award for Distinguished Contribution to Montana Literature. She founded and directs the Master of Fine Arts Program in Creative Writing at San Diego State University each fall, and has directed SDSU's International Writers Summer Program at National University of Ireland, Galway

In addition she is, or has been, a member of the faculty at University of Michigan, University of Montana, and Pacific University and a writer-in-residence in Glacier National Park and Central Park, New York. She received two individual artist fellowships from NEA, and her poems have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *Poetry* and *the Pushcart Prize Anthology*.

**Sandra Alcosser & her poetry:  
here is one of the poems she read at  
"100,000 poets for change"**

### **WHAT MAKES THE GRIZZLIES DANCE**

June and finally snowpeas  
sweeten the Mission Valley.  
High behind numinous meadows  
lady bugs swarm, like huge  
lacquered fans from Hong Kong,  
like serrated skirts  
of blown poppies,  
whole mountains turn red.  
And in the blue penstemon

grizzly bears swirl  
as they bat snags of color  
against their ragged mouths.  
Have you never wanted  
to spin like that  
on hairy, leathered feet,  
amid swelling berries  
as you tasted a language  
of early summer--shaping  
lazy operatic vowels,  
cracking hard-shelled  
consonants like speckled  
insects between your teeth,  
have you never wanted  
to waltz the hills  
like a beast?

– Sandra Alcosser  
from *Except by Nature*

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## Claudia Poquoc

**THE OFFICIAL BIO:** Claudia Poquoc, a much-honored contributor to the Border Voices Poetry Project (see Web site, [bordervoices.com](http://bordervoices.com)) has a BA in Education and English and an MA in Health Education.

She has been writing and teaching poetry for 30 years in San Diego. Her published song and poetry book, *Becomes Her Vision*, includes a CD.



**Claudia (right) with student**  
annual classroom anthology. She has also taught poetry workshops as a volunteer to San Diego schools.

She has several chapbooks. Her poems appear in the *San Diego Poetry Annual*, *Magee Park*, *Oasis* and other publications.

Classroom children know her as “Grandmother Spider of the Word Wise Web.” She teaches year-long poetry projects in Nevada elementary schools, producing an

Claudia recently became a teacher with California Poets in the Schools (CPITS), the nation’s largest writers-in-the-schools program, serving over thirty California counties since 1964.

Claudia is also a founding member of The Celtic Ensemble music group in which she is the lead singer, drummer and occasional flute player.

She writes many of her own songs and often mixes poetry and rhythm while performing publicly and in the classroom.

Here is one of Claudia's poems. She asked that it be placed at the end of her biography ...

### **No Need to Grieve**

Even a child believes in change.

As if some magic conceives the change.

A star blinks out alone at night.

There is no need to grieve this change.

Life's harvest brings hidden gifts.

And still green leaves bereave the change.

Are we so frightened of our death?

We pray that someone thieves the change?

Some people sense this coming tide.

It tumbles in and heaves the change.

Grandmother Spider stores the threads.

Then spins the web that weaves the change.

### **Claudia Poquoc & her poetry: what she brought to read at "100,000 poets for change"**

*A BASHFUL FOOTNOTE: as co-host, Claudia had to forgo her turn reading –  
because of time constraints – but it seems a shame not to include her lovely poems here.*

### **A Hot Night with Neruda**

*"And now we will count to twelve and we will all keep still."*

**– Pablo Neruda**

Well, Pablo,

Here we sit, *still* –

having counted way past twelve.

Fishermen are *still* "harpooning the whale,"

those who prepare for war

*still* "fighting for victory with no survivors,"

I am *still* riding the dragon's tail

of a chilling wind,

while we struggle to ignite the word

before the icy god of oblivion.

Our human hopes

clenched in this god's frozen fist

must be released by our steamy breath –

this breath - that weaves fragile webs

to catch new life.

Perched on your poetic branch of being,  
amidst ice-capped feelings,  
I burn to be.

Feeling the ache of intonation  
your hot rhythms scorch my tongue –  
inflammé my need to speak.

Your stillness moves within my half frozen soul.  
I hear the hiss of melting ice.

Long before the sound enters my inner ear  
I will - my life - be given.  
The burning word fights the dragon's breath.  
I can keep *still* no longer.

– Claudia Poquioc

## **The Tamarisk Tree**

On a hot desert winding road,  
Old Man Coyote and I rolled slowly along  
hunting for that oldest volcanic glass  
or even a piece that was handsomely chipped  
and willing to rise into the world  
of our fleshed-out hand.

It was hot and dry – not the dry that is solely  
without water – but the dry that lacks humor,  
creates weariness.

We stopped at a boarded-up trading post  
in Agua Caliente to sit beneath  
a shade-offering tree.

It was the largest of two Tamarisk trees.  
There were no others. Beneath it  
squatted a lonely picnic table. Nothing else  
could be seen breathing.

We sat. We snacked. I looked up.  
There on the lower branch, lay

a Mexican man looking down.

I, alarmed, said “Hi.”

In a gentle Spanish voice,  
with legs strapped around the branch,  
he told us how he was trying to get home.  
It was the soulful plea of a native son

begging Tierra Madre for mercy.

Enrique had paid to cross miles  
of desert expanse, but instead,  
was robbed of everything.  
And, after walking for days over mountains...  
ended up here – waiting – for the last four days  
in the shade of this tree,  
lost...hungry...lonely...

with only water, and after his three fellow travelers  
had abandoned him. Afraid...afraid  
to die here, hanging onto a tree,  
out of food, out of will – never again  
to see his wife and son.

My cell phone was dead.  
And although he offered to pay us,  
we knew there would be border checkpoints  
and couldn't risk it. He understood.  
We sat together quietly. I offering him  
what little we had,  
a protein bar and small can of juice.

Finally I spoke. He needed help.  
The border guards would give  
him medical attention, a place  
to sleep, food and water.  
He would be sent back. But  
he would live.

He agreed. I took his telephone number  
to notify his family on this side.  
We reluctantly left him, returned  
to the border guards, reported his location.  
As the officer drove away, I ran to his window  
saying, “ His name is Enrique... *please* call him Enrique.”

Two months later, I learned that Enrique  
made it safely back to Mexico.  
The Tamarisk tree that had offered so much  
is still there... rooting us to place,  
embracing all equally in our hour of need,  
no borders...no papers...no questions.

– Claudia Poquoc

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## Seretta Martin

### THE OFFICIAL BIO:

*QUESTION: What do you get when you combine  
a flash of fire-red hair with a calm, gentle poet?*

*ANSWER: An Oxymoron!*

The above is a tongue-in-cheek review of the sparkling personality of Seretta Martin, who – in addition to possessing a self-deprecating sense-of-humor – is author-illustrator of *Foreign Dust*, *Familiar Rain* and *Love, Rain, Dog* (Blue Vortex Publishers).



Seretta is also poet-teacher coordinator for the Border Voices Poetry Project. She serves on the editorial staff of *Poetry International Journal*, is a *San Diego Poetry Annual* regional editor, and hosts poetry at Upstart Crow Bookstore, Seaport Village, San Diego, 3rd Wednesdays 7 p.m.

Seretta earned her degree in Film, Television and Educational Technology from SDSU. She also studied at Cal Arts, Los Angeles. (Formerly, Walt Disney's Chouinard Art Institute). She is a James Irvine Foundation grant recipient,

After growing up in San Diego she lived in New England for seven years then, returned to San Diego where she resides on the family homestead with her feral tiger cat, Velcro (Velly).

Seretta teaches poetry K-12 in San Diego City and County Schools and at the YMCA.

She also leads adult classes at libraries and conferences. Dozens of her students have been published in the Border Voices Poetry annual anthology, as well as the California Poets in the Schools annual anthology, *Magee Park*, *A Year in Ink*, *San Diego Poetry Annual* and on-line journals.

Seretta has also served as host for a weekly TV show featuring famous poets from around the world.

As host, she interviewed award-winning Border Voices students on Educational ITV's Doorways to Vision show. Among her many co-hosts was Ken Waldman, "Alaska's fiddling poet."

In 2011, she was one of the featured poets in the annual Border Voices anthology (along with Steve Kowit, Chris Baron and Celia Sigmon) and in Instructional TV's "Virtual" Poetry Fair.

Her writing and translations are published in anthologies here and abroad in including *Web del Sol* and *Margie*. [web.mac.com/serettamartin](http://web.mac.com/serettamartin)



**Seretta Martin & her poetry:  
what she brought to read at  
“100,000 poets for change”**

*A BASHFUL FOOTNOTE: as co-host, and because of time constraints, Seretta read only two of the seven poems she'd brought with her. It seems a shame not to include all seven of her lovely poems here – and so we do.*

**We Didn't Do It**

We didn't do it in the hall of justice  
or on the cold kitchen floor.

Didn't do it in lightness,  
in woods or shallow waves.

Thought of doing it in an airplane,  
but didn't have the nerve.

We didn't do it to please,  
played it safe, offended no one.

Didn't do it with art, joy,  
or clarity of mind.

We didn't perspire like runners  
pushing to the finish line.

We had no fervor or conviction.  
Even in a catastrophe, we did nothing.

We sat — prophets and politicians  
on our side,

and when the heavens opened  
it rained for nights and days—

like feeble earth worms with no destination  
we floated on the current.

— **Seretta Martin, © 2010**

**Monarchs**

*A true story from New York City, Ground Zero, 2001*

Search dogs lead firemen  
through dense air,  
retch with the stench of death.

Streets are heavy-laden —  
walls fallen, lampposts  
buried in mounds of plaster;

lights blown out.

Mind-weary, yet they trudge  
with hope of finding  
another breath.

As if called, the men look up,  
to see a tower of light –

a flock of Monarch butterflies  
hover and descend  
through the hell-born dust.

One, golden with welkin wings,  
rests on a fireman's shoulder.

"Souls," he whispers,  
and the men bow in prayer.

– **Seretta Martin, © 2007**

from *Best of Border Voices* anthology,  
Level 4 Press, 2007

## **Himalayas**

Once every thousand years  
an immortal bird flies over  
brushes granite peaks  
with a silk scarf in its beak  
and the mountains wear away  
as one day passes in a cosmic cycle –  
time has no haste.

– **Seretta Martin, © 2003**

from *San Diego Arts & Poets Magazine*, Volume 1.3, 2003

## **Ever-Present Past**

“...*the past is not dead*”

These days  
the past spills  
into the present  
faster than before.

There is no use  
trying to stop  
memories.

Frozen guilt,  
endless images  
persist, until

a room opens,  
unfinished,  
filled with belief.

– **Seretta Martin, © 2003**

from *San Diego Arts & Poets Magazine*, Volume 1.2, 2003

### **Let Sun In**

Let the early-morning rain  
patter its footsteps up the stairs.  
Let passionflowers sip.

Let the rain-gauge fill to the brim  
as the snail takes up its journey  
like a Humvee, tracking labored time.

Let rust cling to the keys lost  
in dry leaves and the wind tug  
on the long rope, calling a bell to song.

Let the lover alone in bed  
find relief from yearning  
in the comfort of a dream.

Let the apples in the garden  
fill with juice and shine.  
Let sun in. Let worms come.

To the curtain at the window,  
to the watch on the wrist. To the breath  
in the lung. Let sun come.

Let it warm, as it will, and rest  
assured, change comes to all.  
So let sun in, let in the rain.

– **Seretta Martin, © 2009**

from *San Diego Poetry Annual 2009/10*

## Wounds

*The air is cool. The lake is still. By noon it will be hot.*

Gunny sips thick military coffee,  
gazes out of his one-room trailer,  
sees a sudden flush – geese in V  
jolt him from his stupor.

A daunting memory of muffled mortar  
moves him from his chair.  
He hobbles to a dim corner.  
Slippery wood and steel wait.

Swinging one leg over the seat  
he positions himself, reaches  
for a batch of wet clay –  
gives the wheel a swift boot.

Bending forward with his left hand  
and the severed stump of his right,  
he guides the mass. As it wobbles  
and spins, flashbacks whirl:

the blast, his troops sprawled  
face down, flames sweeping,  
bodies heaping, smoke, no screams.

Ashes settled, his body, a lump of flesh  
quivered, still breathing,  
when death leaped toward him,  
then backed away, stealing his arm.

The potter's wheel now shapes memories –  
When a bulb of earth rises to form a *perfect* pot,  
he places it in a lineup on the patio wall  
with other raw vessels bearing scars  
of violent imperfection. Shouldering

a twenty-two rifle, he aims – blasts a hole  
through the fresh clay. A bullet cuts in clean  
but leaves the back side with fleshy petals:

*fatal flaws he will fire in a furnace where jagged exits are preserved.*

– Seretta Martin, © 2001

from *San Diego Writers INK Anthology*, 2007

## Critical Matter

The physicist I meet in an Irish Pub  
tells me the weapons he makes  
can't possibly be worth the harm they cause,  
says his head is too big to fit  
through the Nuclear Plant door  
where he has been called to a meeting.

Escorted by an armed guard,  
he passes through heavy fences  
enters a thick-walled, windowless building,  
tennis shoes squeaking on the slick floor.  
His bushy Einstein hair flows behind him  
like a wave of gray matter.

In this massive tomb where they "*do weapons*"  
other big heads sit at a large table, some sip  
coffee from paper cups, others inhale oxygen.

They discuss buying uranium from Russia,  
Canada or Australia, how to make safe bombs  
and keep them from terrorists.

Later, national resources exhausted  
they may reveal the cost-effective,  
earth-friendly benefits of using  
nuclear energy for electricity.

These nuclear nerds with the force  
to destroy everything, believe all we see  
can be formulated into cold, linear equations.

But at the end of the day they meet in an Irish Pub  
and tip Single Malt Scotch. Knowing  
the power of the "*bang*,"  
it frightens them *more* than it does us.

– **Seretta Martin, © 2004**

from *Muse Apprentice Guild e-zine, International Literary Review*  
*2<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary Issue, August 2004 // Magee Park anthology, 2007*

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## Shadab Zeest Hashmi



**THE OFFICIAL BIO:** Shadab Zeest Hashmi has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and her book *Baker of Tarifa* is the winner of the San Diego Book Award for poetry. Her work has appeared in many journals worldwide. She has been the editor of the annual *Magee Park Anthology* since 2000. She has recently joined San Diego State University as the writer-in-residence. Her second collection *Kohl and Chalk* is due out in 2012.

### Shadab Zeest Hashmi & her poetry: what she read at “100,000 poets for change”

#### Ghazal

Was this not the garden of the crisp acorn and the dusty, bearded Oak?  
We left paradise because justice was promised on the other side.

There was much wood to collect, so we cut down the oak, the teak,  
the olive. The new bridge was burned before we reached the other side.

Who hung the garlands, snatched the rose from the lark's side?  
With the sun arrived the moon-filled aubade, night's other side.

Strange how they thought to compensate me with two minutes of silence,  
or replace you with pension, I on this side of the war and them, the other side.

Remember the broken sky, the terrible storm, animals tumbling  
in the ark? It was a man of faith who carried them to the other side.

If ever there was a wish, it was this: Zeest, may you belong  
to the one who knows to cherish you, this side of life and the other side.

— Shadab Zeest Hashmi

#### In the Piazza

A tentative note on the accordion  
Across the mural a weak dawn  
Fractured columns of light  
on the goddess of war with a ridiculously small head  
and metallic horses sculpted in unnatural proportions

There are people in the piazza too  
The accordion player's wife  
a banker finishing his coffee  
a young nun in a bubble jacket looking for keys  
in her backpack and my baby chewing on his terry lion

There are boys running after pigeons  
that carry rainbows around their necks  
The sun humiliates statues of gunmen  
that dwarf us with their big ideas  
Us and our small music

– **Shadab Zeest Hashmi**

## **War Ghazal**

*Human*, the word, came from the word for love in Arabic, *breath*  
from love in Hebrew. Language: purple mass, body without breath.

Our bread came from the same oven and we drank from the same deep well  
rimmed with the name of God, over whom we fought with every breath.

You saved our salt to sprinkle on this, my gaping wound. I saw your bullet  
cross the steel-blue night. I woke up sweating and short of breath.

A small button killed thousands and we never saw the blood-filled Euphrates.  
Instead, the news-caster's pearls, her mouth, vowels crisply shaped by breath.

Fresh milk, a shawl for warmth, a drop of medicine, paper to relieve  
the heart's burden, a place to pray; things we wished for, other than breath.

There is a sigh squeezed between bricks of our house. Our names lie flat  
and dead. Take the key to unlock air, to waken the sleeping breath.

The stars have become our sins, bullet holes edged with yellow poison. Look  
at us going down the drain, into the stench of discord. Hold your breath.

– **Shadab Zeest Hashmi**

## **Window Overlooking the *Furn***

The dough lies dreaming  
Pregnant  
and smooth in an earthen basin  
It is summer and the soap white curtains  
are exhaling like sails

There is far away laughter  
And a pulse nearby  
in oil

semolina

She catches the pulse  
the imprint of fate-lines

It is the summer  
Of barley    white flour    spiced honey lavender sourdough  
From the houses of Jewish leather merchants  
Christian boatmen singers  
Muslim botanists

Held by a mother  
with kohl-lined eyes

Bread  
for apricot-skinned children  
— **Shadab Zeest Hashmi**

## **Guantanamo**

A guard forces you to urinate on yourself  
Another barks out louder than his dog  
the names of your sisters  
who live in the delicate nest  
of a ruby-throated hummingbird  
Each will be a skeleton he says

Was there someone who gave you  
seven almonds for memory  
a teaspoon of honey every morning?  
Cardamom tea before bed?  
Someone who starched your shirts  
in rice water  
then ironed them  
Held your chin  
saying the send-off prayer  
before school?

You're tied to a metal coil  
and memory  
is like a burnt wire  
— **Shadab Zeest Hashmi**

## **U.S. Air Strikes**

In the four minutes  
it took me to mince the cloves,



dump the tea leaves  
in the rose bush,  
and soap the carafe,  
a whole city was lost.

There were feet still in school shoes,  
limp flesh singing into satchels,  
clinging to a post, a shattered clock.  
The children, if not orphaned  
were purpled beyond recognition.

Orders had been carried down,  
one signal igniting another.  
And a man had let a deafening rhapsody  
guide his young hand to drop  
a five hundred pound bomb  
on a mosque.

Just when I finished rinsing the carafe,  
a whole city was under cement dust and smoke,  
and I thought I heard screaming behind walls of fire  
in the kettle's sharp whistle,  
just when I added the cloves,  
the last green lime.

— **Shadab Zeest Hashmi**

### **The Stonemason' Son Contemplates Death**

Because my heart  
became a kiln  
I wished to die

The inscription on the tiles  
made a prayer in butterfly script  
crowning your well

*May the water refresh your soul*

The clanging of keys became loud  
A soldier stood behind me pissing in the well

Someone sang in the distance  
Couldn't tell if she was a Jew  
Christian or Muslim

It was a devotional song

— **Shadab Zeest Hashmi**

## Ghazal for a Superpower

News of massacre beats a heavy hell-drum on the front page.  
This head mangled for democracy, this blood sprayed on the page.  
Shrapnel screams when I open my mouth, broken whisperings of glass  
wedge their holy knives between every “civilized” word on the page.  
America of shining cellophane up to the stratosphere, snap the barbed wire  
that strangles your stars and cuts through to puncture heaven’s venerable page.  
Ballooning, high-rising, you end up caught in your own sharp talons  
making confetti of history. New chapters spell out grief page after page.  
In God you trust. For His creation: missiles, emissions, torture. Detainees  
may have diplomas & dear ones but are not “persons” on your law’s page. \*  
The soul coughs up the book of desire in the torture cage. Come  
as yourself, bring the ink of your veins, meet me on the first page.  
— Shadab Zeest Hashmi

*\*In a 43-page opinion, Circuit Judge Karen LeCraft Henderson found that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, a statute that applies by its terms to all “persons” did not apply to detainees at Guantánamo, effectively ruling that the detainees are not persons at all for purposes of U.S. law.  
(Report by the Center for Constitutional Rights)*

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## Kathleen Hartshorne

**THE OFFICIAL BIO:** Kathleen Hartshorne performs the beautiful and haunting music of ancient and contemporary Ireland on her Irish Lever Harp. Singing in both Irish and English with her rich soprano voice, she takes listeners to a world of myth and magic in the misty emerald hills of Erin. She is a former member of the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra Festival Choir, and attended the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music.



Kathleen’s music was one of the high points of the 100,000-poets-for-change event in San Diego on Oct. 15. The audience also enjoyed her poems (below).

**Kathleen Hartshorne & her poetry:  
what she read at “100,000 poets for change”**

**On Top of the World**

*(If we all, as a people, came to understand our deep connection with Mother Earth...and our connection to each other through Mother Earth...we would not hurt any part of that glorious body...lest we hurt ourselves as well.)*

On the top of the world; windswept, rugged, cold,  
I lay my tired body in dry and unforgiving rocks,  
As the night came and the angry roar of the storm  
Pummeled my fragile shelter and soaked my body,  
Night gave way to brutal destroying gods  
Who tore at the soul and threatened the very earth.  
I stood to the gale, though my body was weak,  
And reveled in the power of the universe.  
I stood and survived, though all was washed away.  
And in the morning I sat, as a new day dawned.  
Birds fluttered and chirped in the morning mists  
That gathered both below in the soft wet crevices of the valleys,  
and above like billowing arms of Zeus' softening rage.  
Rose, gold, purple, and silver were the soft colors of the battle's end;  
Softly caressing the mountainside in glorious light of joy and elation.  
Above and below, colors like a soft quilt of Father Sky's love;  
Romantic caresses after the storm, warming the soul;  
and I watched in ecstasy as the mists parted,  
and eternal love was born between man and God.

**– Kathleen Hartshorne**

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## Veronica Spinharney



**THE BIO:** Veronica Spinharney came to the Oct. 15 event direct from her activities at Occupy San Diego (see accompanying photo: Veronica has the bullhorn). She is one of the most prominent activists in San Diego, and the list of her causes seems inclusive:

environmentalism and nuclear power, politics and gender roles, etc. One of her favorite quotations is from John Lennon: “As soon as you’re born they make you feel small // By giving you no time instead of it all.”

### **Veronica Spinharney & her poetry: what she read at “100,000 poets for change”**

#### **Bullhorn**

an unadorned worked hand  
worn and thin-skinned  
gestures for the heavy horn  
grips the thick-handled  
powered amplifier in rage  
and pumps fisted muscles  
swelling fingers blood red  
and blackening the blue arm veins  
dirty and bruised  
a manly manifestation

the bullhorn positioned  
45 degrees skyward  
bulges the wrist tendons white  
in a deliberate extension  
to the open jaws  
primal screams bugle  
the claim of grandmother  
shattering the festive drums  
in protest and wrath  
telling the story of our time  
of social injustice,  
corporate corruption  
and stolen democracy  
of hungry children

and lost tomorrows

“I love my country and I love  
my American brothers and sisters”  
she anguished  
revealing her vulnerability  
illuminating the common story  
enlightening the attendance  
uniting the crowd  
“If we don’t put aside our differences  
And take back  
the power of governing  
by the people for the people  
we will be refugees tomorrow  
and our children will be slaves  
as we are becoming now,  
this is not anger talking  
this is fact  
this is why we are here today”

– **Veronica Spinharney**

### **Redefining Patriot on Facebook**

... for me being a Patriot means ... if you are going to take my freedoms,  
silence my voice, and sell-out my children ... you better kill me mother  
fucker, because if I get the chance ... I'll put you down with the rest of us and  
make you accountable for your crimes and unable to buy your way out;  
punished accordingly... keeping our democracy alive even at the risk of  
death ... what else is there??

– **Veronica Spinharney**

### **Post to ‘One Million Pissed-Off Women’ Facebook Site**

We must not let the media, governments or organized religions dictate our  
nature, tell us and our daughters what is our power, our limits, our beauty  
and how to love. Our nature is community, our power in numbers, our limits  
acceptance, our beauty in being varied women, and through love be true to  
ourselves ... bringing peace, focus and the strength to make the changes  
today, tomorrow and within ...

– **Veronica Spinharney**

## **Today I mourn**

Today I mourn  
a death  
the death of God  
source of life  
life from water  
waters of our home  
nutriment of mother  
Mother Earth

Yesterday they announced  
the Ocean's death  
cradle of birth  
first nursery  
of our being

Today I mourn  
Our death, my death  
a death  
in Earth's life  
– **Veronica Spinharney**

## **“America” October 2011**

America could use a break  
the gloomy stories  
of corporate corruption  
government oppression  
and environmental pollution  
are never ending ...  
you can't read them all ...  
you can't post them all ...  
you can't see the end to the means ...  
maybe it is time to go outside ...  
I will just water my radioactive garden  
with my plastic tainted tears  
before I have to rent my own house  
and have a yard sale to sell my things  
to bailout my protesting college grad  
and to feed my grandchildren ...  
– **Veronica Spinharney**

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*they call the shots they call the culture of means they dole out  
the opportunities for growth and they dictate the balance of  
power and oppression ....*

““THEY””

first they train you to be enslaved and tell you this is the American dream  
---then they rent you your own house  
next they take your tax money and tell you we need it to stay afloat  
---so they buy a big boat and a big party  
again they say if you love your land send the children to do their conquests  
---your beloved comes home zipped in a bag  
and I am supposed to feel worthless because I am poor  
and told I'm greedy because I am a teacher, police officer, fireperson, a union  
and I am selfish because I am old, sick or disabled  
who the fuck is “THEY”

– Veronica Spinharney

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## Sylvia Levinson

**THE OFFICIAL BIO:** Sylvia Levinson discovered poetry as a means of self-expression while working in sales management for the Old Globe Theater in 1991.

Her poems address a spectrum of life experience – the joys and pains of childhood, family, parenthood, love, loss and lust, as well as the philosophical and humorous aspects of growing older. In recent years, reflecting on nature and the human relationship to the natural world has



become prominent in her work.

Early childhood roots on an Ohio dairy farm and growing up years in the Catskill Mountain area of New York State imprinted an appreciation for landscape, animal and plant life. This was further enhanced when she attended college at Alfred University in the picturesque Finger Lakes Region of New York State's Southern Tier.

**Sylvia Levinson**

She continues to seek out and be nourished by natural settings – a monastery in the San Diego mountains, the wildly rugged coast of Oregon, the sun glinting off Washington's Puget Sound, hiking the Red Rocks of Sedona, a forest on Maui, a trail in the Snowy Range of Wyoming, a cabin in the pines in Idyllwild, or sitting under the orange tree in her own garden, watching the hummingbirds among wisteria and morning glories. This point of view is the focus of her book *Gateways: Poems of*

*Nature, Meditation and Renewal, A Self-Guided Book of Discovery*, which was published by Caernarvon Press in December 2005.

Her work has also been published in *Snowy Egret*, *City Works*, *Tidepools*, *Magee Park Anthology*, *Poetic Matrix*, *Acorn Review* and The Writing Center anthologies.

She has received numerous honors for her poetry.

**Sylvia Levinson & her poetry:  
what she read at “100,000 poets for change”**

**Mindful Soup**

While onions and garlic are sautéing,  
and I am drawing fresh, filtered water,  
a woman is walking many meters  
to dip a bucket into a well  
at a refugee camp in Uganda.

While slicing organic carrots and celery  
carried home from the farmer’s market,  
a four-year-old boy and his six-year-old sister  
are sorting food scraps  
in a garbage heap in Managua.

In goes clean barley, scooped from the grocer’s barrel,  
while a girl in Myanmar, a woman in Somalia,  
are stirring a kettle above an open fire,  
rice gleaned from their village’s diminishing crop,  
by cyclone or drought, by soldiers torching fields.

Into my garden for chard, spinach, basil,  
green and fresh, planted by my own hands,  
while the child in Sierra Leone whose  
hands were severed during civil war,  
begs in the streets.

With each ingredient, I become smaller.  
The pot simmers, I stir, taste, season.  
A roadside bomb kills an American soldier and two  
Iraqis, the streets of Tijuana splatter with blood.  
A woman in Congo, left to bear her rapist’s child.

– **Sylvia Levinson**

*Mindful Soup* was published in *San Diego Writers Ink Anthology*, 2010 and *Poets Over 70* (McMaster University, Tower Poetry Society, 2010).



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## Gary Winters



**THE OFFICIAL BIO:** Gary Winters has written a hundred cross-cultural articles on Mexico. He has won awards for short story, poetry, novel, and photojournalism. In the United States he has won numerous awards and been published in the *Mensa Bulletin*, several literary journals, and was a poetry contest winner in the *Mensa International Journal*, distributed in a hundred countries. Gary was the English editor, feature writer and columnist for a bilingual newspaper in Baja California. He was severely censured by immigration officials when he championed Mexican union workers and muchachos selling chicle on the streets of San Felipe. He writes fiction now.

### **Gary Winters & his poetry: what he read at “100,000 poets for change”**

#### **habeas corpus**

if you want to be a smart poet  
stay away from political themes  
because this country's Patriot Act  
makes it a crime to persuade someone  
to even *think* about disrupting  
government's stance on your dwindling rights

do not urge your friends to think about  
how they've already been stripped stark naked  
of something called habeas corpus  
what does that mean--present the body

Homeland Security surely knows  
they're here to watch out for you and me

they don't spy on decent citizens  
who change their underwear twice a day  
and listen to Rush Limbaugh's brash voice  
explain things in drug-soaked baritone  
scoffing at those filthy liberals  
who wring their hands over your freedom

the ones who think the constitution  
is relevant in this modern age  
a scrap of paper your leader said  
so be a good little patriot  
and whatever you do don't look up  
the meaning of habeas corpus

Oh by the way  
our previous chief  
is the one who  
took this right from us  
the current POTUS  
peace prize & four wars  
didn't give it back

– Gary Winters

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## Student Poems

### *and other scintillating odds 'n' ends*

One of the charms of an open-mike “poetry fair” is the unexpected:

- (1) Chris Vannoy, the brilliant street-poet and master of the spoken word, assumed a “role” as a heckler-social

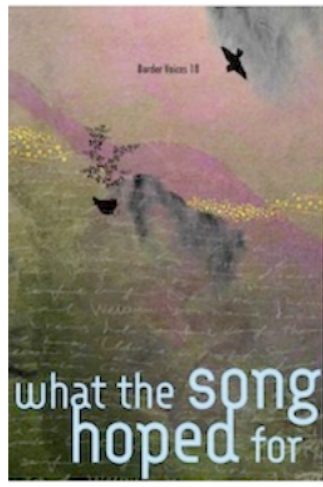
observer, rising out of his chair in the audience to delight listeners with hilarious and trenchant observations about modern society.

- (2) Hope Meek, despite a long and debilitating illness, showed up with some of her poems. The Border Voices donor and La Jolla social star was too weak to read, but we read one of her poems for her:

### **Temple Bell**

The bronze bell hangs  
from temple beams,  
hums in the wind.  
The grey log swings.  
Vibrations of a thousand years.

- (3) Seretta Martin read poems by two of her students, both of which appeared in the 2011 Border Voices anthology *What the Song Hoped For*. Here are those poems:



### **The World of Things**

One day, one boy received  
nine boxes full of things.  
He shrunk himself  
to fit into the world of things.

The walls were red,  
the ground was purple,  
and a yellow highway  
ran north and south  
with nineteen tiny cars.

Each day, more boxes arrived  
filled with things. Some  
were stuffed with green bills  
and silver coins.

There were so many things:  
dozens of Rubik Cubes, a ball,  
rulers, watches, calculators,  
a backpack, a TV.

Soon the world surrounded him  
and he had to sleep  
in an empty box  
to get back to himself.

One day, one box  
made a sound—a scratching sound.  
When he opened it  
out jumped a tabby cat.

***Brent Stewart***

Grade 3, Spreckels Elementary School

Poet-teacher: Seretta Martin

Classroom Teacher: Marisela Sparks

## **The Silver Eclipse**

Outside our world of color  
the glimmering eclipse  
shines toward earth, so bright  
we cover our eyes with dark glasses.

Watching its glow  
in the shimmering air  
we can taste the cold light  
as we let our minds go out

free, in a trance, while the silver  
slowly fades.

With one last flash  
the eclipse ends, and there we are  
in a trance, with silver light  
dripping from our lips.

***David Melendez-Perdomo***

Grade 3, Spreckels Elementary School

Poet-teacher: Seretta Martin

Teacher: Marisela Sparks

- (4) Finally ... Claudia Poquoc read a poem by her student Jesse Hanneman. The poem, "Jump," won the second-place award in the 2011 Border Voices poetry contest, elementary-school division.

### **Jump**

The shape of the past fits inside the grip of the future.  
The rock bottom of December can never become the  
glory of October.  
At the top of tomorrow waits another noon.  
At the center of boredom is the path to excitement.  
The sadness of a kitten is being alone.  
The swirl of loneliness sounds like the spin of a broken  
heart.  
The opposite of tender lives inside a rock.  
The hiding place of rain shivers underneath the snow's  
freezing ice.  
The enemy of green hides between shadows and nightfall.  
If you look underneath peace you might hear a war  
over freedom.  
When you toss anger to the wind, it returns as sadness.  
If you turn hope on high, you need to forget failure.  
At the edge of silver is a path of gold.  
If you jump into the present, you'll land on it.

***Jesse Hanneman***

Grade 5, Fernley Intermediate School, Nevada  
Poet-Teacher: Claudia Poquoc  
Classroom Teacher: Vivian Olds



*Photo by Niki Berg*

### **Marilyn Chin**

- (5) Marilyn Chin, the award-winning poet, had a competing event far far away, and so sent a poem to be read from the stage. (Marilyn Chin has won numerous awards for her poetry, including ones from the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. She has received a Stegner Fellowship, the PEN/Josephine Miles Award, four *Photo by Niki Berg* Pushcart Prizes, the Paterson Prize, a Fulbright Fellowship to Taiwan, as well as residencies at Yaddo, the MacDowell Colony, the Lannan Residency, and the Djerassi Foundation).

Here is Marilyn's poem:

#### **THE AFTERMATH**

There was blood and guts all over the road.  
I said I'm sorry, darling, and rolled over,  
expecting the slate to be clean; but she came,  
she who was never alive became resurrected.  
I saw her in dream...a young girl in a chipao,  
bespeckled, forever lingering, thriving  
on the other side of the world, walking in my soles

as I walk, crying in my voice as I cried. When  
she arrived, I felt my knuckles in her knock,  
her light looming over the city's great hollows.

Hope lies within another country's semaphores.  
The Goddess of Liberty, the Statue of Mercy—  
we have it all wrong—big boy, how we choose to love,  
how we choose to destroy, says Zhuangzi is written  
in heaven—but leave the innocent ones alone,  
those alive, yet stillborn, undead, yet waiting  
in a fitful sleep undeserved of an awakening.

**Marilyn Chin**

from *THE PHOENIX GONE, THE TERRACE  
EMPTY*, Milkweed Editions, MN, 1994)

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## Afterword featuring Mafia killers, Muhammad Ali & others celebrities

**by Jack Webb**

organizer of “100,000 Poets for Change” in San Diego

### AN EXPERIMENTAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY BY JACK WEBB:

A wise man once said that an honest and useful autobiography should let readers know how someone came to be the way he is ... which seems almost impossible in a few paragraphs. But, since the whole object of my life (shaped by the nuns who raised me) has been to help others, I'll take a stab at it ...



**Jack Webb**

At a fancy lunch a few weeks ago, thrown by the president of San Diego State University, I was sitting next to a wealthy and learned donor. She asked me what I did. I mentioned that I had founded, and continue to lead, the Border Voices Poetry Project, sending poets into hundreds of classrooms. I host a

TV show featuring Nobel laureates and others talking poetry with San Diego students. I've published 23 books, etc etc ... the tone of my voice, I knew, was growing increasingly weary.

"I guess you can tell all this means very little to me," I finally said. "My real goal has always been to find wisdom, and share it with others, especially our kids.

"I could tell you a lot of interesting stories. I was an investigative reporter at a major newspaper, and rode with the Hell's Angels, spent a week with Muhammad Ali, interviewed Ronald Reagan. There are some interesting things there ..."

And so there are ... some of which you will find in a brief magazine article I wrote about those exhilarating and sometimes frightening experiences, and which I will place at the end of this brief semi-autobiography.

But first ...

### **Jack Webb & his poetry: what I read at "100,000 poets for change"**

#### **We Lean this Way Forever**

The years still hold us there, asleep,  
beneath a tree, in grasses deep ...  
our common dream so new that you  
comprehend nothing, only  
this humming in the brain,  
the wind whispering the leaves  
into mourning. I tell you  
only the very old know  
what the song hoped for,  
why the membrane shivered into silk.  
Full of our vast death, without impatience,  
we enfold each other; where you choose  
to lead I go, or lovingly wander by your side,  
our happiness like a cloak of light,  
radiant now between us.

– Jack Webb

#### **Remembering Tinker Bell**

It wasn't the mysterious land  
that she remembered, after all those years,  
but the star that went ahead of her.  
"Grandma, Grandma, tell us about Peter!"



they'd cry, and she would, of course:  
the old story of the Lost Boys and the Indians,  
and the terrible pirates of Skull Cave.  
But then, at the edges of the firelight,  
she would see the star, and the children wondered,  
those dear sweet ones, why grandma always cried  
at the best parts of the old, old story.

– **Jack Webb**

**And now, as promised, a true story from my days as an  
investigative reporter ... & a continuation of this experiment in  
autobiography.**

## MIDNIGHT IN ANAHEIM

WHY SOMEONE MIGHT HAVE SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT BEING AN  
INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER

**By Jack Webb**

It was midnight in Anaheim. There were three other men in the room, and they ignored me while they debated what to do next. They were debating whether I should die.

“Who the fuck is this guy, did you ask yourselves that?” Jim was the youngest of the three, a 38-year-old former CIA assassin. He couldn't believe his pals were letting me live another minute. He looked at me, hands curling into claws, grey eyes unblinking. He leaned forward out of his chair, and I could feel the hate and fear vibrating in his body.

“The last guy who asked questions like that was carried out of here with shit dribbling down his leg.”

“Hold on.”

It was Tony, the big-shot, the guy with mob connections, and the only one, other than myself, who was wearing a suit.

“Let's give it a minute,” Tony said. “Jack isn't going anywhere.”

I'd been scared before, and I knew what to do. When you're in trouble, don't show fear. Fear makes your opponent think he's got an easy mark. I'd used that technique many times in my career as an investigative reporter, sports reporter, and political correspondent for Copley News Service and *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. I'd talked to Mexican Mafia killers, been the target of suspicious angry men at Hell's Angels parties – hell, I'd even been given a rough time by Muhammad Ali in his prime, when

he was feeling cocky and wanted to show the brash young hot-shot reporter who was boss. Yeah, I knew what to do. Keep cool. Nothing bad could happen if you kept cool.

Right. It was midnight in Anaheim, and I was within minutes of death with no one to help. The only one who knew I was there was my city editor, who talked a good game but could do nothing in a situation like this. Keeping cool wasn't going to get me out of that room. Keeping cool and thinking fast might.

"You with the Feds?" Tony asked.

"No, just a reporter, like I said."

"ATF? State? Local cops?" It was Jim again.

"I told you, no. I'm a reporter, that's it."

Tony leaned back in his chair, head falling forward onto his chest, like a judge on the bench, deciding what to do. After a minute, he looked at me, as hard to read as a cop in the middle of an investigation.

"You're going to call your city editor. You think he's there now?"

I doubted it. But we were a morning paper, he might be working late.

"Maybe."

"Call him. Tell him there's no story here."

Ohmigawd. I knew Hal Jacobine (I've changed the city editor's name, for reasons that will become obvious later in this story). There was no way Hal was going to accept that. Our sources had given us good information on this El Kamas organization, who they were, what they were doing. They were recruiting mercenaries to fight on the wrong side in African wars, they had a ship full of weapons in the Long Beach harbor, ready to set sail to South America to supply the narco druglords. These were the bad guys, and they'd been bad a long time. Jim had assassinated a bigwig in Israel a few years before, Tony had his mob connections – and Hank, the big silent one, he was the thug, the guy who beat up leftists for "C" up north. I sent a rare prayer heavenward: "Dear God, please sharpen Hal's wits when I call."

The direct line to Hal rang three times, four, five, and I was thinking all the time, how to signal Hal that something was wrong without letting the three killers know what I was doing.

"Hal Jacobine." That high impatient voice, whistling over the wires.

"Hey Hal, it's Jack."

"What you got down there?"

"There's no story here."

"What do you mean, no story." I held the phone away from my ear as his voice rose.

"That's the way the cookie crumbles."

"There's gotta be a story!"

“That’s the way the shoe drops.” I was wracking my brain for more dumb clichés. Hal KNEW how much I hated clichés. Come on, Hal, remember!

“I don’t get it,” said Hal. “What’s going on?”

“The story went twenty-three skidoo.”

A long pause.

“You in trouble?” asked Hal. Finally.

“That’s right.”

“Get out of there any way you can. We’ll get those guys.”

“Right. Hold on.”

I looked over at Tony, who looked like a well-dressed boulder in his chair – unmoving, ominous, unreadable.

“Hal’s pissed.”

“Fuck him.” Tony gestured at Hank, who lumbered out of his chair and punched on the speaker phone, then rested his hand not-so-gently on my shoulder. Tony cleared his throat.

“Had a nice chat with your boy here, Mr. Jacobine.”

“So I gathered,” Hal said. “Looks like he’s wasted your time. And mine. Jack, I’m gonna wanta talk to you when you get back here.”

“Don’t be too hard on the kid,” Tony said. “He feels bad enough as it is.” For the first time, Tony smiled at me. If he meant to reassure me, he needed practice.

I was shaken and angry when I got into the car. I’d only had about four hours sleep in the previous week, as I’d chased leads and tips around Southern California, and I’d been living on four or five pots of coffee a day. As I started the long trip back to San Diego, I felt a weird pain in my chest that grew more agonizing with each mile. Somewhere around San Clemente my car started weaving as I began twitching from the pain.

I’m not sure how I found the hospital. There are weird blank spaces in my memory about the next few hours – glimpses of doctors’ and nurses’ faces, lying on a table with wires taped to me. They shot me up with something, and, when I was fully conscious, explained that the coffee and the fear had driven my heart into overload.

Hal was in his little glass-walled office when I finally got to the *Union-Tribune* about 11 a.m. He didn’t look too excited to see me.

“Hal, we’ve got a great story here. Give me a couple of hours and I’ll have it on your desk.” I knew that I looked like death: I’d seen myself in a mirror as I left the hospital, and I was pale and drawn with red eyes and rumpled clothes. But I hadn’t bothered to stop at home to freshen up. I was too eager to take Hal up on his word and “get those guys.”

Hal shifted in his chair, which creaked under the load. Hal was short, maybe 5 feet 6 inches, and built like a bear – a teddy bear, maybe, if a teddy bear had black hair and cropped it real close on top of his head, and also

wore short-sleeved starched white shirts and clip-on ties around a double-size neck. I recognized that shifting motion, which went with the sort of distant look Hal got on his face when he was about to do something that – if anyone else had done it – would be considered inserting the shaft, but which Hal thought of as good journalism.

“Those guys gave you a pretty hard time?”

“Yeah. They said I wasn’t leaving that room alive unless I backed off the story.”

The look on Hal’s face became more distant, but – and this seemed odd – for the first time in all the years I’d known him, there seemed to be a crack in the façade, through which I glimpsed a flickering of uneasiness. Or fear.

“I’ve been thinking about it,” Hal said. “I don’t think there’s a story here. We can’t document that stuff.”

I argued. I swore I’d dig up anything we needed. Hal was unmovable. Finally I gave up, leaning back in my chair and just staring at him. Hal nodded.

“Good, that’s that then.” He picked up a familiar-looking slip of paper he’d been fiddling with while we talked. “I’ve been going through the stuff on your desk. Why don’t you follow up on this story instead?”

He handed me the paper. On it was written some contact information I’d dug up, a phone number and a name. Davila. A Cuban who was looking for ex-military men to fight abroad.

“You used to be in the military, didn’t you?”

“Yeah.”

“Why don’t you let yourself get recruited by this guy . . . this Davila guy. I promise to print the story, all the gory details. But forget this El Kamas thing.”

I went back to my desk. Sure, I’d do the Davila story. Piece of cake. But first I had something to take care of.

I spent the next few hours talking to friends I’d made during the course of my various investigations. First, there was a soft-spoken grey-haired guy who just happened to be head of the Anaheim homicide detectives, a guy with a well-tanned craggy face and ice-cold eyes who was more-than-intrigued to hear about a CIA assassin working in his city. The assassin’s sidekick, the leftist-beating thug, was the cherry on the investigative cake.

Then I made my second call, to a very straight-arrow guy who spent two days a week working out in a gym, and the rest of his time hunting down bad guys for Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. He was delighted to be given the location of a shipload of illegal weapons. And so on. By the end of the day, I’d talked to two hard-drinking undercover officers for the Department of Corrections who went by the code names “Crusader Rabbit”

and “Moco Verde” (aka “Green Snot”); the key state investigative agency in Sacramento, and a bunch of others.

When I hung up the phone, I was satisfied that the wheels had been set in motion, and would grind very fine when they got to my pals from El Kamas. It was not the sort of thing I would normally do – journalistic ethics urge caution when sharing confidential information with the authorities – but I had never told the El Kamas people that I wouldn’t contact the cops. They had just assumed I wouldn’t. And besides – and this was the clincher – the El Kamas killers had *seriously* threatened me.

THEN I went to work on the Davila story. I was finishing it up a week later when my phone rang.

It was Tony, the Mafia lawyer.

“What did you do?” Tony asked.

“What do you mean?”

“We can’t turn around without tripping over a federal, state or local agent.”

“Don’t know anything about it,” I said.

A week after that, the head of Anaheim detectives called me. “Those El Kamas guys bombed their own office and fled. We caught one in Miami. Still looking for the other two.”

Great. They were gone. That’s all I wanted.

Meanwhile, I was having new problems with Hal over the Davila story.

Hal was the sort of editor who thought he could edit anybody and everybody with a red pencil that was like a hatchet. And he did. When he was done, every reporter in the place sounded like Hal Jacobine, which might have been OK if Hal wrote on the level of Dickens or Proust or Virginia Woolf. But Hal’s stuff read like a telegraph message from a bad Hemingway imitator. If the *Union-Tribune* had been a theater company with Hal in charge, and Shakespeare had been on the staff and turned in his “to be or not to be” speech, Hal would have read it with an increasingly pained expression, and then his pencil would have started flailing. You remember the speech. It starts out:

HAMLET: To be, or not to be: that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;  
No more; and by a sleep to say we end  
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation  
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;

To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come . . .

“Pretty archaic language, wouldn’t you say, Willie?” Hal would mutter. “And what’s this ‘consummation’ business? A big word, too big and too sexy for our readers.” Hal would scribble away, and, when he was done, hand “Willie Shakespeare” the rewrite with a triumphant smile. “Here, try this!” And this is what Willie would read:

HAMLET: I’m trying to decide whether to kill myself. It isn’t easy.

Hal would grin with satisfaction, missing – or more likely ignoring – the stunned look on Shakespeare’s face. “See? Nice, tight, tells the story without all the fol-de-rol. Go back and work on the rest of your stuff, keep it tight, just like that. Tight sells!”

Hal had worked a similar magic on my Davila story. The portrait of the whippet-like Davila, his cruelty and greed, had been reduced to a short businesslike article about the mechanics of illegally recruiting mercenaries, with only a hint that there was anything wrong with it. Tight. Telegraphic.

I went to my old friend Chaffin Wallace, the managing editor, a man who’d been a rip-snorting reporter and editor in his day, but who now sat in his big glass-walled office and rocked and rocked in his chair, with the funniest sort of chained smile on his face. Some of the older reporters called him “the caged lion.” It hadn’t been his idea to make Jacobine the city editor, but Wallace was near the end of his career, and ready to do anything the relatively new editor-in-chief wanted. And the editor-in-chief had wanted Jacobine.

“I don’t fight those battles anymore,” Wallace said.

“I got it,” I said. “But I’m tired of risking my life for stories, only to see them spiked or chopped up into wastebasket fodder. I’ve won a wall full of awards for my writing, but I don’t think I’ll win another one while I’m working under these conditions.”

“Maybe not,” Wallace said, slowly rocking.

“I’d rather have a desk job.”

“Good decision,” he said. “Always room for a good editor, secure too.”

So I gave up writing for the newspaper, like a lot of other reporters did. Some went to other newspapers. Some ended up on the news or copy desks. As time passed, better editors came, ones who knew how to let good reporters have their head. But I’d already turned my ambitions to poetry and fiction, and to bringing creative writing into the schools (see accompanying biography). Sometimes we old-timers talk about what we might have written, the stories we might have covered, if it hadn’t been for people like

Hal, at the *Union-Tribune* and many other newspapers. Sometimes I say a prayer for Hal, who did the best he could, and left the newspaper much earlier than he wanted, looking like a sad teddy bear as he cleaned out his desk.

And sometimes I think of that room in Anaheim, those three angry men, and the hint of death at midnight. There's a regret for the stories not written, for the odd back-alley people I'll never meet, and for the zest that comes with uncovering corruption and exposing it, whether it's the sort of corruption that can harm a nation, or the shysters who prey on San Diego families. I do what I can, passing on tips to other editors, fingers itching to cover these stories myself.

These days, the only thing I'm doing at midnight is creative writing – poetry mostly – or watching old Clint Eastwood movies like “The Unforgiven.” It's a film about an ice-cold killer who tries to go straight after he falls in love with a fine woman, but the woman dies and the ice creeps back into his heart and his trigger finger starts curling . . . anyway, it's a great movie. It brings back memories.

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## **A Hopeful Conclusion ....**

It was only AFTER the Oct. 15 gala that we discovered that the site of the event – the Café Libertalia – was named after a famous pirate colony in Africa ... a colony dedicated to freeing human beings from every form of slavery: from subjection to greedy overlords, from the shackles of ignorance, and so on.

Wonderful. For that's exactly what we are trying to do, here in our West Coast “colony” for 100,000-poets-for-change.

The effort is NOT something new for us.

The poems you've just read illustrate how the writers of San Diego have been striving for wisdom and freedom for many years, each in his or her own way.

There are dangers in this, of course. I dealt with those dangers, and the very real rewards, in my opening remarks at the Oct. 15 event:

I have a confession to make. Confessions can be fun, especially if they're full of color & pizzazz, & I can promise you mine is ...

I've received a lot of publicity as the retired *Union-Tribune* editor who founded the Border Voices project, which sends poets into hundreds of classrooms throughout San Diego. Others know me primarily for my weekly TV show, where I interview Nobel laureates & others about how they write poetry. Or they've read some of the 23 books I've published.

But none of that is what I really am, & THAT is the confession.

What I REALLY am is a rabble-rouser.

For example, I was one of the original, leading organizers of the Vietnam War protests in San Francisco & Berkeley, protests that spread across the nation & toppled a president.

Because of the terrible things I saw at that time, my rabble-rousing has been more cerebral ever since.

Today, we're in the middle of a new explosion of rebellion, of demands for change, & we need to be a part of it.

Civilization is beginning to sing a new song, & it is our song.

But I return to my underlying theme:

I saw terrible things occurring around me back in the 1960s, & in other crusades I have been involved in since. People turned on each other, & on their fellow citizens, with contempt & violence.

We cannot let people of hate co-opt the latest movement for creative change.

That is one reason I have promoted poetry in the schools since 1993. By teaching our kids to think for ourselves, we build hope for the future.

And poetry is the best way to do that. As the greatest historian of the last 400 years said, poetry & civilization are pretty much the same thing.

It was in the songs they sang around their campfires that our ancestors – 100,000 years ago – discovered the dream of civilization.

Today, in the Café Libertalia, we will listen to poets, with new dreams & new songs, offering competing & exciting visions of the future.

Thank you for joining us.

– Jack Webb