Newsletter

The Writer's Block

By Sandra D. Simmer

Winter 2026

Dear Readers, I hope everyone had a joyous holiday season. I spent time with my family and connected with old and new friends through California Writers Club (Mt. Diablo) meetings, the Benicia Literacy Table Talk chats, Pt. Richmond Library critique group, and several bay area poetry/arts collaborative organizations. Thank you to everyone organizing and hosting these wonderful activities and for allowing me to share your announcements and outcomes with other creative spirits.

See page two and three for my poems written to two inspirational paintings from Ekphrastic art events hosted at galleries in collaboration with Suzanne Bruce, Fairfield Poet Laureate Emerita and Kathy Monroe, Benicia Poet Laurete.

Are you smarter than a fifth grader? During the dark and rainy winter months of January and February my attention turned to writing memoirs and critiquing short stories from my archives. For any writer that likes a challenge, I've included a fun writing exercise supplied by my substitute teacher friend. See page four for the prompt and page five for my short story response.

Keep creating! Spring (and my next issue) are coming soon.

Sandra D. Simmer

www.sandradsimmer.com

Please visit my website for more information on my creative work

All rights reserved for this newsletter. All written work and art cannot be reproduced in any form without written permission from the author/artists.

© 2026

Change of Season

The sun shines brightly on a September afternoon

Not a cloud in the sky like a mid-summer day

Only crisp tasting air and a slight chill in the breeze

Alert my senses to note, the season is about to change.

The path I take through the forest to the lake shore

Surprises me with its new rainbow-colored carpeting

Layered, veined, and entwined like a woven fabric

Of red, orange, yellow, and brown mottled leaves,

Remnants of the season tangled in perfect chaos.

There is a satisfying crunch under foot as I walk.

The once bright green leaves now brittle with age

Release the fragrance of fresh mulch with each step.

The trees have transformed their dense leafy costume

Into an eye-catching cry for my attention,

An attempt to celebrate their connection to life.

"See, we're still here, even more beautiful in our decline.

Let us share our glorious gift of vibrant foliage

Before we become dormant for a long winter nap.

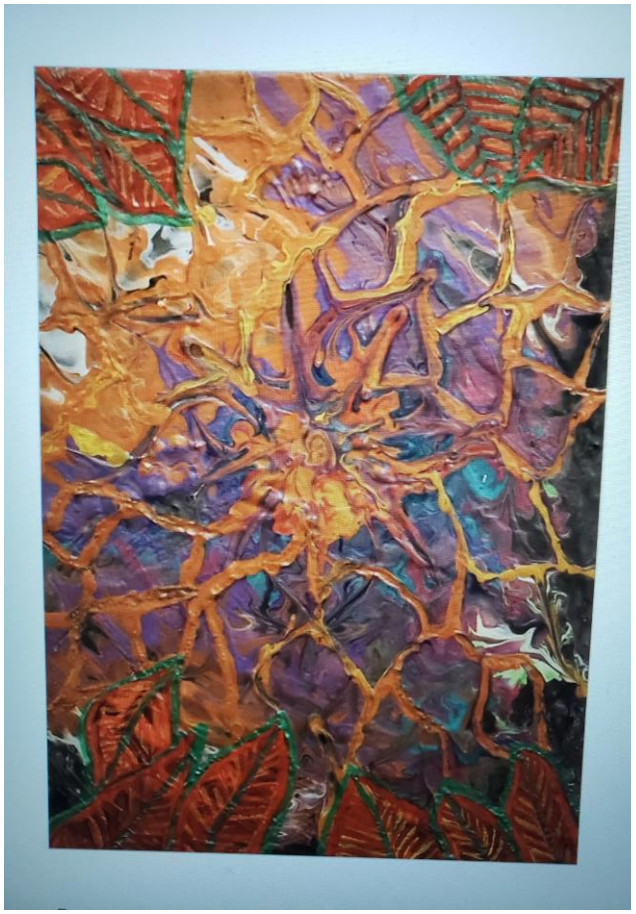
But never fear, we shall return to bud, and grow,

And provide shade for your next summer in the sun."

My heart fills with gratitude for their colorful bequest,

And for the reminder life will renew in spring

For I, too, must prepare for a change of season.



Ekphrastic Poetry to Art

October 2025

Solano Town Center Gallery

Sponsored by

www.fvaa-arts.org

and Suzanne Bruce

Fairfield Poet Laureate Emerita

fairfieldpoetlaureate.emerita@gmail.com

Art: Change of Season

Artist: Rachel Warren

Poem: Change of Season

Poet: Sandra D. Simmer

Check with Suzanne Bruce for information on coming events in April and May

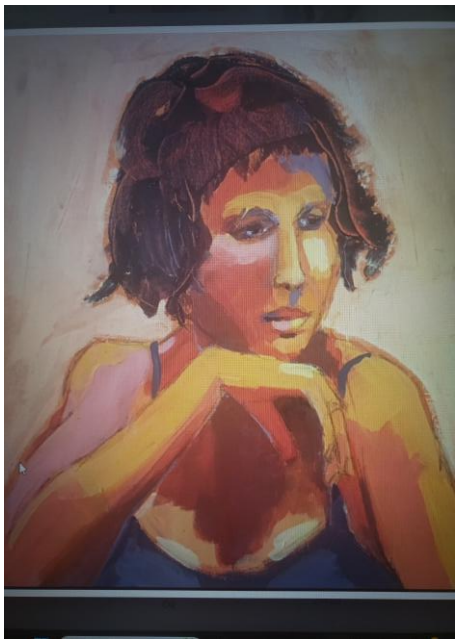
Ekphrastic Poetry

Viewing the amazing artwork of the many local artists on exhibit at galleries around the east bay area has been a major source of joy. Having the opportunity to write poetry inspired by a work of art makes it really special.

***This page includes the inspiration painting and my response poem from the* Ekphrastic Event at Martinez Main Street Gallery October 2025**

Coordinated by Kathy Monroe

Contact:poetlaureatebenicia@gmail.com



Artwork: Introspection

Artist: Pam McCauley

pmwatercolor@gmail.com

Poem: Weathering the Storm Within

Poet: Sandra D. Simmer

www.sandradsimmer.com

Weathering the Storm Within

The girl in the painting looks preoccupied and pensive.

What could she be thinking behind the shadowed façade?

Imagine her thoughts as passengers gathered into a small craft

Carried by the currents along the waterways of her mind,

Sometimes meandering down quiet streams of consciousness.

Other times losing control in divergent river rapids of confusion.

A mindful presence places hands upon the helm to steer

The vessel plagued by disparate contemplation towards

A lake of calm introspection,

All unbeknownst to the outside observer

Who's not included in the action taking place

Inside the internal world behind the somber face.

Will the captain of her destiny choose to guide her

To a restful resolution of her uncharted deliberation?

We may never know.

s

Writing Prompt

Use as many words as possible from the list below in a short story

Balderdash, gewgaw, skedaddle, hootenanny, flummox, hunky-dory, snaggletooth, wishy-washy, thingamabob, topsy-turvy.

See the following page for the children's story I wrote using the word list. Enjoy!

Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader?

Are you familiar with the television game show that has aired on Fox, Nickelodeon, or Amazon prime since 2007? The premise is adults face questions taken from elementary school subjests and can be assisted by school-age cast members to try to win a million dollar prize.

While I won't be passing out any prizes, I thought it might be fun to challenge my readers to answer a prompt I was given during a writing group session a few years ago. One of our members, an elementary school substitute teacher, brought us a list of words she uses as a writing exercise for her 5th and 6th grade students. My story is on page five.

Challenge yourself to write an original story using her list of words. The goal is to use as many words from the list as possible in a short story. For this exercise you may use any genre for any age reader. (To vary the prompt, you may pick random words by flipping through a dictionary.)

***See the sidebar for the list of 5th grade story words.**

Email me at sandradsimmer@gmail.com if you enjoyed the prompt.

Other updates:

What's happening with my own artwork these days? I've joined an informal art group at my condominium complex on Monday afternoons. It's been great meeting other creative neighbors and sharing our artwork. I'm also taking a mixed media class at the Richmond Art Center to add new techniques to my skill box. Both are fun and relaxing activities.

The exciting news is that my writing muse has reappeared and I am happily back to working on my second science fiction novel. It was put on the shelf in 2025 for a while, but a new year and a new frame of mind has me reengaged with my protagonist, Sally Jablonski, and her exciting adventures. Look for part one *The Reclamation: Earth Under Siege* on Amazon and watch for more updates in my next issue.

Stay happy, well, and creative!

Click link below to view my Book of 42 interview on You Tube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nF76qBHT8kk

Thank you everyone for reading my newsletter. You are welcome to forward it to other interested readers, writers, and artists. To subscribe visit www.sandradsimmer.com

Best wishes to all!

Grandpa Rabbit

Grandpa Rabbit stretched his stiff bones and crawled out from under the briar patch bush he called home. The early morning sun in the east gave a pink and purple cast to the morning sky. It was the perfect time of day to look for a breakfast of carrots and greens in his favorite neighboring vegetable garden. But just as he started to hop across the country road, a little furry ball of trouble came tumbling into view. It landed topsy-turvy at his feet. Even with cottontail in the air and long ears on the ground, Grandpa Rabbit could tell it was his youngest grandchild, Rupert Rabbit, or Rudy for short.

"Rudy, my boy, are you okay?" asked Grandpa Rabbit. The little rabbit looked flummoxed to see his grandfather bending over him. But he untangled himself, quickly sat up, and gave him a big snaggletooth grin.

"Grandpa, you're up! I'm so happy to see you," exclaimed Rudy. "I came to invite you to a big hootenanny at Aunt Petunia's rabbit warren. Everyone's coming to celebrate the arrival of spring."

"Balderdash!" said Grandpa. "I'm not going to any party. I'm just hunky-dory in my little briar patch. Being around all you wild youngin's makes my whiskers hurt. I'm too old for all that folderol."

"But, Grandpa you have to come," cried Rudy. "I'm not supposed to tell, but it's a surprise birthday party for you. We all want to celebrate your amazing life."

"I don't need any gewgaws or thingamabobs at my age. I don't need a party," said Grandpa. "You skedaddle on home and tell your auntie I won't be there."

Rudy looked thoughtful for a moment. He tried to think of something to get his grandfather to come to the family gathering. Everyone loved and respected Grandpa, even if he was a grumpy old jackrabbit at times. They would be so disappointed if he didn't attend.

Rudy was about to give up when he looked across the road. He could see the lush green carrot tops just on the other side of the fence. He knew how to get Grandpa to the party.

"Aunt Petunia is making your favorite carrot cake with baby lettuce green frosting for the event. You don't want to miss that," said Rudy. "It's your favorite."

Grandpa Rabbit looked a bit wishy-washy as he considered his options. He didn't like all the fuss and bother his family made. But he would have to risk climbing under the fence to get to the carrots nearby. The sun was getting higher in the sky and the gardener would soon be at work chopping weeds with his big hoe. And he did love Petunia's carrot cake.

"Okay, Rudy, you win. I'll come with you," said Grandpa. "Just you and your cousins try to be quiet."

"Yay!" yelled Rudy. "Let's go!" He hopped away at a quick pace barely glancing to see if his grandfather followed.

Grandpa Rabbit cringed at the loud squeal of delight but shook himself clean of dust and twigs. With a hint of a smile on his face, the old rabbit slowly hopped down the bunny trail after Rudy.