



**DECEMBER 2025**

**PDF VERSION**



**SUPPORTING WRITERS OF THE SACRAMENTO REGION SINCE 1955.**



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## *Celebrating our 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary !*

### *Welcome Greetings –*

We are a professional association whose purpose is to foster, encourage, and educate writers and independent publishers, representing all genres, from all ages, and writing at every stage in their careers. We offer monthly meetings featuring opportunities to network with other writers, skill-building workshops, and presentations by regionally recognized authors, editors, agents, and publishers. Our monthly meetings are held on the second Monday of each month from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m at 5501 Dewey Drive, Fair Oaks in the Fellowship Hall (straight back from the road, through the gate in the white fence). Visitors are always welcome.

In addition, we offer less formal Writers' Mingles where all writers are welcome. Our Mingles currently meet the third Saturday of every month from 9 to 11 a.m. at the Denny's Restaurant in Roseville (corner of Sunrise and Douglas).

SSWC is also known for its well-designed, professional "critique groups" where other writers provide intensive feedback for various creative works while in progress. Critical revision is often an essential step in creating a successful work.

Our professional library and monthly newsletter provide additional member resources.

Network and share with other writers. Be informed. Be inspired. Join us!



**DECEMBER 8  
7 TO 9 PM**

### *Annual Holiday Potluck*

**CELEBRATE SSWC'S 70<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY WITH YOUR  
MEMORIES AND REMINISCES.**

**CROSSROADS FELLOWSHIP  
CHRISTIAN CHURCH  
5501 DEWEY DRIVE, FAIROAKS, CA**

**BRING YOUR FAVORITE DISH AND A STORY TO SHARE!**

**EVERYONE IS WELCOME.**



## **STORIES OF THE SEASON**

**BY: LINDA VALLATORE, CAROL JOHNSON, PAT BIASOTTI, AND MARIE MCCLURE**

### **Season of Light** By Linda Villatore

Before dawn, I peeked out my bedroom window. All was still.

A sanctifying snow had fallen overnight, blessing the trees, muffling all sound. On that cold Christmas morning, the air was clean, even and calm.

The oddest thing was the light. The trees and misty sky were blurred in powdery blue... everything outside was resting, effervescent and blue.

I opened my eyes wide to a surprising peace, wondering at this blue. I woke my little sister so she could look out with me.

The tranquility was almost blue enough to quell her Christmas excitement. Not quite. Urgent to unwrap presents downstairs, she tugged at my sleeve. "Let's see what's under the tree!"

Down we went.

As I had wished, Santa left a heavy box for me. Ice skates!

In the winters of my childhood, amidst the wooded lakes of New York State the trees lost their leaves. I could pull ice spears off the trees. They looked dead against the sky. The earth chilled. The ground and lakes chilled, then froze solid and hard. The slant of light changed. The weakened sun had almost abandoned us and the terrible ice queen reigned with her cold bitter heart.

Under this white shield, my childhood memory is rooted in the culture of the north. I remember how the frozen ice on Sparkle Lake felt under the blades of my skates.

As a child, in New York, I felt seasons change. I looked up, concerned, at the diminished sky, the feeble sun. Why does sunlight grow weak... still... why does it snow in winter? why do we have seasons of light in the north.

At Christmas, what else are we praising with a tree full of lights? Is it the ancient hope of renewal, of the sun's return?

The music and stories of my childhood Christmas brought comfort to my winters in the north. That happiness of lights on an evergreen tree, snow, and ice skating formed this as a time of goodwill, inwardness, and gifting. It was easy to celebrate these.

With our rituals, we pray that the sun will return to its full power, and bring back light to the world. Then, only then, will that light have strength to melt the snow, thaw the hard ground, raise the grass underneath, and

hatch the bugs and flower the wheat. Sheep and birds can be born and will have food to eat. We pray that the trees will leaf again. For now, life appears dead. It is winter north of the equator. The question is an old one. Our oldest answers contained magic. The actual cause is a strange one. You wouldn't guess it. We keep investigating our situation. Five hundred years ago, it was a struggle to figure this out. We discover that we are flinging through space, around a hot star. Imagine that!

Knowledge, in that past could cost you your life. It needed a telescope to prove. The idea that the earth went around the sun took 100 years to accept. But after that, we learned even more...that our planet is tipped over a bit. It travels around its heat source at an angle. Earth is not straight up facing the sun. It's tilted. It's cockeyed. Because of that tilt, we have seasons. In New York State, the temperature varies 100 degrees Fahrenheit between winter and summer, there are seasons of light.

That early Christmas morning, peering out my window at the wintry scene, I didn't know then, that I was living nearer the top of our tipped over planet. So, being north, in New York State, in my house, and I peered out the window, I was leaning away from the sun, getting less heat. There you have it.

I want to return to my ice skates...

Ice grows towards the center of a lake. It is not flat. When it's cold enough to start freezing, the surface water grows still. It freezes unevenly, in chunks which link up.

The edges around the shoreline freeze first. As cold deepens, the center begins to slush up. Winter winds move the waves around out there, so the center hardens last. Lake ice makes noise. It moans creaks and cracks. It has bubbles of air in it. It moves, in cycles, thawing, now refreezing, thawing again, until it stays frozen day and night in the grip of deepest winter.

The surface ice finally closes over and covers the fish. Most fish will survive the winter this way because the water below is warmer than outside, or on the land. The fish swim around down there under the ice. They keep eating. They do just fine.

But up top you know the ice queen has you.

Lake ice is bumpy and has ridges and bubbles in it. You scrape over these, or carve around them when you skate. Lake ice is silvery grey with white seams which crack and shear down into the depths. Who knows how deep these seams are? They run off in every direction. The submerged air bubbles offer some clue to the depth of the ice. You learn to read these carefully.

The center of the lake is the thinnest ice. You have to watch out. You can fall in.

Ice skating on a lake is more difficult than ice skating on a rink. I was never very good at it, but enjoyed being out there clacking along, blades against the hard surface on a cold bright day, sweating, and puffing steam.

One typically bitter-cold day out on the ice, I saw my friend Karen Gordon's mom had built a fire on the far shore. I had to skate over there, almost a mile. Clever mother that she was, she somehow had produced hot cocoa. She had imagined in advance the pleasure this would give my cold nose that day. I took off my mittens and warmed my hands and face over her fire, and sipped cocoa in a hot mug. The sun would get dimmer. It would get colder. I had to start back. Fortified by the hot sugary treat, I looked over the span of ice to the far shore, and knew I could make it back.



## *Christmas Time* *by Carol Johnson*

*Christmas all over the United States is celebrated in various ways, and in the very short daylight and often the worst weather conditions, it is still "Merry and Bright" and generally speaking is one of America's and possibly the world's favorite holidays.*

*On Arizona and New Mexico, the candles in many cases are placed in handmade cut-out paper bags half-filled with sand, commonly referred to as luminarias. The effect is a lit-up fence along sidewalks, driveways, and along roof lines. The peaceful illumination that brings light to the evening darkness emits an incredible ambiance in the neighborhood or shopping area. Visitors, viewers, and carolers alike are thrilled by the amazing flickering of the light inside those brown bags, a scene prevalent in the Southwest.*

*Far away, Alaska offers a different Christmas lighting story. Strings of colored lights strung from one side of a home to another and around the front door indicate Christmas is truly on its way. The lights, carefully placed, lift the spirits of the locals even through the mostly dark days of December. The light reflections on the icy, crusty snow piles give an invitation to guests and children entering a neighborhood to prepare their wish lists. Often, the Northern Lights and bright stars are visible in the heavens, as much as the Christmas lights emit joy on the frozen, cold earth of the North.*

*Whatever Christmas decorating is to you, we must remember the reason for the season!*

*Carol Johnson*

## **A CHRISTMAS TREE WITH CHARACTER**

By Pat Biasotti

Decorator Christmas trees covered with velvet bows and crystal balls may be *tres chic*, but a colorful tree festooned with Pac-Man, Mickey Mouse, Marvin, and the Cookie Monster once fascinated kids of all ages.

Many years ago, Mary S. created such a holiday surprise for two small grandchildren. When they arrived at grandmother's house, they laughed, seeing the tiny tree decorated with six Disney ornaments from the Sears catalog. "Micky Mousie! Micky Mousie!" grandson Keith squealed, jumping up and down.

From that foot-high tree in a basement playroom, through the years, that tree grew to an oversized twelve feet, decorated with over two hundred character ornaments. Captivated children and adults alike clustered around it to identify ornaments like Jack Frost, the Little Drummer Boy, Jack in the Beanstalk, or the Frog Prince.

However, the real fun was the collecting. Mary used family vacation trips to seek all-year Christmas shops in different cities. Friends also got into the act. One sent Humpty Dumpty from Victoria, Canada. A house guest from Mobile, Alabama, brought with her Santa's *nine* reindeer (yes, Rudolph makes nine).

Completing a particular set—she looked for years to find a Goldilocks to join the Three Bears—often became a treasure hunt. Marjorie Goyner, of “Dorothea’s, in Folsom, California (the first West Coast all-year Christmas shop) explained, “Few companies make storybook ornaments, bringing out maybe one new series each holiday season, and available only a year or two. Consequently, they become rare, more valuable with time, and prized collector’s items.”

In time, Mary’s August birthday began to look like Christmas. Her husband, previously very indifferent about her hobby, surprised her one birthday with a meticulously hand-crafted Scrooge with a long flowing beard, white nightcap, and ruby-red velvet dressing gown. Also nestled in the box was Bob Cratchett in top hat, wool overcoat, and with Tiny Tim perched on his shoulder.

However, Mary had her Santa’s helpers. She would beg people leaving on vacation trips, “Please look for Popeye while you’re in Boston. Olive Oyle and Wimpy have spent years alone on the tree.” Friends searched and searched before someone triumphantly pounced on a Popeye in Folsom (practically in Mary’s backyard).

Mary’s treasure hunt continued for thirty years or more, until her death, but her hobby leaves precious memories and heirlooms for her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Grandson Keith grew up many years ago, and now “Micky Mousie” occupies the place of honor on his own family’s Christmas tree.

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## Lighting The Tree in Tennessee

By Marie McClure

For over a week, we'd been talking about seeing them light our town's Christmas Tree. We ( my family of four children and my sister's family of four children ) were all very excited.

The day finally came and we all bundled up for an exciting evening outside to see them light the tree.

The streets were lined with people from all around the area. Everyone was in a happy mood laughing and talking to each other even though we were strangers.

It was time. Everyone got quiet.

Then it happened. The tree came alive with lights. Everyone clapped and yelled "Merry Christmas."

That is, except my sons. They were quiet. Truly a look of disappointment on their faces.

We looked at them and asked, "What's the matter?"

The middle son spoke up and said, "I thought they were going to set it on fire."

A true story we still laugh about. These boys are now great grandparents.



## *Sylvia McBride*

### **A Shared Place**

(Between Birthdays)

The world has been rearranged,  
Rhythms long the ritual of our days  
Suddenly displaced  
By strange, uncharted ways.  
Today's food stored away,  
And we like hurried squirrels  
Rush round, piling up our trove  
For gray uncertain days.  
We carry on and try to make  
Of our reduced and tossing world  
Some sense, and try to share

A noble word with others in our space.

But now we know the value of the hours.

Thank you for your calm and quiet phrase - -

Words that rain like rubies in this closing space:

Heaven to be here, in a shared place.

Except of birds flying high

So remember to continue to try



## Flower

Written by Karen Sepahmansour

August 31, 2025

I walk along flowers and plants  
Because God has given me a chance  
To test my goals in sun and rain  
To lift my heart from any pain

I walk along the mud and dryness  
To experience the waves of kindness  
Faces of ups and downs  
And the nature to minimize the frowns

I walk along fruit trees bitter and sweet  
And remember to forget the tweets

I walk alone. efforts seem in vain  
That come with so many domains  
As I walk along a big hill  
I stumble remembering to chill.

I walk along fruit trees bitter and sweet  
And remember to forget the tweets  
Except of birds flying high  
So remember to continue to try

*Karen Sepahmansour*



*December 20 --- 9 to 11 am*

*Denny's Roseville*

*(Douglas and North Sunrise)*

*Bring a story or poem  
to give away!*

*Wrap it with a ribbon.*



## *Tips for Crafting Iconic Holiday Characters for Your Stories*

### Making a “Grinch” . . .

The character of the ***Grinch***, created by Dr. Seuss, has become an enduring symbol of the "seasonal villain"—one who not only causes disruption but also embodies the themes, atmosphere, and distinctive qualities associated with the season.

This article will examine methods for developing a seasonal antagonist that possesses the same level of depth and memorability.

#### 1. Define the Spirit of the Season

Every seasonal story is built around certain emotions, activities, and symbols. Before designing your villain, ask yourself: What does this season mean to your audience? Is it about generosity, togetherness, hope, or celebration? Your villain should act in direct contrast to these themes, creating dramatic tension and opportunities for growth.

#### 2. Give Your Villain Relatable Motives

The most memorable villains aren't evil just for the sake of it—they have motives that readers can understand, even if they don't agree with them. The Grinch despised Christmas because he felt excluded and annoyed by the festivities. When crafting your character, consider what personal grievances or misunderstood feelings drive their actions. This approach not only makes the villain believable but also opens the door for possible redemption.

#### 3. Use Iconic Visuals and Themes

Seasonal villains should visually and symbolically stand out against the backdrop of the holiday or event. The Grinch's green color and mischievous grin are instantly recognizable, while his actions—such as stealing presents—are tied directly to Christmas traditions. Think about how your villain's appearance, behavior, and schemes can play off the imagery of the season to make them unforgettable.

#### 4. Balance Menace with Humor or Heart

Part of the Grinch's appeal is his comedic mischief and the ultimate warmth he shows. If your villain is too menacing, they may alienate young readers or dampen the festive spirit. Consider weaving humor, quirks, or moments of vulnerability into their characterization. This balance makes your villain entertaining and gives your story emotional depth.

#### 5. Build Toward Transformation

The best seasonal villains end up learning a lesson or undergoing a change. The Grinch's heart grows three sizes when he discovers the true meaning of Christmas. As you write, think

about how your villain’s journey can mirror the seasonal themes—whether it’s forgiveness, generosity, or love—and leave readers with a sense of hope and renewal.

## Conclusion

Creating a seasonal villain like the Grinch involves more than just crafting a troublemaker; it’s about designing a character who both challenges and ultimately reinforces the spirit of the season. By focusing on relatable motives, strong visuals, and a path toward transformation, you can write a villain who becomes an iconic part of holiday storytelling for years to come.

- Define the season’s core themes
- Give your villain understandable motives
- Play with recognizable visuals and traditions
- Balance villainy with humor and heart
- Let your character grow and change

Happy writing and may your next seasonal story become a tradition in its own right!

####



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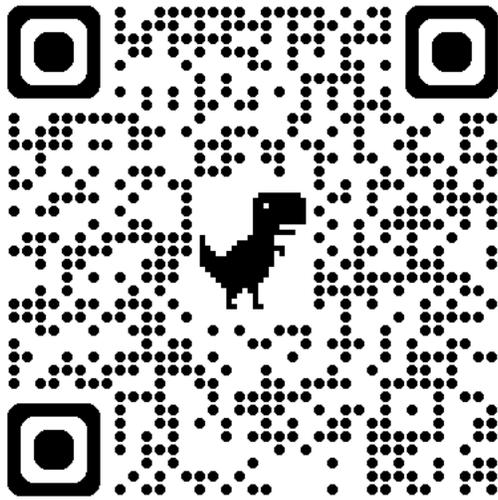
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