



Santa Barbara's muses, Marcia Meier, Janet Lucy, and Perie Longo, inspire writers.

Harvesting creative *dreams*

*"... point out the sun breaking
through the fog, how it swifts like a deer just above your head.
Reach for it, and when all you feel is your own hand,
write."*

—Santa Barbara's Poet Laureate, Perie Longo

It's harvest time, marking the end of the growing season; time to reap the rewards from spring plantings and summer nourishment. But fruits and vegetables are not the only treasures being harvested from our rich soil. Santa Barbara's *cultural* climate has proved to be a fertile environment for artists as well, and three local women writers—Perie Longo, Marcia Meier, and Janet Lucy—are doing their part to enhance that climate. Instead of sun, soil, and water, they offer instruction, encouragement, and inspiration to budding artists in the community.

The Santa Barbara Poet Laureate position was initiated in 2005 as a way to reward such leaders in the art community, specifically distinguished local poets. This year, Perie Longo was awarded the honorary position for her successful published works, involvement in the arts community, and critical acclaim. Her Laureate duty, "to advance awareness of and appreciation for literary arts and humanities within the greater Santa Barbara community," comes quite naturally for Perie, who is well-known for her involvement with the Santa Barbara Book and Author Festival and California Poets in the Schools program. She also teaches poetry privately, and, as a Marriage and Family Therapist and registered Poetry Therapist, facilitates workshops for Hospice of Santa Barbara and Sanctuary Psychiatric Centers.

"My goal is to continue making poetry accessible to the community," says Perie. To do so, she weaves poetry into local events including Santa Barbara's highly successful 1st Thursday events (on the first Thursday night of every month). She has also written poems for the Summer Solstice event; for the exhibit of *Forged Iron Crosses of Chiapas, Mexico*, on view at Casa de la Guerra through the end of November; and in a monthly "Poetry Matters" column for the *Santa Barbara Independent*. She is particularly pleased to be one of 50 women invited to contribute a letter and poem for a Girls, Inc. book called *Letters from the Heart II*, based on the theme "What I Wish I Knew Growing Up," to be published in 2008.

While very successful in her own right, Perie's career as a poetry teacher and therapist has sewn fertile seeds of creativity in the minds of all who work with her. "Everyone is creative and capable of writing poetry if given a chance, a few tools, and good examples of poems for inspiration," says Perie. "Most important, given encouragement to explore their inner life and then have it valued, I find my students are always surprised by their

creativity, and I believe nurturing it, in many different forms, aids incredibly in the self-discovery process."

In 1984, Perie joined the Santa Barbara Writers Conference (SBWC) as a workshop presenter. Now she and Executive Director, Marcia Meier, collaborate on bringing new talent to Santa Barbara. Like Perie, who seeks to nurture young talent, one of Marcia's dreams was fulfilled with the creation of the Young Writers Program element of the SBWC.

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"Under the Young Writers Program, teenagers can experience the entire conference—all the workshops, panels and speakers—for a discounted fee, plus we have special events throughout the week just for them," said Marcia. "We also provided lunch for them with Paul Fedorko, an agent with Trident Media Group in New York ... This year, seven kids pitched their novels to him."

Urging writers of all ages to nurture their creative souls, Marcia stresses that they keep working and never give up. As a testament to her philosophy, at this year's SBWC opening night festivities, Marcia introduced Selden Edwards who had worked on his novel, *Fin de Siècle*, for more than 30 years before his big break last spring.

Marcia recalls this year's highlight: "Selden's story is one of hard work, yes, but also of perseverance. Whenever someone asks me for advice, I always say, 'Put your bottom in a chair and write every day. Be persistent. Listen to constructive criticism and take it to heart if it resonates. But most of all, believe in yourself and your work. Don't let rejection—even over a long period of time—dissuade you from your dreams.'"

Even for those who do not consider themselves artists or writers, Marcia strongly encourages tapping into personal creativity of some kind. "Perhaps it's taking a photograph of a child or cutting up magazines to make a collage or simply writing down some passing thoughts at the beginning of the day," Marcia says. "Creativity is a gift that doesn't discriminate. It's in everyone."

Art and music lessons and writing workshops can help to fuel this creativity, especially for adults whose creative energy may lie dormant. In 2002, local author and muse, Janet Lucy, founded Women's Creative Network, offering weekly writing groups, creative workshops, and retreats to facilitate women's creative, intuitive, and professional development. Her popular writing groups are small and supportive, focusing less on critique and more on witnessing and reflecting women's journeys and stories within a safe, comfortable, and inspiring atmosphere.

"Women value the camaraderie and the freedom to write in a nurturing environment. I have found by facilitating the groups in this manner that the writing process becomes much more spontaneous and authentic. Many women come into the groups censored and left-brained. I seek to develop the more creative and intuitive right brain aspect of writing. Once a writer taps into this creative energy, the writing becomes a vehicle to open up to other dimensions and unlimited possibilities," says Janet.

She humbly acknowledges some of her numerous success stories, like Colleen McCarthy Evans, who rekindled a hidden passion for board games within the season of one writing group and now develops new games for her award-winning company, Toying with Games. Evans says, "Janet has the gift of seeing what is unique and essential in others. Her ability to 'see' me and encourage me was instrumental in my finding the courage to make a career change. These days I am healthier, happier, and more successful than I have ever been!"

Janet views the creative process like the seasons of the year. Her intention is to plant the seeds for creative dreams, nourish them until the seeds blossom, and finally, as with Evans, to harvest the fruits of the creative soul's labor. She affirms, "The unconscious mind speaks to us in subtle and mysterious ways, and our wise souls know what new seeds are ready for planting and gestation, even when we cannot see clearly."

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