

# HEALDSBURG ALIVE!

EIGHT SONOMA COUNTY WRITERS  
PAY HOMAGE TO A GREAT  
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA TOWN

A HEALDSBURG LITERARY GUILD BOOK



McCAA BOOKS • SANTA ROSA



McCaa Books  
1535 Farmers Lane #211  
Santa Rosa, CA 95405-7535

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Healdsburg Literary Guild  
P. O. Box 1761  
Healdsburg, CA 95448

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ISBN 978-0-9838892-2-9

First published in 2012 by McCaa Books,  
an imprint of McCaa Publications.

Printed in the United States of America  
Set in Minion Pro

Cover photograph used courtesy of Barbara Bourne.  
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Cover design by Sharon Beckman.

[www.mccaabooks.com](http://www.mccaabooks.com)

*In Memoriam*  
*Laurel Cook*  
*Doug Stout*

*This book is dedicated to Laurel and  
Doug—the founders and guiding  
lights in the creation and growth of  
the Healdsburg Literary Guild.*

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## **Preface**

**T**HE HEALDSBURG LITERARY GUILD is delighted to publish this new book, *Healdsburg Alive!—Eight Sonoma County Writers Pay Homage to a Great Northern California Town*. It follows a number of previous Guild publications, including *Present at the Creation* and three books entitled *A Day in the Life of Healdsburg*, in addition to several poetry chapbooks. This new book provided writers in the Healdsburg area with a four-session workshop in which to hone their writing skills along with an opportunity to publish their pieces.

Armando Garcia-Dávila, Healdsburg's 2002–2003 Literary Laureate, led the workshop. The price of admission included marvelous meals prepared by Armando.

The workshops met four times in 2010—once in each season. Armando opened sessions with a discussion of writing prompts, techniques, seeds, and subjects the participants might consider. Writers were then on their own for about three hours to wander Healdsburg and surrounding areas in Sonoma County, looking for inspiration for a story or a poem. Although the stated premise of the workshop was to write a piece that matched each season, writers followed whatever muse grabbed them and led their pens in preparation of a first draft. The group then reconvened and writers read their drafts. A lively discussion followed, offering each writer comments, ideas, and encouragement.

Armando then selected and edited pieces for the book. And *voilà*, we have *Healdsburg Alive!*

We hope you enjoy it.

# WINTER

*Winter solitude—  
In a world of one color  
the sound of wind.*

—Matsuo Basho

**Surprise**  
by Chris Peasley

I wrote an essay about a gift I gave my mother one Christmas. When I asked what she wanted she always said, "Surprise me."

Took her up on her word. Donated five books in Spanish to my childrens' Immersion School. When I took her to the library to show her the books, she said, "I sure didn't know I wanted books I can't read."

I cried a little at her dismissal, but I laughed it off and after that she always said precisely what she wanted and I got it. Never asked her what she meant by her remark. I thought it was a great gift for someone with everything.

*foreign answers  
rolled up in paper  
missed translation*

Then she died. All the stories I wanted to hear she took with her. When they called with the news, they said my mother had died and I said, "My father you mean." "No your mother," said the nurse. I'm still surprised.

*my father was ready  
I was not  
no more chances*



# SPRING

*First day of spring—  
I keep thinking about  
the end of autumn.*

—Matsuo Basho

## **The Month of Mary** by Armando Garcia-Dávila

IT'S MID AFTERNOON at the downtown Plaza. Most of the Mexican men hoping for a day's work have long gone. A young Mexican family passes my bench. The papa says, "*quedate aquí conmigo hijo*," (stay here with me son) taking his little boy's hand to keep him from running into the street. His wife carries an infant wrapped in a blanket. It's as perfect a spring day in Healdsburg as I have experienced. It is warm but not hot, a profoundly deep blue heaven overhead; a slight breeze blows from the west.

May; it's the month of roses and the Virgin Mary. I didn't like it that Ma had the family get on our knees once a month after dinner to pray the rosary. We recited the Glory Be's, the Our Father's and Hail Mary's over and over until we mumbled them trance-like as mantras. My older sister leading the prayers raced through before the "Dick Van Dyke Show." In May, we had to pray the rosary every night in honor of Mary the teenage girl impregnated by God who would give birth to His Son.

It is said that she is the only person to never have sinned. She was pure and every woman is to emulate her. I suppose that is one reason that sex is considered a duty rather than carnal pleasure among the women in our family. My brothers, sisters and I are a testament that Ma did her duty at least seven times.

I wonder if this young Mexican family passing me are Catholic and worship the same ancient Jewish deity as our family, or have they been swept up in the evangelical tsunami engulfing the Mexican culture over the last few decades?

When Ma and her sisters attended mass in Mexico they wore black lace mantillas to cover their hair lest somebody think them vain or they exact a righteous castigation from the good priest.

I walk to the west end of the plaza toward a bench occupied by two middle aged Mexican men engaged in casual conversation. I make eye contact with one.

"*Buenas*," I say with a smile. Simply saying, "*Buenas*," is enough among Mexicans. It is like greeting someone in the culture of the *Norte Americanos* by saying, "mornin."

"*Buenas*," answers the man with a smile. His name turns out to be Serafín, his partner is Edgar. Both are in good spirits as they had found work earlier and have returned to the Plaza to do what Mexicans do so well; socialize. Serafín got work with one of his regular customers who needed help getting her yard ready for a garden party. He and Edgar have returned

*“aver si nos toca otro pescado aunque sea chico,”* (to see if we might snag one more fish even if it’s a small one).

In short order we know where each other’s families have originated. “Your father is from Sinaloa?” Edgar says. “They say that the women from there are pretty tough and *‘hablen recio’* (speak roughly)” he says with a laugh. “I was there once and a woman hit on me, and right in front of my wife!”

*I miss this*, I think to myself, being around people who are so at ease in the world, people who don’t die of stress and are as comfortable talking with a stranger as with family. I think that both would be an ideal CIA mole though I don’t think Serafin or Edgar would be interested in a job involving deception. I notice that each wears a thin gold chain around his neck. Between Serafin’s shirt buttons I am able to see enough of a gold medal to know that it has the image of Mexico’s patron saint. Our Lady of Guadalupe, the apparition of the Virgin Mary who appeared to a humble Indian man named Juan Diego.

It’s a safe guess that these two are traditionalists still worshipping the same deities as my mother. It would not surprise me if they and their families are praying the rosary on their knees every night this month.

# SUMMER

*'Tis moonlight, summer moonlight—  
All soft and still and fair,  
The solemn hour of midnight  
Breathes sweet thoughts everywhere.*

**—Emily Bronte**

***As the Russian River Runs***  
by Simon Jeremiah

Coiling quietly out of Coyote Dam from  
Lake Mendocino, the river runs south and west  
Through the vineyards and gravel yards and campgrounds  
Under the bridges of Ukiah, Hopland, Cloverdale;  
By swerve of shore it makes an oxbow beyond Fitch  
Mountain then returns over the summer dam at Del Rio  
Woods and on passing Penelope's door (and sometimes  
visiting her living room on darker days).

The river moves quietly today, its summer waters  
Mostly underground and pumped up to the cities of the  
Russian River Valley, to the grape fields, the swimming  
pools, the golf links,  
Under the bridges at Wohler Creek, Summer Home Park,  
Guerneville, Duncan Mills.

The waters gather all their forces carrying canoers,  
fishermen, swimmers, kayaks, ducks,  
flowing on, always moving until at last,  
Weary of its wanderings, happy perhaps, it flows  
Home to the sea.

# AUTUMN

*Like a joy on the heart of a sorrow,  
The sunset hangs on a cloud;  
A golden storm of glittering sheaves,  
Of fair and frail and fluttering leaves,  
The wind blows in a cloud.*

—Sarojini Naidu

**Healdsburg Morning: Autumn**

by David Beckman

*Ne'er saw I, never felt a calm so deep!  
 The river glideth at his own sweet will:  
 Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;  
 And all that mighty heart is lying still!*  
 —from William Wordsworth's  
 "Composed on Westminster Bridge"

My heart awakens not to London or New York, not to Buenos Aires, Athens, Mexico City, Paris, New Orleans or Quito. But to a soft Healdsburg morning with the scent of dry leaves on the Plaza walkways, not yet raked.

I awake to the Russian River's slow westward sigh, seeking the Pacific on the far side of hills and vineyards. To the V of geese overhead, slanting down the morning sky with the purpose of a thrown javelin.

To the gathering Farmer's Market where, near Doug Stout's bench, a yellow van thinks it's a 15-foot-long outdoor planter with greenery vining from every window and door. I greet the driver and he greets me.

To the deserted asphalt lot of the burned and cleared post office where once love letters hunkered in cubbyholes like teenagers parked in a lover's lane.

To where North Street Craftsman houses nervously watch who's passing by as if it's 1944 and someone's not yet come back from war.

The pale green cottage at 325 First Street, whose front brick patio hosts a blanket of maple leaves curled like burnt paper and crisp as new money. And the cat two houses down armed tooth and claw and no doubt daring again to enter the lists against mouse and mole.

The driveway on Prince Street where a maroon Porsche 646 with a spoiler big enough to cook an elk on, dreams of turning fast laps at Infineon Raceway to the screams of pubescent girls.

The young jogger on Matheson Street, running as if to an important rendezvous, whose earphones thrum to the rhythms of Taylor Swift and Lady Gaga.

The chatter at the Goat where a couple's heads nearly touch above their table, and their words rise like coffee steam: *I would, would you? Yes, in a heartbeat. Where? Under a full moon.*

And finally, to the corner of Healdsburg Avenue and West Side Road and the paint-peeling Vine Street Gas Station, forever for sale, its rusting and padlocked accordion gates keeping everything out but cats and ghosts.



## ***Authors' Biographies***

**DAVID BECKMAN** lives in Santa Rosa. His poems appear in *Present at the Creation*, the 2006 anthology of Sonoma County poets; in *From the Hills*, *Jackass Review*, *Blue Jew Yorker*, and *Western Friend*. His chapbook, *Times Three*, appeared in 2009. His latest chapbook, *Language Factory of the Mind*, was published by Finishing Line Press in December 2011. He's been featured at Healdsburg Literary Guild's Third Sunday Salon and Healdsburg's Literary Café; at Katherine Hastings's WordTemple Series (emerging poet), and at Ed Coletti's Poetry Azul.

**ARMANDO GARCIA-DÁVILA** has won awards for his prose and poetry and was named the Healdsburg Literary Laureate for 2002–2003. He refers to himself as the “Blue Collar Poet,” and says, “I am neither an academic nor an intellectual and try to write in the voice of the common man.” Armando also moonlights as “The Gourmet Poet,” merging his loves for cooking and poetry by preparing first class meals for dinner parties and then reciting his poetry.

**SIMON JEREMIAH** lives on the right bank of the Russian River, where he keeps a small retreat for artists and writers. He is a founding member of the Healdsburg Literary Guild and remains active in the local arts community.

**DAVID MECHLING** has been writing for only a short time but has found his way into the local Sonoma County publications of *The Sitting Room* and the 2010 *Vintage Voices*. Watch for his collection of poetry and stories titled *Daveisms, miscellaneous ramblings from a suburban kind of guy*.

**MONA MECHLING** considers herself a “dark Erma Bombeck”. As a teen, she began writing poems and short stories that went into a drawer. Her first story was published in the *Vintage Voices* anthology at age 50. Her writing is inspired by life in the ‘burbs. Watch for her story collection, *The Fridge Magnet Chronicles*, coming soon to a bookstore near you.

**CHRIS PEASLEY** is a writer of poetry and prose living in Windsor. She has published one book titled *The Rows Between*, an entertaining book of poetry with art by her husband, Bill Geer. She is also included in a number of collections including *Present at the Creation* and *A Day in the Life of Healdsburg-2007*.

**WAIGHTS TAYLOR JR.** is a Santa Rosa writer. His first non-fiction book, *Alfons Mucha's Slav Epic*, was published in 2008. His second book, *Our Southern Home: Scottsboro to Montgomery to Birmingham—The Transformation of the South in the Twentieth Century*, was published in October 2011. Waights has just recently started writing poetry, short stories, and one-act plays. His first chapbook, *Literary Ramblings*, was published in 2010.

**MARGO VAN VEEN** lives in Santa Rosa. Her poems appear in *First Leaves*, the 2009 anthology of Bay Area writers, and in *Continent of Lights*, the 2010 anthology edited by David Madgalene, as well as on line at *Burning Bush*. She performs her poetry throughout the Bay Area and has been featured at Healdsburg Literary Guild's Third Sunday Salon and Ed Coletti's SoCoCo and Poetry Azul.