

# The woman beyond the words

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**C**HANCES ARE YOUR Saturdays are yo-yo drives to the nursery, hardware store, or kids' events. Chances are you've tuned into NPR between 2:00 and 3:00 and heard the deeply melodious, dare I say sexy voice interviewing a prestigious author or upcoming writer. You may have wondered about this mysterious voice and how she attracts her tantalizing profiles.

Montecito resident Frances Halpern is the creator and radio personality behind "Beyond Words", described as "the lively, often funny show for literary toilers and word lovers." "Beyond Words" began in 1996 as a 20-minute interview KCLU host Jon O'Brien granted to Halpern, an award-winning newspaper columnist, publishing expert, and author.

Halpern's first "break" followed years of volunteer writing in homeowners' bulletins and PTA flyers, when she proposed a column to her local newspaper. She vividly remembers the response. "The editor told me, 'All you housewives think you can write a column and the minute your kids come down with the measles or your husband wants to take you on a cruise you won't deliver.' I told him my husband will never take me on a cruise and my kids have already had the measles. I sent him some columns and he hired me for 15 cents an inch, telling me 'don't pad'. God forbid another 15 cents."

Halpern leveraged this inauspicious, midlife beginning to columns for the Los Angeles Times and the Herald Examiner as well as two books: *Writer's Guide to West Coast Publishing* and *Writer's Guide to Publishing in the West*.

She ran workshops and lectured on the publishing business from Houston to Hawaii. Then she discovered her affinity for radio interviewing.

A perfect profile is someone who has great stories, Halpern says. "Guests who resonate with listeners discuss their failures and successes: their relationships with family or their struggles gaining recognition. A personal conversation develops and suddenly it's like talking to a pal. I think of 'Beyond Words' as a conversation, not an interview."

She recalls John Steinbeck's author son Thom, who was willing to reveal life stories. Ray Bradbury was "childlike in a very positive way," Halpern adds. "He shared on the air about why we are on this earth. I was so moved I cried." In 1971 she won the National Women's Press Award for Radio Interviewing.

Halpern's current activities include conducting a panel at the annual Los Angeles Festival of Books (this year's begins April 28). But her first priority is planning her show.

She sorts through publicists' proposals and unsolicited books, responding to each personal letter. She attracts other word-aficionados like actor-authors, poets, literary agents, and word puzzle creators.

If all this sounds like it would require the energy of a toddler, consider that Halpern is a senior citizen ("A very youthful senior," she insists).

She packs her energy on a 5-foot frame — a powerful chip on a tireless motherboard. Next time you want a friend to accompany your Saturday errands, tune in KCLU (FM 102.3) and she'll convince you to start writing your Great American Novel.

*Karen Telleen-Lawton's Wednesday column is a mélange of local people, nature, events, and observations transporting the reader around the world and back to Santa Barbara. She is a local writer and the author of Canyon Voices — the Nature of Rattlesnake Canyon. E-mail Karen at backyard@santabarbarafree.com.*