



March Speaker — Lisa Cron:

"Redefining Backstory: Why it is the most crucial layer of your story, and how to get it onto every page."

Andrea Polk

Lisa Cron received high praise the last time she spoke to us. Her passion for the importance of backstory to infuse characters with depth and motivation, move your plot whether your story is fiction or non-fiction, comes from extensive experience as an agent, TV producer, story consultant, educator, and her research in brain science. Don't miss her energy and insights.

She writes: Backstory is what drives your novel, memoir or screenplay forward, giving everything that happens in it meaning. Without first creating story-specific backstory you cannot create a compelling plot or memoir. Because as William Faulkner so aptly said, "The past isn't dead. It isn't even past."

We'll discuss:

- What a story really is, what we're wired to crave.
- What really hooks your reader: it's not beautiful writing or the plot.
- Why your story begins long before the first page.
- We'll redefine backstory what it really is, and why it's so misunderstood.
- How, where, and why backstory is present on every page you write.

Lisa is the author of Wired for Story: The Writer's Guide to Using Brain Science to Hook Readers From the Very First Sentence (Ten Speed Press), and her video tutorial Writing Fundamentals: The Craft of Story can be found at Lynda.com, and her TEDx talk, Wired for Story, opened Furman University's 2014 TEDx conference, "Stories: The Common Thread of Our Humanity." Her book, Story Genius: How to Use Brain Science to Go Beyond Outlining and Write a Riveting Novel (Before You Waste Three Years Writing 327 Pages That Go Nowhere) will be published by Ten Speed Press in August, 2016.

She has worked in publishing at W.W. Norton, as an agent at the Angela Rinaldi Literary Agency, as a producer on shows for Showtime and Court TV, and as a story consultant for Warner Brothers and the William Morris Agency. Since 2006, she's been an instructor in the UCLA Extension Writers' Program, and she is on the faculty of the School of Visual Arts MFA

February in Review

J. Raymond Kent

I don't think I can be accused of being unfair, when I say that February's program was kind of a non-starter. It was the victim of technical problems from the beginning, and things didn't improve as the meeting went on.

As they say, "It went great at rehearsal, but..."

With my penchant for ionic humor, I will one day probably use the event as source material for comedy. Maybe, something in an operating room, with a patient in seizure and a recalcitrant defibrillator:

DOCTOR: Nurse, we've lost sinus rhythm! The patient's crashing!! Get the cart!"

NURSE: Got it!! Charging!

DOCTOR: Are we ready? ... CLEAR!

NURSE: No! Wait! It's not charging. It wants to upgrade to Windows 10. Do we want to do that? DOCTOR: NO DAMMIT. Just charge the paddles! NURSE: Well, it's saying that we have an older version of Adobe Reader. Is that OK?

DOCTOR: FOR CHRISSAKE! Somebody start chest compression on this guy! WHERE THE HELL ARE THOSE PADDLES?!

NURSE: Now, it says something about needing to install Quicktime components before we can proceed. Do we want to do that?

DOCTOR: How the hell should I know?! We gotta open this guy up and do heart massage! Scalpe!!!

NURSE: It's asking me if I want to use Firefox as r

NURSE: It's asking me if I want to use Firefox as my default browser...

DOCTOR: We're losing him! Somebody ventilate! NURSE: Now it wants a registration number. Do we have one of those?

DOCTOR: NO PULSE!! What's holding things up? NURSE: It's asking for a PayPal account...

Noise rises to crescendo, then abruptly ceases.

SFX: The whoooooo of a heart monitor — flat lined.

DOCTOR (subdued): Oh God! It's no use. He's gone.

[sigh] Call time of death!

NURSE: It wants to know our default time-zone...

Maybe I've just seen too many episodes of *House*, *MD*, but that's what it seemed like — as we tried valiantly to get computers, projectors, and amplifiers to communicate.

Kay Henden did yeoman ambulance service — twice, but to no avail.

The members were fairly oblivious to all of this, chatting and discussing writing and their latest projects. Later on, at the post-mortem, they said they'd had fun and it was a good meeting.

Can you imagine how much more they would have enjoyed the *real* show?! -=jrk=-



Pasident S Connections Andrea Polk

Oops!

Due to technical difficulties at our last meeting we had an interesting sharing time. Which only goes

to show that we, the people, like each other. We learned from each other about how we write, what we write, how we find the time to write and who suffers when we do find the time to write.

This is what happened when my computer's internal sound speakers were blown by a power surge. No sound, no TED Talks program as planned. Serendipity took over and the reports were that while this was frustration for me, Ray Malus and Kay Henden, it turned out to be one of the best experiences in some time.

What I learned was that we writers need time for sharing ideas and experiences. We got to know each other better. The time spent was clearly valuable. Yes we do learn from each other as well as from our featured speakers. Our successful critique groups have demonstrated this.

In a show of hands members were also interested in writing for a San Fernando Valley branch anthology and judging submissions from a sister branch of equivalent size. We are moving forward and our Vice President, Sylvia Molesko, is in conversation with the Napa Valley branch on this dual project.

Finally, there are thousands of opportunities for entering your writing in contests, anthologies and getting published. The *Writers Digest* and *Contemporary Poetry Digest* list them. Yet, in the future there will be a summary list of writing events, contests, and local publishing opportunities that space limitations prevent from publishing in the *Scribe*. This list will be available at the registration table. The list simply represents information that comes my way. They are not vetted, but timely and look interesting. We do not endorse these events unless they are CWC sponsored. I hope this will be helpful. I will commit to provide an updated list through the June meeting. If it is not useful, I will stop.

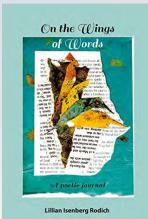
Share your ideas, energy, disappointments and successes with our fellow writers. We learn from them. See you Saturday, March 5th to hear Lisa Cron. She is also on TED Talks. Check her out. She's dynamic!

Cron (cont'd from pg 2.)

program in Visual Narrative in New York City. She is a frequent speaker at writers' conferences, schools and universities.

In her work as a story coach, Lisa helps writers, nonprofits, educators, and journalists wrangle the story they're telling onto the page. She can be reached at wiredforstory.com.

See you March 5th. □



New Book Release

We are pleased to announce the publication of Lillian Rodich's, *On the Wings of Words*, a beautifully written memoir — told almost entirely through verse.

You'll experience Rodich's growing and coming of age in Los Angeles, her marriage of nearly fifty-three years, the grief and self reflection

following the loss of her husband that evolved into her love of art and dance, all forms of creative writing, and a passion for family and friends.

The book illuminates Rodich's nearly three decades as a classroom teacher — a source of hope and inspiration to economically disadvantaged children in Southern California, and the life's lessons she learned from those she taught.

Rodich's story is not unique. The sharing of it is. Told through poetry and verse, infused with an exploration of civilization, the worlds of nature and human nature, as well as connection with the human universal spirit, this is a one-of-a-kind literary experience.

HELP WANTED

The Valley Scribe is currently short one proof-reader.

We do not re-write submissions; we feel that each of you has a unique voice.

But we do check them for blatant errors in spelling and punctuation.

The requirements for this job are speed, accuracy, and — most of all — tolerance.

If you would like to help, please contact me: cwc-sfv@roadrunner.com.



As always, please check the websites for more information before submitting. When you see "ms" or "mss" this means manuscript and manuscripts respectively. Best wishes and good luck to all!

CRICKET MEDIA

Website: http://www.cricketmedia.com/submission-guidelines

Editor's Note: Are you interested in contributing to our family of award-winning children's magazines? We seek to publish the finest quality writing and illustration for children of all ages. Our readers share an alert curiosity about the world around them and a delight in artistic expression. To learn more about submitting writing and art to our magazines, follow the links below. NOTE: We no longer accept hard copy submissions. For BABYBUG, LADYBUG, SPIDER, ASK, CRICKET, and CICADA, please submit online via our Submittable page, where you'll find guidelines and submission Forms.

Literary Magazines
Illustrated poetry, fiction, and literary nonfiction for ages 6 months – 14 years and up

- BABYBUG for ages 6 months-3 years
- LADYBUG for ages 3-6
- SPIDER for ages 6-9
- CRICKET for ages 9-14
- CICADA for ages 14 and up

Our literary magazines welcome submissions from writers of every level of experience. Please do not submit the same piece to multiple literary magazines. If a submission to one magazine is more appropriate for another, we will pass it on to that magazine's editor. To learn more about submitting writing and art to our literary magazines, follow the links below. Cricket Media is committed to a diverse literary culture, and we welcome works by writers from underrepresented groups (people of color, people with disabilities, LGBTQAI+ folks, and other marginalized peoples). Our literary magazines do not post theme lists.

Nonfiction Magazines

Science, technology, culture, social studies, and ideas for ages 3 and up

- CLICK Science and Discovery for ages 3-7
- ASK Science and Discovery for ages 7-10
- MUSE Science and Discovery for ages 10 and up

- COBBLESTONE American History for ages 9-14
- DIG Into History World History and Archaeology for ages 9-14
- FACES World Cultures and Geography for ages 9-14

Our science, social studies, and discovery magazines seek writers with subject expertise. Those interested in writing for these magazines should submit a resume and several writing samples.

Writing and Art by Children and Young Adults.

Children of all ages can submit stories, poetry, essays, and art to contests that run in our magazines.

Our magazines do not accept general submissions from children under the age of 14. Young adults ages 14 and up can submit writing, art, and comics to <u>Cicada</u> magazine.

Many magazines do publish student work. See listings at the <u>NewPages.com Young Authors Guide</u>.

BABYBUG

Website: http://www.cricketmedia.com/babybug-sub-mission-guidelines

LADYBUG

Website: http://www.cricketmedia.com/ladybug-sub-mission-guidelines/

SPIDER

Website: http://www.cricketmedia.com/spider-sub-mission-guidelines/

CRICKET

Website: http://www.cricketmedia.com/cricket-sub-mission-guidelines/

CICADA

Website: http://www.cricketmedia.com/cicada-sub-mission-guidelines/

GUEST POLICY

In general, guests at our meetings are asked to pay a small (\$5), tax-deductible donation.

However, each member of the branch is permitted to sponsor TWO FREE GUESTS during the year.

(Unfortunately, these do not 'roll-over'.)
If you are sponsoring a guest, please assist in their checking in, and notify our Membership Chair.



Parallel Structure

There's an old English-teacher joke about how if Lincoln's Gettysburg Address were handed in as an essay assignment today, it would receive a C minus with "needless repetition" written in the margin. The Sermon on the Mount would have received the same grade with all its *blessed are the poors*, *and blessed are the meeks*, much less God's Ten Commandments with all the *Thou shalts* and *Thou shalt nots*. (Okay, that's stretching it a bit.) The joke is of course that the imaginary teacher's grammatical nearsightedness completely misses the power of repetition and parallel structure.

Parallel lines, Parallel words

In a series of words or word groups, each word or word group should be parallel; that is, on the same grammatical level as the others in the group. My girlfriend likes to swim, to hike, and cuddling lacks parallelism. It should be: My girlfriend likes swimming, hiking, and cuddling where the enjoyments all end in –ing.

And the sentence When I relax, I like an interesting book, a good hammock, and I like some soft music too. lacks parallelism. It should be When I relax, I like reading an interesting book, lying in a nice hammock, and listening to some soft music.

Words in one part of a series should be included in all parts of the series:

Everyone thought that Jason was the witty one, that Georgia was the wise one, and that Howard was the crazy one.

In the same way, if a word or words are missing from one part, they should be missing from the other parts:

Everyone thought Jason witty, Georgia wise, and Howard crazy.

The articles a, an, and the should appear either before the first word in the series only:

He liked the French, Italians, and Portuguese best.

or before every word in the series:

He liked the French, the Italians, and the Portuguese best.

The same applies to prepositional phrases – one or all, no mister-in-between:

Mike looked <u>in</u> the encyclopedia, <u>in</u> the card catalog, and <u>in</u> the Sears catalog.

It's not necessary to use the same preposition each time, however.

... of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Correlatives

A correlative is two or several words used in a rhetorical partnership:

both, and not only, but also either, or first, second, third

Correlatives are always followed by parallel forms.

Both typing well and writing shorthand are necessary for this job.

She was not only pretty, but also fluent in five languages.

He had to either control his temper or suffer a divorce.

My objections to the proposal are <u>first</u>, the ambiguous language, and second, the impossible requirements.

Lit-Cred

Ray Malus

Imagine an experiment: Before our meeting, we place six books on a table. None of the titles are familiar. Five are written by members of our branch. The sixth is written by John Grisham (J. K. Rowling, Tom Clancy, take your pick.) There is also a sign, "Take One Book!"

Which book will a given member select?

Even if s/he knows the local writer, the member will select the book by the well-known author.

Why?

The answer is something I am going to call "Litcred."

Lit-cred: the belief that reading a work by a given author will be a rewarding experience.

What is 'success' for a writer? I believe it lies solely in establishing a persistent expectation in readers: "If I read this, I will be rewarded." Lit-cred.

The reward may be clear, understandable, knowledge or skills. (The "...For Dummies" series.) It may be entertainment (The "Jack Ryan" series). It may simply be pleasure (any Erotica). It may be mental stimulation and challenge (Mysteries). It may be experience of the unfamiliar (Sci-fi, travel) [Please notice I said 'experience'] It may be vicarious romance. On and on...

Lit-cred is the reader's conviction that your work is worth his effort to read it.

It must be earned — by consistently producing engrossing, powerful books, and enticing the public to read them — by establishing a 'track record'.

But how does an unknown writer do this?

In past eras, the answer was well known. Publishing houses have multiple *imprints*. These are subsidiaries, which specialize in various *genres*. (Check out Harper Collins' imprints. You will find almost too many to count.) Editors at the publishing house read submissions. If the manuscript was considered to fall within the parameters of the imprint and meet its standards, it was accepted and published under that (or a more suitable) imprint. This mechanism assured readers that *someone knowledgeable* felt this unknown author was 'vetted', that the book would meet their expectations and reward them. The *imprint* had Litcred, even if the *author* didn't. Eventually, through familiarity, the author would amass his own Lit-cred.

With the advent of self-publishing, this mechanism has all but disappeared. The onus is on the writer!

So, ask yourselves, "How many of our members carry that cachet?"

I can think of (perhaps), four or five. Four or five

of our members, that would entice me to invest time reading their work, *if I weren't obligated to*. (You may each have your own list, but I doubt you'll fill a minyan.)

It is this that I find lacking in our agenda: a recognition and focus on aesthetics and effective writing.

I believe the cause is reliance on two false premises. First: The belief that we are a 'numbers game' — the 'facebook' premise.

You may have a thousand 'friends' on facebook, but none of them is going to help you move, lend you money, or eulogize you at your memorial. They are not friends; they are a number.

Similarly, the premise that we can buttonhole the average pedestrian, charge him \$65 and turn him into a successful writer is as absurd as the idea that you can sell someone a \$65 tutu and then star him in a production of *Swan Lake*!

It takes training, experience and talent to write effective work. The writing of "The" and "End" as the fifty-thousandth and fifty-thousand-first words of a manuscript that is relatively free of errors, is very different from the writing a good book.

Second: The idea that the advice of five averagely adept writers can produce a superior work of literature — the critique group premise.

Certainly, one needs feedback, and auditing.
Camaraderie and encouragement are vital. But (to continue the analogy) knowing the definitions of plié, jeté and, pirouette is a far cry from being able to execute them gracefully and effectively. And if simply following the rules of spelling, grammar, and usage were sufficient for being an exceptional writer, the best seller lists, theaters, and Oscar nominations would be rife with the works of retired English teachers.

As I said, in the past, there was a virtual jury that decided this: The publishing industry. That is no longer true. The criterion: 'published book', while gratifying to the ego, is no longer equivalent to 'success as a writer'. We have a membership that has been led to believe their goal is solely to publish. The disappointing quality of our published work shows this to be false. The goal is to attract, and keep, readers. To write well. To amass Lit-cred.

You do this by making every page, every paragraph, every image, every *word* powerful. You do this with engrossing stories, skillfully told. You do this by focusing on your reader's gratification, not your own. You do this by never betraying, boring, or disappointing someone who takes the time to read your work.

Isn't this what we should be exploring?

YOU SHOULD KNOW



SMILE!

California Writers Club, San Fernando Valley Branch, is providing this notice to inform our members, and guests at our events, that Still Photography may be taking place.

These pictures are occasionally posted on our website.

If, for some reason, you don't want your likeness used, you must notify us in advance.

OPEN MIC RULES

In order to maintain order and provide fair access for all members, the Board has established the following rules for Open Mic:

- 1. Readers may not read in consecutive months. Consider the rights of all the members and make room for them.
- **2. There will be a maximum of six readers.** In the event there are fewer, the time will be added to the Business Meeting or fellowship period.
- **3. Strict five minute time limit.** Time your work at home. Don't feel you need to fill every second. Sometimes, less *is* more.
- 4. Presentation must be of original written material by the reader or another member who has designated the reader. We are a writers' club!
- **5. Readers must sign up in person. No 'proxy sign-ups'.** If you feel it's important that you read, come early!

Never Too Old

Leslie Kaplan

Of course I remember that kiss
Like a lightening strike
My body felt the urge never to stop
The tremble ... the yearning ... the power
Feeling the passion ... the desire
But that was yesterday

Of course I remember ... the sweetness of youth

The feeling of love ... of being loved Of feeling sexy ... alive and beautiful Of Tropical Rain storms

Of wet naked bodies ... the wonder of it all

Of course I remember so many farewells Leaving me lonely and cold No arms to embrace me in the night Like being alone in the winter Without my blanket.

Of course I remember that kiss
Like a lightening strike
It matters not that I am now old
To remember ... to dream ... to feel
Wishing you could be there once more.

YOU ARE NEVER TOO OLD

Rag Bag Lillian Rodich

silver sequins on my torn sweater

old cardigan beginning to unravel can I remember the words if not the text emotions that rip apart quietly like a bird's muffled cry in the night

I might capture that bird comprehend its song feel pulse within its body know it is a living thing to be set free before restraints injure it

what are memories made of a bird's heartbeat a torn sweater silver viewed as tarnished

unraveling knit
first only a pulled thread
one of many
threads holding silver sequins
one by one falling at my feet
below my vision
because I do not wish
to look there

shiny silver sequins in a glittering pile free of yarn scraps just beyond where I choose to remember



March Madness Keyle Birnberg

March madness,
Rude and harsh,
Playing games is here;
Torrential rains drown my grass
Weeds come up for air.

March madness
Implacable and harsh,
Loosens tiles on my roof
Lifting layers of wounded pieces
Scattering without mercy
A dripping heap by my door

March madness
Shake my trees;
Naked branches shiver without leaves
Pleading
With the sun to warm their fear,
Hoping
For the wind to disappear.

Angry winds
Rattle my windows
Like diamond dust
Shattered glass falls
Murmuring secrets
Before night ends



Oy, I Hoyt. Norman Molesko

One person flippantly comments as a comic, "So kiddo. You should know it's part of life. So you hoyt. So you have discomfort? Tell some funny jokes and you will feel better."

Another says to me with psychological overtones, "The discomfort will go away. It's only mental. Just pay attention to this advice.

Change your attitude! Relax! Take it easy!"

And a third person relates to me as a magician, "Just forget you are having discomfort.

Realize you are just imagining it.

Ab-bra-ca-da-bra! Your discomfort is no more."

An elderly man, more philosophical, says, "So, what's new? You are older.
What to do? It hurts. Many of us hurt.
Get used to it. Adjust to it."

So I hoyt. I will need to trust my instincts. I will connect with my judgments, consider my doctor's advice, and decide on my best option.

I will be my own advocate.

NOTE: I re-print this every year or so. So far, it hasn't made a difference

The Saved Hours

Ray Malus

Where do the saved hours go?
To molder, like a "time withholding tax," in interest-free required Term Accounts and, anxious, await for filings in the Fall, when they will be repaid to us again?

Where do the saved hours go?
To languish with un-baptized Cath'lic babes in Limbo, disconnected from the earth, in barrenness, not heaven, neither hell, eternally condemned and scorned by God?

Where do the saved hours go?
Far banished to some seedy summer camp to vainly master useless arts and crafts, excluded from the family barbecues, from roisterous days and stinging sunburned nights?

Where do the saved hours go?
To slave in some Dickensian stockade,
to earn release through months of servile toil?
Or are they tutored in the arts of crime
To earn a paltry ladle-full of gruel?

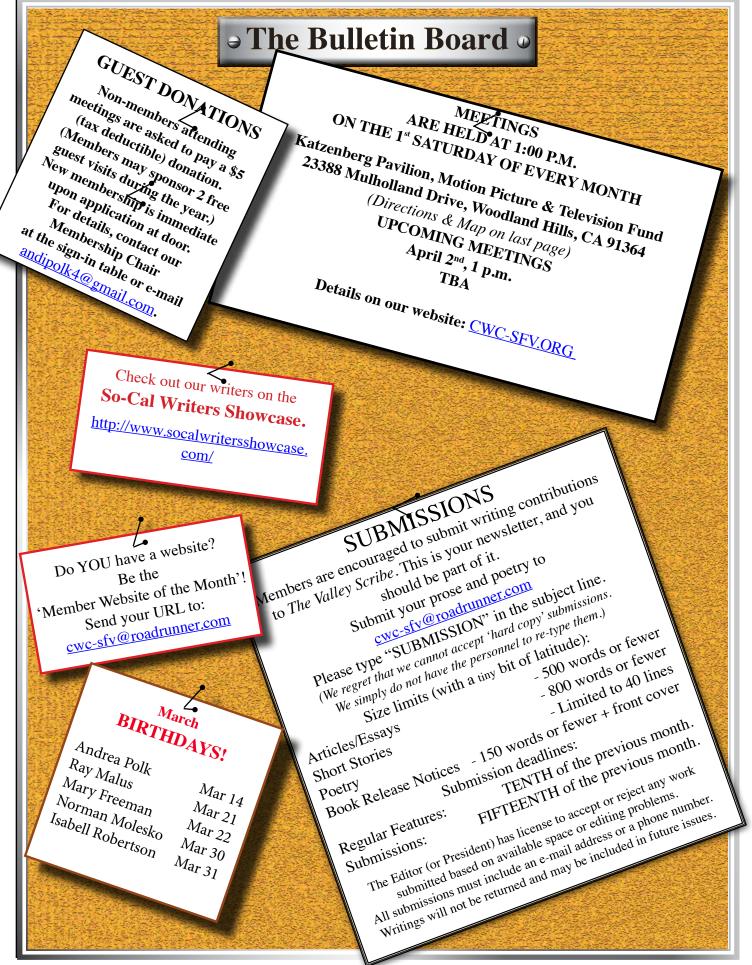
Where do the saved hours go?
To sit, with snotty lips and tearful eyes, in barren rooms in city shopping malls, with all the missing children who have strayed from guardians by glitzy sales seduced?

Where do the saved hours go?

To lurk with all the missing un-matched socks and half-remembered dreams and nagging guilts that skitter in the woodwork in the dark, and threaten as we cower in our beds?

Or do the saved hours dance and caper with the other hours saved like carnival confetti in the air that sputs and darts on gigg'ling summer winds, and swoop where useful hours cannot go?

Oh no! The saved hours lie like umber compost spread abundantly on rows of nascent corn in sultry fields that reeks on steamy summer afternoons. 'Cause Daylight Saving Time's a pile of crap.



The Fine Print

San Fernando Valley Branch of California Writers Club meets at:

Motion Picture & Television Fund Katzenberg Pavillion 23388 Mulholland Drive Woodland Hills, CA 91364

Directions:

From the 101 Freeway exit on Mulholland Drive South. Proceed to Steven Spielberg Drive and turn right into the campus.

(If questioned at the gate, tell the official that you are attending a CWC meeting.) At the 'T', turn left and follow the road to the large parking lot on the left for Villa Katzenberg. Parking is free in any of the lots.

(Please do NOT park on any of the streets.

You will be ticketed!) Interactive maps at:

http://cwc-sfv.org/Meetings/Location.php

The Valley Scribe The Newsletter of the

San Fernando Vallev Branch of California Writers Club

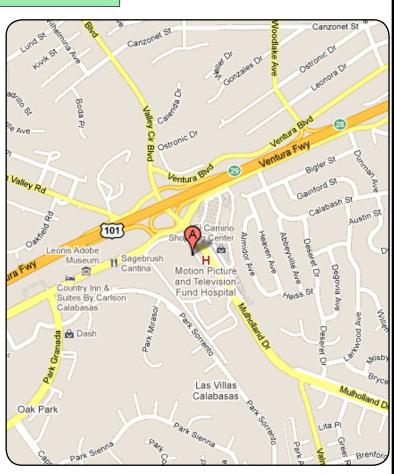
is published monthly. We solicit submissions from members. (See Bulletin Board: "SUBMISSIONS")

> Editor Ray Malus

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California Writers Club

San Fernando Valley Branch

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LOTS of great information at our Website:

www.cwc-sfv.org