



# The Valley Scribe



Newsletter of the San Fernando Branch of the California Writers Club

## Hear the Latest on Audio Books



**David Stifel**

Award-winning book narrator David Stifel will present “Audio Books: The Why and How for Authors,” on Saturday, December 1st, at the Motion Picture and Television Fund located in Woodland Hills. He’ll speak at 1 pm.

Stifel’s varied career has taken him from the Yale School of Drama to work in film and television. Among his many acting roles, he played an eyeless man selling drugs to Tom Cruise in *Minority Report*.

He entered audio recording by launching a long-term podcast serializing those works of Edgar Rice Burroughs in the public domain.

Expanding into a growing market, he began booking narration work through Audible’s acx.com. Collaborative connections with producers and publishers including Macmillan, Blackstone, Tantor,

BeeAudio and Crossroads Press soon followed. He was a Double Award Winner at the inaugural 2018 Audiobook Listener Awards for Best Lit RPG (Literary Role Playing Game) for *Awaken Online: Precipice* by Travis Bagwell, and Best Biography/Autobiography: *Trout Friends and Other Riff-Raff* by Bill Stokes. He has been an active participant in the phenomenal growth of the audio book industry.

“There can be good money in audio books if you have a successful title,” says Stifel, “And audio is now expected, just like print and eBooks.”

Stifel will guide his listeners through the growth of the audio book industry in the Saban Community Room, located in the Saban Center for Health and Wellness. He’ll share the intricacies and necessary steps a writer must know in order to take advantage of the new opportunities waiting in the production and distribution of audio books. —Nance Crawford

“Someone needs to buy a radio station, then play nothing but audio books, with a different genre of book played at set times. That way we can always have something new to read, no matter where we are.”

— Author **Shana Chartier**



# President's Message

**I**n this monthly column, my message to the SFV members would normally wax poetic about the month of December. Well, not this time. November has been so painful, I'm not in a poetic mood. Life in Agoura Hills is usually quiet and peaceful. The shooter at the Borderline Bar (a place my wife Rita and I have been to a number of times) lived in Newbury Park, near the homes of two of my friends; they are shocked that this tragedy has happened, as was everyone else in my community.

Then, just as we were trying to adjust to this terrible shooting, fires forced us to evacuate our home for four days. After the emergency we returned to discover that our house was fine, thank God. But many were not so lucky. I know that the increase in fires is the new *abnormal* per Governor Brown. So ... what to do?

I watched a TV news show a year ago which showed a home near Yosemite where a retired fire chief had planned to live out his old age. He had used his fireman's experience to make fire-resistant improvements to his home. His home was the only house on the street that didn't burn down in a recent fire. Something to think about, I decided afterward. I told my wife Rita about the show and we decided to try some of his home protection ideas.

But I wonder ... should people build houses on hills that are prone to wild fires? Should politicians take campaign money from real estate developers? Does global warming exist? And if it does exist, are all these fires making global warming worse? Questions are easy. Answers are more difficult.

See you all in December, Bob



**Mourners in Thousand Oaks**



## In This Issue

Speaker David Stifel	1	In Memoriam Dave Wetterberg	8&9
President's Message	2	Review and Refresh	10
Op-eds	3	The Ladder of Comedy	11
Diane Hinds Review	4	Andi's Critique Group	12
The Procession	5	Holidays, Housework And Hospitals	13
SFV Board Doings Tri-Valley Conference	6	Map & Directions	14
Ken's Pet Peeves	7		

*Perhaps catastrophe is the natural human environment, and even though we spend a good deal of energy trying to get away from it, we are programmed for survival amid catastrophe.*

—Germaine Greer

November has been a stressful month for Southern Californians. On November 8, a mass shooting took place in a neighborhood bar in the small community of Thousand Oaks. As Bob Okowitz wrote in his monthly message, just as locals were trying to deal with that shocking event, wind-driven firestorms flared in our hills and forced thousands to flee from their homes.

Some of us were forced to evacuate on short notice; others opened their homes and took in relatives and friends who'd morphed into frightened refugees from the terrifying infernos.

For days, dark billowing clouds of smoke loomed over the land and polluted our air. In the nighttime, red-orange flames writhed like dancing demons on nearby hills. Water-laden aircraft droned over our roofs, day and night.

On the news, we watched as families mourned their lost homes, pets and possessions. They told us about the family photos, paintings, jewelry and irreplaceable personal mementos that burned amid furniture and cars.

But most people who were interviewed after these disasters also expressed their deep gratitude to be alive and have a chance to start over again. In stressful times, many folks seem to look past the material losses and focus on what's really important.

—Kathy Highcove



## Submission Guidelines

I'm often asked for the submission guidelines of *The Valley Scribe*. Here's the scoop: submissions should be sent to my email address within the first two weeks of the next month. However, if I know early on that an interesting article, story or review is being prepared for submission, I'll reserve space in the issue.

I'm also asked what sort of submissions I want for the newsletter. That's easy. I like book reviews, memoirs, articles, fiction and nonfiction stories, commentaries, and info about helpful websites and writing workshops.

Sometimes I'll announce a theme or ask for a certain type of article for the next issue.



than 700 words.

If I assign a story, I'll tell the author how many words I'll need.

Lastly, let me know if your submission is not a new work and has already appeared in the Scribe in recent years.

Submissions that I **don't** want: a badly edited story or one that has a high word count. Unless I've approved a longer word total, submissions should be less

—Kathy Highcove  
[kghighcove@gmail.com](mailto:kghighcove@gmail.com)

# She asked, "What's your message?"

Diane Hinds



photo by Ester Shifren

**Diane Hinds is on a mission! A mission to help independent writers develop an effective public relations campaign.**

Hinds enjoys a varied career representing internationally known artists. She regularly speaks at literary festivals and libraries and has participated in UCLA's personal essay writing course. She coaches writers in person or on the Internet.

As our November guest speaker, she presented her basic strategy: define and present a clear message in the first sentence of your press release. Then send this message to major local and special interest publications as well as radio stations. Post it prominently on social media.



photo by Ester Shifren

**Diane Hinds makes her power point!**

Good public relations, Hinds emphasized, differs from advertising in that there is minimum cost but potentially huge exposure for your writing. "The Internet is removing obstacles of accessibility," she said. Then she traced the development of media influence from the Vietnam War—the first "living room war"—to Twitter/Amazon/Facebook/YouTube, which combined with mobile devices to serve as megaphones for social movements.

Hinds then suggested PR techniques

(persuasion, repetition, reputation, and information, entertainment) to be implemented with these tools: print

and social media presence, radio interviews, library readings, interest groups, iconic imagery, ISBN code, book websites, Facebook pages, and press releases.

"It takes some of your time, but very little of your money," she said. Her Power Point presentation showed several examples of expensive editorial coverage obtained completely free through her canny PR campaigns.

Hinds emphasized face-to-face interactions, even if one travels some distance for interviews. "It's all about creating a network of contacts," she said.

Our speaker then asked for a volunteer author to submit to her own PR analysis. New member Ray DeTournay seized the opportunity, came forward with a copy of his novel, "The Boy at Booth Memorial."

Hinds asked: What's your book about? What's your message? Who's the target audience?" and encouraged answers from Ray and the audience. A lively group interaction ensued.

While listening, I recalled Rosalind Russell's bold advice in *Gypsy*, "You gotta have a gimmick!" And that adage circles back to Hinds' own premise: independent authors must deliver a clear message for an effective PR strategy.

—Joan Zerrien

Hinds offers CWC-SFV members 15 minutes free coaching on Skype. (Contact her on [www.theentertainmentbureau.co.uk](http://www.theentertainmentbureau.co.uk))

*How To Promote Your Book* by Diane Hinds is available on Amazon.



## THE PROCESSION

Anne W. Lee

Satan's Mistress-  
jealous and demanding equal glory,  
comes to vindicate her anger.  
She will not be dismissed.

Hem of her royal red gown  
cascades gracefully, effortlessly  
down the canyon staircase.  
Your eyes are fixed on its glow.

She consumes simple sagebrush  
as greedily as museum delicacies.  
Her palate never cleansed  
from one course to the next.

The winds play in her hair-  
she feels refreshed.  
Sparks fly as she snaps her long fingers-  
she feels impatient.

Only her mercurial mood  
determines access to her intrigue  
or flight from her wrath and roar.  
Your anxiousness amuses her.

She breathes ash upon you  
indifferent to you gasping for air.  
Her acrid scent  
sears her profile into your memory.

Now trapped in this procession  
you clutch your irreplaceables like children  
hiding them behind you  
keeping them silent.

You bow.  
Afraid to look her in the eye.  
What will she demand of you?

“Sacrifice them all!” hisses the inferno.

She passes and never looks back.

## FROM YOUR BOARD



### OPEN MIC REBOOT

There have been ongoing Board discussions regarding continuing Open Mic as a regular feature prior to the monthly general membership meeting. After spirited debate, it was agreed that a musical performance is not appropriate for Open Mic. As a result, the Board has passed the following resolution: “Open Mic sessions are for members to read their prose and poetry within the guidelines set by the Board.”

—Nance Crawford

## A New Board Member

The Board voted to approve President Bob Okowitz’s appointment of Stacie Hammes as a new member of the board. She retains her Co-chair Hospitality position. The refreshment table will still be replenished and organized under her watchful eye.

President Okowitz comments on this appointment: “Stacie will be our member-at-large which means she’ll be a liaison between you, the membership, and the Board. She’ll head the ‘Complaint Department’ while wearing her awesome smile. The best smile the complaint department has ever seen.”

—CWC-SFV Board

## The First Board



September 2007

PHOTO: KEN WILKINS

*Signing in for the last meeting of CWC/WV's first year in June are (clockwise from the top): Dave Wetterberg, incoming President; Art Yuwiler, Membership Chairman; Bill Johnson, outgoing board member; Bill Hutchins, In Focus Editor and Di Johnson, outgoing President.*

Here they are, hard at work, getting ready for the next meeting. Looks like they’re working on the roster sign-up sheet and maybe Dave Wetterberg—the Veep in 2009—is making name tags. Some things don’t change in a writing club ...

It was over a decade ago, and sometimes it’s hard to believe that we’ve been at the MPTF that long.. Let’s hope we’re here for many more years to come.

—KH

Here's a seasonally appropriate page from the "Valley Scribe" archives.

## Ken's Pet Peeves by Ken Wilkins

### SHOPPING CART ABANDONMENT

A vacant space in the parking lot?  
It sure looks empty but it is not.

A shopping cart has been left behind.  
Some thoughtless soul with a pea-sized mind.

Left to dent fenders, maybe a door.  
Why can't the user properly store?

It takes but a moment to return  
Saving someone doing a slow burn.

Show you belong to the human race.  
Return your cart to the proper place.

— Ken Wilkins



What fool left  
THAT thing there?!



Gotta exchange  
this jacket and  
it's Christmas Evell



We're all waiting  
on the mall roof  
top, Santal! Let's gol



### HAPPY (?) RETURNS

The place is crowded, I'm starting to burn.

I have a small sweater I want to return.

The kids should have known I've put on some weight

The waistline has increased, an oldster's fate.

The lady up front has a brooch to exchange.

The sparkle she wants is out of her range.

Lord give me the strength just to stand in this line,

Absorbing complaints, be they far from Divine.

— KEN WILKINS

## In Memoriam Dave Wetterberg

The Hawaiians have the right idea. Aloha means hello and goodbye. When it comes to remembering Dave Wetterberg, I'm going to use aloha-hello. Maybe he is giving Ted Danson an assist in running heaven.

Dave was my friend, a fellow English teacher, a mentor and a feline fan who corralled and tamed a feral cat. The loyal cat was resting on his chest when he passed away.

Besides being president umpteen times, he was an admirable conversationalist chatting with prospective and regular members who sat in on our monthly meetings. He presided over my first critique group with members Art Yuwiler and Elaine Shevin.

As the King of Grammar and Usage, he admonished, "Don't use clichés; a pronoun must agree with its antecedent and the list; people use too many commas ... His Review and Refresh column has been a mainstay in our Scribe.

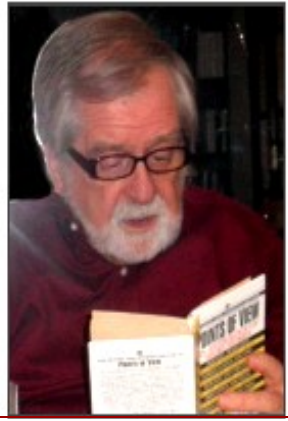
When my husband Jerry died in 2011, I went into a dark place. It was Dave's phone call saying, "We need you in our critique group," that brought me out of my funk. He was my savior.

Later, when it became difficult for him to navigate coming to the Katzenberg, we (Gary Wosk, Kathy Highcove, Joe Highcove, and myself) formed a luncheon group with Dave. We met when we could and often it was at Jerry's, Dave's favorite deli in Encino.

Later we followed him to *The Foothills*, an adult residence center in Simi Valley. He was happy there. Our last visit was about a month ago. He showed us his writing abilities by reading for us, "Papa and the Fireflies," one of his Christmas stories.

We promised Dave that we'd bring something of ours to share the next time we met. Sadly, it never happened.

—Sheila Moss



When Dave was president of the West Valley Writers Club, I joined his critique group. My first creative writing teacher had encouraged me to write my memoir pieces in first person present tense. Dave didn't care for that format and didn't understand why I persisted in writing that way. After a couple of years I got the message and tried to write in past tense. But I kept

going back and forth from present to past to present in the same story. Oy. But Dave's critique group was an awakening and helped me become a better writer.

As time progressed, Dave and I became good friends and he became my movie buddy. We shared an occasional meal at Costco. On these occasions we enjoyed gossiping about people we knew ... good-naturedly, of course. Our discussions on politics were in agreement and socially liberal. We laughed a lot together.

He was my best friend. How I wish I could write that last sentence in present tense.

—Leslie Kaplan

I was having lunch at the Fallbrook Mall food court, year 1985? I don't remember the exact date. While seated there, a crowd of people rushed by me. I got up and followed them because I was looking for the CWC/SFV club. A rustic entry with a welcome sign at a side door showed me the way.

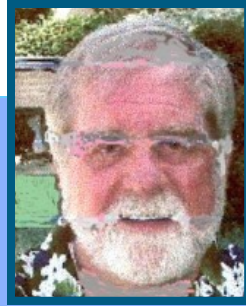
The speaker that day was Dave Wetterberg, a club member who had recently lost his wife. His sad kind face welcomed a big crowd of writers, extending to us the comfort Dave himself needed. That was the date he was voted SFV president and everyone applauded loudly.

Dave led the way in many of our group's writing adventures and earned our respect. He was always there when a member needed him. He was something rare—a good kind friend.

—Keyle Birnberg.



**"Dave was my mentor, teacher, critic, but most of all, my dear friend..."**



Dave has been my mentor, teacher, critic, but most of all, my dear friend over the past decade. He was a man of superb talent and humility ... and appreciation of others' writings. He shared his wonderful stories and classic style poems, each one an example of excellent writing. His love of poetry was expressed in long memorized passages he quoted.

Dave was a big man in stature and character, warm and sentimental, passionate and caring. He taught because he loved teaching, wrote because he loved writing, recited poetry because he loved the classics and was a true friend because he was a kind man possessing great affection for his peers.

All my memories of Dave are happy and admiring. And he excused me from "commas" and encouraged me to be confident in my own voice and of course, "show, not tell." I will always cherish his memory with loving friendship and admiration.

—Lillian Rodich



West Valley's Dave Wetterberg was "traffic cop" at WV's May meeting. With all the construction at MPTV, some of the roads were closed, so Dave helped members find their way to the meeting room.

June 2007

**Dave loved poetry and could recite several from memory. This poem by Yeats was a favorite.**

**The Wild Swans at Coole**

**W.B. Yeats**

**'The trees are in their autumn beauty,  
The woodland paths are dry,  
Under the October twilight the water  
Mirrors a still sky;  
Upon the brimming water among the stones  
Are nine-and-fifty swans.**

**The nineteenth autumn has come upon me  
Since I first made my count;  
I saw, before I had well finished,  
All suddenly mount  
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings  
Upon their clamorous wings.**

**I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,  
And now my heart is sore.  
All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,  
The first time on this shore,  
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,  
Trod with a lighter tread.**

**Unwearied still, lover by lover,  
They paddle in the cold  
Companionable streams or climb the air;  
Their hearts have not grown old;  
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,  
Attend upon them still.**

**But now they drift on the still water,  
Mysterious, beautiful;  
Among what rushes will they build,  
By what lake's edge or pool  
Delight men's eyes when I awake some day  
To find they have flown away?**



## *The Comma — Part One*

Note: Let's get it straight. There is no rule that says you insert a comma somewhere within a sentence because of some vague notion that a comma belongs there. And there is no rule that says you insert a comma because you can feel a "hesitation" in the sentence. And there is no rule that says that when you're in doubt, plug a comma in "just to play it safe." (On the contrary, whenever you're in doubt, leave the comma out. You'll be right more times than you're wrong. I guarantee it.)

### **The Comma with Items in a Series    Something New ... NOT!**

Put a comma before each item in a series when the series has more than two items.

*The only dissenters of the plan were Bill Murphy, Al Newman, and Mark Kitahara.*

Some would say that this rule has changed and leave off the comma after Newman.

*The only dissenters were Bill Murphy, Al Newman and Mark Kitahara.*

This change in the serial comma is a recent phenomenon and seems to be found in newspaper articles. A publication often needs a bit more font space and so the last comma has been deleted in recent time.

### **The Comma and the Appositive**

An appositive is a word or a word group placed after a noun that identifies or supplements the noun. Commas are necessary to set off an appositive. ("Set off" means one before and one after.)

*I haven't seen Tillie and Barbara, two of my closest college chums, since 1977.*

In some cases commas are not necessary when the proper name comes first and the appositive shows a close relationship.

*My brother Bob and my sister Sue are in the Air Force.*

A reverse order would call for commas, however.

*Bob, my brother, and Sue, my sister, are in the Air Force.*

### **The Comma in the Compound Sentence**

The conjunctions *and*, *but*, *or*, *for*, *nor*, *so*, and *yet* are the only words that can join sentences together correctly. When they do, a comma before the conjunction is necessary.

*The car raced off after the shooting, but a bystander got the license number.*

If the compound sentence is a short one, the comma may be left out.

*The dog barked and Melissa screamed.*

Sometimes the pronoun *it* is confused with a conjunction and is used incorrectly as a conjunction.

*He looked down at the map, it was drenched. (incorrect)*

The following are examples of the pronoun *it* used correctly in the same situation:

*He looked down at the map, but it was drenched.*

*He looked down at the map. It was drenched.*

*He looked down at the map; it was drenched.*

*I have spent most of the day putting in a comma and the rest of the day taking it out.*

- Oscar Wilde





# The Ladder of Comedy

First published in "The Valley Scribe," April, 2009

Comedy has its levels of sophistication; hence the terms "low comedy" and "high comedy." Low comedy takes in bathroom humor and crude sex. Bathroom jokes are on the lowest rung, the peepee and doo-doo jokes most kids like. Sex jokes begin when little Mikey discovers that what's under his diaper is different from cousin Suzy's.

Next rung up comes mindless physical action comedy, stock characters, and sight gags. When Lucille Ball gets on a pie assembly-line and it gets out of control, her antics bring the house down. *The Three Stooges* still sell. *Gilligan's Island* had its stock characters; the beauty, the millionaire, etc. Kramer gets laughs on *Seinfeld* falling down and bumping into doors. Some things never change.

Next up, the "comic incongruity" is like a diagonal line crossing parallel lines. George Gobbels got a long laugh sitting between Dean Martin and Bob Hope on *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*. "I feel like I'm wearing a tuxedo with brown shoes," he quipped.

Mayberry's deputy sheriff Barney Fife in an incongruity among the more solid parallels of his profession. Sheriff Taylor doesn't let him keep a bullet in his pistol for fear he'll shoot his foot off. Characters out of their element generate laughs. Take a family of hillbillies and put them in posh Beverly Hills. Talk about incongruity!

Comic exaggerations give us a hoot:  
Archie Bunker's blindfolded vision of society.

*I Love Lucy's* craziness.

Verbal wit comedy requires listening and double-takes. "Take my wife," says the comedian. "No, really! Take my wife!"

"Tough", says Rodney Dangerfield. "When I was playing football, we sacked the quarterback, then we went after his family."

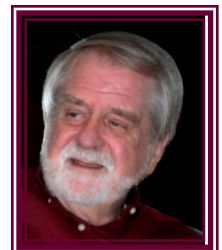
At the top of the ladder comes high comedy, the use of satire and irony to call attention to the silliness of ideas and institutions. *Saturday Night Live* is an example. Some irony bites hard. Jon Stewart catches a politico stating one opinion today, then shows clips where the same politico said the opposite thing yesterday, delighting *The Daily Show* audience.

The best example of gentle irony is Governor Adlai Stevenson's masterpiece to the Illinois legislature vetoing Senate Bill 93, better known as the *Cat Leash Law*. The governor's humor creeps up gradually. A cat is a creature entitled to its freedom, he writes. It has a "natural right to roam" around in its neighborhoods. Should he sign this bill, another would surely follow to leash birds and prevent them staining the sidewalks of Illinois.

"For these reasons, and not because I love birds the less or cats the more, I veto and withhold my approval for Senate Bill 93."

Classic. I have a copy if you want to read it.

—Dave Wetterberg





## Andi's Wednesday Critique Group



Left to right: Pat Avery, Anne W. Lee, Mary Freeman, Rita Keeley-Brown, Paula Diggs, Lillian Rodich, Andrea Polk.

The Wednesday critique group meets on the second and fourth Wednesday of the month at the home of our founding member, Lillian Rodich. We set aside four hours from 10:30 am to 2 pm to earnestly dig deep into the creative writing before us.

The group has evolved over the years as members moved out of the area and new members joined us. The net result has always produced a group dedicated to support, encouragement, candor and trust. We email our submissions in advance and critique each submission as written. Then we hear the submission read aloud and refine our critiques and discuss our insights in turn.

We write in all genres inspired by the stories, essays or poems that demand to be written. The poems, essays, short stories, mysteries and novels are critiqued with a careful eye and ear that are mindful of the authentic spirit, character development, use of language appropriate to the time, place, character and plot; and how members' poetry impact a reader's imagination.

Laughter, joy, tears, bravos and good food are freely shared; so is assistance. Someone will step forward to help whether technical, proofreading, organizing or providing other creative arts is requested.

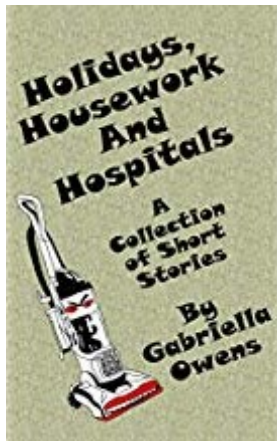
No matter what our chosen genre, the critique group helps us find the right format, the right words. When we read our work aloud we discover we often read a smoother more authentic version than the words on the page.

There have been occasions when a short story became a novel, when poems have been morphed into another genre, and a reading has engendered thoughts of stage plays or musical treatments.

Our inspirational gathering of strangers has become a family of creative wealth. Three of us have published and the remaining four are on their way. So long as we write, this group will live on.

—Andi Polk





## Holidays, Housework and Hospitals: A Collection of Short Stories

Kindle Edition

by Gabriella Owens (Author), Allyson Farrar (Illustrator)

These are three short stories about my family. The first two are funny, the last is serious.

### A Gift Worth Screaming For

Humor - Holiday fun and the joy of giving the perfect gift! We've made it a holiday tradition to torture my sister with bizarre gifts. This was one of the best.



“The gloves did look very frog-like. However, they didn't look quite like live frogs. Their shade was closer to the dead frog perception.”

### The Vacuum of War

Humor - A housework horror story full of heroes and high drama (or should I say low drama?). Yes, it really happened. It was already ridiculous before I exaggerated and embellished. The finished story had Lynne laughing so hard she could hardly breathe.

### Still

Somber - My son had an unexpected hospital stay. It was hard to live, hard to write and is still hard to read a dozen years later. I end up in tears every time. When the CWC-SFV published their anthology (*Cascade of Pearls*) in 2017, several people urged me to submit this story. It had to be cut by half to fit in the anthology. In this book I was able to tell the full story.



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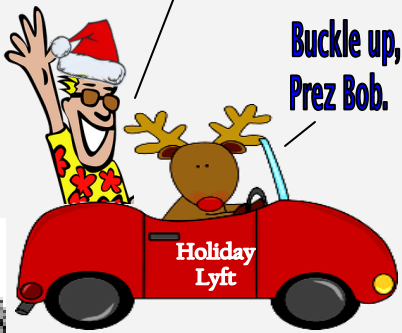
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I'll see you at the MPTF!



Buckle up,  
Prez Bob.

### How to Find Us

Driving west on the 101 freeway to the Woodland Hills area, exit at the Valley Circle/Mulholland off-ramp. Coming east, exit at Calabasas Rd./Mulholland off ramp and move left with traffic onto Calabasas Rd.

West bound travelers go south over the 101 freeway you just exited and drive straight on until you see Spielberg Drive on your right.

Eastbound motorists must be in the far right lane on Calabasas Rd. so you can easily turn right onto Mulholland road. Continue to Spielberg Drive.

Drive along Spielberg Drive, turn left at an intersection and continue along the road to a kiosk with a gate across the road. Inform the kiosk attendant that you've come for the California Writers Club meeting and ask for parking directions.

The parking lot for our meeting is near a statue of a trombone player. (Buddy Rogers) When you leave your car and look around, you should spot a group of buildings nearby. That's where the Katzenberg Pavilion is located. There's a large koi pond and small bridge over the pond right beside an entrance to our meeting room.

Another clue—if you're lost, wandering around the facility's campus, Katzenberg Pavilion is directly across from the Stark Villa. Look for our sign-in tables set up outside the Pavilion. Club members are waiting to welcome you into our gathering.



The Saban Center  
for Health and Wellness

The CWC-SFV Meeting  
will be held on Dec. 1st, at 1 p.m.  
in the Saban Community Room  
Located at the  
Motion Picture and Television Fund  
23388 Mulholland Drive  
Woodland Hills, CA 91364

