



The Valley Scribe



Newsletter of the San Fernando Branch of the California Writers Club

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Fired Up and Ready To Go!



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At our June meeting, CWC-SFV members elected the candidates for three CWC official Board positions: Bob Okowitz, President, Nance Crawford, Vice-President, and Patricia Avery, Secretary/Treasurer. All three had already held these positions and voluntarily chose to continue their Board jobs next year.

Listed on the left are four members who have been asked by our President to attend Board meetings. These people provide crucial vital services for our branch and have held these positions for two years.

Lori Hamilton will continue to find interesting speakers, Andrea Polk will multitask membership and a multitude of other tasks, Michael Rains will faithfully post each new newsletter issue, and I will continue as The Valley Scribe editor.

The one newcomer, Jenny Jordan, will be taking over the Critique Group Coordinator duties this coming year. We're all very grateful for Geri Jabara's long service in this position and know that she'll help Jenny Jordan learn the ropes.

-KH

SFV News and Announcements

Many of our members have recently published a book and are in the midst of a marketing endeavor. The Board has resolved to help members market their new books and give their efforts a boost. Below you'll note two recent Board motions that addressed marketing at meetings.

The Board approved the following policies to address member marketing:

Motion: Members may promote their newly published book during a scheduled General Membership Meeting. Their presentation is limited to five minutes. The member must notify the President one week prior to the General Meeting and receive written confirmation that they will be on the agenda. The member may sell copies of their book after the meeting. Unanimously passed.

Motion: We will provide a table at the General Membership Meetings so that our members may advertise writing opportunities and events and approved non-profit literature that promotes activities or events related to the writing industry. We will request that MPTF make an additional table available for this use. Unanimously approved.

In other words, SFV members may introduce and sell newly published books at our future meetings. There will be further discussion of these two motions at a future date.

-KH



Our thanks to Andi Polk and Alan Wills for helping to organize this summer event.

Meet, Greet and Eat

Remember that our annual August Social will be held on **Saturday, August 3rd. at 1 pm**, in the Saban Community Room. Refreshments are potluck, so please bring your favorite finger food to share. (And pay your dues.)



Rita Keeley Brown Led the Prompt Parade

Writing instructors have often advised their students: “Write everyday. Always make it a rule to write ... anything ... every day.” And most writers find the Daily Write Advisory doesn’t agree with their muse. What happens when hands are poised about the keyboard, ready to go, but the spirit is not willing? In that case, perhaps it’s time search out an experienced blahs-buster like Rita Keeley Brown - author, teacher, writing coach, our SFV Jack London nominee. Keeley Brown has many methods to soothe and settle a balky muse. Our club members should know because for several months this past year, Keeley Brown has patiently led us through several rounds of prompt exercises.

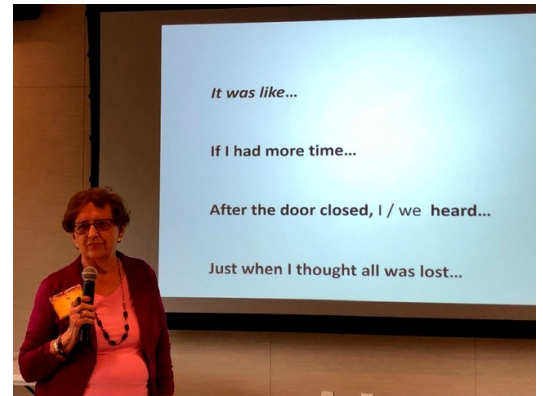
In each of these sessions, our resourceful leader encouraged us to remain open to any intriguing thought, sight or sound that might incite a story. Some of her former creative writing students, we learned, have continued to work with a prompt and turned it into a short story or ... a book!

Our June meeting was the perfect time for Keeley Brown to take the podium and review what she’s presented in previous prompt exercises. On this occasion, she highlighted several ways a prompt might inspire a short story or poem. The first two

rounds featured leading sentences to suggest a memoir piece or a humorous anecdote. Next, we viewed a photo prompt and then listened to a few bars of a musical composition. After we read or looked or listened to a prompt, we were given twelve minutes to write a response. Following the writing, volunteers stood and read their stories or prompt responses to the group.

Keeley Brown voiced her prompt mantra before each round of writing. “Relax, open your mind, and let the ideas come flooding into your head. Choose a thought that really grabs your interest and just start writing. See where it takes you. Anything goes. Quiet your self-critic. No judgment, just WRITE!” We followed her advice. These photos attest to the group’s musing and writing in the comfortable Saban Community Room. And in succeeding pages you’ll find stories that were the result of our hour of prompts. Enjoy.

-Kathy Highcove



Thanks to Ester Shifren, here are several shots of our hour of inspiration.

Photo Prompt: A Dove and Her Chicks

Parenthood

Tucked under each wing
The bird protects her young
From cold breezes, rain
And marauding ravens.

Growing raucous, demanding
Chicks stretch their limbs
Parenting ebbs to feeding
Only if they beg.

Finally fledged, aloft
Their tentative flight
Unshielded and solo
Brash adolescents.

Pat Avery



A Mother's Love

Ever vigilant, frame stretched and covering her babies. No words, just warmth, ease and a feeling of security. One day what is tiny will be large, what seeks comfort will give comfort. Maybe in the same place, but more often than not it will be somewhere new. Life is movement, and thus the new extends the ways of the old. The old fades then disappears and yet in love is fully a part of now. Love connects the past to the present, so that the future can be born. It is why love is not always spoken in words. It is bigger than that.

Michael Savage

Dove and Chicks photo

Sheltered under the wings of mama,
The little ones stay quiet.

They understand: Don't Move.

The sun is hot and they're too young
To fly solo.

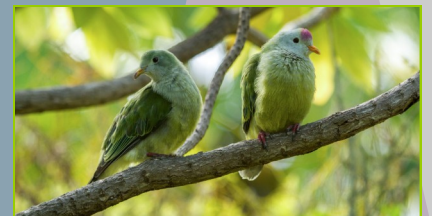
Two wings shield the fledglings yet
Let them safely see the world.

Surrounding trees are green like their feathers
And perfect camouflage.

The camera barely distinguishes
The birds from the tropical green leaves.

Soon they will fly free from mama ...

Andrea Polk



The Tale of the Tails

Forty-five minutes earlier it was smiles, let me fix your tie, do I look alright? Bride or groom? Thank you. Now it was bells, laughter, hugs and the wonderful smell of fresh flowers as Mr. and Mrs. Scott glide past me into the sunshine closely followed by family and friends eager to talk to each other rather than sing and pray.

Just because I was tall had equated to my being older and wiser in the “taskmaster’s eyes,” but I wasn’t that person. I was just an early stage teenager, with raging hormones and various categories of confusion, conflicting mush, and myriad insecurities within my head. I was surrounded by what had been entrusted to me prior to the wedding service, but I now had a huge problem and no chance of escape.

He was dressed for the occasion, and I knew as he walked toward me that gone was the awkwardness of wearing the unknown. The sun was shining and buoyed by myriad compliments of “you look handsome” and “wows.” He seemed to bounce rather than step toward me.

I tried to distract myself from his approach by looking at the pretty girls dressed in their new outfits but it was to no avail. The model specimen of masculinity was closer now, and his impressive stature and bouncing strut had distracted me from the clone “handsomes” following behind him. He wore a perfect smile, on a handsome zit-free face and his confidence was the nemesis of my awkwardness.

My hand grasped felt and leathery material and a rather stiff brim as I gave the first hat to the leader of the handsome gang. Being new to top hats or any hat beyond one-size-fits-all, I was oblivious to the nuances of sizing. A complete

lack of training or suggestions of how to organize a small cloister filled with top hats hurriedly handed to me was the catalyst of doom for me and would prove to be the downfall of many a manly pate that day. Luckily, I didn’t know most of them and after repeated visits to the open bar and myriad toasts to the new couple my hope was the memory of my faux pas would be erased for many whilst remaining etched in my mind.

Thankfully victim one being tall and heedless to the ways of the top hat held it in his hand. My relief was quickly crushed by the short

“handsome” behind him who wanted the “hat lift” and whom immediately raised arm and hat upward. I gulped.

It perched like a Kippah on his head. It felt like I’d stepped into a Laurel and Hardy movie as top hat slapstick ensued under the pressure of an impatient photographer eager to get his moment in the sun. Size matters in hats as my next helpless victim extended his arm for his hat. The present was built upon the past. I could only give people the hats I had left.

In the foreground the bride and groom shone brightly in their love but to the left and right of them it resembled a top hat swap meet, with hurried exchanges and a quick try on before stepping into the frame of the next wedding shot. Lewis Carroll called him the “Mad Hatter.”

Now I knew why.

-Michael Savage



Life Stories

Two months ago, SFV member Anne W. Lee, submitted her poem, *As Refugees*, to this newsletter. She also wrote a foreword that spelled out her reasons for writing the verse.

I found her poem very insightful. It made me think about the travails of refugees who petition for asylum at our Mexican border.

During the prompt session led by Rita Keeley Brown, I sat beside Anne Lee and when the time came to share a prompt, she read to me her experiences visiting the San Fernando Valley Rescue Mission. Later, I looked online at the 90 bed facility for homeless families. It's was very impressive.

Anne's prompt story described her meeting with a group of homeless women who had found sanctuary at the Valley Rescue Mission. They shared with Anne how it felt to have a bed, food, clean water, bathrooms, a quiet place to sleep and peace of mind. Their children had benefited from medical care, schooling, and enjoyed a safe well-equipped playground. Anne was moved by this experience.

Not long after our club's June meeting, I was pleased to receive another poem, *Arriving*, from Anne. Her verse describes how homeless women feel when they find shelter, and the chance to learn new skills - the only way to escape poverty's grip.

You'll find the poem, *Arriving*, on page 7. -KH

The San Fernando Valley Rescue Mission



Musical Prompt



The last round of our prompt writing was a totally new experience. Keeley Brown turned on a tape and played, for about 5 minutes a modern piano composition. She asked us to listen for a while and then try to describe what we heard in the music. We could write down anything ... phrases, verbs, scenes, or even a story. Many of us were perplexed and not many were willing to stand and read their reactions. But Andrea Polk raised her hand and gave us a long list of impressions. Here's what she read:

Lullaby ... jaunty ... lilting ... dancing through the words ... hide and seek ... caught! You're It! ... cookies and milk ... dabbled sunshine ... action slowing ... late afternoon ... no, I don't want a nap ... can't I play more?

Keeley Brown looked very pleased when she heard this reaction of the musical prompt. We felt that Andrea had somehow earned an A+, but we weren't sure why. Then our "teacher" divulged that the music had been written for her 80th birthday celebration. To learn more, read pages 8 and 9.

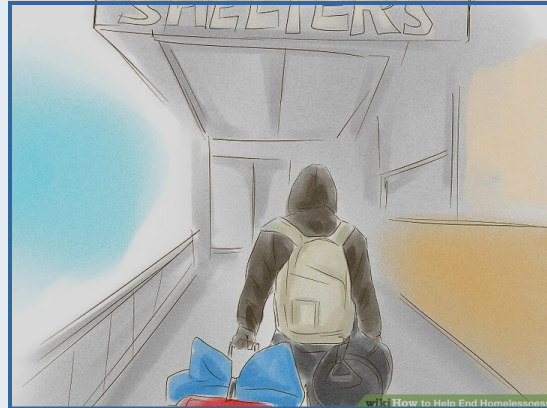
-KH

Arriving

written by Anne W. Lee/April 2016
after an introductory visit to the
San Fernando Valley Rescue Mission

**This Blessing
arrives weary.
Not knowing
whether to be more afraid of past or future.**

**This Blessing
drags a bulging suitcase,
slings a beleaguered bag
of mismatched items-
life stained, life remnants
“Hurry! Quick! Now!” echoes from the packing.**



**This Blessing darts their eyes from yet another assessment form. So many questions
asked about their turmoil.
How to place it all in the open hands of those that say “trust us” amid
their restoration rules and expectations?
Blessing has gripped turmoil tightly for too long and the fingers feel numb.**

**This Blessing
takes in familiar smells
and clanging from the kitchen.
It is warm, free food – life energy spooned on to a clean place. Bittersweet memories
of when they ruled their own kitchen garnish it.**

**This Blessing
runs its hands across a freshly made up bed hoping between the four corners
no harm can come.
That sleep here lets both eyes close.**

**This Blessing
sees some trying to lean forward
but holding back in suspicion.
Hears others loud and obnoxious with competing stories. Children break the barriers
as their curiosity demands it.
“Let me play with your toy! Run with me!”**

**This Blessing
gives in to a lounge chair
and recognizes the commonality
in the fighting and fleeing that it took
to get them all this far.
Resistance to demons external and internal is so exhausting.**

**This Blessing
catches their own reflection
in the shiny surfaces of the common bathroom,
and starts fishing for the key of Hope in their pocket. Will it unlock Resiliency that
waits patiently imprisoned in spaces between their broken places?**

A Gift

by Rita Keeley Brown

When you want to give something truly special to someone you care a lot about, where do you start? Would you go to a gift consultant at Macy's? A jewelry store? Concert tickets? A resort or spa? Macy's could give you good practical ideas and suggestions. But suppose you said to yourself, I actually want to give something unique to this person – something that will last, not just an “*everyone* loves to get a _____” kind of gift.

This story is about the unique gift I received on the occasion of my big ‘8-O’ birthday. It is an example of the thoughtfulness I have always felt from my children. All six children have enriched, thrilled, and filled my life in ways far beyond any calculable measure, from those kindergarten hand prints in plaster to thoughtful gifts purchased with their own hard-earned money. Without the tiniest bit of exaggeration, my children are the greatest treasure in my life.

On that birthday, they took me to dinner at one of my favorite restaurants. My oldest daughter, Teresa, appeared having just flown in from Georgia to surprise me. My youngest son, Paul, called me from Oakland to say “Happy Birthday, Mom.” The other children, Steve, Mary Anne, Cathy, and Jen, live nearby so they were all there. It was such a lovely celebration. Other friends had taken me to lunch, etc., during the week. Two days later, Steve, my oldest son, took me to a wonderful LA Philharmonic concert at Disney Hall. I did kind of wonder why none of the other children came along, but my prevailing thought was what a lovely birthday *week* this has been!

On the way home from the concert Steve surprised me by saying, “Is it okay with you, Mom, if we stop off at St. Bernardine’s for a short while? Several of my elementary school classmates have planned a sort of reunion while they are in town this weekend.”

“That’s really nice!” I said. “You can just drop me off first and then you can stay as late as you want and

catch up on all that is going on in their lives. That should be great fun and I don’t mind at all. I am quite tired anyway and the house is close by.”

“But they said they want to see you, too, Mom,” he insisted.

“Why on earth would they be interested in seeing me? I’m flattered to hear that but they are not going to want an ‘old bird’ like me hanging around. They had enough of someone’s mom ‘hanging out in the wings’ when you were young.”

“No, Mom, they said they always liked you and some have even read your books and would really like to see you. They have a lot of good memories of coming to our house.”

“I really don’t think that is such a good idea, besides I would feel out of place after five minutes and I certainly do not want to make any of them feel like they have to ‘watch what they say.’ You can just tell them for me that ‘old Mom was really tired – she just turned 80 years old, you know.”

“But they asked if you would come.”

“Are any other parents coming?”

“I don’t know. They just asked about you.”

“I really think it would be best if you just dropped me off at home and you went by yourself.”

“Oh, come on, Mom. We will just go in, say ‘Hi,’ and then I’ll take you home, please? They will be disappointed if you don’t at least say ‘Hi.’”

I could tell he was not going to give up and I had run out of excuses, so I reluctantly said, “Oh, all right. But just for a short while, right?” I sort of lagged behind him a bit walking down the hallway in case there might be a chance for a reprieve. I love young people, but I didn’t relish being that ‘onion in the petunia patch.’ However, as usual, I could not bring myself to say an absolute – “No.”

As we entered the room I first saw someone who looked like my friend and former boss before I retired. It is Dana! And there is her husband, Frankie! Then the first pastor of our parish, Monsigneur. Murray walked up – then, Father McNamara, the current pastor – then I saw our piano teacher and

her husband – and, Paul, my son who lives in Oakland, came to give me a big hug – on and on and on! There was a large crowd shouting “Happy Birthday, Rita!” Grandkids came running up, friends I hadn’t seen in a long time. I was stunned. I couldn’t think of anything to say except, “Good Lord! This is why you wouldn’t let me off the hook. I can’t believe this. I am totally in shock. All my children – so many special friends, and I had no clue.” I truly did not.

A beautiful display of all kinds of food and drinks was waiting so all were urged to eat right away before the food got cold. (Five of my children, Teresa, Cathy, Mary Anne, Jen, and Paul had been getting everything set up for the party while Steve kept me out of their way at the concert. That’s why none of them came.) After eating, everyone gathered around and each person was introduced to the group. Then Steve introduced Danae Vlasse, our piano teacher (we both study piano with her) and he told about commissioning her to compose a work based on my life. Danae explained how she had written *Sonate Pour Quatre Mains*, a Sonata for Four Hands, to be played on one piano. (Yes, she is French.) It has three movements. The first is entitled “L’Enfance(Childhood), the second “Lamentations” (Sorrows), and the third, “La Joie De Vivre” (The Joy of Life). She explained that “Each movement is taken as a moment in the life of Rita ... in three distinct stages.”

They presented the score to me along with a CD of her performing the other version for two hands which she also wrote. The score begins with a wonderful description of how she structured the work and an analysis of its development. In reading it I was struck by the similarity to the structuring of poetry. The CD was then played for all to hear and I followed it by reading the score. It was one of the most beautiful listening experiences I have ever had. She captured the playfulness of childhood, the minor keys spoke deeply of the travails of midlife, then the resolution and peace in later life.

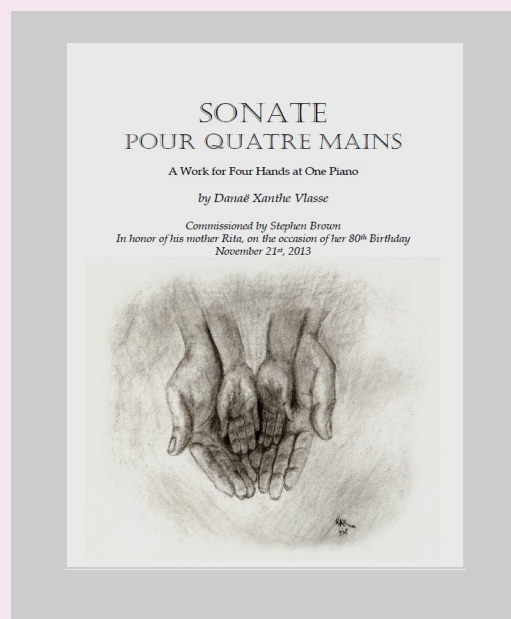
To add to the overwhelming effect of such a precious gift, the cover of the work featured a pencil drawing I had done from a photo. It was of four hands – the open hands of a child held between the open hands of an adult which I had titled “Guiding Hands.”

Since the presentation and my listening to the CD over and over, Danae now has Steve and me learning to play the Sonata. We performed the first movement in one of her recitals and are now working on the other two movements. This beautiful composition resonates as deeply in my soul as anything in my life ever has.

I have said before that it took twenty years for me to truly accept the fact that I had turned fifty. I did not want to get old! I expected the big 8-0 would rattle my cage a bit too. My memories of this birthday are so deep and so pleasant that I can only say, “Hey, I’m ready for 81, 82, even 90 and on! I love my life.”

Danae frequently refers to a quote by Victor Hugo – “Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and that which cannot remain silent.”

This CD and score are available from Music Vision Studios.com as well as the opportunity to listen to this work performed by the composer, Danae Vlasse.



SPEAKER CHAIR LORI HAMILTON HAS PLANNED AHEAD

Greetings Members and Friends:

Now in my third year as Program Chair, I confess that it has been a pleasure, an adventure and a learning experience. A pleasure because I got to choose speakers whose subjects I want (need) to learn more about. An adventure because there is no guarantee that a speaker will live up to expectations. So far, I believe that most of the past speakers were well received by our members. And I am so grateful when members give me feedback of the speakers and their subjects.

I find our speakers in various ways—by raiding workshop rosters of speakers I know, by scouring reviews of books and articles about writers, and by referrals from members. Gary Wosk is responsible for several speakers coming in the season ahead. And then, of course, there's serendipity. Or luck.

Here's a preview of what you can expect:

SEPT. 2019: Anne Perry. Yes, the famous, prolific writer of so many best sellers. She has no qualms about sharing the secrets of her success.

OCT. 2019: John Loesing, Managing Editor of the Acorn. He will talk about his experiences dealing with and hiring innumerable writers. And what he looks for to get the best for his newspaper.

NOV. 2019: Debra Tash. Debra is an award-winning author, journalist and accomplished speaker. She is Editor in Chief of Ventura's Citizen Journal, and will speak on Historical Fiction, a subject in which many members have expressed interest.

DEC. 2019: Peter Rubie (This is a work-in-progress.) Peter Rubie is an agent, a former BBC Radio and Fleet Street journalist, author of two books, member of NYU faculty for ten years, editor and former jazz musician. The goal is to bring him from his New York headquarters to the MPTF to speak on *VOICE AND EMOTION IN FICTION*. He has generously offered to do a two-hour

workshop concentrating on the writer's voice. Details to follow.

JAN. 2020: Laurie Stevens. Laurie is an award winning author of both literary and psychological suspense novels, an editor, a screenwriter as well as playwright. Her subject: An Analysis of Psychological Murder and Detective novels.

FEB. 2020: Ara Grigorian. We heard Ara in May speak about the essence of the story. With a Power Point Presentation, he used a simple plot to show character transformation. Members liked him so much that he was asked to return and give his two-hour version. Details will follow.

MAR. 2020: Jeanne De Vita. Jeanne, an award-winning author and editor, is currently the Developmental Editor at Waterhouse Press, and also teaches A Writer's Program at UCLA Extension. His subject: *BASICS ON PLOT*.

APRIL 2020: Mark Rose. Mark's presentation will be on science fiction. He is an editor and Elizabethan expert whose book, *Alien Encounters: Anatomy of Science Fiction*, is considered the encyclopedia of the genre.

MAY 2020: Annette Rodgers. Annette is the senior editor for Poison Pen Press which has now been acquired by Sourcebooks with Penguin Books an investor. She has spoken to us before and always has such a wealth of information on writing, editing and publishing that we invited her back for more.

JUNE 2020: TO BE ANNOUNCED AND PLEASE DON'T HESITATE TO MAKE SUGGESTIONS.

Lori Hamilton, CWC-SFV Speaker Chair

Vacation Plans?



If you're taking a trip this summer, please share a photo from your adventures- or a selfie - with Valley Scribe readers.

Include a short tag that tells us about the scene. That's your prompt - share the shot and a caption.

Send to kghighcove@gmail.com



Dug IN: An Irish Family's Search for Justice

My novel, **Dug IN**, is now available on Amazon Kindle. The story begins in Ireland in 1916. Joe and Mary Duggin, like many Irish of that time, are forced to leave their homeland and immigrate to New York city. Multiple times, the English authorities had harassed and jailed Joe for his active opposition to English rule. As the head of the Brotherhood in Mulingar, the English hounded Joe and beat him mercilessly.

The couple hopes to get a fresh start in New York, but Joe confronts "Irish Need Not Apply" signs at job sites and it took months for Joe to get a decent job. He got fired from one job because he asked for a raise.

There are other troubling social issues, like getting a union started where he works and racism, that challenge the couple. Mary gets involved in helping homeless folks. They have three sons, two of whom - Jamie and Danny - get into mischief growing up in

their New York neighborhood. The third son, Patrick, becomes a priest.

Fifty years later, when these two sons are caught up in the 1966 NYC Subway Strike: Jamie is a union leader, and Danny is a banker whose boss tells him to lean on Jamie to stop the subway strike.

My book is not yet in hard copy, but you can read it on Kindle. If you don't have a Kindle (like me) you can download a Kindle app (free) to read the book (and many other books) on your computer. You can download it

from the **Dug In** Amazon page. Aren't they smart, over at Amazon? It's Amazon Amazing !! To see my book online, go to: https://www.amazon.com/sk=Dug+IN+Okowitz&i=stripbooks&ref=nb_sb_noss

--Bob Okowitz



Time to Re-up Your Membership

CWC--SFV Members, Don't Forget!

IT'S TIME TO RENEW YOUR DUES!

**\$45 Check or Cash
Due Now
through September 27, 2019**

Make your check payable to: CWC-SFV

**Mail to: Pat Avery, Treasurer
P.O. Box 9023
Calabasas, CA 91372**

***Do not send CASH* through the mail.**

**Dues payments will be accepted at the scheduled general meetings
Saturday, August 3rd, and September 7th.**

A Workshop in Long Beach



Presented by California Writers Club of Long Beach

Winning With Writing

SECRETS OF THE PROS

A face-to-face workshop with professionals



Saturday, September 28, 2019 1:30-5:00

Liberal Arts Campus, Long Beach City
College, 4901 East Carson St., Long Beach

**A \$35 ticketed event with limited seating open
only to CWC members - register online at**

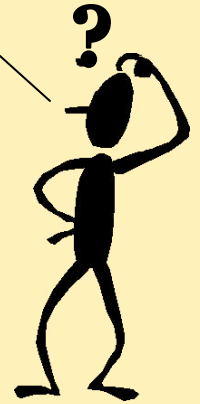
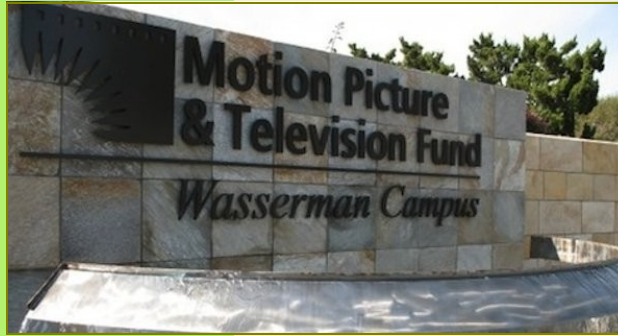
<https://winning-with-writing-workshop.eventbrite.com>

password required CWCLB! (capitals, exclamation point)

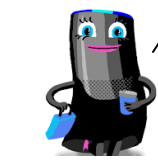
Toony Typo and Alexa Look for the SFV Meeting

Alexa, am I at the right place?

Yes, you have arrived at the
Motion Picture and Television Fund
23388 Mulholland Drive
Woodland Hills, CA 91364



Alexa, will I find the Saban Community Room in this building?



You are correct.



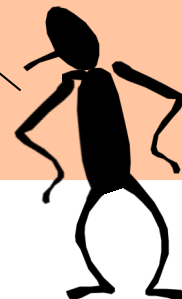
Yay me! I found the meeting room. Alexa. where are all the writers?



The members of the CWC-SFC
do not meet in July.



Alexa, why didn't you
tell me the SFV club
doesn't have a July meeting?



CWC-SFV

You did not ask me ... dufus.

JULY 2019

