



The Valley Scribe



Newsletter of the San Fernando Branch of the California Writers Club

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Historical Fiction – An Invitation to Your Readers

Debra Tash is an award-winning American author, journalist and accomplished speaker. Her books have won multiple



awards and been sold nationwide.

Debra was born in Los Angeles where she honed her skills through various creative outlets including painting, with a few of her pieces touring internationally in Japan.

She also worked as a docent at the world-renowned Getty Museum and Getty Villa where she gave tours and spoke on historical figures and art.

She gets her inspiration from current and past events, focusing on positive morals and uplifting themes. Her most recent book *Last Call America* focuses on the not so distant future and takes the current American political climate to a chilling conclusion. Here's an excerpt from columnist Rich Eber's review: "*Last call America is a page turner...the pay-off is a thought provoking book which is well worth spending the time to read.*"

Tash served as Editor-in-Chief

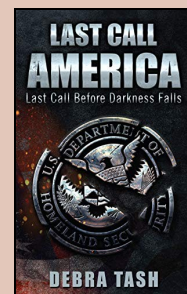
of *Citizens Journal*, a Ventura County based online news site that covers current and breaking news in Ventura and Los Angeles communities.

les communities.

She has given lectures for such organizations as the Daughters of the American Revolution, The American Associated of University Women and the Southern California Federated Women's Club.

Tash has served as a panelist at the Historical Novel Society's North American Conference. She currently resides in Ventura County where she is a mother, activist and a passionate advocate for literacy and education for all children.

--Stephanie Dufner



"Chilling dystopian novel brings 1984 to the present."

Richard Eber, California Political News and Views

President's Message

CWC at Work

In the early morning hours of October 12, CWC members, Andi Polk, Rita Brown and I journeyed to the High Desert Book Festival. This event, organized by Davida Siwisa James, a member of our club, was a great opportunity for book lovers to congregate and spend a beautiful desert day in Hesperia.

We enjoyed pleasantly warm temps, clear blue skies, at this well organized event. Thanks to Davida, her volunteers (including her husband, son and godson) our “delegation” had a great day. The festival was funded by Davida’s foundation.

Our club’s chief organizer, Andi Polk, likes to display our CWC banner in the public whenever possible. At the festival, I handed out flyers on my book, *Dug In*, which is hadn’t yet morphed into an Amazon paperback. (Since the Festival, *Dug In*, finally made the soft-cover stage.) I also handed out flyers on Kay Henden’s book *Streets of Silver*, as she’s currently out of town (and moving to Michigan !!!)

Rita brought Nan Hunt’s memoir, *The Map and the Perfection of Distance*. about Nan’s travels around the world and what she learned about life during this adventure. Rita also brought her own two books, *Good Luck Mrs. Brown*, a memoir about living with six kids and a husband with mental illness, and *Pawn Of Fate*, a biography of a man born in China who was sold as a slave when he was a four-year-old.

Andi promoted YA mysteries, *Susanne Collier’s Little Book of Mysteries and Mayhem* and *Susanne Collier’s Second Book of Mysteries and Mayhem* by author Paula



Bob Okowitz

Diggs and Lillian Rodich’s poetry book, *Do Not Break the Circle*. By SFV poet Lillian Rodich and illustrated by Paula Diggs.

Davida told us that a Book Festival speaker—a poet—had to cancel and so Andi volunteered to take the speaker’s place in the Speaker’s Tent. Andi read selections written by the poet to her attentive audience. Davida was grateful.

There were possibly twenty booths with all kinds of books ranging from a biography of Pat Boone to children’s books and science fiction fantasy.

I had never tried to sell my book before (hard to do without a book in hand) but here’s what I learned that first try: Make good eye contact, listen to what a book buyer is interested in, and smile a lot. If they want to move on, just nod and say “Have a good day.”

As you read this November newsletter, Halloween is probably past and all of us are looking forward to Thanksgiving. This year I’m extra grateful to share this holiday with my family and friends. A year ago, our community experienced a tragic shooting at the Borderline Restaurant and then a terrible fire storm. That was a very difficult time. We had Thanksgiving with friends in Newbury Park with whom we’d shared dinner with a few times at the Borderline. All of us had been forced to evacuate during the fire, so it felt good to get together under more positive circumstances.

All year, I’m thankful for family and long term friends and all the new friends I’ve been making in the CWC. Happy Thanksgiving!





Sci-fi Is In His DNA



Mark J. Rose

Mark J. Rose took the podium and declared, “I never planned to be a science fiction writer. I sort of edged into it.” He further revealed, looking a bit bewildered, “I’m a seat-of-the-pants writer.” Additionally, we learned, when he’s not at his day job, he strays into script writing. And somehow, Rose has written and published a popular sci-fi series.

To begin his presentation, Rose lit up the Saban Room’s slide projector, and launched into the story of his journey into the world of science fiction.

His talk was a Power Point presentation and his slides were scenes of his past, places where he’d stopped and looked around on his sci-fi journey. We viewed many examples of his early interests: comics, fantasy fiction, popular sci-fi TV shows and movies. He showed us photos of early science fiction writers: H.G. Wells, Ray Bradbury, Frank Herbert, and Douglas Adams, authors he’d discovered as he grew up. As an adult, Rose has primarily worked in scientific research.

Stimulating discussions with physicists and other scientists in his workplace stirred his imaginations and led to his first ventures into sci-fi writing.

He wrote his stories in his free time and became more and more fixated on his writing, and less interested in his day job. Finally, he decided to take a year off from his research to write sci-fi full time. Interestingly, what he expected to be an ideal time to hone his craft and polish his prose, turned out to be a very flat time.

After a year, Rose returned to his career and resumed his research. He had learned that new technology and scientific research fed his fantasies and ultimately, inspired his sci-fi novels.

He loved the imaginative plots, alien characters and the other-worldly situations of sci-fi plots and scripts. Studies of how new technology impacted on human behavior fascinated Rose and prompted him to create more and more sci-fi plots and adventures.

“Science fiction has no boundaries, no clear boundaries. It’s a place where anything can happen,” he told us.

Our speaker also emphasized his keen interest in very basic sociology and physiology questions: What does it mean to be human? What makes us unique among Earth’s creatures?

And in the sci-fi genre, how might we match up to intelligent life on other planets? If we ever find intelligent life, will we be open to a meeting of minds, or will we be wary and very careful about making new “friends?”

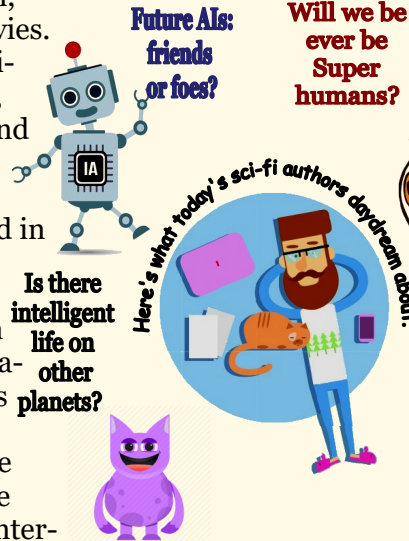
Rose believes that sci-fi stories reflect our human species’ need to explore the unknown, make discoveries and create new skills to facilitate our explorations. Of course, sci-fi also feeds our inbred fear of the unknown, the stranger, the “dragon” that lurks in a dark cave.

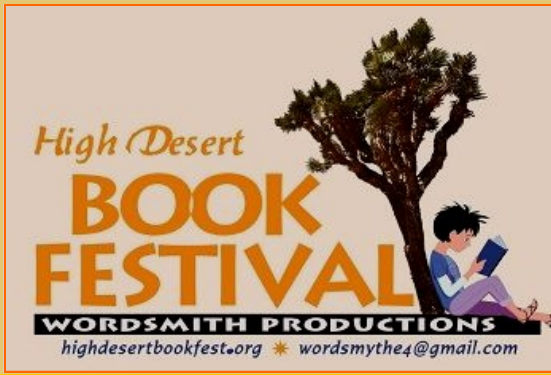
What’s in the future for sci-fi? Rose suggested these topics: time travel, wave theory, genetic engineering, alternate worlds, quantum mechanics, and — who knows? —human emotions and sensibilities might be downloaded into a sturdier, space-travel type of robotic being or A.I.

Rose believes, from his several interactions with millennial audiences, that there is a strong strain of pessimism about a future world government and wise nurturing ET visitors. In other words, in younger POVs, if a fleet of UFOs orbit Earth, they probably traveled here to distribute cures for all our ills. They could be looking for a new home. Such visitors will be welcomed with our military forces, not welcoming world leader delegations and a children’s choir.

Where does Rose go from here? What’s his destination? He strongly hinted that he’ll continue to explore and write science fiction. His journey isn’t slowing down.

—Kathy Highcove





And Polk and Rita Keeley Brown meet and greet.

It's good to see and be seen. So stretching our legs beyond the San Fernando Valley, Rita Brown, club president Bob Okowitz, and Andi Polk attended Wordsmith Productions' fourth annual High Desert Book Festival in Hesperia on Saturday, October 12th. The festival was founded by club member Davida Siwisa James. We wanted to support Davida's Herculean efforts in producing this book festival and also have a presence outside of our comfort zone in the valley.

It was a lovely day at Hesperia Civic Plaza Park, in a setting that seemed absolutely made for a book festival, with paved areas, grass and fountains. We were exhibitors among 60 other authors and organizations, speakers and visitors who came out to enjoy the day. Last year, the club shared Wordsmith's booth at the L.A. Times Festival of Books at USC

Several things happen at a book festival beyond selling your books. One meets interesting people, young and old. There is a fantastic camaraderie among writers and organizations, as people go from booth to booth at breaks to chat, exchange information, share ideas and find commonalities.



Andi Polk does poetry readings for a rapt audience.



Davida Siwisa James, in center, flanked by her volunteers on either side.

So the networking and making others aware of your books and organization has great value.

We got to visit with our sister organization – members of the High Desert Branch of CWC. And as part of that networking, we engaged Paul Levine, one of the literary agents presenting a panel in the Speakers Booth, as a future speaker.

Wordsmith Productions was doing a special panel on "Literature of the California Desert" and it took everyone by surprise when the main speaker did not show up for

her presentation. Davida later learned that a family crisis the night before had caused her to suddenly leave town. Upon realizing this, long time club member Andi Polk half volunteered and was 100% recruited to step in at the last minute to do some readings of desert poetry for the waiting audience and save the day. As a last minute speaker, Andi was engaging, energetic and captivated everyone as if she had placed and planned to do a presentation all along. Bravo, Andi!

Your Hesperia Correspondent

Ready for your close-up? We've got a publicist!



We've joined the big leagues by engaging a publicist to do our publicity including releases to the media. For several years, SFV member Gary Wosk has done excellent press releases for us but he's now unable to continue that work. Gary, a busy freelance writer, has attracted new clients who need big chunks of his time. But he put us in touch with a professional publicist whom he knew would fill our PR needs. And it turns out that we've got a winner! The moment **Stephanie Dufner** got the SFV assignment, she produced a well-written and researched press release that was speedily sent out to local media.

It is of key importance for writers in local communities to be informed of the benefits of our writers' club. Our CWC-SFV specializes in featuring speakers who help our members increase their writing skills. Stephanie has kept in constant contact with me and often takes the initiative in making new contacts. We are grateful to Gary for his help in finding this winner. You can look forward to meeting Stephanie Dufner at our next meeting.

And now, I must bring up a hard fact of life: These days, as everyone knows, everything costs more. Our club just manages to keep in the black amid rising costs. But we are reluctant to raise membership dues. The alternative is to fund raise, something new for our club. During Board discussions, there have been numerous fund-raising suggestions: an evening Open Mic reading session has great possibilities. Another simple solution — a used book sale. Members can donate their own published books or search their home library shelves for books that would be enjoyed by others.

If you have any books in either of the aforementioned categories, please bring them to SFV meetings so we can get start a sale collection. Of course, there are always the old stand-by fund raisers—bake sales and unwanted household white elephants. If you have any ideas, please be sure to share them. We'll be looking into fund raising in the coming weeks and will soon make our plans. Stay tuned ...

—Lori Hamilton



If you have suggestions for a fund raiser, send them to Pat Avery at rpavery@mac.com On the subject line of your email, please write Fund Raiser. Thanx, the SFV Board

Writing is Painting with Words

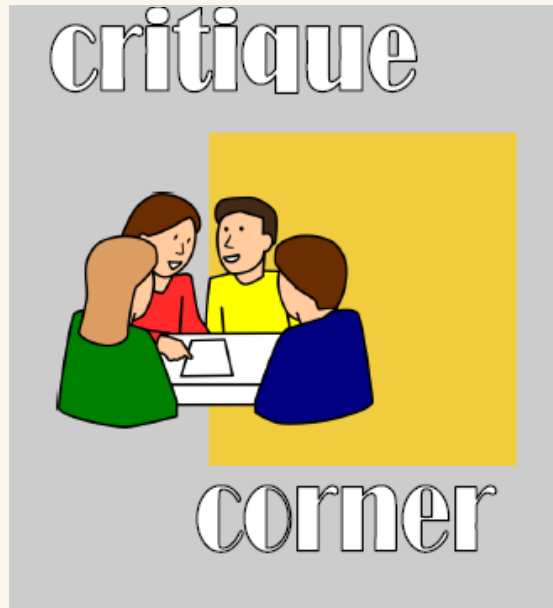
Leonard Cohen once said, “The cutting of the gem has to be finished before you can see whether it shines.” His advice applies to writing and any of the creative arts.

Mozart was the only creative genius that I know of whose music never needed to be changed or rewritten. The rest of us don’t have that gift. We all need a little help.

That’s why a critique group is so valuable for most writers.. When writing my first nonfiction book, a pivotal character in the story was someone I knew extremely well. When I asked another writer to critique my book, she said, “You know, Rita, this is a great story. You’ve effectively shown me the traits and personality of the main character, but I have no idea what he looks like.” Good grief! She’s right, I thought. This character had been in the family so long, I’d unconsciously assumed everyone else knew what he looked like. Comments like that are golden—valuable information for necessary rewrites before final publication.

In my critique group, we email our story, poem, or chapter to each other to be read before our meeting. When we meet, each of us reads their story aloud and, one at a time. Then each listener shares their comments and suggestions.

Reading a work aloud is very important. Others often say, “I didn’t quite understand



that line until I heard you read it.” Each person seems to offer a different perspective for an author’s consideration. However, It’s your work, and you’re not bound to take their suggestions or advice— but another POV can broaden your perspective.

At home, read your piece aloud just for

yourself, and you might hear things that are awkward or unclear. I read my material to my dog if no one else wants to hear it. Max likes the attention and I discover things that need to be changed.

Helping each other improve our writing is a win/win situation! I love this quote from Helen Keller: “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

Other resources I’ve found to be very helpful are found in magazines and online newsletters, such as *Poets & Writers* and *Writers Digest*. These publications provide listings, information on contests and other opportunities for submitting your work. Contact them at pw.org and [Writers Digest.com](http://WritersDigest.com).

Our latest CWC-SFV anthology, *Cascade of Pearls* (2018), contained a good reminder for authors in the introduction:

Only time and grit can create a pearl.

—Rita Keeley Brown



Scholastic Art & Writing Awards



You can help judge the 2019 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards

by **David Siwisa James**

I am happy to share information about this prestigious writing awards competition with my fellow club members. This will be the second year that the nonprofit I founded, Wordsmith Productions, will be one of the Region-at-Large Partners with the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers based in New York City. The Alliance works with a network of nonprofits and writing organizations nationwide to help encourage the next generation of young artists and writers.

For almost 100 years, the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards have provided educators with a unique opportunity to motivate and challenge students to become better writers. The organization counts among its alumni some of the nation's most celebrated writers, including Truman Capote, Sylvia Plath, Joyce Carol Oates and Stephen King.

Our nonprofit is recruiting volunteers who will read and rank submissions from students across the country in grades 7-12. The nonprofits that work with Scholastic Art & Writing Awards receive a stipend for managing the team they assemble.

I am hoping to encourage club members to become judges and share in a unique opportunity to help inspire the next generation of writers with one of the most prestigious and longest-running scholarship and recognition programs in the country.

Our nonprofit's role is to recruit readers and oversee their progress in submitting their rankings for the literary submissions that are assigned to them. The volunteers, like you, have literary experience and a diverse array of perspectives, whose mission is to read, appreciate and score student work.

It's all done online and the student submissions are anonymous. So the readers do need a certain comfort level with computers because they will need to logon to the judging portal to access the written submissions that they will read and rank. The online portal is very simple to maneuver. It's exciting to think that your own love of books and poetry could have you involved with encouraging our country's next great writers.

Through the Awards, students receive recognition in addition to exhibition, publication and scholarship opportunities. National Medalists are recognized at an annual National Ceremony at Carnegie Hall during a week of celebration in New York City.

If you would like to learn more or sign up as a judge, please contact me at **310-270-5115** or email me at wordsmythe4@gmail.com

Glass Hands

Glassblower's studio
heat bludgeons
sweat soaks and drips
skimming his skin

Glass canes and rods
widest spectrum of light
brilliant saturated tones
await purification

Artist's breath
escapes
his body's furnace

Blows bit-like spits
captured
in glands of the glass

Hands dance
efficient steps
the craft's choreography –

wave the metal wand
like a flag
plunge it again
into glory hole of perdition

turn and roll
upon steel table
turn and roll
in mitted palm

pinch and cinch
baptize in water
a tender tap
calls out the crack

A tenuous pilgrimage
this glory travails
from hellfire to
annealer's cool respite

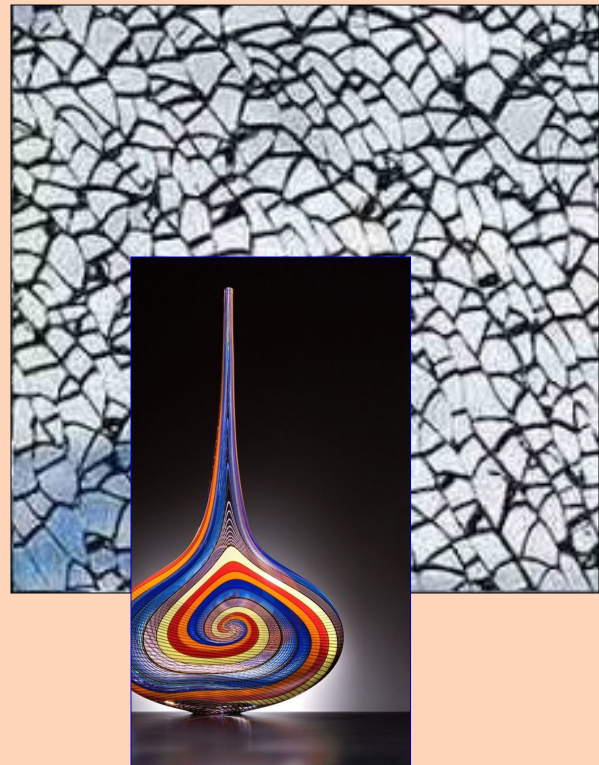
Radiant molten putty
grips the end of the blowpipe
capricious in its choices

Expand!
glorious colored orbs
stretching and turning—
taffy becomes Aurora Borealis

or

Let go!
sumptuous tension
crashes in suicidal glory
upon a sharded floor

Glassblower accepts both fates
wipes his brow
Inhales again
stoking his creative fire



Anne W. Lee (2019)

Two Prompt

Anne Hansell

It was happening. It was real and it was now.

Years ago, my husband and I went to a cemetery at a Lutheran church. My husband liked to collect data for his family tree so we would travel to many different cemeteries all over New England.

This time, an unusual incident took place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. While my husband walked around, checking gravestones for his distant ancestors, I wandered on my own, noting unusual or weird names on old Victorian-era gravestones. I'd write them down on my notepad. Later, I'd select the names and combine first names with last names for fictional characters in my writing projects.

That day, I happened upon a weathered gravestone, standing next to another gravestone. I noticed the name on the standing gravestone and started writing it on my notepad, but I sensed a presence beside me. I stopped writing and turned my head to the right.

I was surprised to see a blue woolen coat with golden buttons, lined in 2 vertical rows.



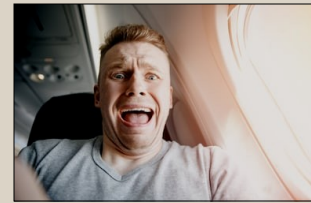
I looked up and saw a tall man, wearing a Civil War era hat. I saw a high-ranking Union officer. Under his wide-rim hat, he had shoulder-length brown hair, blue eyes and beard.

He looked surprised that I could see him. It lasted for only a few seconds – Then, the Union officer vanished into air.

I was shocked – the year was in late 2000's. As a history buff, I knew the last Civil War veteran had died in 1959 – an old Confederate soldier, over 105 or

Responses

Lawrence Linick
Suddenly, I felt like I was flying.



Suddenly, I felt like I was flying. The visual cues were all there - thanks to my VR goggles. So were the physical cues, that sinking sensation in my gut, and the feeling of being pushed back in my seat. I gripped the armrests so hard I thought I might tear them apart. Those guys at "No More Fear of Flying" had thought of everything -- even extra padding on the seats.

Wow, I was doing it, finally tackling my problem after years of stifling fear. But this wasn't real I told myself. It was only a simulation, I thought, trying to swallow the lump in my throat.

My "No More Fear of Flying" classes are over. After six weeks of two-hour "flights," I have to admit the flight simulations just might have worked. Right now, I'm seated on a real plane and we're about to take off!



more years old. So there was no way for anyone, still alive from the Civil War that had ended in 1865.

I realized I had actually seen a ghost – all in blood and flesh – all kinds of color.

When my husband returned to me, I told him about the Union ghost. He nodded. "Yes. This place is supposed to be haunted." Since then, I often thought about the Union officer ghost.

—Anne Hansell

Member Focus: Lillian Rodich

Lillian Rodich has generously contributed her literary works, guidance and volunteer time to our club for fifteen years. During that time, I've watched her give the same thoughtful and nurturing attention to writers in her critique groups. As an editor, I've inwardly rejoiced every time she sent me a creative work for *The Valley Scribe*.

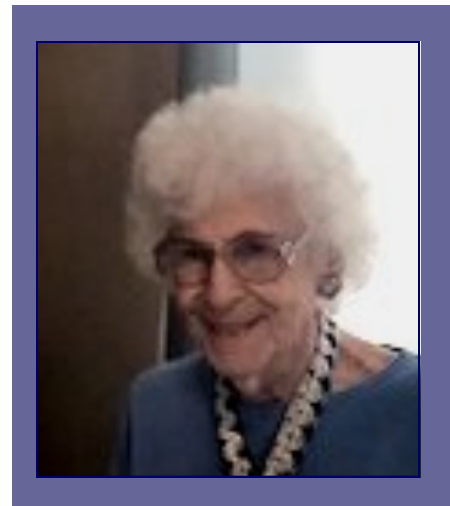
Perhaps you're aware of the Japanese custom of officially honoring a renowned artist or craftsman as a Living National Treasure. I think of Lillian Rodich as our Loved CWC-SFV Treasure.

—Kathy Highcove

My fellow SFV member, Lillian Rodich, is a poet whose writing possesses a wonderful combination of warmth, wit and wisdom. Her soul speaks through her writing, especially in poetry. The beauty of her work is rooted in her life-long twin loves of writing and dance. Dance's rhythm and footwork are reflected in her choice of words that provide color and pulse to her well-crafted poetry.

The seeds of this beautiful gift were sown during her years as a dance student and in her studies at UCLA and UC Berkeley and further by graduate work at California State University at Northridge. A twenty-six year career teaching in the LAUSD (Los Angeles Unified School District) still flourishes, as now retired, in her private classes teaching dancing and creative writing workshops. Lillian leads with a gentleness that brings others to believe in themselves and grow with her. Lillian Rodich is an inspiration to all who know her.

— Rita Keeley Brown



Her Process

Lillian confides ... I have always loved to write and the feeling has never left me.

In 2004 I joined CWC when I heard that they had a critique group program. I had become a leader of a creative writing group and was looking for a place where I might broaden my skills. A decision that awarded me with many unexpected gifts; new deep and lasting friendships, the camaraderie and inspiration offered by so many gifted and humble people. In addition I felt honest validation from my peers and have learned so much.

I always have paper and pen within my reach. When a fragment of a sentence, or a word pops into mind I write it down. Sometimes it is visual or auditory, sometimes right-brain musings. Most of my poetry and many opening lines for my prose are born this way. These become my personal prompts and are not always used right away. Another thing I do when traveling is fill a notebook with phrases and write as I go along.





Tell Me a Story

Everyone has a story
Traded like coins in a casual conversation
Spoken through silent lips
Barely audible in dark dawn's mystery

A forgotten aria sung through laughter
A passionate exchange of intimacies over a cup
of coffee in Denny's one AM loneliness
An hour's fantasy love affair on a metro train

Tell me your story, slowly, tenderly
Guarding your thoughts with careful camouflage
Dictate your story into a book with words
Often overlooked by those who skim
Over its pages like restless birds

Your stories rest on my bookshelf
Holding hands with each other and nodding
Through the dusty sunlight within my view
While mountains echo your voices through canyon
Walls where few are ready to listen

I want to tell you my story
Some of it once scribbled on pages decades ago
Some shadow memories struggling for recognition
My pen trembles with the effort
Words tumble off pages denying their own existence
And I search for them in my dreams
awaiting their return

My story doesn't climb a mountain to reach its summit
Or remain breathless in pursuit of what I cannot comprehend
Or preside proudly and alone on my bookshelf
My story remains like an unfinished painting
An aging canvas empty of color
Waiting for completion
Words searching for a brush
I am trying to make peace with it and find
Peace within its frame

Lillian Rodich



My Sister ... Ms. Lillian

**She's from the West coast
I'm from the East
We met as strangers
At a writer's club meeting
Nothing in common we both thought
Except good chemistry
As we got to know each other better
Astonishing coincidence happened
She said she thought I was a "movie Star"
That's funny because I grew up star struck
And always wanted to go to Hollywood
And be a Movie Star**

**Well I finally got to Hollywood where we met
Two widows with late husbands named SY
Perfectly paired as two Virgo's and two Capricorn's
Raised by Russian immigrant parents
Both learned to speak Yiddish
Ms. Lillian's birthday January 7th
My Sy's birthday January 7thy**

**Two Capricorn's known to be very compatible with
Two Virgo's born in September**

Me and Ms. Lillian each having husbands with the same name

**And so the connections kept renewing
Whenever we got our histories together
We love the same musical Broadway shows
Our views on politics are similar and correct**

**I have found a sister
I love her and she loves me back.**

—Leslie Kaplan

Yay Me!



Whenever a member has published a book, made a presentation, or has a publishing tip to share with fellow SFV members—please send *The Valley Scribe* the news! I'd like to have a marketing page in every issue of this newsletter.

Share an encouraging experience, a kudos from a reader or publisher, or a website that has helped you market your book.

Spread the word, in other words!

—Kathy Highcove
The Valley Scribe Editor

Got Something to Share? Let's Hear It!



Dug IN is finally in paperback on Amazon/Kindle. It has been such a PAIN, but its done! Yea! Yea! Yea!

This novel is about Joe and Mary Duggin who have to escape Ireland in 1916 as the English keep arresting and beating Joe up as he fights for Irish Independence. They move to NYC and find themselves involved in the city's Union movement. The paperback book is available on and search for 'Okowitz Dug IN'

Go forth and tell the Whole World about it!

—Bob Okowitz



Authors Preview

AuthorsPreview@gmail.com is a **FREE** website for you to preview your Writings and receive Critiques. You can submit **Short Stories, Poems, or even Chapters from Your Books!** You will receive Critiques from readers! You may even include your Publisher's or Agent's email for readers to order your books. A bio, including a photo if you choose, is available for you to be listed under Writers. Don't be surprised if a Publisher, or Producer contacts you!

Regards, Alan Wills

CWC-SFV Board and Coordinators

President
Bob Okowitz
& Central Board Rep.
apthealth@gmail.com

Vice-President
Nance Crawford
Nance@NanceCrawford.com

Treasurer and Secretary
Patricia Avery
rpavery@me.com

Membership
Andrea Polk
andipolk4@gmail.com

Programs
Lori Hamilton
lorecaha@verizon.net

Critique Coordinator
Jenny Jordan
Jennyjordan2@gmail.com

Webmaster
Michael Rains
opie_rains@yahoo.com

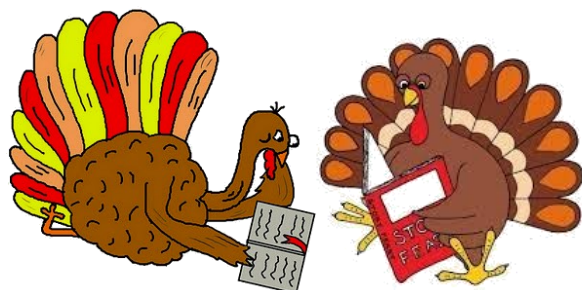
Newsletter Editor
Katherine Highcove
kghighcove@gmail.com

Audio Visual Consultant
Monte D. Swann
cygnetvideo@gmail.com

Our next CWC/SFV Meeting
will be held on Saturday,
November 2 at 1 p.m. at the
Motion Picture and Television Home
23388 Mulholland Drive
Woodland Hills, CA 91364



We will gather at the Saban Community Room.



Please join us.

