



The Valley Scribe



Newsletter of the San Fernando Branch of the California Writers Club

CONTENTS

President's Message	2
Script Analyst	3
Member News	4
Member Focus	5
Critique Tips	6
Photo Prompts	7
April Morning	8
Valley Scribe 2014 Poems	9
Those Who Are Poets	10
Hands of Time Frequencies	11
Night Visions	12
Meeting Info	13



Our New Challenge:

Pandemic!



Just a month ago, Angelenos traveled anywhere in this sprawling city, met our relatives and friends for dinner or outings, visited our physicians, and made plans for spring and summer trips. Some were immersed in their favorite team's games, went to classes, taught classes, worked out at the gym, played mahjong, visited with neighbors and shook hands with new acquaintances. A few weeks ago, we saw how the Chinese population was suddenly forced to fight a new ultra-contagious virus, in city after city. And we wondered if this invisible enemy would cross the ocean and invade our comfortable lives.

A month later, the answer is obvious: the coronavirus is everywhere in the world. In L.A., like people all across the country, we "shelter in place." What does that mean? We wear masks in the market, wash our hands multiple times a day, and try to keep in touch with family and friends on social media.

A pandemic has changed all our lives. Right now, everything is different. I can only remember feeling this way after 9/11 and the Northridge Earthquake. Some of you would add the destructive fires of the past couple of years which burned local communities into mounds of ash.

As with the other emergencies, we will regroup and find our way through the after-

math of this national disaster. This April issue, planned long before the emergency, has many pages of members' poetry. April is National Poetry Month and I asked for verses from several members, and perused old *Valley Scribe* newsletters to find a few more. I hope you enjoy the assortment.

In the May issue, I hope to display many short pieces from SFV members on this topic: *How I shelter in place*. Tell us how you've adjusted to the new normal and found ways to stay in touch with the world around you.

In conclusion, here're some wise words from SFV member, Pat Avery: *I've heard from friends and relatives through social networks, I'm sitting down to write without the distractions of busy-making activities and also taking this opportunity of a pause in our lives to reflect. Our critique groups are figuring out how to meet on-line. The encouragement from our network of writers goes on and the work goes on with perhaps more depth than was there before.*

Yes, it's important to remember that this coronavirus, like other traumas we've endured in the past, will eventually be in the rearview mirror. Write on!

Kathy Highcove.

President's Message



This has been a most distressing start of spring. The pandemic is scary and devastating to anyone who contracts it. Our CWC-SFV members, like most Californians, have been forced to cut back on social contacts -which most folks find a strange thing to do. Canceling our Saturday workshops was a very difficult decision for the SFV Board.

Bob Okowitz

But when the MPTF directors announced that the Saban Room must be closed, that made our decision easier, but ... what if we decided to meet somewhere else? Would that be wise? I asked myself. Not really. If someone came to a meeting who had the virus, but no symptoms, we'd all be exposed. So ... cancel we must.

It's raining outside, and thank God for that. It seems like the perfect time for to catch up on my reading. I remembered recently how much I enjoyed the poems of William Carlos Williams, whom I discovered in my college days. Here's a sampling of his work:

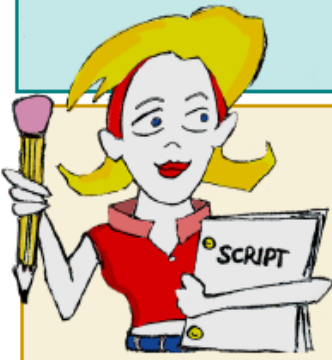
Spring Storm

The sky has given over
its bitterness.
Out of the dark change
all day long
rain falls and falls
as if it would never end.
Still the snow keeps
its hold on the ground.
But water, water
from a thousand runnels!
It collects swiftly,
dappled with black
cuts a way for itself
through green ice in the gutters.
Drop after drop it falls
from the withered grass-stems
of the overhanging embankment.

William Carlos Williams

What's a Story Analyst / Script Reader?

by Anat Golan



There are several types of scripts: a TV feature or pilot, a book-to-film or a story-to-film. A Script Analyst or Script Reader is the gatekeeper for production of most feature screenplays, television pilots and book-to-film or story-to-film. Production companies, agents and managers use these specialists to evaluate potential projects and writing talent.

The analyst evaluates the submitted material based on how a writer has mastered the art of structure and created compelling conversations. The analyst notes strong dialogue, plot conflict complexity, an intriguing theme/premise and a compelling story. Readers often add comments on a project's marketability and whether it fits the needs of the client. For example: Hallmark channel doesn't feature bloody horror films and Disney rejects R-rated projects.

Analysts' readings are done for production companies/writing contests. Clients want to improve their script before submission. Production companies and agencies will usually require a logline (a 1-2 sentences summarizing the story, main characters and conflicts), a 1-1.5 page synopsis summarizing the entire plot, and 1-1.5 page comments. Ratings for a project: Pass (not for us), Consider with Recommendations and Consider to Recommend Private reading.

When a project is already in development and a deeper, more detailed reading is requested, the analyst will generally prepare 3 to 10 pages of notes. Note: a rejection or pass doesn't necessarily mean your project is a bad job. The rejection might simply mean that the project isn't right for the client's production.

There are many companies online offering reading

services for a pretty penny. Many promise, if they like your project, they'll share it with their network of professionals. **Do your research.** Never go with a company that hides who actually reads the script. If a company gives a few vague details about the reader, be wary. But if you have a thick skin and are willing to put your art out there, you really don't need to spend money for a quality reading. Writing communities (online and writing groups) will read, critique and evaluate work for one another. I've even received requests through my social media, such as Twitter.

The best evaluation will not sugarcoat the comments or critique. If you can't take the truth, you don't belong in the screenwriting game. Remember, positive comments don't just deconstruct your material, but also justify the reasons behind the evaluation and should suggest ways to fix possible problems.

In summary, keep on writing, but remember to pay attention to structure, characters, dialogue, conflicts, premise and grammar. Oops, grammar.

And that's all, folks!



Anat Golan

About the author:

CWC-SFV member Anat Golan is a professional freelance story analyst who worked with companies such as Amazon Studios, Atlanta Film Festival Screenplay Competition, Crispy Twig Productions and others. She's an optioned screenwriter with a screenplay that won the pitch-to-script *Family Friendly Screenplay* contest, a script that placed at the top 20 at Sundance *Table Read My Script* contest, and wrote scripts that placed in contests like *Story Pros* and *Page Awards*. She holds a BA in Film/Television and English Literature from Tel Aviv University, and has worked for Keshet Productions, the Israel Educational Channel, and various independent film productions.

Member News

Fans of The Learning Channel's "Dr. Pimple Popper" (aka dermatology doctor Sandra Lee), will get a big kick out of the alternately chilling and amusing *Heads and Shoulders*, a short story written by Gary Wosk, who has flair for the bizarre.

Gary's story is featured in the horror anthology *The Hollow: Where All Things Evil Lie!* (really upbeat title, right?) that was released by Breaking Rules Publishing in March.

In Gary's story, Dr. Sharon Lea is asked to perform the most complicated surgical procedure of her career (hint, it has nothing to do with lipomas, cysts or skin conditions). Before she begins make any incisions, however, she must come to grips with certain ethical issues. As is usually the case with his stories, there is a surprise ending.

"I hope that my story will send shivers down the spines of the readers and that they keep in mind that it is meant to be a satire," Gary said.

If you're the type of reader who doesn't mind a little gore such as descriptions of oozing coconut cream-type excretions, and other delights, order a copy of the anthology at breakingrulespublishing.com and click on bookstore at the top of the page.

The anthology includes far-out short stories written by authors from around the world including the United States, Poland, Canada and England.

Coming soon in *Adelaide Literary Magazine*: "Tell a Friend" by Colin T Gallagher

A retired owner of several CPA offices is walking to his hotel in Seattle. He is surprised by a flying saucer business. As he stops to take a look, the salesman comes out and convinces him to take a test flight. The reader experiences the nimbleness and power of the flying saucer.

They travel to the moon where they explore it from above, and they spot the Lunar Hotel. Having a drink while flying back, they close the deal. With a fifty-million-mile warranty, the buyer is happy.

They land back in Seattle. At the sales lot, they wrap-up the deal, and the buyer is to come back the next day for flight lessons. He receives a gift certificate for a two person stay at the Lunar hotel.

The salesman gives him a flying saucer ride to his hotel's saucer pad on the hotel's roof and then things get really exciting for the retiree protagonist.

In September



Two major book festivals to be held in March and April had to cancel due to the pandemic. Since the *High Desert Book Festival* is in September, CWC-SFV member and promoter, Davida Siwisa James, asks all SFV authors to mark the date on their calendars. Here's hoping things are back to normal and authors and book lovers can once again mingle and support the arts.

Member Focus: Monte Swann

After thirty years in the motion picture industry, I'd finally had enough. The long hours and months away from home finally caught up with me. I cashed in my chips and booked the next flight to Retirement. Finally, I'd have time to pursue one of my long dormant interests: writing.

I'd read a number of books over the years and always wanted to write one of my own. Doesn't everybody? My only opportunity to write was to pen articles about the film business in trade magazines and film journals. Sure, I wrote short speeches and poems on family greeting cards but never anything note-worthy or challenging, nothing certainly to write home about.

After retiring, I started working on an ambitious sci-fi extravaganza that was going to captivate readers and enthrall critics around the world. 'Who knows?' I told myself. 'This masterpiece is going to change the literary landscape forever. Perhaps,' I dreamed, 'even start a worldwide movement!' Fast-forward three years and the cumbersome hulk of a manuscript is in its seventh revision and I'd barely gotten past the second chapter. Clearly, I was no Ray Bradbury.

I joined a few writer's groups and, although interacting with other writers improved my skills, most groups turned out to be unorganized and amateur. All that changed when I discovered the SCV-CWC via the Meetup app.

I discovered at SFV a group of writers of all genres. I found this club to be professionally managed, with an organized structure and ... *get this* ... They had their own dedicated meeting space! No more trying to save a table at a local Starbucks, or waiting for an actual meeting to get underway.

After the first meeting, I knew I had found a new home. The monthly meetings featured interesting people from all walks of life, guest speakers from the literary world, writing exercises for stimulating creativity—thank you Rita Brown—and this club even featured its own newsletter, *The Valley Scribe*, thank you Katherine Highcove. But wait, there's more. Not only were the meetings stimulating, they also offered free snacks! "Where do I sign up?" I asked.

Most helpful to me, however, are the club's off-campus critique groups. These small bi-monthly get-togethers help spur the struggling writer in two major ways: SFV critique groups not only read and dissect each member's writing, but also required each member to read and critique his fellow members' writing.

Since joining the CWC, my work, and work ethic has improved immeasurably. Though the guidance of 'group therapy' I'm focusing now on short stories and I find the results to be more tangible and far more rewarding.

My writing may not yet be ready to start a worldwide movement, but at least I see a glimmer of hope now. And there're always those delicious snacks, thank you, Alan Wills.



CWC-SFV



5



APRIL 2020

How to Stay Popular in a Writers Group

by Joe Bunting

Here's my rule to judge a writers group by: Good writers groups give good critiques. To grow your writers group, then, you must learn how to give better feedback. Critiquing isn't just a normal part of most writers groups, however you may find it to be the best part.

However, if you've ever received a bad critique, whether it was poorly thought out or just straight up wrong, you know that sometimes critiques can do more harm than good. With that in mind, let's talk about how to give feedback as good as any New York editor, and then how to take it like a pro.

Three Steps to Giving the Best Feedback

Before we begin, let's acknowledge something about the nature of criticism: it sucks. Criticism is painful even at its best, deeply wounding at its worst, and can often cause lasting impact to our writing and self-confidence. One surprising thing about criticism: researchers have found that a helpful criticism is far more effective for generating creative ideas than group brainstorming.

Step 1: Give positive praise.

The first step is to start by talking about all the things you liked about the writing piece you read. Be as specific as you can, and describe exactly what they did that was effective

- What is unique or effective about their writing style?
- What did you appreciate about their characters?
- What phrase or paragraph especially stood out to you?
- Which famous authors do they remind you of?

What if you *can't* think of anything good to say?

Then you're not reading closely enough. I've edited some pretty bad writers, but even then, I've found that when I'm struggling to find something to praise, it's my fault, not theirs. I find that as I look back at their writing and read closer, I will always find many things to praise.

The golden rule of critiquing is, "Seek first to understand, not to be understood." Your job as a critique partner is to draw out what's best about their writing. Don't you want the same thing from *your* critique part-

ners? If you can't give positive feedback on someone's writing, you're not reading closely enough.

Step 2: Give constructive feedback.

Next, share your negative feedback. Honestly, I find it's usually easier to talk about what I didn't like than what I did (perhaps that says something about me!), but that's why the first step of critiquing is so important. If you don't give positive feedback, the writer may not be able to accept your negative feedback. Again, be as specific as you can. Say exactly what didn't work for you, and give precise examples.

Step 3: Give *more* positive praise.

You always remember negative criticism more than the positive praise you get, and that's why it's so important to overwhelm negative comments with something positive. What I find is that I'm much more ready to take the negative feedback if it's surrounded by insightful, positive praise. **Hint:** If you run out of nice things to say, copy and paste something from Step 1. *Positive. Negative. Positive.* That's the formula for giving a critique that can transform someone's writing (for the better!).

Why We Critique

Not only can this kind of feedback be incredibly time consuming, it can also be difficult to give tough feedback to writers you don't know very well. Wouldn't it be easier to just say, "Great story!" and move on? Be better than that. Be a writer who cares about the craft enough to say the hard things as well as the good things. At the very least, be a writer who cares enough about writing to give the kind of feedback you hope to receive in kind.



Joe Bunting is an author and the leader of The Write Practice community. He is also the author of the new book *Crowdsourcing Paris*, a real life adventure story set in France. It was a #1 New Release on Amazon. You can follow him on Instagram (@jhbunting).

Photo Prompts

If you're attended any of our meetings this past year, you should be very familiar with our group writing exercises, led by SFV member Rita Keeley Brown. During this exercise, she asked us to take out paper and pen, and then she passed out sheets of paper with several prompts. We read the prompts and waited for a story inspiration from one of the prompts and prepare to write.

Rita always gave us ten minutes to write whatever came to mind. When time was up, some of us grasped a mic and shared our stories. These prompt sessions have proved very popular with both members and guests. After all, we are all writers and we enjoy writing. Win/win situation. We have enjoyed sharing our creative work in a non-judgmental atmosphere and this editor has enjoyed sharing some of these prompt reactions.

In the past fall and winter months, Rita gave us several types of prompts: a quote from a book, a phrase, a few bars of music, and images such as a painting or a photo. This month, even though we're in

quarantine, SFV members can still react to a prompt.

Below, you'll see four photos. Take a close look at each photo. Does an image ring your story bell? Can you imagine a scene to match the photo? If so, and since you must have some extra time, write down your reaction to the photo prompt. Perhaps you'll want to share it with *The Valley Scribe* readers.

Before you send a story to me, consider a rewrite, and then edit your story. Submissions are due on April 1th.

Here's a thought: this photo exercise might be used by your critique group. After you've worked on a story, **paste** it into an **email** to fellow critique group members and send it for their reactions. They will **read** your piece, **type in** their comments and a **reply** to you. Make any desired changes **before** you send me the **edited story**. Paste the **titled** composition into an email or send it as an attachment.

Please, no pdfs.

Write on, Kathy Highcove

Woman In A Crowd



Old VW Van



A Gift



Running Child





An April Day In Woods by Emilia Michelva

April Morning

one morning in April
the sky exploded
into torrents of rain sparkles
birds wove in between streams
reflected in roadside puddles

one morning in April
a crimson rosebud slowly unfurled
turning toward the sun
stem and leaves bent silently
toward light and life

one morning in April
wind clattered into my life
setting leaves and bells and bits of wood
into a reality of sounds
often silent in the confusion
and first conscious moments of my dawn

one morning in April
the sky was cloudless and faded blue
birds gathered on my window sill
busy with their own gossip
oblivious to the notes of my song
lost within their own harmonies

Lillian Rodich

WHEN COOL AIN'T COOL

Wherever I go
There are things
I need to learn
Need to discern
When COOL ain't COOL

Whatever I feel
Whatever I see
I need to learn
Need to discern
When COOL ain't COOL

Whatever I do
I'm me, not you
I need to learn
I need to discern
When COOL ain't COOL

No matter at what age
No matter what appeals
I don't intend to be caged
I need to learn
When COOL ain't COOL

All remains the same
Nothing has been changed
I need to learn
Need to discern
When COOL ain't COOL

Now, isn't that COOL?

Norman Molesko

Poets

Tap into that agonizing spot
Search for that eerie corner
Scrape that old wound

Bring to a bleeding
Create a rupture
Compose a melody

Sing your song
For yourself and others
Tormented and daring

Why this craving
Wonder who really cares
One cannot deny it

Cannot stop the flow
If this is madness
Salvation to one's soul

Puhiya Goldstein

At Our Piano

Doink.
A key strikes
Out of tune.
Around it
wraps Amazing Grace
Grandma sings
"... but now I see."
A rough soprano
head bowed
in reverie.

Old fingers
hunt the chords.
Eyes closed
some distant memory
guides her words

Hearing her
I cross the room.
My alto joins
in harmony.
From piano to forte
our voices ring.
When age chokes off
her next ...
Only I am left to sing.

Andrea Polk

Pitter Patterns

I love the pitter of rain in puddles
where little translucent men jump up
and down in glee
and with all their tiny kin
dance down the concrete sidewalks
into windy, rain-slick streets,
celebrating in big block parties
the imminent coming of spring.

Lenora Smalley

Those Who Are Poets

those who are poets ---
often alone, never lonely
in a living breathing place

view their world
through unique glasses
listen to butterflies sing
savor a snow-field's crop
ponder a mountain's whisper
find their tears and laughter
in a basket of dreams

transfer verse to paper
like a brush to painting
like a wakeful dream
like imaginative artists
true to their own artistry

never feel at peace
their words
warring competing
melding intruding
painting perceiving
whispering
shouting at the sky
restless even after
they come to rest on paper


often wander away
from simple conversation
wake suddenly at dawn
looking for pen and paper
or someone to listen

those who are poets
light a candle whenever
pen touches paper
and the words become a torch

Lillian Rodich



Poet by John Powell



Hands of Time

Time sympathetically pats the head of historians
as they wince with guilt over their crumbling temples, whispering
There, there distraught ones.

Time protectively holds the back of the shirt of futurists
as they lean farther over the edge to see what is beyond—
Why so wild-eyed and cavalier?

But Time prefers to cross its hands behind its head,
lean back and rest in the Now,
knowing its realm of influence is at its apex.
Admonishing
*Let love embrace the present gift
the presence of this moment of Now!*

Instead we reach back behind us
trying to touch a moment as we rush by its details.
So love's clarity has no choice but to melt into abstract.
We pant and complain of our emotional disconnect.

Time warns—
*Be intentional,
if you long for my embrace with your love.
Tether all your neural senses
to nuances of the moment Now,
securing them deep in the recesses of the prehistoric mind —
in the crawlspaces where blood relentlessly pounds the heart.*

Then the hands of Time will sign,
Good, you've got it—let's move on!

Anne W. Lee

FREQUENCY

Where you land
in your thought frequency
is perfect and fair—
your political ego insists!

Must I land exactly there too
in that narrow stridency
before you hear my vibration?
Blending in with your constant
verbal static—
so pitch-perfect to your ear.

But if you could quietly
tune-in to me
you would hear a different tone—
a stretched zone
that holds conflicting thoughts
simultaneously.

A non-dualism that keeps me
aligned in moderate tones
holding both high and low ends
of frequency's sound thoughts.

Sound that brings a leveled peace—
a broader human space beyond
your narrow bandwidth.

How long can you be
locked in far afield edges—
a frequency that insists it
wretch your shrill human autonomy?

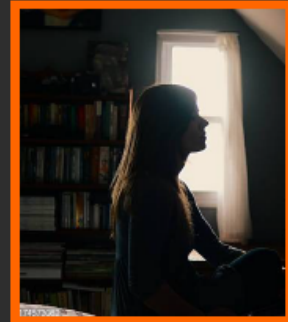
Anne W. Lee

This verse was written for Jolie and Dena, two friends who both lost their sight as young adults. When I asked, they described their dreams. Then I wrote this poem ...

NIGHT VISION

by Kathy Highcove

Days' hours hold her earthbound
where her sensing hand searches space,
feels for the familiar, holding
a long wand, which waves
and taps to seek safe passage,
a metronome for a rocking pace.



Her world recedes and advances,
surprises and taunts as her sight
struggles to peer past a dark blindfold.
But in sleep she glimpses a remembered world.

First, flashing white light, stabs the dark,
Followed by snaking neon red ropes of current,
When she slips into deep sleep's release,
Images bloom and grow on night's negative.

Then come glimpses of familiar faces, blurred,
as if pressed against thick panes of glass.

She develops a dream that outlines a lover's form,
strolling closer

with weightless steps,
down a hazy gray hillside,
toward her up-lifted face.



color spills toward her
in slow motion, as if
his youthful hands fill her lap with flowers.
the dreamer smells the purple of violets,
the red perfume of roses, then
she rises,

floats into the gray space around him,
and slowly reaches out to take his hand.

Through suffused moonlight, their soft-focus forms
Moving together again through her mind's inner dimensions.





On a Saturday afternoon, in the near future,
we'll meet again in the Community Room
of the Saban Center for Health and Wellness.

Here's the address:
23388 Mulholland
Woodland Hills, CA 91364



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