



The Valley Scribe



Newsletter of the San Fernando Branch of the California Writers Club

CONTENTS

- Karen's Corner 2
- Writing Funny 3
- If Love Is In The Air 4
- Unhappy Endings 5
- Riddles in a Pandemic . 6
- A 911 New Year 7
- 2011 Valentines 8
- Wake Up Your Muse .., 9
- Surprise! 10
- The Persian Cat 10
- Goldy 11
- The Proposal 11
- A True Romantic 12
- If Intentions Were 13
- Dimensions
- Under Her Wings 14
- CWC-SFV Info 15

Beth Yarnall Delves Deep into Her Characters' Raw Emotions

If you've ever wondered which point of view (POV) to use in your writing, don't miss our monthly Zoom meeting on February 6 at 1 pm, when we welcome *USA Today* best-selling author Beth Yarnall, whose presentation is titled, "Going Deep Into Point of View."



Beth Yarnall

In a recent email to me, Yarnall notes, "Have you ever read a book that grabbed you on the first page and pulled you through the whole book almost nonstop straight through to the end? Did you have a difficult time putting it down? Did you lose sleep, miss your train or bus stop, or put off work so you could stay in the world the author created?"

She continues, "If you answered yes to all or most of the above questions then the author did their job. How did they do it? By using deep point of view. Deep POV is achieved when the writer so fully immerses the reader into the character's head and heart that the writer virtually disappears, drawing the reader deeper into the story."

Although she's been telling stories since childhood, professional writing is Yarnall's encore career. Initially, she worked as a hairstylist and make-up artist. She also owned a salon, which must have been fertile ground for stories that people enjoy sharing.

Yarnall won the 2016 Daphne du Maurier Award for Excellence in Mystery/Suspense for Best Paranormal Romance for her novel *A Deep and Dark December*. Her novel *Atone* was a 2017 RITA Award finalist. (The RITA Award was presented for excellence in romantic fiction by the Romance Writers of America from 1990 – 2019.)

Yarnall's *Crafting Unputdownable Fiction* Series is available as a boxed set or as individual booklets: *Making Description Work Hard For You*, *Going Deep Into Deep Point of View*, and *Some Like It Hot: Writing Sex and Romance*. "Whether you write in first person, third person, omniscient, or a combination of POVs, the reader

should be clear about whose head they're in, and most importantly. . . why," Yarnall notes on her website.

In this presentation, you'll learn about the different types of POV, choosing the right POV for your scene, when, how, and why to shift POV, how to achieve deep point of view, and more.

For more information on Beth Yarnall and her large collection of best-selling romance novels, go to:

[Beth Yarnall - Home | Facebook](#)



All presentations are free for club members who will receive a Zoom invitation prior to the meeting. CWC members from other clubs may also attend presentations without charge but must contact the Zoom host at cygnetvideo@gmail.com prior to the meeting date to request an invitation. Guests are cordially invited to purchase admission to this program at www.cwc-sfv.org.

Karen Gorback
CWC-SFV President

The safest way to meet your date on Valentine's Day, 2021.



Karen's Corner

By Karen Gorback, CWC-SFV President



Following my sophomore year at UCLA, I represented the university at the National Hillel Summer Institute in the woodlands of Northeastern Pennsylvania. Early one morning, as my parents drove me down Century Boulevard to LAX, my mother looked back at me and warned, “Do not fall in love with a boy from the East Coast!”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” I said. Besides, I had been dating someone special all year and wore his initial ring on a chain around my neck. I was clearly not pursuing passion in the Poconos.

Fast forward two years and hundreds of love letters later: I married the boy from Penn State I met at the Hillel Summer Institute.

In last month’s column, I wrote about the power of prose to move mountains, to make a difference in terms of social justice and other causes about which the writer is passionate. I referenced grant applications, op-ed articles, and legislative proposals. This month, I want to acknowledge the sweeter side of language, the passion part of passionate, the words that fill our hearts with joy, that makes us swoon -- and marry boys from Penn State.

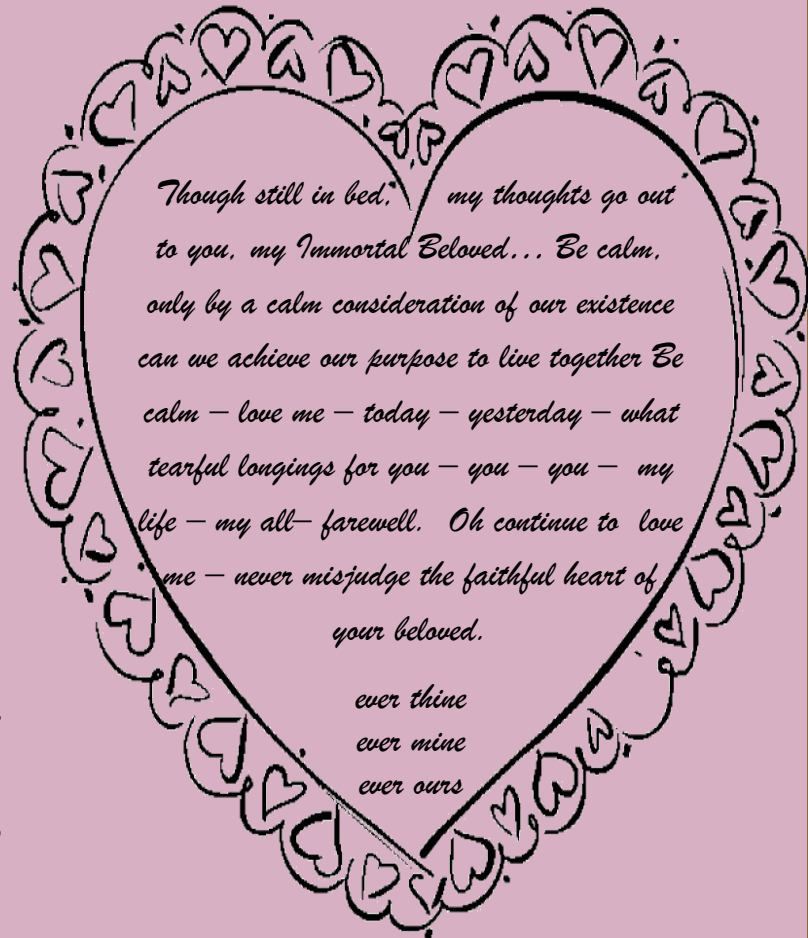
Ah, love letters – a centuries-old literary expression of affection. According to a blog about [Jane Austin](#), “The love letter’s earliest manifestation may perhaps be the Bible’s *Song of Solomon*. Letter writing was furthered by Cicero and Pliny, turn-of-the-century Romans who affectionately wrote letters to their wives.”

Interest in historic love letters surfaced in the 2008 *Sex and the City* movie. If you’re a fan, you may recall the scene in which Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker) and Mr. Big (Chris Noth) are lying in bed while Carrie recites from *Love Letters by Great Men*. Although the excerpts were factual, the book title was fictional, disappointing untold numbers of SATC devotees who yearned to purchase the book. But not to worry. Thanks to quick-thinking entrepreneurs, a real book with the same title emerged on Amazon and has been available since 2010 -- in two volumes.

I prefer a more egalitarian collection of period pieces titled *Love Letters of Great Men and Women – From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Megalodon Entertainment, LLC. 2008), because it features the prose of lovesick ladies, as well as men, who are equally ardent in their pronouncements of passion for the objects of their affection.

A resurgent interest in historic love letters is further demonstrated by a recent feature in Glamour.com titled [The Best Romantic Love Letters Ever Written](#). (Nov. 2, 2020). The article summarizes classical love letters, as well as those more contemporary, such as the letters from George H.W. Bush to his wife Barbara and those written by Ronald Reagan to his beloved Nancy. The article reminds us of the timelessness of romance and the beauty of properly penned pronouncements of love.

It is interesting to note that historic, amorous correspondence also play well on Broadway, as in the love letters between John and Abigail Adams, sung as recitative in *1776* (premiering in 1969)



In conclusion, please enjoy, as did Carrie Bradshaw, the love note from Ludwig Van Beethoven to his Immortal Beloved. And to those who celebrate,

Happy Valentine’s Day!

These days, more than ever, we need laughter in our life. But as the great Jack Lemmon once said: “It’s hard enough to write a good drama, it’s much harder to write a good comedy, and it’s hardest of all to write a drama with comedy. Which is what life is.” To help us inject humor into our writing, author P.J. Colando joined our monthly members’ meeting with some much needed pointers on what makes comedy works.

Colando quoted an expert’s definition seen in Videos of [Comedy = Truth + Pain?](#) as “laughter being the best medicine.” It’s also “an antidote to fear and the unknown, which daily life presents.” She went further to explain that drama and comedy are siblings. As Erma Bombeck once said: “If you can’t make the circumstances better, you can laugh at them.” The TV show *Seinfeld* is an example of how this notion is showcased well.

A Colando tip to “writing funny:” Smile while you write. It’s helpful to keep a mirror handy to see yourself looking happy. Think of what makes you laugh. What senses come to life when you hear a joke, or tell one? What do you see, smell, taste that turns your frown upside down? Colando reminded us that a joke and a story have the same structure: A beginning, middle and end. Both need a conflict. Both set up expectation and end with a payoff, such as a joke or an ironic ending. The movie [Some Like it Hot](#) ended with a zinger of a line that made audiences laugh all the way out of the theater, and the TV series *Friends* used a [Holiday Armadillo](#) instead of Santa Claus.

A funny ending puts a spin on the “Rule of Three” —lists of three things. The first two are straight and the last one goes against a reader’s expectations. Purposely arrange a sentence so the humorous shock is at the end, like a comedian’s punchline. Just be sure to keep the joke to the punchline and not follow it with something sad. For example: “The wedding guests celebrated with dancing, toasting and cannibalism.” Twisted clichés can also be used as a type of a surprising ending, like: “Where there’s a will, there’s a family fighting over it!” Sound sequences like alliteration and onomatopoeia tend to make people laugh aloud. However, Colando warns that such devices must make sense within the scene.

Research has shown that words with the K sound in the middle like “joke,” “joker,” and “jocular” tend to prompt a smile. The word “sidekick” is often associated with something funny. Other tools in the comedic writer arsenal are words that start with P, B, T, D, K, G or have “oo” in the middle. Strong verbs, precise adjectives, specific nouns and double-entendre words that mask or disclose satire can also elicit laughs. Replace overly familiar words with funnier synonyms like “scamper” instead of “hurry.” “Dupe” rather than “mislead.” “Pandemonium” in the place of “chaos” and so on.

Gigantic proportions, exaggeration and hyperbole can also prove funny



Some of my stories are powered by a rant or a personal pet peeve or an encounter that perplexed me. One of these grew into a book, compelled by a need to tell more, to show more, and to create.

P. J. Colando

in a story. For example, *James and the Giant Peach*, *How to Cook Husbands*, and *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*. There is no limit to what can be used to create comedic situation and characters in a story, like word play, tweaking words and puns. Others include call-backs and Deja-Vu, amusing similes, metaphors and analogies.

A situation itself can set the stage for a comedy. Consider a family who is looking to adopt a brother to their only son, only to bring home a...mouse (*Stuart Little*). Bodily functions, sexual scenes, insults, food and party scenes can all be made funny (*American Pie*, *A Fish Named Wanda*, and *Animal House* to name a few).

Characters are an asset in funny writing, and, according to Colando, “The best and most effective comedy is set up by the book’s characters.” Once you have defined the right personality, funny lines are apropos. Detective Adrian Monk in the *Monk* TV series is an example of a character who’s funny because of his tragic background. We don’t laugh at his Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), but rather how it inhibits his ability to do his work as a detective, as depicted in the [show’s](#) first scene. Note that ensemble is funnier than a sole character because of the interplay between characters with appropriately different personalities. Remember “[Chuckles Bites The Dust](#)” from the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*?

Note your character’s different tones of voice as you write—they can be used for comedic situations. (*Seinfeld*’s outraged whines and aggrieved complaints always made us laugh.) You can also spoof a character or use irony to flesh out comedic aspects of your character. Charlie Chaplin in [The Big Dictator](#) and [George of the Jungle](#) that spoofed *Tarzan* are just two examples out of many.

Dialogue is a great way to infuse your story with humor. Use subtext and double-meaning to flesh out your hidden message or point of view. The movie *Toy Story* used this tool to perfection. When Woody expressed his frustration with Buzz being invasive and disrupting his friendship with Andy, he states: “The word I’m searching for, I can’t say because there’s preschool toys present.” *In Back to the Future*, Marty McFly goes back in time from 1985 into a diner in 1955 and asks for a Pepsi Free. He means no sugar, but the guy at the counter informs him that “If you want a Pepsi, you’ll hafta pay for it!” And don’t underestimate the power of a pregnant pause or sounds like “pssst” to make your readers laugh.

Whatever you use to write funny, Colando emphasized in her summary, make sure to polish the comedic elements more than the other story components. After all, we writers want to be comedy queens—not drama queens.

Romance novels are a huge market, and not just in terms of readers. Networks like Hallmark and streaming services like Netflix search for the right romance story, and thousands of writers now dip their hands (and keyboards) into the Romance genre.



Romance lit fans know what does and doesn't work in this market. But newbie romance writers must study the genre if they aspire to see their work go to the top of any best-seller list. However, it's important to note that romance stories are surprisingly difficult to write. A romance plot needs more than passionate embraces, sweet words and steamy love scenes. Today's romance stories tend to fuse different genres into the classic love story of boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl, and boy-finds-girl. Some secret loves are out of the closet: today there's a large market for girl-meets-girl and boy-meets-boy romance stories. And romance writers experiment with horror, thriller and science fiction/fantasy genres. But, before you decide on a sub-genre, make sure you know the characteristics or basics of Love Lit, such as conflict, theme, character development, goals, believable dialogue and—most importantly in a romance story—the right sort of steam in the sex scenes.

The key to riveting romantic conflict? Two lovers can't be together, such as: they might come from different historical time periods ("Outlander"), different species (The "Twilight" Boos Series), different social classes ("Wuthering Heights," "The Notebook"), competing businesses ("You've Got Mail") and so on. Their road has many obstacles to overcome before they can finally embrace. The more difficult and complicated their journey, the more engaging and rich their love story. In "Outlander" for example, the two lovers lived in two different time periods. Also, the heroine was married to a man in one time period who happened to be descended from a ruthless English army commander, who abused and tormented her new love interest in the earlier time period. Whatever obstacles clutter your characters' road to love, make sure they eventually arrive at a Happily Ever After! Every avid romance reader expects and needs a happy ending.

If you are using a trope, or a recurring theme, in your romance, put some spin on it to avoid the pitfall of clichés. According to [AutoCrit](#), these common themes include a couple stranded on an island, morphing from enemies to lovers, forbidden love, etc. Other than changing gender roles (the professor on the island is a woman and the movie star is a man), you can put a spin on the reader's expectation of what the role entails. "Brokeback Mountain" introduced two gay cowboys, for example. Another way to make your story unique: include various external and internal conflicts. If the lovers are stranded on a deserted island and must struggle to find food and shelter just as a storm is closing in (external conflicts), perhaps one of them is also extremely allergic to insect bites, or is bleeding from a wound. (another external conflict), while the other character is an army nurse who suffers from PTSD and can't stand the sight of a sick person or blood (internal conflict).

Character development is crucial in Romance, and the protagonists should have interesting friends, relative and rivals in the supporting

roles. Today's readers demand more than a Fabio type hero to save the damsel in distress. Every human is fallible, has weaknesses and readers want to cheer for a protagonist who overcomes a personal problem as the story progresses. Give your characters (main and minor ones) a clear goal, but note that finding love need not be their **only** goal. In the romantic comedy, "Working Girl," the lead character wants to be acknowledged for her business skills so she can advance her career. As she seeks recognition of her business acumen, she simultaneously finds love. [Cosmopolitan's](#) Heeseung Kim emphasizes that even though mismatched or polar opposite

couples are fun, they shouldn't be defined solely by their love affair. Give them additional dimensions. When in doubt of what you should include in your protagonists' relationship and their road to find love, "[The Novel Smithy](#)" lists six stages: establish their flaws, spark mutual interest, create a conflict, and give them time to bond. Separate the couple, and then unite them again. However, as [Bella Pope](#) notes, beware of common mistakes when crafting your characters' relationships, such as glamorizing abuse, instant romance, detailing a one-sided relationship or writing about a couple with absolutely nothing in common. They may not like everything about each other, but they each must find one irresistible quality. Finally, allow your characters to feel vulnerable, even if they don't show their weakness externally.

Romance doesn't have to translate into cheesy and clichéd language. Take into consideration your characters' occupation, age, social background, education level, where they live, their neighbors, their co-workers, their family status, (married, widow, divorce, single, kids), religion, who they interact with—family members, best friends, clubs, sports, hobbies, etc. Let their background guide their dialogue. Gestures, rather than words can be part of your dialogue. Remember that not every woman wants chocolates and flowers on special occasions. Don't pad a plot with stale tropes.

Be very careful with sex scenes. It's easy to get swept away into descriptions that might make your reader roll their eyes. You don't want to end up on the [Literary Review's](#) "Bad Sex in Fiction Award" (yes, there is such a thing and it's not an honor to receive it). Sexual scenes are not a requirement in romances, so if you don't yet know how to write a believable sex scene – don't write it. And for crying out loud, don't have a sex scene just to have a sex scene. There must be a reason for it. After all, sexual attraction doesn't equal love, or as "[The Novel Smithy](#)" puts it, can you imagine Belle being attracted to the vain Gaston rather than the Beast? Sure, he takes one look at her beauty and wants to make her his wife, but does he love her? Ah, there's the rub!

Still unsure how to write your first romance? There are many resources and even templates on the internet. Check out Steph Fraser "[How to Write a Romance Novel in 12 Steps](#)" and Savannah Gilbo's "[6 Key Scenes Every Romance Novel Needs](#)" to name just a few. And remember, though the Beatles sang how you "Can't Buy Me Love," selling it can sure pay the rent and for a handy roof job.



It's natural to hope for a happy fairy-tale ending, but many famous romance stories have sad outcomes for the lovers. Why? Any ending should complete a story's arc and underline the author's message – what he wishes to convey. And though readers might agonize over the ending, the final scene can be the best outcome for a protagonist. Let's review a few sad endings of well-known romantic stories:

Romeo and Juliet – a Stage Play by William Shakespeare

One can debate the advantage of teaching impressionable high-school students the tale of two teenagers in love who end up killing themselves when they can't be together. But one can't ignore that when it comes to literary characters, few lovers are better known. But if Shakespeare sought to tell the greatest love story ever told, why did he end it with not one but TWO tragic deaths? Perhaps Shakespeare didn't intend to talk about a love so pure and true that it can't survive in the real world. And perhaps he wanted to warn his audiences of the harmful consequences of hatred without boundaries; hatred like the hot feud between The Hatfield & McCoy feud. Americans need no reminder of how differing opinions can lead to utter devastation, such as the Civil War that threatened to end the American Experiment. While we may wish to see Romeo and Juliet marry and live happily ever after, we know, deep down, their families wouldn't allow it. Perhaps Shakespeare believed that passion and emotion-driven blind love must often be sacrificed to bring about an age of reason. Even high school sophomores can grasp that truth.

Gone with the Wind – a Novel by Margaret Mitchell

And speaking of the Civil War, why didn't the author let Rhett and Scarlett end up in each other's arms? Just a stroke of the pen really. Alas, Scarlett is not just a spoiled brat coming-of-age in a time of war. She's not just a woman learning to use her inner strength to stand on her own two feet. She's not even just a strong woman claiming her place in a male dominant society. Scarlett is a representative of the Old South that sees its way of life fading away and must change with the times--or wither away. It's no wonder she compromises when it comes to establishing her business, hiring cheap labor from the local jail to replace free slave labor. Scarlett is in love with a man she can't have, because the South he represents can no longer exist, and she can't join Rhett, because she's still tied to her allegiance to Tara. In the end, when Rhett leaves her, he's not just done with her. He doesn't give a damn what the South will do to survive. Scarlett goes home to Tara, the place where she can heal, revive and thrive in the new South. She doesn't need a Southern gentleman still stuck in his old ways (Ashley) or a man who has completely adopted the Northern way of life (Rhett). She can do all

right on her own; perhaps even better, since she is not tied down or dependent on either lover.

Casablanca – A Screenplay by Julius & Philip Epstein and Howard Koch

Everyone who's seen the movie knows that Rick belongs with Elsa and Elsa belongs with Rick. So why not send Victor on the airplane to a place where he can continue his fight against the Nazi regime, and allow Rick and Elsa to go back to his club to drink champagne and continue their romance? The answer is found in the movie's underlining message: "Casablanca" is a war movie masquerading as romance. It debuted in 1942, less than a year after the U.S. entered WWII. This romance story takes place in Casablanca (White House), a city not quite under full Nazi regime, but one that might easily fall into their hands, just like the U.S. (i.e. White House), if it doesn't fight to protect and ensure its way of life. Rick is an American who wants nothing to do with politics of the region, but like the U.S. leadership, he's drawn toward it. Louis, the Frenchman, is the European allied forces representative who tells Rick that if his country enters the war, the Allies are sure to win it. But men had to leave their loved ones, forsake their everyday life, and go to war. Rick chooses to send Elsa away, and join the Allied forces. And Elsa doesn't just disappear. She returns to the U.S., where she'll work to support the troops and the war efforts at home. Their romance must end for a higher cause.

Titanic – A Screenplay by James Cameron

Let's move along from an airplane on its way to freedom to a ship headed for disaster. Yes, the show "MythBusters" already proved both Jack and Rose could have been saved if Jack had also tied his life vests around the piece of wood Rose was drifting on in the ocean. But the writer chose to kill off Jack because he was a tool, a means to an end. He helped Rose realize that she didn't need a man to survive. She left England behind (i.e. old world) where she was tied to a man she dislikes, but forced to marry to support herself and her mother. After the wreck she reaches New York (i.e. the new world), as a free woman ready to live her life to the fullest. Had Jack been allowed to live, Rose would have been overshadowed by another man, which would go against the screenplay's message. The audience might want to see the two lovebirds together, but Jack's death is necessary. Rose has mastered his lessons on life and it's time for her to prove it.

When you write a romance, ask yourself: what is my message in this story? Will love last forever or be lost for a higher cause? Then build a story that stays on message and makes sense for your characters and your readers.

Keeping busy during the pandemic gets harder the more time passes. With many businesses forced to close as cases rise, people are spending more time at home and trying to stay entertained.

A Calabasas resident has taken it upon himself to help local minds stay active and entertained-- and to learn a thing or two in the process.

Alan Wills has been running a weekly email trivia game since March. It's free to join and it's multiple-choice. Wills said he wanted to make it a little easier than standard trivia games.

"I sent it out to 10 friends in March, and here we are in December and we have 250 members. It goes out every Friday and it's been very well received. It's just grown from word of mouth, it's been incredible," said Wills, 80. "Regular trivia is a lot more complicated because you have to come up with the answer. This one, you might get it, you might not."

Game master is not a new role for Wills, who oversaw trivia and several other games at the Calabasas Senior Center before the pandemic. When the facility had to close its doors, he decided to keep the game going digitally.

He bought eight books filled with trivia factoids and started the email. He quickly learned to double-check his information before sending out the game.

"I have to check on Google because a lot of the questions in the books are old-fashioned and things have been updated. For example, I wrote a question about the Wailing Wall (in Israel), and one of the members emailed me to say it's now called the Western Wall," Wills said. "My books are supposed to be current, but I'm still learning quite a bit from my members."

In addition to keeping his community busy, Wills has found the game to be a productive use of his time. He



CWC-SFV member Alan Wills and wife Norma.

spends most Thursdays preparing the 15 questions and concocting realistic wrong answers to disguise the right ones.

Players have welcomed the game as a distraction from the goings-on of the world and as a way to stay busy.

Walter Kaufman, a friend of Wills from the Calabasas Senior Center, started playing the game as a way to stay connected during the pandemic. He said Wills has an outgoing, community-focused nature that brings people together. "(He's) the type who likes to engage other people. That's

how we met. He and his wife and their friends have been playing for some time. I walked into the senior center one day and they invited me to play with them," Kaufman said. "We've been friends since then."

Kaufman said that, for him, the trivia game isn't about learning anything; It's just a nice way to be reminded that there are other people in the same boat as him.

Wills said the only complaint he's received is that his questions are too hard.

"I wrote a really simple quiz the next week and then I got a bunch of emails saying it was too easy," Wills said. "You can't please everyone."

He spreads the questions across a variety of subjects, including history, movies, music and U.S. presidents.

Wills said he appreciates players calling him out when he makes a mistake because it's a chance to learn.

"I'm 80 years of age, but that doesn't mean I can't still learn things," he said.

To join Wills' game, send an email to awills@charter.net, with the subject "M.C. Trivia."



An example of Wills' Trivia

What is the wealthiest city in South Korea?

A. Seoul
 B. Busan
 C. Incheon

In Sweden, what sport is Kaninhoppning?

A. Children jumping through hoops
 B. Steeplechasing
 C. Rabbit show-jumping

Magic Johnson became part-owner of which baseball team?

A. L.A. Dodgers
 B. N.Y. Mets
 C. S.F. Giants

Examples of Wills' questions:

A 911 NEW YEAR'S EVE

By Raymond A. DeTournay



Since the year 2020 has been such a bust, Louise and I tried to smooth over the bumps by recalling some of the most memorable New Year's Eves we have spent together. The first one, of course, was the best. It was 1958 when we celebrated with friends in Paris, France. We remember driving up and down the Champs-Élysées in our MG-TF, still wearing the goofy hats from the party we'd just left. The next most memorable happened in 2008, some 50 years later, in Woodland Hills, California.



which the police helicopters shine a high-powered searchlight on top of their house and ours. Standing under a leafless tree as the brilliant light passed back and forth, it felt like we were inside a huge kaleidoscope—very disorienting while sipping champagne.

Next came the display of Shock and Awe. Four police squad cars descended on our neighborhood, lights flashing and sirens wailing. The circling helicopter flushed out many guests who suddenly decided they had other parties to attend. They ran into the waiting arms of the police. This segued into the Street Floor Show. Officers lined the guests up against a fence with arms over their heads and clasped behind their necks, and began a pat down and identity check. That's when the girls started crying.

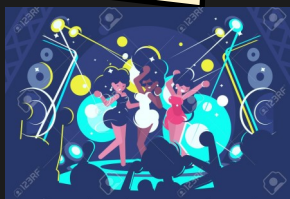
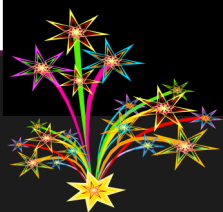
The Fire Department Extravaganza came next. A fire engine, sounding its blast horn, threaded through the illegally parked cars on our narrow street. It was responding to calls from neighbors who'd found smoldering fragments of fireworks in their pools and patios.

Standing in our front yard with a panoramic view of the Valley and the entertainment playing out below us, we noticed the front window of their house was shattered. A tipsy guy came out the front door, stepped on a beer can, lost his footing and rolled down about thirty steps toward the street. Someone stopped him just before he reached the waiting arms of the police. He shouted nasty words at the cops about search warrants and the like, but they just looked amused. Still steaming, he went into the house and threw some sizeable objects through the remaining windows. An attempt to improve ventilation we presumed.

The grand finale was the dramatic appearance of an ambulance whose flashing lights and siren had little effect in clearing the choked street. A girl had been severely cut by broken glass flying around inside the house during the earlier ventilation improvements. The injury didn't damage her vocal chords though and she had choice words for the cops and technicians as they whisked her off to the hospital.

Louise and I watched the whole production unfold while sipping our champagne and wishing we'd brought some chairs. We didn't realize until later we were watching a classic "stick it to the man" party – The kind in which guests are invited to tidy up the place before the bank takes over. The ventilation efforts were only the most visible effects.

In reflection, it was a great way to start 2009. We learned more about our soon to be gone neighbors and watched our tax dollars at work. We now have new neighbors and they seem really nice ...but we made a resolution not to leave home next New Year's Eve. You never know.



Instead of attending a party, Louise and I decided to spend a safe and sane evening in the living room of our San Fernando Valley home while waiting for the ball to drop in Times Square. As it turned out, the ball wasn't the only thing that came down that night.

A year or so earlier the expensive vacant home next door was purchased by two men in their early twenties.

They said they were in the mortgage business. Apparently, they'd gotten a deal on the house. Shortly after moving in, their roof bristled with multiple satellite dishes, but being young and unfamiliar with upkeep, the property began a slow decline beginning with weeds in the lawn and a pool that turned the color of cooked spinach. We never got to know the guys well, so when they decided to welcome 2009 by throwing a party for their friends and clients, we weren't surprised not to be invited. Even so, they provided several shows that evening that were more entertaining than any we'd ever paid to see.

The first was a Car Show. Their guests all drove very expensive iron. Lined up along our hillside street was a stunning array of Mercedes, BMW's, Bentley's and Hummers ... all black with darkened windows and leasing company logos where the license plates normally go.

Next was the Musical Show where a deejay played our favorite heavy-metal music really loud and piped it directly over our fence. "Well, its only once a year," we rationalized.

At the stroke of midnight came the Pyrotechnics Spectacular, a 15-minute display of heavy-duty fireworks blasted from their carport roof. Being high-spirited young men they probably didn't realize it was against the law to launch incendiary objects in a high fire danger area. We went out to watch, if for no other reason than to make sure our backyard didn't go up in smoke.

The fireworks were a trigger for the Helicopter Flyover Show, the one in

We Make A Pair



Today I am so happy,
I can sigh,
thinking of the good
things we have,
My lady and I.

So many thoughts
I can itemize,
about our wonderful life
together,
My lady and I.

So many good feelings
I can specify,
about our relationship
together,
My lady and I.

My lady-fair is
the apple of my eye.
She is my lady.
I am her guy.

Together we are partners.
Collectively we make a pair,
and a pair we are.
This viewpoint we both share.

I am blessed
to have my lady
as a friend and as a wife.
She has given a lot to me,
adding so much to my life.

Norman Molesko

DRIFT AWAY

Cloud weather, falling rain
Absent lover causes pain
Hiding stars and missing moon
Indoor it won't be soon
'Til my darling's home to stay
And the clouds will drift away.



Long the hours waiting here
Constant showers never clear
Yearning heart and misty eyes
Vainly plead in anguished cries
For my darling home to stay
Then the clouds will drift away.

By the window staring out
When I see her I will shout
Waiting arms and burning lips
Shall protest all future trips
When my darling's home to stay
Then the clouds will drift away.

Ken Wilkins

My Secret Love



Amniotic Ark.

Warm welcoming
womb.

Beloved bathtub.

Ray Malus

How to Wake Up Your Muse and Let the Words Flow

Whenever a writer has a deadline and must an essay, a novel chapter, an article, a lecture, a short story or an op-ed in the local paper, he or she quite often runs out of ideas. The writer sits and stares helplessly at an unfinished document. Inspiration is blocked. What to do? Time is ticking away. Sometimes, a walk or nap or some type of diversion will clear the blockage, but many writers find relief by using a prompt as an indirect way to wake the muse.



prompt for a short time helps them warm up for their assigned or professional work. Try to write for just ten minutes on a prompt and you might find it easier to return to the piece you intended to write. Some people think that prompt reaction writing helps a writer learn the habit of daily writing, and build up stamina for longer writing projects.

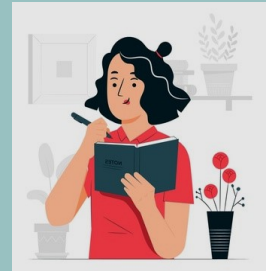
During our shelter-in-place, many SFV members missed the prompt exercise session. The CWC-SFV Board – and this editor – also missed out prompt ritual. “We’ll do it after our Zoom meeting!” we decided. And so the SFV Prompt Exercise activity is now continuing online.

Every club meeting in the Saban Community Room, before the speaker’s presentation, we took time for a Reaction to a Prompt exercise. Published author, lecturer Rita Keeley Brown led us in a half hour Prompt exercise. She would pass out a sheet of paper with several prompt topics, asked us to “Select one, wait for my signal to begin, and then start writing!” She counseled her “class” to just write whatever came to mind, without an invisible “Judge” whispering caution. After ten minutes, she said, “Stop!” and we prepared to share our reactions with our companions.

People receive a prompt list from our new “teacher,” SFV secretary/treasurer and critique group leader, Pat Avery, and the fingers start to fly on the keyboard. After ten minutes, a few in the Gallery read their stories for the group’s enjoyment. And, every month, a few prompt stories are reprinted in this newsletter.

Some of the stories made us laugh, applaud and urge the author to keep the story going at home and see where it leads. Rita told us that some prompt responses became memoirs, novels or a series of short stories.

On the next two pages, you’ll find four stories that were started in our January Zoom Meet. When you read them, quiet your inner critic and just go with the flow of the story, wherever it leads. And in the February meeting, join the prompt Gallery and write on!



“The prompt helped writers get the creative juices flowing and unblocks the work on other writing projects,” she told us.

Kathy Highcove

Many writers think that focusing on an unrelated

On the following two pages are prompt responses sent to me by four members of our January Gallery: Nance Crawford, Michael Rains, Anne Hansell and new member Heather Bradshaw. They were inspired by one of these three prompts to write a short story or scene. After your read, were you able to tell which prompt each writer chose?



1. Love
2. Hidden Treasure
3. Your best (or worst) Valentine’s Day.
4. Your pet starts acting strange and you suspect ...

My husband David had to videotape an audition.

Setting up was a pain: crowded studio area in our back room, unmovable center table, something resembling a record turntable, and a record album.

I got to be the camera operator.

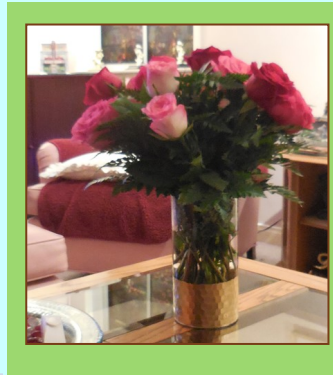
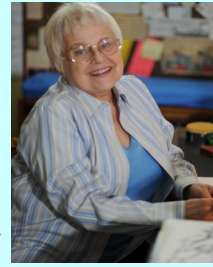
A suitably focused tape was submitted. Called in to meet the producer/director, singer, musician and songwriter, Don Henley, David was hired on the spot to be the opening act of the immediately upcoming Eagles *Hotel California* tour. *

David was in and out of town for several

* Ed's Note— The *Eagles* tour is currently on hold due to COVID-19.

weeks, including Valentine's, when they played Madison Square Garden.

That afternoon, having survived a long period of fiscal squeeze, I was shocked to answer the front door and receive delivery of a beautiful bouquet of roses.



There was an attached card:

"I wish you could be here today for my NYC opening – but you ARE here in my heart. I love you SOOOOOO much!"

Valentine's Day 2020 was the best day of the year.



The Persian Cat Named Celica

by Anne Hansell



Years ago, when I was a teen, I had a Persian cat named Celica. Every night, she would sit on my window seat and watch me while I was doing my homework on my computer.

But one evening while I was finishing up my essay on Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Celica began to behave strangely. Instead of climbing up to her usual spot, she got up a nearby chair and jumped on my desk. She walked to my keyboard and started typing with her paws!

Startled, I managed to save my assignment and pushed my chair back. Before I could pick Celica up, she typed several words: "Sarah, time for bed now."

I frowned. Celica wanted me to go to bed now? Why?

The cat looked at my face and typed in more: "Hurry – go to bed now."

I put my arms across my chest and stared at her. "Celica, enough of that. I won't go to bed now – too early for my taste."

Snarling, the cat bared her teeth and got closer to my face. She hissed at me, showed her teeth, almost biting my nose.

Frightened, I got up and jumped in bed and pulled the comforter up to my chin and over my clothes,

Seemingly satisfied, Celica strolled to my desk lamp and pushed its button, plunging my room into darkness. Under moonlight streaming through my bedroom windows, I watched her



jump to the floor, walk over to my bed and leapt up to snuggle next to me. I couldn't believe she was in bed with me. Normally, she slept in her own bed in a far corner near my closet.

Suddenly, I heard heavy footsteps coming in the hallway behind my closed bedroom door. My hair stood up because my parents were attending a three-day doctor convention in New York City, and my older brothers were both away at Yale University.

The door opened, revealing a tall, huge creature, dressed in military garb—including a gun. The beast looked around and sniffed but it didn't seem to see me. Then it closed the door. I hid under the covers and shivered in fear.

An hour later, Celica tapped on me my head with a sharp claw and ... said, "Get up!"

"Celica! How come you can suddenly speak and write? I'm not getting up!"

"Get up!"

"Why? I'm so scared! What was that thing?"

Celica blinked her eyes at me and replied: "The Bear People are looking for the Guardian of Fate.

And that's you."

"ME?"

"Yes, you. And I'm your bodyguard, chosen long before your birth."

Editor's note: Some prompt stories become the first installment of longer story, perhaps several chapters or even a book. This prompt response is a great example of an potential intro to a longer fantasy adventure. KH

My pet was acting strangely. Really, really strangely! First, he went around the room, sniffing at everything! Then he barked at the window a few times for no reason at all! I tried to give him some treats to calm him down.

"Goldy, what could be wrong??" I kept saying. It was very strange behavior. Extremely strange. Goldy has never acted like this before!



Then Goldy licked my face and chewed on a pillow. He barked at the window again.

I didn't know what could possibly be wrong with him! I thought about taking a video to show to the veterinarian. But once I started the video, Goldy went back into his fishbowl and I had nothing to show for it.

The Proposal

By H M Bradshaw

Biscuit was barking by the time I punched the last digit into the front door keypad. When I opened the door, his front paws landed heavily on my chest, almost knocking a bottle of red wine out of my hand. It was Valentine's Day. My boyfriend, Teddy, was traveling on business and I wanted to be in the mood for some fun FaceTime later.

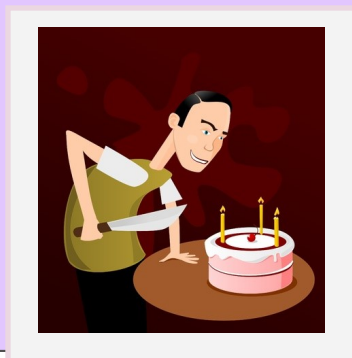
Biscuit yapped, jumped and circled me as I made my way to the kitchen. This was over the top, even for him. His cold nose nudged my hand as we approached the back door.

"Out?"

I tickled his ear and reached over to slide the security panel out of the doggy door. But it wasn't there. An image of our landlord, with his creepy grin, squeezing through the opening and slithering into the kitchen popped into my mind. Unease prickled over me.

Biscuit whined. I flicked on the light and gasped. There was a chocolate cake on the kitchen island. The wine bottle slipped from my hand and smashed to the floor. Knees weak, I fell against the wall. The landlord *had* been in the house again.

He lived three houses away. At first we had laughed off his attentiveness while enjoying the home-baked treats but after a while his unexpected house calls felt like an intrusion, occurring more frequently when I was alone. He perfected the motion of stepping inside as soon as the door opened, giving some half-baked excuse for being there. Teddy didn't see the harm as much as I felt it. He didn't want to move again so soon.



I felt for the phone in my pocket but I had left it charging in the car. I couldn't go outside. He could be anywhere. It felt like he was everywhere. He was in my head, if not my house.

I could use my laptop to contact Teddy!

Biscuit bounded down the hallway towards the bedroom. I followed, brandishing a shard of broken glass. I grabbed the laptop from my desk and carried it into the master bathroom, planning to lock myself in, but when my foot touched marble, I froze. The tub was filled with bubbles and rose petals.

A champagne cork popped.

"Surprise!"

I screamed, slashing wildly with the jagged shard. Biscuit barked. Champagne mixed with blood. Teddy slipped to the floor, a ring box at his feet.

"Sorry," I towed the wounds. "I thought it was the landlord."

Teddy mumbled through blood spittle. Biscuit whined.

"Yes," I whispered, slipping on the ring.

We kissed.

"Congratulations," an unmistakable voice said.

I turned slowly. The landlord towered in the doorway, three dessert plates in his large hands. He grinned. "Piece of cake?"



She's A True Romantic—In Love With Love

Longtime SFV member Leslie Kaplan has a romantic streak that she's nurtured all her life. While a member of our club, she has written many memoirs, poems, essays and short stories about her loves, flirtations and her very happy marriage to the late Sy Kaplan. In the years that our club met in the MPTF's Katzenberg Room, Leslie had a SFV February meeting ritual: She would arrive at the meeting with an armload of single red roses with long green stems. Leslie would be perfectly coifed, made-up, and looking sexy in a form-fitting lacy black sheath and red high heels. When our club business was finished, Leslie came forth and took the mic. One by one, she

called out the names of all SFV men at the meeting. Each man would walk—rather sheepishly—to the front of the room to receive a rose. Leslie would give each honoree a quick hug or a peck on the cheek as we witnesses chuckled and cheered on the romantic ritual. Alas, no longer do we meet together during the pandemic—we Zoom these days and blow air-kisses. But in [The Valley Scribe archives](#), I found several Leslie Kaplan stories for the 2021 February issue. Here's a memoir piece and a lusty Leslie verse about love and desire.

Kathy Highcove



PIN UP GIRL

By Leslie Kaplan

Betty Grable was the number one Pin Up Girl during World War II. Being star struck as a young teen, I tried to emulate the way she and other glamorous movie stars looked, dressed and performed. Secretly, in my heart, that's what I wanted to be when I grew up.

My first boyfriend, Norman Tarin, five years my senior, joined the Marines and was sent to the South Pacific theater of war. He called me Angel in every letter. Some of these letters were so censored that all I could read was Angel and Love. The other words were blackened or cut out.

One day a package arrived from him. It contained a grass skirt in which the woven waist band read Essie, my nickname, and Tarin, his last name. That was his way of proposing. So I went

to our neighborhood photographer and had a studio portrait taken in full color wearing this authentic, beautiful grass skirt.

I had no idea on which island he might be engaged in battle. According to news reports, the fighting in the Pacific was fierce and costly in lives. But I sent an eight-by-ten full color "Essie Tarin" to his box number hoping he would receive it, and he did.

So there I was, a Pin Up Girl right next to Betty Grable in the Marine barracks. Who ever thought this little girl with the squint in the sun and the over-bite...the kid who dreamed of becoming a movie star would be represented on the wall of a Marine barracks somewhere in the South Pacific...becoming their number two ... PIN UP GIRL?!

Red Roses

When she pictures the look on his face
As she dresses down... to satin and lace
Though the glow of her youth has grown dimmer
Does he still view her younger and slimmer
As his finger retraces her face

Like a mellowed and fine tasting wine
Chocolate kisses still tasting divine
Does he yearn... as she does... for romancing
Holding close... as two pages... while dancing
As he whispers to his Valentine

If he gifts her with roses of red
Will he carry her off to his bed
And though youth may forsake her
Will he always awake her
As he lays one red rose near her head

By Leslie Kaplan



If Intentions Were Dimensions

If intentions were dimensions
I would direct the universe
If just willing was fulfilling
There'd be more dollars in my purse
Instead of ensorcelled in this curse
Think of all the things I would do
If I could plow all the way through
My reserve is so friable
I know I'm irreconcilable
Because I am not reliable
So awfully sappy and crappy
Making us forever unhappy
I wish I didn't need my nappy
Haven't I become a whiner
Things would be a great deal finer
If we tossed the old recliner
I would sign up and then do more
Hopefully not asleep on the floor
Curled up, my gosh, a dreadful bore
There is no use in my crying
Spilt milk is oh so quickly drying
But, I will keep on with my trying
Until I'm in my coffin dying
The sky above would turn bright blue
If my dreams would just once come true
And I could always follow through
With what I say I'm going to do
Each and every task completing
At long last not self defeating
Not list on list on list deleting
I would no longer be tight fettered
Living could be so much better
With all jobs done to the letter
Things wouldn't go from bad to worse
I'd be free from bondage's curse
And I would rule the universe



Michael Edelstein

Under Her Wings

Once there was
a devoted mother seagull
Who nurtured a fledgling bird
The bird hesitant of flying
Uncertain if he could glide or soar

Under stormy weather and enraged clouds
Unable to see the horizon clearly

While the wind blew forcefully
Graceless and out of control

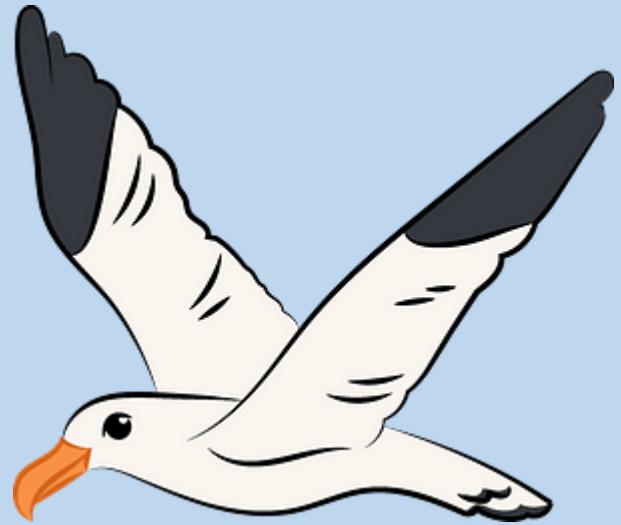
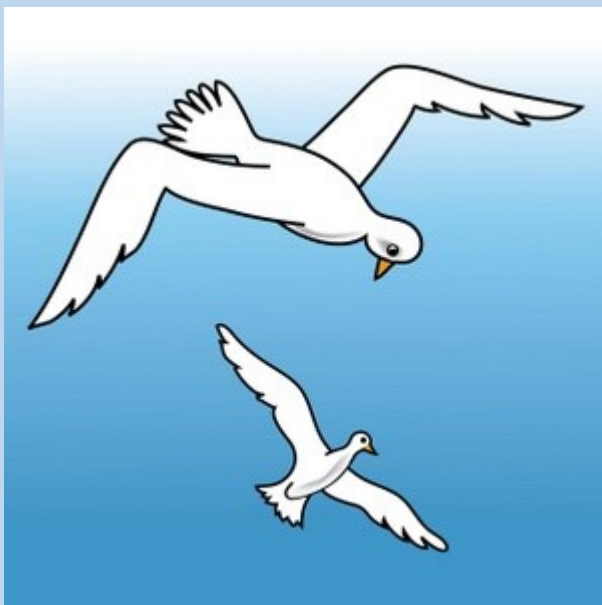
He heard her tireless, yet gentle voice
Urging him to dare higher and higher

*“Do not emulate the rest of the flock
Don’t adapt to their pace and beat.”*

*“Let your inner voice, your rhythm guide you
Allow your hidden light to steer you.”*

He attempted over and over, filled with qualms
Whether he could master the art of flying

Yet, she would not surrender
Guarding, soothing, attentive, and adamant



Then he gathered his strength
Trying despite his searing inner turmoil

The air carried her reassuring tone
Cheering, speaking on his behalf to the flock

He discovered new styles of flying
Finding unknown vigor in his wings and enjoyment

Bit by bit, morsel by morsel he gained
More strength, fearlessness, resilience, and boldness

For a long while he tried, doubtful still encouraged
Then one day he approached her with exuberance

To declare he is ready to perform his artistry
To paint the sky with the movement of his strokes

To fill the air with his music
To dance solo and as a member of the flock

She watched him with boundless joy
Silently, filled with tranquility
While her teardrops twirled in the air
Spreading fragrance of hope and belief
That covered the Earth.

Written by Pirhiya Goldstein
Inspired by Lil Rodich



When our CWC branch first formed, our members met in the Katzenberg Room, on the MPTF grounds.

These 2011 photos were taken during our agenda's short break between club business and the scheduled speaker. Cookies were very popular.

As our membership grew, the SFV Board requested from the MPTF their permission to hold our monthly meetings in the larger, tech-friendly Saban Community Room. The facility agreed and in 2018, we made the move. Very soon, members, we will return to the MPTF meeting room and write on ... and on!

Kathy Highcove



CWC-SFV BOARD AND COORDINATORS

- Karen Gorback, Ph.D.....President/Program Chair
- Monte Swann.....Vice-President/ Zoom Host
- Pat Avery.....Treasurer
- Anat Golan Wenick.....Secretary
- Michael Rains.Webmaster
- Andrea Polk.Membership Chair
- Kathy Highcove.The Valley Scribe Editor
- Bob Okowitz.....CWC Central Board Representative

**When the lockdown is over,
the CWC-SFV will meet once more
at the Motion Picture and Television Fund
Residential Community
in Woodland Hills.**

