



# The Valley Scribe



Newsletter of the San Fernando Valley Branch  
of the California Writers Club

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All around the Maypole,  
Maypole, maypole,  
All around the maypole,  
And now, Miss Sally,  
Won't you shout for joy?

*Anonymous folk rhyme*

## Memoir — Emotion Bracketed by Time

Please join us on May 1st at 1:00 pm via Zoom for a presentation by CWC-SFV President Karen Gorbach whose presentation is titled: "Memoir – Emotion Bracketed by Time."

Karen became a member of CWC-SFV in 2007 and promptly joined the board as a Member at Large and Publicity Chair. The late club president, Dave Wetterberg, also asked her to represent him at the CWC-SoCal Regional meetings.

Several years later, Karen was happy to assist Program Chair Rita Brown, who encouraged Karen to publish her novel *Freshman Mom* (Outskirts Press, 2014). The book was well-received, winning the USA Regional Excellence Book Award for Adult Fiction set in the Western United States. It also placed as a Finalist in the Readers' Favorite Book Awards.

As a contestant in the 2015 Ms. Senior Ventura County Pageant, Karen read from the novel for the talent portion of the competition. She went on to win both the Talent Award and the pageant – with a



ILLUSTRATION BY ANTHONY RUGG

rhinestone tiara to prove it! "I never had so much fun!" she says.

Karen enjoys writing in a variety of genres, including short stories, poetry, picture books, memoirs and plays.

Four of her one-act plays were selected through a blind judging for production in the New Works Festival at College of the Canyons in Santa Clarita. "Watching the student actors bring my characters to life was a surreal experience.

Writing for the stage helped me hone the dialogue skills that are transferrable to other genres, for which I will always be grateful."

Along with winning a local memoir contest, two of her memoirs have been published in the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* anthologies. ["The Jackpot" is included in Chicken Soup for the Soul—My Amazing Mom](#) (Chicken Soup for the Soul, LLC, 2018) and "A Degree or Diapers?" was published last month in [Chicken Soup for the Soul - Be You!](#) (Chicken Soup for the Soul, LLC, 2021).

*(Continued on page 2)*

In addition to serving as this year's club President, Karen is the Vice-Chair of the Advisory Council of the Ventura County Area Agency On Aging and represents Ventura County as a Senior Senator in the California Senior Legislature (CSL), serving in a leadership capacity on the CSL Legislative Committee. She is very proud of her work in CSL, which includes researching and writing proposals for potential legislation to improve the lives of older adults and individuals with disabilities throughout California.

Karen also enjoys teaching writing classes at Conejo Valley Adult School and speaking to other writers clubs. She is a member of the Central Coast Chapter of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

and is passionate about promoting greater diversity in children's literature.

Karen is a former college dean with a doctorate in education. She has four grown children and nine grandchildren "who live too far away." Still, through the magic of Skype and Zoom, she loves virtual visits and is planning "fully vaccinated" trips this summer to catch up on some "non-virtual hugging" time.

[www.karengorback.com](http://www.karengorback.com)

*This program is being presented without charge to the general public as part of the CWC-SFV Spring Membership Drive. Club members will automatically receive Zoom invitations. All others, anywhere in the world, should contact VP/Zoom Host Monte Swann at [cwcfvhost@gmail.com](mailto:cwcfvhost@gmail.com) for a free invitation. For security reasons, we ask club members to NOT share their Zoom invitations with others. Instead, ask them to contact Monte for invitations of their own.*

## FYI: Special Edition L.A. County Library Cards: Celebrating 100 Years



This year marks the 100th anniversary of the ratification and adoption of the 19th Amendment in August 1920. Despite its passage, many women of color were barred from voting for decades through racial discrimination and intimidation. To honor this centennial and the ongoing work toward achieving equity, Los Angeles County is celebrating with an artistic partnership: the Department of Arts and Culture has collaborated with the Women and Girls Initiative to commission 6 artists to create commemorative artworks, and LA County Library has made 3 of the artworks into special edition library cards.

For more information about all 6 artworks, including downloadable files and biographies of the artists, visit the [LA County Department of Arts & Culture](https://www.lacounty.gov/artsandculture). These special edition cards will be available starting October 14 at [Sidewalk Service libraries](https://www.lacounty.gov/sidewalk) during business hours, while supplies last. Existing library cards may be exchanged for these designs, free of charge.

To apply for a new library card or replace your current library card, please call your nearest Sidewalk Service library. You will need to wear a mask when picking up your new library card.

# In these challenging times, some ask: does poetry matter? Does it change lives?

In his April talk, Poet Luis Rodriguez presented the power of his verse.

By Anat Golan Wenick

Does poetry matter? To answer this question and help us celebrate Poetry Appreciation Month, our club was honored to host poet Luis Rodriguez, an accomplished writer and the 2014-2016 Los Angeles Poet Laureate.

Rodriguez's answer to this question became clearer as he shared with us his inspiring life story and then followed up with poetry reading that touched our hearts.

Rodriguez first read a poem he wrote to his wife of thirty-three years, to demonstrate that love is just one emotion that comes through powerfully in poetry.

When Rodriguez finished his readings, he said, "Poetry is inside all of you! It's a way to celebrate or sing about your life and share your deepest experiences. He continued, "Poetry saved my life," and then he recounted growing up in an L.A. barrio.

He lived in a tough, poor neighborhood. As a son of immigrants, he spoke poor English at school, and wasn't that keen on studying and getting good grades. And though he started writing in high school, he had quite a turbulent youth. He joined a gang, became a heroin addict, got tossed into jail and was thrown out of the house by his own family. He was an outcast in every way.

But in the 1960s, Rodriguez found a new interest: the Los Angeles Public library. That's where he fell in love with reading, and more importantly, found a mentor in his neighborhood, who believed in him and gave him the tools to make changes in his lifestyle.

Rodriguez worked hard to make it as a writer. He recalled for his audience how he signed up for a night journalism class, where he was one of fifteen other students. By the second week, he was the only one who showed up for the class. The teacher explained to young Luis that he had to cancel the class because he could not sustain himself from one student's payment. However, when we



**Luis J. Rodriguez**

saw how disappointed Rodriguez was, he told him, "I'll keep showing up, as long as you show up."

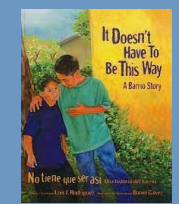
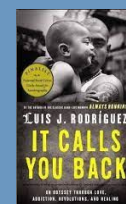
Rodriguez stuck with the class, showing up week after week. And with the help of the teacher he went on to study journalism at a prestigious university, and eventually secured his first writing position.

Despite his mom's objection to poetry as his chosen profession—"You are wasting your time!"—Rodriguez went on to write articles, novels, collections of poems, and now he gives lectures all around the world.

Rodriguez assures his audiences that words have power and poetry is a way to harness that power. He told us that he feels the need to give back, and to mentor to young writers and poets. For years he has been teaching creative writing in Chino prison. To demonstrate to us that poetry does matter, he revealed that one of his students, a man who served over thirty years in jail, has become an accomplished writer. When he was released from jail, this former student helped Rodriguez edit a book of poems. The contents of this book, *Make a Poem Cry*, were written by Chino inmates.

Today, Rodriguez runs a successful bookstore in Sylmar and continues to write poems and edit books, as well as lecture about writing. He is waiting for the time COVID restrictions will be lifted and he'll be able to go back to teaching creative writing in jail.

By the end of the amazing hour we spent with Luis Rodriguez, we had no doubt – Poetry certainly does have power to change lives and make a difference in the world. Below is a sampling of Rodriguez' work.



“I can’t see ‘em coming from my eye, so I had to make this poem cry.”  
—Jimmy McMillan, an incarcerated poet in California’s prison system.

## Make a Poem Cry

By Luis J. Rodriguez

You can chain the body, the face, the eyes,  
the way hands move coarsely over cement  
or deftly on tattooed skin with needle.  
You can cage the withered membrane,  
the withered dream,  
the way razor wire, shouts, yells, and batons  
can wither spirit.

But how can you imprison a poem?  
How can a melody be locked up, locked down?  
Yes, even caged birds sing,  
even grass sprouts through asphalt,  
even a flower blooms in a desert.

And the gardens of trauma we call the incarcerated  
can also spring with the vitality of a deep thought,  
an emotion buried beneath the facades  
deep as rage, deep as grief,  
the grief beneath all rages.

The blood of such poems, songs,  
emotions, thoughts, dances,  
are what flow in all art, stages, films, books.

The keys to liberation are in the heart,  
in the mind, behind the cranial sky.  
The imagination is boundless,  
the inexhaustible in any imprisoned system.

And remember—we are all in some kind of prison.

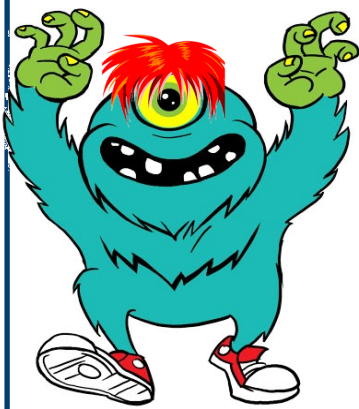
If only the contrived freedoms  
society professes can flow from such water!



Artwork by Banksy



## CALLING ALL SFV WRITERS!



**A**re you a fan of Isaac Asimov, Kurt Vonnegut, Ray Bradbury, Jules Verne, or H.G. Wells? Do authors like, Roald Dahl, C.S. Lewis, Steven King, or Edgar Allan Poe inhabit your bookshelves?

If you like to write stories that transport the reader into imaginary worlds or stories that explore mind-bending alternate realities, you're in luck: one of our club members is interested in forming a critique group specifically for fans of science fiction, fantasy and horror.

If you're interested in joining a SFV sci-fi critique group, contact Pat Avery at [rpavery@me.com](mailto:rpavery@me.com)

## It's Been A Remarkable Year—What Will You Remember?

Hello friends, I recently spotted this cartoon in the LA Times' comics page. It made me chuckle. Then I sent Dale Coverly a request to display the cartoon in our newsletter, thinking that many SFV members would enjoy it. He quickly responded:

*Thanks so much for asking permission to reprint that cartoon! Please feel free to do so - a clean copy is attached in case it's helpful. I absolutely understand the frustration of marketing, as I've had to do it for my own books a number of times. Ugh, it's a chore!*

*Take care~*

*Dave Coverly*

[www.speedbump.com](http://www.speedbump.com)

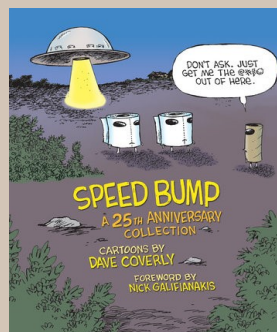
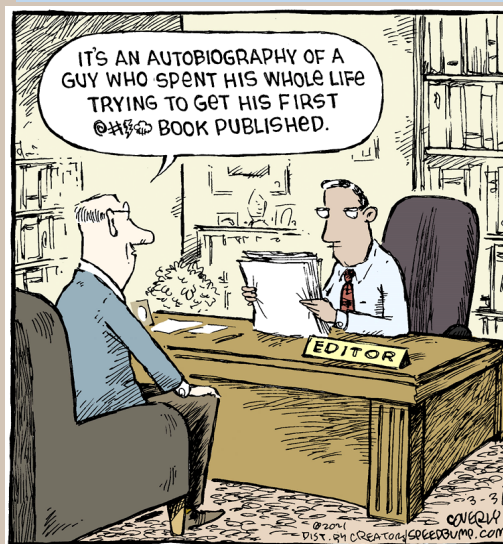
Speed Bump 25th Anniversary book:

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/645996/speed-bump-a-25th-anniversary-collection-by-dave-coverly/>

My exchange with this cartoon (and author) demonstrates how the Internet has given all of us new tools for easy communication—and self-promotion of a new book.

Writers can efficiently research online pubs and zines. Our speakers often tell us how and where to find the best online

*Speed Bump* by Dave Coverly



publisher—but caution that we shouldn't expect immediate success. You really have to work the Internet and earn your success, much like the old way of submitting countless letters to writing agents and picky publishing houses.

These days, every writer must have computer know-how, a healthy social media presence and marketing skills that would rival those of a used car salesman.

In the past year, during the pandem-

ic scare, our members discovered Zoom Rooms and attended online gatherings with family, friends, writing peers and important contacts.

In the coming weeks, I'd appreciate receiving from any member a short essay on your pandemic experiences. Did you learn anything new or notable about yourself, your life, your near and dear and/or your writing?

Submission should be fewer than 400 words, and submitted to me by May 22. If your work is accepted, I'll contact you. Weigh in on this extraordinary year and share your pandemic experiences.

Kathy Highcove  
kghighcove@gmail.com  
The Valley Scribe Editor



## SPRING MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

**T**he public is invited to attend our May 1 Zoom Meeting and Presentation for FREE – this month only—to kick off the Spring Membership Drive! Author and CWC-SFV President Karen Gorback will speak on memoir writing in a presentation titled: **“Memoir–Emotion Bracketed by Time.”**

### ALL MEMBERS AND GUESTS—PLEASE TAKE NOTE!

- Before our meeting, all SFV members will receive a Zoom invitation.
- *As a security measure, SFV club members should never share their Zoom invitations with other people.*
- Guests must immediately contact VP/Zoom Host, Monte Swann, [cwcsfvhost@gmail.com](mailto:cwcsfvhost@gmail.com), to receive a Zoom invitation.
- CWC-SFV members who refer a new member will receive a \$20 discount on their own renewal dues, after the new member joins. Please contact Treasurer Pat Avery for details. [rpavery@me.com](mailto:rpavery@me.com)
- For additional membership information, please visit [cwc-sfv.org](http://cwc-sfv.org).

CWC Vice President Roger Lubeck  
to Speak to CWC on Preparing and Giving  
Professional Presentations on Tuesday, May 25, at 6pm

## “Dos and Don’ts of Professional Presentations”



**R**oger C. Lubeck, PhD is vice president of the California Writers Club and immediate past president of Redwood Writers. President of It Is What It Is Press. Roger’s publications include: ten novels, two business books, short stories, poems, two contest -winning stories, two produced ten-minute plays. Roger’s blog is [www.rogerinblue.com](http://www.rogerinblue.com).

Roger will share his insights as to what makes for an effective professional presentation based on his 25 years as a business speaker and workshop leader focused on leadership and management combined with 15 years of teaching university classes on psychology, and 10 years conducting workshops on writing, self-publishing, and book promotion.

Roger’s career includes author, business consultant, workshop leader, retreat facilitator, professional speaker, publisher, photographer, speechwriter, assistant professor, researcher, parent trainer, pigeon wrangler, and dog-catcher.

Because this topic is so essential to the overall Mission Statement of the CWC in assisting writers to market their work, we are offering this Zoom presentation at no charge to the state-wide membership of the CWC. The event is scheduled for Tuesday, May 25, 2021 at 6 pm.

Registration for this free meeting is required and may be made with this link [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScv53EcgAbnFuE2RAfdqDPq7fA2RBtHsIQ4fJ3QboS5X83Ehg/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScv53EcgAbnFuE2RAfdqDPq7fA2RBtHsIQ4fJ3QboS5X83Ehg/viewform?usp=sf_link) or by visiting [www.hdcwc.com](http://www.hdcwc.com)

I  
In autumn's warming  
hangs regret of younger days,  
conflicted desire.

### Haiku For Phyleen

II  
On moonlit coolness  
rides hope for one more summer,  
a sorrow to heal.



III  
From pine scented trees  
float dreams of a sweeter day,  
scarred but kind, and you.

- Dean Stewart  
2001

# Ester is speaking about her life in Shanghai, and you're invited.

On the morning of May 1, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. SFV member. Ester Benjamin Shifren, will be a featured lecturer at the [San Diego State University Chinese Cultural Center](#). Starting in 2020, the SDCHM has provided remote programming via twice-monthly lectures, under the program title *The Chinese American Experience and Beyond*. The museum supports a video bank of recordings of past lectures in the series. Please check out the Museum's [Events Page](#), to look into and register for future lectures.

Ester will speak on the history of her family, as the descendent of five generations of British Jewish nationals who lived in Shanghai for more than one century. Dr. Lawrence Baron will moderate. To make a reservation in the SDSU CCC Meeting Room, go to:

[https://sdsu.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcvceyhrj8tEtNgtLQ7Tq\\_qiEPqIOr61INx](https://sdsu.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcvceyhrj8tEtNgtLQ7Tq_qiEPqIOr61INx)

Remember, if you attend this lecture, that our own May 1 Zoom Meeting follows that afternoon at 1 p.m. CWC-SFV President Karen Gorback will speak on the topic, "Memoir—Emotion Bracketed by Time." Remember, with the help of your keyboard, you can instantly move from San Diego to Los Angeles in a few seconds. One might suggest that May 1 is a "Zoom Room Boom" for SFV members—two lectures on one day!

Last month you read an article in this newsletter about Ester's upcoming 2020 book titled: *Rhymes in Covid Times*. She told us, "During the early days of Corona isolation an idea began taking shape in my head ...I began recalling the daily poems by the poet Patience Strong. I felt inspired and empowered! I googled her, and got detailed information--the internet is wonderful!

"I suddenly felt compelled to start a daily rhyming regime--that I thought would surely end when I reached one hundred! ... Well, year one ended without my skipping a single day of rhyming, and sometimes I added bonus poems. I have an amazing Muse who almost dictates the lines! My daily social media posting has brought people, with whom I lost touch years ago, back into my life."

Ester's rhymes have proved so popular on social media, that she confides that she has continued a daily composition in 2021 and now has written 400 daily poems, that includes her rhymed life story. The rhyming memoir will be contained in a future book. Below is a recent entry ... and you can be sure there are many more to come.

Thank you to my poetry Muse—I love your guiding hand!  
I love the way you form the words, deciding where they'll land.

I start my day with wondering which rhyme will be my "daily,"  
And suddenly the words pop up—I jot them down quite gaily!  
I'll gladly take the choices of your creative liting verse—  
Certain that without your help my writing would be worse!  
Please stay with me—you'll always be a most beloved guest.

Help me write the best I can—fulfill my lifelong quest.

Daily poem from Ester Benjamin Shifren

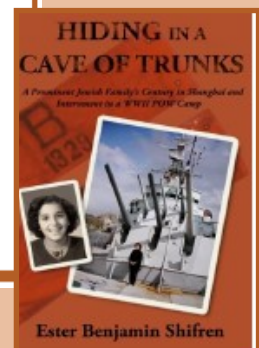


Ester Benjamin Shifren

Ester Benjamin Shifren is the  
author of

*Hiding in a CAVE OF TRUCKS*

[Amazon.com: Ester Benjamin Shifren: Books, Biography, Blog.](#)





# For Whose Mom Do The Ads Troll?

By Yolanda Fintor



"Look at this picture," I said to my husband, who sat across the table drinking his second cup of coffee.

The picture I showed him was an advertisement suggesting a gift for Mother's Day. It was suggestive, all right. The image

staring back at him was of a statuesque, curvaceous young woman with thick wavy hair, pulled to one side of her head, cascading to her left voluptuous breast. She was wearing a satin-and-lace teddy, cut high on her shapely legs. Her right hand was placed provocatively on her hip. Her left hand was holding a frying pan. It dangled between her thumb and forefinger, pinky extended much like she might hold a dead mouse before flinging it into the trash can.

If the picture didn't grab your attention, the bold-type words beside it certainly did: *Real Women Don't Cook on Mother's Day*.

The ad, if you haven't guessed, was featuring lingerie, not restaurants.

Unable to hide the contempt in my voice, I asked, "Now tell me. How many mothers look like this.?"

His answer was flippant.

"How do you think they got to be mothers?"

I thought about my own mother (I never saw her dressed like that) and how, as a child anticipating Mother's Day, I would make my own gift and card for her. When I was old enough to get baby-sitting jobs, I would spend \$3 to \$5 dollars for her gift. Poor Mom, she received more cheap perfume and jewelry than I care to remember, but she wore them because she knew they were given with love.

The image of children clutching hard-earned dollars as they shop for their moms is what I see when this special day comes along. So, when I looked through the pages of the Sunday paper, I was amazed at the gifts being advertised. At whom are these ads aimed?

For instance, at one prominent department store, you could buy Mom a floral print dress for \$140 and Calvin Klein sandals

for \$90. Another store had a two-page ad on fine jewelry. There was nothing under \$200. Giorgio perfume could be had for a mere \$70 for a quarter of an ounce. If you can't afford the perfume, kids, you can always buy just the fancy bottle made of crafted crystal and let Mom buy her own fragrance.

My conclusion, then, is that these ads are directed at well-heeled adults, particularly males. Get out and make that luxury purchase, guys, and you're sure to win her heart.

If Madison Avenue pundits were to have their way, I have a feeling that phrases constituting the acronym for

M-O-T-H-E-R would read something like this:

**M is for the maximum limit on your MasterCard**

**O is for the opulence it buys her**

**T is for the teardrop diamond necklace**

**H is for her heart on which it rests**

**E is for her earrings made of gold or pearls**

**R is for the rapture these things will surely bring her**

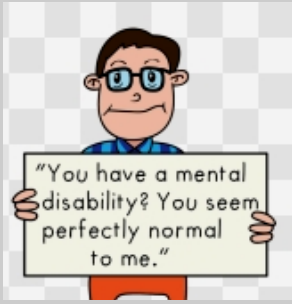
**Put them all together, they spell money, the word that makes the world go round.**

Allow me one last comment about sexy ads. Ladies, we may have to endure pictures of beautiful moms this month, but take heart---come June, we will have the opportunity to ogle the likenesses of perfectly proportioned men in bikini underwear, or, in tight jeans. They will have full heads of hair and will be somewhere in their thirties. Perhaps some man out there will complain, "How many fathers look like this?"

If I were to hear it, I would resist the temptation to say, "How do you think they became fathers?"



# mi·cro·ag·gres·sion



Vox Media, an online dictionary, defines microaggression as a noun, a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group. In this era of social divisiveness, CWC authors need to understand and be aware of microaggressions. Defining mi-



croaggression as only as a racial hurt, doesn't go far enough. Consider comments made about the mentally ill, the disabled, other cultures, and so on. Think about what you say and what you write. Vox Media shows examples such as:

An Asian-American student is complimented by a professor for speaking perfect English, but it's actually the student's first language.

A black man notices a white woman flinch and clutch her bag when she sees him in the elevator she's about to enter. He is painfully reminded of racial stereotypes.

A woman speaks up in a meeting, but is interrupted by her male colleagues. In another scene she is ignored by them.

I recommend the article and the accompanying short video. <https://www.vox.com/2015/2/16/8031073/what-are-microaggressions>

I'm currently managing CWC's *Literary Review*. A judge brought to my attention a submission that contained what the judge felt was racism. To give the author the benefit of the doubt, since I don't know them and prefer to think the best of others, I'll call it an unconscious slip—a microaggression in the form of a quick mention of a trait that could be assigned to a person of color. A character in the fictional story denigrated this person for reasons unrelated to race. So why mention the trait? Does the author unconsciously believe that trait helps to show the character as less? The comment was unnecessarily hurtful.

Wikipedia gives the history and pros and cons of the issue. **Microaggression** is a term used for brief and commonplace verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative attitudes toward stigmatized or culturally marginalized groups. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microaggression\\_-\\_cite\\_note-1-1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microaggression_-_cite_note-1-1)

The term was coined in 1970 by Harvard University psychiatrist Chester M. Pierce to describe insults and dismissals which he regularly witnessed non-black Americans inflicting on African Americans. By the early 2000s, use of the term was applied to the casual degradation of any socially marginalized group, including LGBT people, the poor, and the disabled. Psychologist Dewald Wing Sue defines microaggressions as "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership." The persons making the comments may be otherwise well-intentioned and unaware of the potential impact of their words. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microaggression>

Elisabeth Tuck  
Mt. Diablo Branch Newsletter Editor  
State Secretary

One step up.

Then another.

“You can do it,” his brain says.

“Are you freaking kidding me,” replies his heart.

One step up.

Then another.

“If she could do it, so can you,” the brain insists.

“Might I remind you that she is younger,” protest the lungs.

“Only by two years,” assures the brain.

Another step up.

How many was that? Oh yes, five. How many more to go? Ten. Might as well be ten thousand.

Another step up.

Then another.

Slow but steady. It’s a race, but winning is a short lived happiness, so he might as well make sure he doesn’t stumble. Nothing to gain if he doesn’t make it.

He looks up the stairs. As tall and unreachable as the peak of Mount Everest. What was he thinking? But he has to. He just has to.

“Come on legs,” commands the brain.

She is waiting. She knows he’s coming. She has to know.

Another step up.

Then.... Another.

She came down to him nearly all their life together, so this one day, this one time, he can do it for her.

Another step up.

Then rest on the tenth step. Take a few deep breaths. The legs are trembling. He’s so far from the bottom, and a very long way from when he used to be a long-distance runner at high school. But just like then, his legs tremble, only then, it was for the sight of her on the bleachers, and now... well now he ain’t running anymore. Now his all body trembles just from the thought of seeing her in a few moments. He glances up the stairs... well, maybe a little more than a few moments.

Another step up.

And another.

The only way now is up. More than half way through – almost there.

“I know you can do it,” encourages the brain.

“You followed her your all life, so what’s another flight of stairs?” Chime his feet.

And what a journey they shared. The scars under their skins almost identical, from the moment they committed themselves to one another. But all the scars pale in comparison to ho so many wonderful shared moments they celebrated.

Another step.

And another.

Just one more to go. Sure, the road up got harder over the years, but she was always worth it.

“I can’t,” chokes the heart. “I don’t have it in me.”

“Just one more step.” beg the knees.

“Hold on tight to the banister,” caution the hands.

“Don’t drop the flowers,” warns the brains.

Another step.

And he’s up.

“Don’t look down,” worries the brain.

It’s just a short walk to her room. The door is ajar.

He takes a deep breath before pushing it open. The room is dimly lit.

With the sweat dripping from his forehead into his eyes, and his eyesight that went to hell quite a few years prior, she is a little fuzzy.

Her nurse is by her side, reading a book. She raises her head and looks at him with surprise. In the six months she’d been with them, ever since his wife’s fall and the surgery that followed, she’d never seen him come up. She knows how hard it is for him. And she’s been an angel, bringing his wife down on a wheelchair to see him, whenever she was able to sit up without too much pain. Or at least, whenever she was able to mask the pain so well, the nurse didn’t notice.

But he did. You spend the better part of your life with your soul mate, and you get to know what’s behind every glance, every wince, every brave smile.

“I couldn’t bring her down today. She is not doing

*(Continued on page 12)*

well,” the nurse apologizes.

“I figured as much.”

“You look pale. Why don’t you sit down and give me those” the nurse puts her book down and stretches her arm towards the flowers.

He dismisses her with his hand.

He struggles to her bed. He’s so tired, but he never missed an anniversary, and he sure as heck not going to start now.

He stands above her, looking at her face, that much like the Greek story, never failed to launch his ships. She’s worth every step he just climbed and a thousand

more.

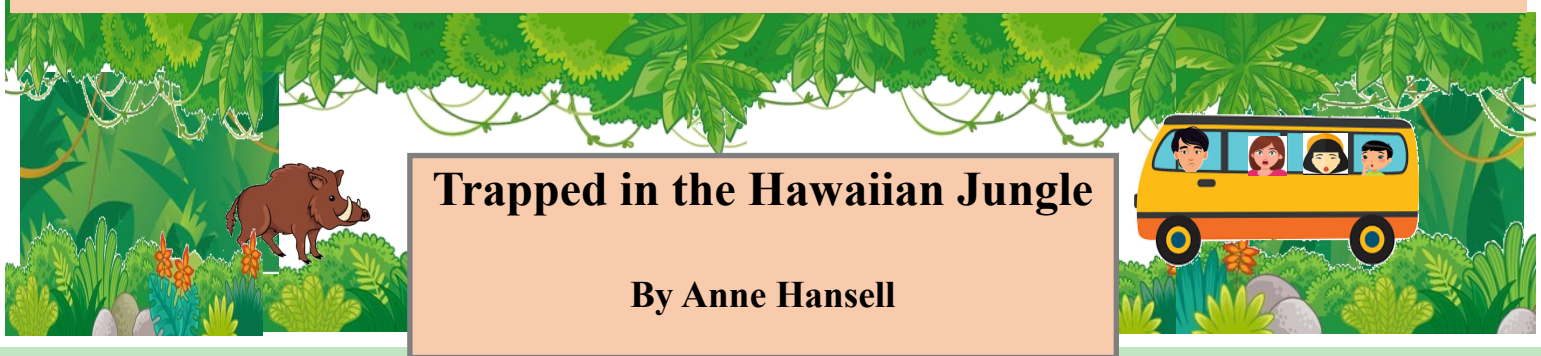
He places the flowers near her. Did her eyes just open? It’s hard to say for sure. She has a little smile on her face, but he was hardly ever able to catch her without one. And somehow he knows that she knows he’s there, And that’s all that matters.

Her breathing shallow, and then, her breathing is gone.

He sees the nurse rushing over to check for pulse. He hears her calling for help.

His legs tremble and then they give from under him. As he falls to the ground, there is a big smile on his face because he knows – he’s about to follow her upstairs.

This story is a response to the prompt: *a dangerous situation you survived ...*



## Trapped in the Hawaiian Jungle


By Anne Hansell

When I was 11 years old, my family and I visited my grandparents and relatives on the Big Island, Hawaii. Grandpa owned a large farm near a vast jungle. One day, my family and I were in one of several cars traveling through the jungle in the center of Big Island. Suddenly, our car broke down. In those days, we didn’t have smartphones – only old-fashioned radios, installed in nearly every local vehicle for emergencies.

In the Hawaiian jungle, gas stations, telephone booths and even towns didn’t exist; you’d find only trees and vines for miles and miles around. I couldn’t get out of our car because of the wild boars living in this jungle. Even at my young age, I already knew that the boars were very dangerous, known to kill people with their sharp tusks. While we were stuck for hours in this place, I remember wanting to take a bathroom break behind nearby bushes, but I couldn’t do it. Too risky. Meanwhile, someone used a radio to summon help. but we learned that the nearest garage was many miles away and it would take hours for a tow truck to arrive.

So as the sun set, my family shared several candy bars and one can of soda and spent our time playing a game called “cat’s cradle,” using strings wrapped around our fingers. Finally, the tow truck arrived. After the repair, all the family members went back home to Grandpa’s farmhouse to have dinner.

Many years later, my husband and I visited my relatives on the Big Island. When we were renting our car, the rental agent told us not to drive through the center of the island. We were allowed to drive only on roads, lining the island’s coasts. My husband, a Pennsylvania native, was puzzled until I told him about this incident in my childhood as well as dangers of the jungles – the wild boars, quicksand and the like. He soon understood that the center of Big Island is too dangerous for tourists not familiar with the hazardous nature of the jungle.



## a mishmash mush

by Sam Glenn

a mishmash mush of tarps and tents line the sidewalk  
by the shopping center parking lot

stuff and more stuff, an upside down bicycle,  
filled to the brim grocery carts

a tattered child's stroller clutter, clutter everywhere

an encampment or is it a conclave, a settlement

a block from my house it grows bigger each week

fifty or a hundred feet farther another cluster and

another cluster around the corner.

Who are they? Where did they come from?

What's their story?

They're the central attraction encircled by

a movie theater, 7 restaurants, See's Candy, Ralph's Market,

a bank, an Auto Zone store but

where do these homeless souls go to the bathroom?

what do they eat? how do they bathe?

and so I drive by, try not to look, but can't help think

for there but by the grace of God I could be.

## Visiting Vermont

Where my mother spent her childhood ...

I visit Burlington

There a blue and purple iris grows

Visible among tender greens

She bends toward the bloom

And cups it gently in her hands a moment

Then suddenly pirouettes

And runs through fields of wild flowers

Singing her song off key

*Come on you Y girls*

*Come on and play with me*

*And bring your dollies three*

*Climb up my apple tree*

*Look down my rain barrel*

*Slide down my cellar door*

*And we'll be jolly friends*

*Forever more ...*

Forever there in soft shadows

Mysterious forests and blueberry patches

In Vermont's delicate summers

And snow painted winters

She is there, her spirit conversing

With whispering trees and illusive birds

Her fingers exploring soil

And planting seedlings

I visit Vermont

Where wild flowers turn toward the sun

And I can hear my mother singing

In the stillness of dawn

Lillian Rodich



## *From the Window of the Coast Starlight*

By Karen Gorback

Better than a sky suite at Staples  
or a garden box at the Bowl,  
my coveted window seat on the northbound  
Coast Starlight.  
LA to Seattle.  
Thirty-three hours.

With the Channel Islands disappearing on the horizon,  
the conductor lectures on the  
convergence of currents,  
sunken pirate ships and  
whale migrations.  
What a delicious afternoon soaking in the view,  
accompanied by a passionate dissertation  
on the beauty and the beast of the sea.

Leaving the coast, we shadow the Sacramento River,  
with an unscheduled stop in Dunsmuir —  
something about an overheated engine.  
But city slickers on a train trip don't fret over such delays.  
"If we wanted to get there fast, we would've taken a plane."

All too soon, our coach chugs back to life, skirting snowcapped Shasta.  
"Isn't it remarkable!" fellow travelers gush,  
captivated by the imposing summit filling our windows.

Midnight brings a brilliant full moon reflecting off Crater Lake,  
turning night into day.  
I press my nose against the cold window,  
desperate to imprint the image on my drowsy brain.  
Will I ever again see anything so remarkable?

With the fingers of Puget Sound drawing us into Washington State,  
Mount Rainier looms in the distance,  
like the mysterious peak  
in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.  
And like Richard Dreyfuss, I am mesmerized.

Inching toward Seattle Station,  
my window frames the cityscape.  
Nice, I suppose, in a Frank Lloyd Wright sort of way —  
but trivial in the company of the  
vast Pacific and Channel Islands,  
snowcapped Shasta,  
the historic hamlet of Dunsmuir,  
and that remarkable midnight moon  
glistening off Crater Lake.





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## CWC-SFV CRITIQUE GROUPS

Membership in one or more critique groups is open to active members of the San Fernando Valley branch of the California Writers Club, subject to group size limitations. Each group has established general expectations for submissions and critique etiquette. Currently most groups are meeting via Zoom. Presently active groups are as follows:

### **Tuesday Poetry Critique Group**

Meetings held once a month on the 2nd Tuesday from 10:30 AM until 3 PM. Poetry only.

### **Wednesday Daytime Critique Group**

Meetings held 2nd and 4th Wednesday of the month from 11:30 to 3 PM. Long and short fiction, memoirs and poetry.

### **Friday Daytime Critique Group**

Meetings held on the 2nd and 4th Friday of the month from 1 to 4 PM. All genres except poetry.

### **Saturday Long Fiction Critique Group**

Meetings held once a month on the 3rd Saturday from 1 to 4 PM. Focus on long fiction.

### **Saturday Daytime Critique Group**

Meetings held 2nd and 4th Saturday of the month from 10 AM to 1 PM. Long and short fiction, memoirs and poetry.

For further information about joining a critique group contact

Pat Avery at [rpavery@me.com](mailto:rpavery@me.com)

**Our official location:**

**Motion Picture and**

**Television Fund Campus**

**23388 Mulholland Drive**

**Woodland Hills, 91364**

**Our Website:**

**<http://cwc-sfv.org/>**