



The Valley Scribe



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

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Club Info

IN FEBRUARY, LAURA JENSEN WALKER SPEAKS ON: "FROM MEMOIR TO MYSTERY"

The San Fernando Valley Branch of the California Writers Club welcomes award-winning and Amazon best-selling writer, Laura Jensen Walker, as our keynote speaker on Saturday, February 4 at 1:00 pm via Zoom, with a presentation titled "Writing by the Seat of my Pants: From Memoir to Mystery".

A former newspaper reporter and columnist, and self-confessed pantsler, Laura is the author of more than 20 books, both fiction and non-fiction, including her recent memoir, "Good Girl: A Memoir of Overcoming Rape, Breast Cancer & Fundamentalism," which she calls the book of her soul.

Laura has loved words ever since she read 103 books in Miss Vopelensky's first-grade class, which was also when she first dreamed of becoming a writer. Her dream came true many years later when her first book was published at the age of forty.

Residing in Northern California, Laura is a member of Sisters in Crime and Mystery Writers of America. Her cozy, "fearlessly funny" mystery debut, "Murder Most Sweet" (A Bookish Baker mystery), was nominated for an Agatha Award.

In her presentation, Laura posits that the world is divided, generally, into two kinds of writers: **pantsers** and **plotters**, or **gardeners** and **architects** as some prefer. Those who write by the seat of their pants and let the story unfold organically are known as gardeners or pantsers, while those who plot out their book beforehand with detailed outlines are



commonly referred to as architects or plotters.

Outlines, however, make Laura break out in hives, and spreadsheets send her running to the bathroom. "That doesn't mean spreadsheets and outlines are wrong," she writes. "They just don't work for this right-brained writer. It's important to know which kind of writer

you are or you'll wind up wasting time and feeling frustrated, like a square-peg-round-hole sort of problem."

Laura promises to entertain us with fun stories of her writing journey—including mistakes—of writing fiction and nonfiction books by the seat of her pants. She's written that she never expected her journey to include mystery novels because mysteries are all about the plot, aren't they?

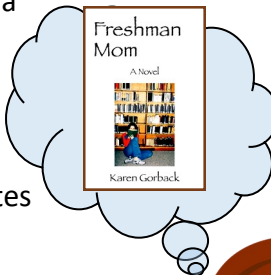
Imagine my joy, she says, when *Publishers Weekly* said of one of her cozy mysteries: "Lively characters complement the twisty plot." This pantsler wrote a twisty plot! Join us on February 4th to learn how.

For more information on this engaging speaker, follow Laura on Twitter@LauraJensenWal1 or visit her website: <https://laurajensenwalker.com>.

Please note that all members of the CWC-SFV will receive a Zoom invitation to this presentation. Members of other CWC branches and guests should contact President and Zoom host Karen Gorback at karen.gorback@gmail.com by noon on February 3 for an invitation. We regret we cannot accommodate late requests.



I love baking. If you also bake, you know that some recipes begin with directions to beat together softened butter and sugar, as the base for a cake or cookies. Other recipes indicate that some ingredients need to be gently folded into another – as in combining sugar and flour into stiffly-beaten egg whites to form the batter of an angel food cake.



When I compose fiction, I'm baking an angel food cake, gently folding in the ingredients of characterization, setting, plot, point of view, and theme. I strive to be subtle rather than aggressive, interweaving all the elements into a perfectly satisfying story. But I often struggle, especially when the story features a theme about which I'm passionate. My work as a writer lies in telling an entertaining story without browbeating my readers with the theme, however important I deem it to be.



For instance, in *Freshman Mom*, the lead character returns to college to learn the skills to make a better life for herself and her family. My task was to gently fold in the theme, the value of higher education, into a light-hearted tale about a newly divorced mom raising two teenagers while going to school. Judging from reviews, I think I was successful. It's a task that's challenging and fun. I often tell my writing students that a well-told story speaks volumes louder than a meticulously-researched academic brief with the same theme.

My current fiction project is far different from the last, because we are products of our environment, and the world has dramatically changed since I wrote the first book. Our experiences now include a pandemic, mutated variants, and continued evidence of global warming. Our language has changed as well and now includes phrases

such as the "Me, Too Movement," the oxymoron "alternative facts," the phrase "unconscious bias," the acronym ICYMI (in case you missed it), and others.

The political, thematic realities of the last several years burn inside me, as I strive to gently fold them into a satisfying story, while respecting the varying viewpoints of my readers. Phew. I love the quote from Maya Angelou who famously said, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." Yep.

So, how do you, my colleagues, address your truths, your untold stories inside you, the important themes of the day, through your fiction? I'd love to hear from you. My email address is karen.gorbach@gmail.com. Let's share our recipes

Finally, in response to those who have asked when I'm teaching again at Conejo Valley Adult School, I wanted to let you know that I have two, in-person classes scheduled in March.

"Show, Don't Tell" on Friday, March 3 from 10 am – noon.

"Writing Dazzling Dialogue" on Friday, March 10 from 10 am – noon.

Each class is \$35.00.

For more information, or to register for a class, please visit <https://conejoadulted.org/catalogs> or call (805) 497-2761.

*Note: Conejo Valley Adult Education compensates instructors by the hour, not by the number of students enrolled.

PLEASE READ MARLENE’S PUBLISHING HISTORY BELOW:



Marlene Bumgarner

I have been writing books about once a decade since 1976, when St Martin’s Press published *The Book of Whole Grains*. Then *Organic Cooking for (not-so-organic) Mothers* came out in 1982, and in the 90s I wrote *Working With School Age Children* (Pearson) and St. Martins published a *New Book of Whole Grains* to include some of the new designer grains that were becoming popular. I finished a memoir of living on the land in the 70s in 2020, and it was published by Paper Angel Press.

Recently, I’ve written a proposal for a nonfiction book about grandparenting, and also found time to write several chapters of a cozy mystery. I was a college professor for 40 years (teaching child development), raised four wonderful children, and now spend as much time as I can with my six grandchildren. I’m on

the Calabasas Library Commission, and I coordinate a mystery book club for *Sisters in Crime LA*. You can get to know me better by reading some of my blog posts at www.marlenebumgarner.com

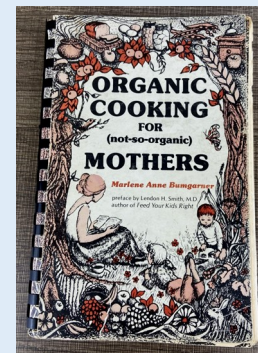
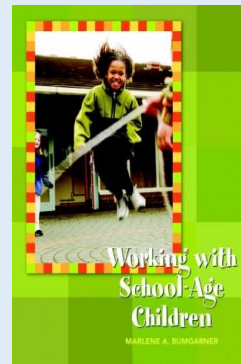
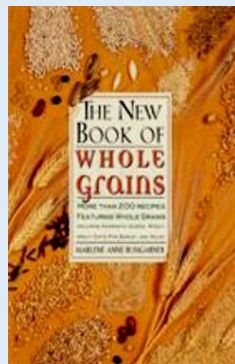
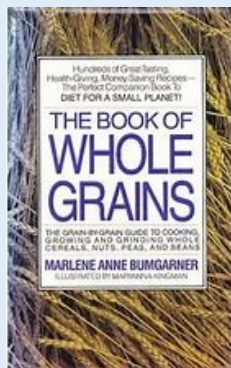
I didn’t know about critique groups when I was writing my first three books, but *The New Book of Whole Grains*, my rewrite of *Organic Cooking*, my memoir, and my two current projects have all been critiqued by fellow writers. I feel very lucky to be in two different groups that give me balanced feedback on a regular basis.

I’m honored to be asked to take on the coordination of our critique groups. I also look forward to serving on the board and meeting the other members

—Marlene Bumgarner

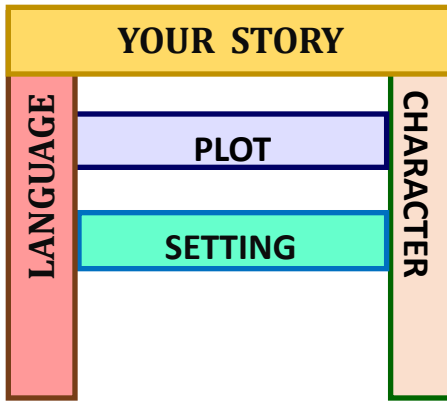
Editor’s Note: My fellow CWC-SFV Board members and I are so pleased and gratified that Marlene will join our 2023 Zoom Board meetings. Our club’s critique groups have a long history and throughout the years ... decades! ... the CWC-SFV critique groups have thrived, multiplied, nurtured and encouraged hundreds of San Fernando Valley writers. I am sure that Marlene Bumgarner, an experienced instructor, lecturer and published writer, will be a multi-faceted resource for our critique groups.

— Kathy Highcove



ANGIE CHATMAN TOLD US HOW TO BUILD A STORY

By Elaine L. Mura



On January 7th, CWC hosted award-winning author Angie Chatman, who spoke on skills in writing. Born and raised in Chicago, this trained and degreed engineer currently lives in Boston, Massachusetts. From the frigid Boston winter, she joined our Zoom Gallery in sunny California to speak on “The First Drafts Club.”

Angie opened her talk by asking the CWC group to join in a writing exercise. Each person was given five minutes to write on Angie’s predetermined topic, “New Desk.” Angie posited that writing is like a puzzle. In the process of solving the puzzle, most people begin with the four corner pieces. She suggested that these four corners might be thought of as

character, plot, setting, and language, the four building blocks constructing the writer’s piece. She drew the analogy that character might be you as the driver, while setting would be the interior the car. Plot would be what happens in and around that car; and language, the specific (and often poetic) words used to tell the story.

Angie further suggested that writers needed to read other authors who specialize in any of the four building blocks – and especially should be reading authors who specialize in skills that the searching author needs to deal with weak points. For example, if the use of beautiful language proves elusive, then it would be appropriate to read some famous and talented poets – and also attend critique group where membership includes at least one poet. If plot is the weak point, then the writer needs to read mystery-thriller authors and join critique groups where at least one member falls into that category. Even though there is a tendency to seek out authors who are like you, it is professionally critical to seek out authors with different skills in order to work on developing your skills in that weaker area. Angie remarked that “Diversity is a blessing.” For people who need to develop their language skills, she recommended poet Mary Oliver: “Her poems seem simplistic, but they are really complex and a good introduction to poetry.” For authors who need to develop plotting skills, she recommended Louise Penny, a writer known for her Inspector Gamach mysteries in Three Pines. She added that the primary difference between mysteries and thrillers is the amount of blood and gore – with thrillers topping the list. Among mysteries, cozy mysteries are subtle, with the murders occurring outside of the author’s words and only related second- or even third-hand.

Angie added that her four corners could also be considered the scaffolding of a piece of writing – and like its namesake, scaffolding must be balanced or the structure will slip and fall. She added that the middle of the puzzle is there so that the author may smooth out the different layers of the tale. Angie cautioned that balance was critical to good writing. Especially for authors who are history or science buffs, they must always remember that they are writing for an audience – and that too much of a good thing turns bad quickly. Therefore, they must limit their forays into factual discourse and remember always that they are telling a story, not writing a text book. She indicated that the author can always add more if needed – and also liberally delete to avoid the writer’s biggest sin – boredom.

Finally, Angie was strongly in favor of joining critique groups, but added that “It’s your book...you can decide to act on the critique or not...use your judgment.” She emphasized that authors should choose groups where they are weak: “If language is your problem, find a group with a poet in it...if plot is your problem, find a group with plotters in it.”

Angie Chatman’s talk was well received by the CWC Zoom Gallery. Several attendees later stated that her suggestions were both valuable and practical information. If you’d like to contact Angie go to [@angiechatman5676](https://www.instagram.com/angiechatman5676)

Angie Chatman began her presentation with a very familiar exercise for many of our CWC-SFV members—a prompt exercise. When we met in person at the MPTF, our meeting often began this this exercise. We would receive a term or topic or perhaps a quote from a novel, and then those who were so inspired would write for about ten minutes on whatever short story came to mind. When time was up, a few attendees would read their story. At this gathering, members of the Zoom gallery jotted down their inspirations.

When Angie asked members to share their stories, a few volunteered. Michael Edelstein read his story and has also shared it with this publication. He writes:

On January 7, 2023, The members of the CWC, San Fernando Valley Branch welcomed Angie Chatman, who spoke to us about the “First Drafts Club.” This type of club is Angie’s term for a writer’s critique group.

In her presentation, Angie discussed her concept of a writer’s “Scaffold,” which is comprised of four elements: character, plot, setting, and language. She then gave our Gallery members a prompt, entitled: “My New Desk,” Then we were given roughly five minutes to complete a short story. My attempt now follows

My New Desk

I just this moment received my new desk, just off the truck, solid maple, untouched, unmarred, unscarred. The drawers are all in alignment. They slide on their rollers like ice dancers at the Olympics, though without the jumps or spins.

The desk will find me resolute – and as I sit behind it, I feel like the President of the USA. I must admit that I’m sad to see my old desk go, with all its cuts and abrasions; with the candy wrappers in the lower left drawer; colored pencils in ROY G. BIV order, and my initials inscribed on the left corner, by mistake, of course.

It has cost me a pretty penny: No dinners out for the next 3 months, but that’s a ruse, as the Covid pandemic has kept me at home anyway. My reward: “Every cloud has a silver lining.”

Michael Edelstein

What Michael Edelstein learned from Angie’s prompt exercise:

“Angie said that ‘The character of my story is the desk.’ It needn't have been animate, but it was the mainstay of my story. She did not speak of the plot (as there was none), but that I might have indicated its setting - a room, and its features such as color, flooring, lighting, appurtenances, etc. As to language, in her discussion, she stated that an author ought to partner with a poet in order to enrich or embellish their prose.”

Three Main Points I Gleaned From Angie’s Talk

By Kathy Highcove

1. Any serious writer will join at least one critique group and be very choosy about the genres and insights of all the group members. For example, Angie requires a poet in her groups because she highly values their strong language skills.
2. Like an architect or contractor, writers construct something: a story. There are four crucial parts or ‘corners’ needed in a writer’s construction: language, characters, plot and setting. An author must learn to balance a story’s four elements.
3. A writer must learn discipline: drastically reduce verbiage because an overload of detail clogs the plot. “Kill your darlings,” she advised, with a knowing laugh. Angie confided that she routinely deletes her favorite phrases in her constructions.



POLICY ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

CWC Bulletin Winter 2022

“It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color.”

— Maya Angelou



An appointed CWC committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, 3CWC Bulletin Winter 2022 consisting of Gloria Pierrot-Dyer (Sacramento), Brian Gaps (Orange County), and Karen Gorback (San Fernando Valley), submitted a draft for a CWC policy on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The board approved the following policy:

“As writers, we recognize the immense and storied power of the written word to inspire or crush, save or destroy, enrich or mislead, and to contribute to the advancement of peace and understanding. However, past inequities have served to exclude or limit the voices of certain segments of our society, a practice which has deprived our world of valuable perspectives. Therefore, we encourage individual branches to honor and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion through any means by which they interact with their members and communities, including but not limited to programming, publications, board representation, and outreach.”

In the board’s discussion of this policy statement, we recognized that these words are only a start. What is required are actions at the club level and especially at the branch and member level. Methods to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion will be the responsibility of every CWC branch.

—Roger Lubeck
CWC State President



“If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse gift will find a fitting place.”

— Margaret Mead



A Remembrance



By Andi Polk,
Friday Critique Group member

Monte Swann, a tall young man with light-brown spikey hair, spoke eloquently to me on some topic when I first met him at the Motion Picture & Television Fund campus. Although I can't remember what he said, I remember that I was impressed. As membership chair of our San Fernando Valley Writer's Club, I had received his membership application and a sample of his writing. Typically, I followed with a brief phone interview just to see what his writing interests were — a pleasant fellow, I thought. Soon after our talk, Monte Swann became a member nearly four years ago, on January 21, 2019.

Within a month or two, he saw a niche in our community and offered to help me with the pre-meeting media set-up in the MPTF's Saban Community Room. I had been following up with the media needs of our club's featured speakers and Monte quickly noted that I was in over my head. He was able to convince the Motion Picture Television Fund staff of his technical knowledge and was quickly given the keys to the media kingdom for our club's continuing use of the Meeting Room. Suddenly, I realized that Monte was not just a pleasant young fellow; he had relieved me of the CWC-SFV's meeting media tasks and improved our tech and mic services for the club's guest speakers.

Monte became much more than a media helper to me, the Friday Critique Group leader. When he first joined our critique group, we got to know a man who had all of the characteristics we hoped for in a human being but rarely saw: genuine kindness, generosity, humor and humility. He listened to us, was present, pleasant and supportive. He appreciated other critique group members' creativity and his breadth of knowledge served to validate the work of his fellow authors. For me, Monte was also a doer and a fixer of mishaps I had inadvertently created with our Zoom links.

He was dedicated to our group, always responsive with entertaining anecdotes and asides. He often regaled us with his youthful experiences of sneaking with his buddies into the back-lots of studios to walk among the movie towns and props. He also related to us his movie production knowledge, gleaned from years of working with props and equipment used in the cinema production business. He never interfered with our conversations except for a time check or a pun. His comments while he reviewed our stories were, "just a suggestion to improve the flow." He was generous and inserted delightful blue, not red, or jarring editorial inserts that were available to us in MS word — just gentle blue suggestions.

The stories he created for our review were uniquely sci-fi, or Hitchcockian in their twists and turns; each with elevated points of view and perspectives. His stories painted scenes with both dark and light hues, with colorful use of texture and wordplay. His fiction often included tantalizing bits of historical accuracy that kept me researching past events and wanting more. When I questioned one story based on an historical character, I ruefully discovered that Monte's plot ingredient was, indeed, based on a true character. Unbeknownst to Monte, the wife of a Friday Critique Group member, Gary Wosk, **was related** to that character! What a surprise! Such lives we live.

Even as his health declined, Monte attended every critique group meeting. His presence was always a welcome addition to the group and we were very grateful for his input. Weakened in his last months with us, he carefully critiqued our stories, which surely must have taken a toll on his energy. My last conversation with Monte was just before Thanksgiving. He spoke to me while he was being treated for pain relief in the hospital. I included him on our group's December Zoom meeting invitation, although I did not expect him to attend. He did not. Fearing the worst, I texted his wife, Donna. Monte was at home. On the night of December 6th we lost a gem. Now that our Monte's light is gone, his loss leaves a hole — a large hole in our club's community. He was special — very, very special. I shall never forget how unique he was. May his wife Donna and their family be blessed by his memory.

Introducing Monte Swann, written by 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, "It might 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 writers' groups and although interacting with other writers improved my skills, most groups turned out to be unorganized and amateur. All that changed with I discovered the CWC—SFV via the Meetup app. I soon 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 to 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 immeasurable. Through 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.

MONTE

A quick smile.
Always a quick smile.
A kind man.
Always being helpful.

Whenever I ran a CWC Meeting.
He would say, 'You did a great job, Bob.'
I had anxiety running the meetings....
Maybe he could tell.

It was like clockwork,
When the meeting was over,
He would come up and say it again,
'You did a great job, Bob'

We didn't talk much then,
But his smile was reassuring.
He was reassuring.
He wanted to be helpful,
And he was.

Knowing that he was
There made it easier.
If we needed something fixed ,
He fixed it.
We knew he would be helpful,
And have a friendly smile.

Monte's smile will always be with us.

By Bob Okowitz

I grew up in Culver City and, when I was younger, I spent a lot of time sneaking into the back lots of Desilu and MGM studios. On weekends, when studio security was most lax, my friends and I would go over the fences and enter a fanciful world few kids could imagine. We'd wander through the cobblestone streets of medieval Europe, or the small town of Mayberry, always keeping an eye out for the security guard. We could roam through the facade of an Arabian castle or board the Cotton Blossom, the old paddle wheeler from the musical, *Showboat*, was permanently dry-docked on MGM Lake.

One weekend, while on a solo mission, I found myself being escorted off one of the back lots by an old security guard. "Next time I catch you in here," he threatened, through a grill of misaligned bridgework, "I'm gonna shoot you!" That's what they always told us, but they never did. Dejected, I headed for home. On the way I passed another small lot just across from the studio bordering the La Ballona creek.

I'd passed this lot many times before but never considered exploring its grounds. There were no actual sets on it, just a few dilapidated buildings and some old studio equipment blistering in the California sunshine.

Determined to recapture the day, I squeezed through the gate and walked through the dry weeds towards one of the old houses. It was a simple wood frame farmhouse with a sagging roof, and a fenced corral area on one side. Not very fanciful.

I walked around the collapsed porch towards the back of the house where an old circus wagon rested in the shadow of an overgrown eucalyptus tree. Its gaily painted scenes of circus life had faded long ago. I approached the cage and peered through the bars, squinting my eyes in the darkness. It smelled dirty inside, like a wet dog.

The bed was covered with matted straw and appeared empty except for a dark shape lying in one corner; a canvas tarp, I assumed, rolled up and moldering. I leaned into the cage for a closer inspection and the old wagon shifted slightly, its rusted springs squeaking in protest. The dark shape suddenly began to stir and the hair on my neck prickled to life. I couldn't believe



what I was seeing!

It was a lion! He raised his head and stared at me with big yellow eyes that seemed confused, as though awakened from a dream. Sitting up, he shook his massive head, throwing off bits of straw and dust from his matted mane. His mouth stretched open in a wide yawn, his ragged teeth and pink tongue glistened in the darkness.

"Run!" I told myself, trembling like a scared Chihuahua. But I couldn't move. I was frozen in place, my hands fused to the metal bars in a death grip. The lion just sat there, stone faced, like a statue guarding the entrance to a library, toying with me, before springing forward to kill me. But he didn't. He just blinked his eyes then lowered his head and rolled onto his side as though he was expecting me to rub his stomach.

With my heart pounding out a thundering beat in my head, I

backed away from the cage, never looking away from that dark shape breathing quietly in the cage. When I reached the corner of the farmhouse I ran as fast as I could.

It wasn't until I was over the fence and halfway home that I realized who that lion was. He was Leo, the once majestic mascot who roared at the beginning of every MGM film,

still waiting here for his next closeup.

That was over forty years ago and, although the memories are cloudy, most of the story is true. I had been on that lot and I had seen the cage, the location and layout of the lot confirmed by old city maps: It was part of the circus of MGM animals that one occupied the site in the 1940's. But today, I realize how unlikely it is that Leo was really there. Was it my adolescent imagination or was it part of a dream that was slowly woven over time into reality? I'll never really be sure.

A commercial building stands on the site where the lot used to be. The only witness to its famous past is the La Ballona creek silently flowing west towards the Pacific Ocean.



A 1940 photo of MGM's Original Back Lot



I only knew Monte Swann for four years, but it felt like a lifetime, a friendship that is not defined by time. A friendship that was just taking flight.

That's how many of us felt about our budding relationships with him. An instant connection. Monte was a gift. Intelligent, creative, caring, always willing to offer a helping hand and very funny. He's irreplaceable. And it all seems so surreal.

And now I miss him so much, praying that his wife Donna and their family will be able to go on with their lives. That's what Monte wanted. He also dearly wanted to see his first grandchild born. Not fair. Not fair.

When he sat down next to me at his first monthly meet at MPTF, we became instant kindred souls. He reminded me of myself in the humor department. Before long we were embroiled in outrageous witticism duels, competitions conducted in person or over the phone. The goal was to try to outdo the other. He always had the last word - much to my chagrin. I couldn't keep up with him. He was that fast. When I heard him laugh at my own puns, that made my day.

Humor was the foundation of our relationship and that bond strengthened when he joined the critique group I still belong to. His stories reminded me of my own. Bizarre. Far-out. Surprise endings. Straight out of "The Twilight Zone." A twisted mind like mine. Wow. I couldn't wait to see what this great writer had written next.

Monte should be here, right now, laughing it up, providing sound advice on how to make our chapter even better. On how to make the world better. He contributed so much and expected so little in return.

Above and beyond all of that, I will always remember my friend as a fighter who never gave up, even when the disease was gaining an upper hand. He was our "Top Gun" Maverick who was not afraid of the danger zone, in this case, a disease that took away from us a one-of-a-kind human being.

He wore many hats at our chapter, including most recently vice president, piloting us through technical glitches at the speed of sound, getting the word out about upcoming meetings in a timely manner, and always willing to do more even when he was in pain.

He rocked like Tom Cruise and had the looks to be movie star. He reminded me of Kirk Douglas. In his younger days, as shown in a video tribute at his celebration of life tribute, a longer-haired Monte had the body of a surfer

I only wish I had met Monte when I was a young man. The many pranks he pulled were right up my alley. As recently told at his life tribute, he once placed a For Sale sign on a neighbor's front yard and then moved it to another property. Everyone in the room laughed until it hurt. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. His hilarity knew no bounds.

As a teenager, he teamed up with his brother to produce "Mission Improbable" on YouTube. Viewers are treated to hijinks reminiscent of Mel Brooks and the Marx Brothers. They pulled out all the stops. Gags aplenty. Watch it when you can. It's hilarious.

That sense of humor carried over into his adult years, another big reason why I looked forward to our critique group meetings. Even though he didn't live a very long life, he led a full life with his wife Donna and his daughters. They traveled around the world to destinations most of us will only dream of.

Some of the photographs they took on their trips were shared at his memorial service. And he knew so many people who said great things about him in their eulogies. Some lavished him with praise for saving their careers and making work fun.

At his service, I discovered just how talented Monte was and that he knew some of the biggest names in show business. Not only was he the best video engineer around, but was he also a top-notch illustrator as evidenced by the comic books and T-shirts he produced, and a prop master.

He kept his fame and glory to himself, but if you look him up on the Internet and go to IMBD, you will see just how much he accomplished during his career. He's credited with the special effects in more than one hundred films. He was the go-to 24-Frame Video-guy who made other people in the industry successful.

We kept in contact over the phone every few weeks or so. I'd call him and he'd call me. Before I could ask how he was doing, he'd beat me to the punch. "How's your wife?" he'd inquire. She'd undergone surgery. That was Monte. Always thinking of others first.

He was also great at hiding secrets such as just how ill he really was. He didn't want people worrying about him. I was always under the impression that he'd beat it. That's why I was always surprised when he'd tell me that he was in the hospital again, apologizing that he didn't call me back right away. "Yeah, I'm feeling better. I should be home in a few days." That gave me hope that he'd turned the corner and was on his way to a full recovery.

Where many in Monte's condition would have chosen to just take it easy, he did the opposite. Just out of the hospital, he'd show up at our next critique group meetings having read all of our stories and gave it his all. What a mensch. I truly believe that Monte is still with us in spirit. I have no doubt that he has reviewed this column. "A lot of potential, Gary," I'm sure he would have said, as he did so often at our critique group meeting to soften the blow to my ego, along with excellent suggestions.

About three years ago—pre-pandemic, of course—I volunteered with the [LA'sBest](#) organization, which was sponsoring after-school enrichment programs under the auspices of the Los Angeles Unified School District. This project was called “Book Buddies”. Twice a week, on various school campuses, we tutored selected first, second and third graders who were not reading at their appropriate levels. Our goal was to keep them from falling so far behind that they would be unable to catch up and advance in their age groups. These were six, seven and eight year-olds who were only reading at first grade levels or lower. The students would join us mid-afternoon for 30-minute sessions after their regular classes ended. A challenge for them, an incredibly rewarding experience for me, which I will always treasure.

But without a doubt, it was my first day on the job that will forever be imprinted in my memory bank. I entered the main entrance of my assigned school and followed the hand-made signs down the hall, until I reached the open door with the sign above it that read “BOOK BUDDIES—WELCOME!” I stepped in slowly and quietly,

Who among us has not experienced the extraordinary way the olfactory senses--our sense of smell--can unexpectedly trigger a long-forgotten memory? Or without warning, wrap us in a cloak of déjà vu, or startle us with a shocking flashback? The aroma wafting from the oven, it has to be Mom's chocolate chip cookies. That new car smell? How special was that when we finally got our first one! And omigosh, who's sporting the Aqua Velva aftershave? A little shiver at the thought of nuzzling my senior prom date on the dance floor...

And that is why, had I been led into that schoolroom blindfolded, I would have known in an instant exactly where I was. I would smell them. All of them. The books. Lots and lots of books. I would know, without a doubt, that I was in a library.

In a matter of minutes I found myself awash in my own childhood memories of that magical room. I noticed the tables arranged neatly and systematically. The chairs appeared truncated, intentionally constructed much closer to the ground to accommodate short little legs. The walls were virtually devoid of any open space, having been bedecked with inspirational posters, many gently reminding students of their commitment to be responsible and caring. Leftover decorations from the most recent holiday were making room for the first touches of the next one. Exciting splashes of color and graphics were dominant, designed to corral the attention of wandering eyes.

But, oh my, oh my! The books! Endless rows, just as I remembered, with the spines facing outward, some so symmetrically arranged on the shelves that they looked like a painting. Upon close examination, the cryptic combination of letters and numbers on the binding dictating how and where the book could be found. But only after a visit to the Omnipotent Card Catalog where, at times, I was able to just reach the top drawer by standing on my tippy toes. First, the search, guided by the Dewey Decimal System, which I considered far more imposing than my multiplication tables. And finally the triumphant walk to the librarian's desk, book in hand with the card removed from the inside pocket, awaiting her rubber date stamp.

But now my reverie was suddenly interrupted by a cacophony of shrill shrieks, screeches and giggles, as a wave of tiny persons spilled into the room. After expertly and swiftly disengaging themselves from cumbersome backpacks, they reported to their assigned tables and scanned the room, anxiously searching for their "Book Buddies". I inhaled deeply, savoring the moment, and then began this wonderful journey.

Unfortunately, Covid eventually descended upon all of us and the onsite meetings were immediately cancelled. In the months that followed, through the extraordinary efforts of many people, the program was launched on Zoom, with the children joining sessions from home. It was a struggle from both their standpoints and those of the instructors: distractions, tech interruptions, absences, etc. When they were eventually allowed to return to the campus on a limited basis, the students were socially distanced and compelled to wear masks. The latter was the worst offender, as those eager, shining, adorable faces were suddenly reduced to two eyes and muffled words and phrases. We could only try to do our best for our little charges, but as far as I was concerned it was never the same. Nothing could ever compare with those afternoons with my knees scrunched up against the undersides of the tables, the hugs and high fives, and oh, yes...that wonderful whiff of nostalgia.



Twelve O'clock Tales with Ava Gardner Review

Review by Elaine L. Mura

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Alessandra Assaf as Ava Gardner in *Twelve O'Clock Tales*
Photo by Frank Ishman

One of Hollywood's shining stars of yesteryear, Ava Gardner was a woman ahead of her times, a woman who fought against racism, believed in the right to choose, and enjoyed her sexuality. Married four times – with short-term spouses including Mickey Rooney, Artie Shaw, and Frank Sinatra – and a studio star of the 40s and 50s, Ava's life was filled in equal parts with spectacle and scandal. "The World's Most Beautiful Animal" certainly drew attention and wagging tongues in her heyday. The contradictions and complexities of this fiery silver screen icon lured playwrights Alessandra Assaf and Michael Lorre into her web – resulting in *TWELVE O'CLOCK TALES WITH AVA GARDNER*. Directed by

Michael A. Shepperd and presented at the Whitefire Theatre, this intimate expose of Ava's life and times cannot fail to grip the viewer.

The time is 1974 and the place is Hollywood, California. Ava's whopping big hits have run aground as she moves into her 50s and begins to age past the film industry's high water mark. After nearly ten years of fallow ground, Ava has landed the starring role in the disaster film "Earthquake" with co-star Charlton Heston. Playing second fiddle to Mother Nature's tremors may seem like a comedown, given her cinematic history – but, after all, Ava must pay her bills. What will her future bring?

In a carefully researched and fascinating odyssey through Ava Gardner's life, *TWELVE O'CLOCK TALES WITH AVA GARDNER* stars co-author Alessandra Assaf in a solo show which dissects the paths and tangents that the star's life took. Woven between snippets of her early history and larger segments of her scandalous liaisons, Assaf skillfully portrays this untouchable but also heavy-drinking and earthy woman who isn't afraid to utter four letter words and have one more cigarette while offering her frank opinions about her world and the people in it. Assaf's lively and enthusiastic approach to the Hollywood film star keeps the show humming along with nary a dull moment. Clearly, she and director Shepperd have reached a clear understanding of what made the woman tick. To quote Assaf, "No matter how evolved we think we've become, eye candy remains a powerful force."

Kudos to Irmgard Quint for the set, props, and costumes which light up the show and place it squarely in the 1970s, as well as to Derrick McDaniel lighting and Tor Jin Brown's sound. And let's not forget the songs that pop up here and there reminding us of the era – and Ava Gardner's life-long desire to be a singer. Happily, Alessandra Assaf has the voice and style to pull it off.

TWELVE O'CLOCK TALES WITH AVA GARDNER will prove absorbing for the film buff as it explores the history and dynamics of the Hollywood culture of the time and also the dynamics of the people – and especially the women – who survived within that culture. But the show offers more than just Hollywood history. It digs into what formed and psychologically shaped Ava Gardner, the perfect example of what we now term Star of the Silver Screen. This is an entertaining and intriguing play which will delight both film and theater fans.



Alessandra Assaf – Photo by Frank Ishman

TWELVE O'CLOCK TALES WITH AVA GARDNER runs through March 5, 2023, with performances at 2 p.m. on Sundays. The Whitefire Theatre is located at 13500 Venture Blvd., Sherman Oaks, CA 91423. Tickets are \$25. For information and reservations, call 818-687-8559 or go [online](#).

CWC-SFV SPEAKERS 2023



ANGIE CHATMAN

SATURDAY, JANUARY 7TH 2023 @ 1PM (ZOOM)

“The First Drafts Club.”

As with any product, your story needs beta testing. Having a carefully chosen critique group is necessary to iron out any wrinkles in your text. Pushcart prize nominated writer and WEBBY award winning storyteller, Angie Chatman, will discuss the criteria to use so that you can get help to polish your piece for publication.



LAURA JENSEN WALKER

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4TH 2023 @ 1PM (ZOOM)

“Writing by the Seat of my Pants: From Memoir to Mysteries.”

A Self-described ‘pantser’, Agatha-nominated and bestselling Amazon author, Laura Jensen Walker, will share her journey (including mistakes) of writing memoirs and mysteries by the seat of her pants. Visit laurajensenwalker.com for more information on this sought-after speaker and her work.



MANDY JACKSON-BEVERLY

SATURDAY, MARCH 4TH 2023 @ 1PM (ZOOM)

“Getting Your Book Published in the Modern World.”

This workshop by author, teacher and podcast host, Mandy Jackson-Beverly, explores traditional, hybrid, and independent (self) publishing and gives you the knowledge you need to decide which style works best for you and your books. Visit mandyjacksonbeverly.com for more info on this popular speaker.



LUZMARIA ESPINOSA

SATURDAY, APRIL 1ST 2023 @ 1PM (INPERSON / HYBRID IF AVAILABLE)

“POETRY: A Method of Reflection, Reconsideration, and Revision of Your Thoughts, Beliefs, and Actions.”

Ventura County’s Poet Laureate, Luzmaria Espinosa, will read some of her poetry and share how her own life experiences, culture and community activism have shaped her work.



ADAM PLANTINGA

SATURDAY, MAY 5TH 2023 @ 1PM

“Writing Realistic Police Procedures.”

Writing a crime novel? 21-year police veteran and Agatha-nominated author Sgt. Adam Plantinga will talk about various aspects of real-life police work crucial to writing a crime-related novel or screenplay.

Visit adamplantinga.com for more information on Adam and his work.

I See Winged Victory of Samothrace

By Anne W. Lee

As I climb the Louvre 's marbled staircase
I come upon you.
Majestic. Epic. Looming.
The air around me is hushed silent and reverent.
Wedged between throngs of onlookers,
I see only you.
Resurrected in pieces from wombs of ancient Greek fields,
your wings brace the museum's vast space around you.
My mind's eye is compelled to complete your original dimensions.

I stand before you, mortal arms at my side
yet within my own body
I feel the stretch of your wings.
Your wings as arms
raised behind at your shoulders.
Their alignment with your sternum
pulling against arched back
thrusting your breasts forward.
Torso taut with core strength of Greek Gods.

You are Nike.
I am lifted.

Carving white Parian marble, the unknown sculptor
Is chosen for his strength in crafting stone.
I see how he embodies you with sensual adoration—
humbled by you as goddess
daughter of the giant Pallas and infernal River Styx.
With every echoing crack of his chisel and hammer
he is beholden to your mythological call to swift defeat.
Ageless in your coloring. A palette of ancient sands,
Each carved nuance redefined by the room's shifting light.

You are clothed in layered folds of splendor.
I see ancient sails of a mighty ship
cut loose from their masts flying into the winds.
They dress your magnificent feminine physique
mid-air for the naval battle ahead.



I see feathers fold in patterns forming warrior shields.
Others drop from wing edges
directing the airstream—controlling your descent
onto the warship's grey stone bow pressing toward me.

I see your right thigh and calf extend to
catch the final impact.

Left leg bent slightly behind
steadies your balance.

Each angled foot is a mere moment from landing.

I endlessly await your arrival
in full classic victorious pose.

I am suspended in your moment of time
created twenty-three centuries ago.

Headless now, you remain mysteriously divine.

I may never see your true face as did those
exhausted rowers of that Rhodian ship gazing up at you,
returning in victory to the isle of Samothrace.

I can only imagine your determined eyes
fixed upon your landing on this chosen altar.

Square jaw lifted frames your ardent Hellenistic profile.

Flushed cheeks and braided crown of thick curling hair
salted by the heavy mist of the Aegean Sea.

You are Nike.

I am lifted.



A Family Valentine

SENT BY FAMILY MEMBERS OF BRIAN MULDOON

We love you, Brian, Poppi, Bri,
but remember you are also Father, Dad.

REPLY BY FATHER AND GRANDFATHER BRIAN MULDOON

Dear Family,

If someone asked me

What is my most valuable possession.

I would have to say

The knowledge, That I am loved

Brian, Poppi, Bri

Shared by Brian Muldoon



the time comes and goes

the time flashes by.

it runs away.

it flees secretly.

you indulge.

you make a dent.

you make a bulge.

you achieve goals.

you make memories.

the time comes and goes.

and then,

away the time went.

the time you have spent.

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Time Turns

hours and days circle
round and between
lingering memories
songs that echo
in my thoughts

now it is time

to smear paint on canvas
like a child
in a swirl of colors
a sense of joy
without restrictions

to renew replenish
and also abandon
allow dreams to grow
into reality



to visit the sea
build sand castles
not waiting
for a summer's day
to read uninterrupted
for a week
savoring each word
while the dust settles
where it may
each day

it is time
to cherish the moment
dance and write and paint
speak heart to heart
with kindred souls
enjoy roses in my patio
when other gardens
are too far away.

Lillian Rodich

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Who We Are And What We Do



The California Writers Club has been in existence for over 100 years, and the SFV Branch for over 20 years. Our mission is to encourage excellence in writing, fiction, non-fiction and poetry, as well as to reach out into our community and mentor writers at all stages of their writing journey. We hold Zoom meetings on the first Saturday of each month from 1 PM to 3 PM. Meetings are free for all members.

Our meetings feature presentations from published writers, editors and other writing industry experts speaking on topics ranging from how to improve our writing, overcome writer's block, get published, and promote our work.

For information and reviews on prior monthly speakers please go to:

[monthly editions of the Scribe](#)

To learn more about the CWC-SFV, check out our website for more information: CWC-SFV.org

In addition, we host six critique groups which meet monthly or bi-monthly to give CWD-SFV members feedback from their CWC-SFV peers. They meet in person, on Zoom, or in hybrid groups.

For further information about the several CWC-SFV critique groups, contact Pat Avery at:

cwcsanfernandovalley@gmail.com