



# The Valley Scribe



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

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INFORMATION

## WRITING FOR VIDEO GAMES AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

By Heather Bradshaw

The San Fernando Valley Branch of the California Writers Club is pleased to welcome author and screenwriter Ross Berger as the keynote speaker on Saturday, June 3rd at 1:00 pm for our first HYBRID meeting (in-person and Zoom), with a presentation titled “Writing for Video Games and New Technologies.”

These days, there are many writing revenue streams but how do you find your way into a market that you know little or nothing about? At our June meeting, expert Ross Berger will discuss and explain how to get started in some of these new and exciting platforms.

Video games are a massive industry that offers countless ways to have fun. Creating the stories for video games, however, is no small task. It requires some common denominators from other media (like TV and film), but there are other skills--and other ways of looking at story -- that are native to the industry itself. Berger’s talk will present the basics of writing a game, show how this medium is unique and why it’s become a force to be reckoned with.

Ross Berger is a writer, narrative designer, and adjunct professor based in Los Angeles. He is the author of *Dramatic Storytelling & Narrative Design: A Writer’s Guide to Video Games & Transmedia* (CRC Press, 2020), a “how to” for fledgling game writers and screenwriters, and is the editor/contributor of *Storytelling for New Technologies & Platforms: A Writer’s Guide to Theme Parks, Virtual Reality,*



Ross Berger

Photo by Yfat Yossifor

*Board Games, Virtual Assistants, and More* (CRC Press, 2022).

His screenwriting credits include: *Law & Order* and the Webby-Award winning *LonelyGirl15*. He also served as the supervising producer for the social media/television gaming experience *The Runner*. Ross has also worked extensively in virtual reality as a writer for the *Oculus Rift* launch title *Farlands* and the award-winning thriller *Eclipse: Edge of Light* for

the *Google Daydream, Oculus Go, and Nintendo Switch*. As a senior/lead narrative designer in the video game industry, he has written AAA games for *EA Sports* (NBA Live franchise) and *XBox*, where he served as the co-showrunner for an interactive TV/video game prototype that set the foundation for *Quantum Break*.

Ross is also the author of short stories including *Football with Leatherman* (2020) and *Evie A.I.* (2021), both published by TulipTree Publishing. A graduate of Brandeis (BA, Philosophy) and Columbia (MFA, Playwriting) universities, Ross is a member of the *Writers Guild of America* and the *Television Academy* and is currently an adjunct assistant professor at University of Southern California’s School of Cinematic Arts, where he teaches a course on game writing.

This lecture promises to be fun and informative, looking at story writing in a new way. Hope to see you there, either in person or via Zoom.

### TWO WAYS TO JOIN THE CWC-SFV JUNE HYBRID MEETING: ZOOM OR ATTEND-IN-PERSON

Our June meeting will be HYBRID (IN-PERSON and ZOOM) at the MPTF Saban Center for Health and Fitness in Woodland Hills and is free to CWC members and MPTF residents.

All members of the CWC-SFV will receive a Zoom invitation to register for this presentation if they would prefer to attend online. Members of other CWC branches and MPTF residents attending via Zoom should contact Zoom host, Anat Wenick, by

noon on June 2nd at [SFV.CWC@gmail.com](mailto:SFV.CWC@gmail.com) for an invitation to register.

Guests attending the meeting may pay \$10 at the door or, if joining by Zoom, may purchase admission at [www.cwc-sfv.org](http://www.cwc-sfv.org) by noon on June 2nd. After purchasing admission, guests will receive a Zoom invitation. We regret we cannot accommodate late Zoom requests.



June 1, 2023

Dear members;

As we conclude another program year, I'd first like to thank you for your support of this professional organization and its board. You are the reason this club exists.

Looking back over the year, we went through some difficult times. Our hearts were broken by the passing of beloved club members Ray DeTournay, Monte Swann, and Alan Wills, honored in the Valley Scribe with beautiful memorials edited by the finest CWC editor in the state -- Kathy Highcove. Those issues of the Scribe are a lasting tribute to our colleagues whose memories are a blessing for us all.

As we persevered through our sadness, we owe a debt of gratitude to our phenomenal Program Chair Heather Bradshaw for organizing a dazzling array of guest speakers on a wide variety of topics, including the importance of "setting," the value of critique groups, the joy of "pantsing" and the "in's and out's of publishing." We were treated to a poetry reading by Ventura County Poet Laureate Luzmaria Espinosa and amazed by the mystery behind the research and writing of Dracula. I have often told prospective members that our monthly lecture series is a graduate level education in the craft and business of writing – at a fraction of the price. Thank you, Heather!

Looking forward, we are all responsible for keeping the CWC-SFV alive and well. No organization can survive on a steady diet of status quo. All organizations need new members and fresh ideas. Please take the responsibility of referring one new person to the club this month, and check out page 5 to learn how your club will thank you. You may also want to provide a gift membership to a relative or friend who enjoys writing or "has always wanted to write." Club memberships make excellent birthday, graduation, retirement, or holiday gifts.



**JIM GIANOPULOS COMMUNITY ROOM INSIDE THIS BUILDING—THE SABAN MEETING ROOM**

Finally, we are excited to announce that beginning with the June 3 meeting, you will have the option to attend either in person at the Motion Picture and Television Fund (MPTF) campus in Woodland Hills or via Zoom, as you've done for the past three years.

That's right! Thanks to our amazing MPTF Liaison Phyllis Butcher, we will be conducting the June 3 meeting in person, as well as online. All club members will receive a Zoom invitation. If you want to attend online, please pre-register, as you've done before. If you prefer to attend in person, you do not need to register online. Simply show up at 1:00 pm at the MPTF. See the map on page 4 for directions to the meeting room. Humongous thanks to Anat Wenick, our webmaster/Zoom host who will coordinate with the MPTF staff to ensure we're linked into Zoom for those who choose to attend meetings online.

*(Continued on page 3)*

However, like other things in life that have been altered by the pandemic, our in-person meetings at the MPTF have also changed since we last met in person; so if you choose to attend on June 3 at the MPTF, please comply with the following rules:

1. Wear an N-95 mask at all times while on campus.
2. Remain in the meeting room and use the restrooms immediately adjacent to the room.
3. Do not take either still pictures or videos while on campus or during the meeting and presentation.

If you feel you are not able to abide by these requirements, please register for the Zoom presentation. The choice is yours!

Thus, lots of new things lie ahead! Heather is already hard at work lining up your guest speakers! Marlene Bumgarner, our outstanding Critique Group Coordinator, is ready to assist you in forming new critique groups! Our notable secretary/VP candidate Elaine Mura will once again report on our speakers to provide you with beautiful summaries of their presentations, published for you in the Scribe.

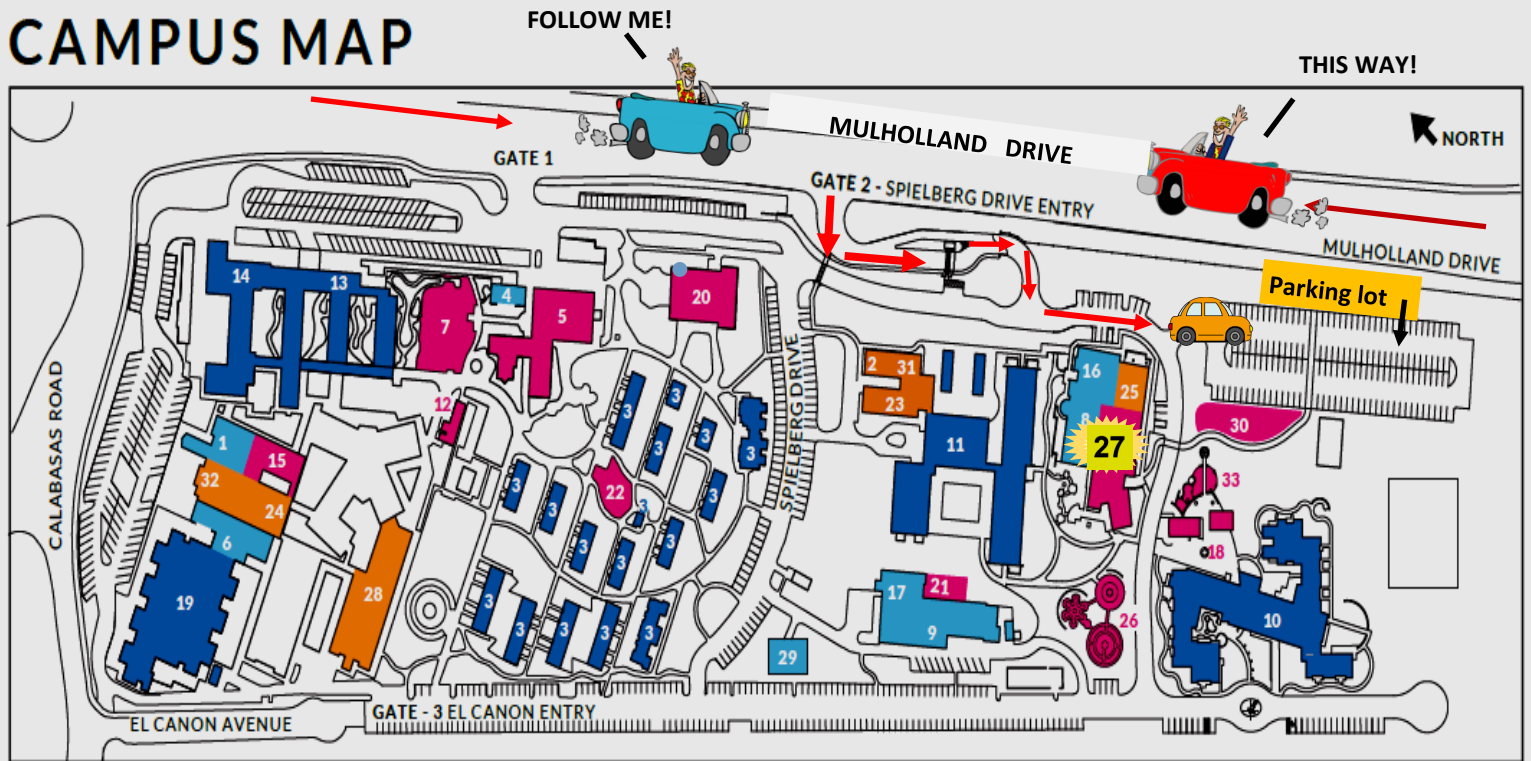
Anat will be contacting you this summer to update your online biographies for our website. Andrea Polk has kindly agreed to represent us at the CWC Central Board meetings, taking over for Bob Okowitz, who has retired from the board. We are so grateful for Bob's diligent representation of our club over many years of service, and we wish him the best as he continues his membership and now has more time to write. Special thanks to Andrea Polk for volunteering to represent us at the CWC-Central Board meetings, in addition to her position as Membership Chair. And a big hug to Pat Avery, continuing to do the vital work of the club's treasurer. And finally, your own CWC San Fernando Valley board is actively seeking new ideas about how we can bring greater diversity into our membership. Please share your ideas with me at [karen.gorback@gmail.com](mailto:karen.gorback@gmail.com)

We are currently recruiting for a "Member at Large" and a "Hospitality Chair" to join the board. The Member at Large is the voice of the membership on the board, contributing members' ideas and concerns about the club to the rest of the board for discussion and potential action. The Hospitality Chair will be responsible for lining up volunteers to provide snacks for our meetings beginning in September -- nothing fancy. You can be creative. If you'd like the opportunity to volunteer, please contact me at [karen.gorback@gmail.com](mailto:karen.gorback@gmail.com)

Finally, on May 1, 2023 the US Surgeon General released an advisory titled Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The [US Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community](#). I've provided a link for you to peruse it. We all know that writing is a solitary pursuit, so please do yourself a favor and plan to attend a meeting each month, join a critique group, and volunteer to serve on the board. It's fun, educational, and an excellent avenue for social connection. And who knows? According to the Surgeon General, active club membership could also be great for your health!

**CWC-SFV President Karen Gorback, Ph. D.**

# CAMPUS MAP



<span style="color: #0070C0;">■</span> 1 Administrative Offices	<span style="color: #C00070;">■</span> 12 Guild Volunteer Cottage	<span style="color: #FF8C00;">■</span> 23 Palliative Care
<span style="color: #FF8C00;">■</span> 2 Age Well	<span style="color: #0070C0;">■</span> 13 Hersholt Place	<span style="color: #FF8C00;">■</span> 24 Pharmacy
<span style="color: #0070C0;">■</span> 3 Cottages	<span style="color: #0070C0;">■</span> 14 D-Wing/Prod Kit	<span style="color: #FF8C00;">■</span> 25 Physical Therapy (in Saban Center)
<span style="color: #0070C0;">■</span> 4 Country House Office	<span style="color: #C00070;">■</span> 15 Heartbeat Café	<span style="color: #C00070;">■</span> 26 Roddy McDowall Rose Garden
<span style="color: #C00070;">■</span> 5 Country House, Dining, Library and Lounge	<span style="color: #0070C0;">■</span> 16 Human Resources (in Saban Center)	<span style="border: 1px solid #FF8C00; color: #FF8C00;">■</span> 27 Saban Center for Health and Wellness
<span style="color: #0070C0;">■</span> 6 Customer Service/PBX	<span style="color: #0070C0;">■</span> 17 Information Technology	<span style="color: #FF8C00;">■</span> 28 The Samuel Goldwyn, Jr. Behavioral Health Center
<span style="color: #C00070;">■</span> 7 Edith Head Plaza	<span style="color: #C00070;">■</span> 18 Katzenberg Pavilion/Outtakes Café	<span style="color: #0070C0;">■</span> 29 Security/Mailroom/Transportation
<span style="color: #0070C0;">■</span> 8 Executive Offices (in Saban Center)	<span style="color: #0070C0;">■</span> 19 Mary Pickford House & Harry's Haven	<span style="color: #C00070;">■</span> 30 Segal Family Dog Park
<span style="color: #0070C0;">■</span> 9 Facilities	<span style="color: #C00070;">■</span> 20 Louis B. Mayer Theatre	<span style="color: #FF8C00;">■</span> 31 Social Services, Elder Connection/Palliative Care
<span style="color: #0070C0;">■</span> 10 Fran and Ray Stark Villa	<span style="color: #C00070;">■</span> 21 MPTF Studios	<span style="color: #FF8C00;">■</span> 32 Social Services, LTC/HH
<span style="color: #0070C0;">■</span> 11 Frances Goldwyn Lodge	<span style="color: #C00070;">■</span> 22 Milchan Green Room	<span style="color: #C00070;">■</span> 33 Wasserman Koi Pond

## MAP LEGEND

<span style="color: #0070C0;">■</span>	Residential Areas
<span style="color: #0070C0;">■</span>	Administrative Offices
<span style="color: #FF8C00;">■</span>	Health Care / Social Services
<span style="color: #C00070;">■</span>	Common / Recreational Areas



### MPTF Directions and Campus Map

From Los Angeles, San Gabriel Valley, Glendale, Pasadena, etc.

- Take the 101 Freeway (North)
- Exit Valley Circle/Mulholland Drive and turn left at the end of the exit ramp
- Go straight through the first intersection, you will see our campus on the right
- Proceed to Spielberg Drive (Gate 2) and make a right onto the campus
- Proceed to the Guard Gate, for parking directions.



## SPRING MEMBERSHIP DRIVE 2023

Please participate and make  
our CWC-SFV membership grow!  
Here are three ways you can help:



**1** Renew your \$45 club membership by June 30!  
The names of all CWC-SFV members who renew their membership by June 30 will be entered into a raffle. The winner will be notified in July and will receive a full refund of their renewal fee. That's free membership for a year! Renew today!

**2** Persuade a writer friend to join our club by June 30, and then receive a \$20 refund on your dues.

**3** New members who join our club in May or June will immediately receive CWC-SFV club benefits! That's 14 months for the same price as a year's membership!

### Payment Options

Payment by check made payable to: CWC-SFV

Mail to:  
CWC-SFV  
Woodland Hills PO Box 564,  
Woodland Hills, CA 91367

OR

Pay your dues with an easy online payment:

Go to [www.cwc-sfv.org](http://www.cwc-sfv.org)

Click on "Membership Information."

At the bottom of the left-hand column, click on "Membership Renewals."

Pay with either a PayPal Account or your debit/credit



# CANDIDATES FOR THE JUNE CWC-SFV ELECTION

The CWC-SFV's annual election of next year's officers will take place in June, either by members filling out a ballot at our June meeting or via email. A quorum of our members must vote to validate the election. If you opt to vote online, frequently check your June email for your official ballot. Our thanks for your participation,



Heather Bradshaw  
Kathy Highcove  
2023 CWC-SFV Nominating Committee



## Karen Gorback, Ph. D. —Candidate for President

**K**aren has been a member of CWC-SFV since 2008, serving on the board as a “member at large,” publicity chair, assistant program chair, representative to the SoCal CWC Board, program chair, Zoom host, and most recently as the president. This past year, Karen updated the club's by-laws to reflect the necessity of implementing new procedures since the pandemic. The bylaws were approved nearly unanimously by the membership in November, 2022. In addition, Karen volunteered to serve on a subcommittee of the CWC to write a new policy for the organization encouraging greater attention to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Most recently, she volunteered to chair another CWC subcommittee of all the branch presidents which meet quarterly to share best practices in club leadership and membership development. Karen has also worked with the legal department of



the MPTF to negotiate an agreement for the club to resume live meetings at their beautiful campus in the near future. Karen is the chairperson 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). One of her CSL proposals for the 2024 legislative session recommends greater oversight of

Artificial Intelligence used in the field of health care, particularly for older adults and people with disabilities. Karen also belongs to the Ventura County Writers Club and the Society for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. A former college dean with a doctorate in education, Karen has four grown children and nine amazing grandchildren “who live too far away.”

## Elaine Mura—Candidate for Vice-President and Secretary

**I** was born in New Jersey, relocated to Manhattan for my advanced degrees, and eventually relocated to live and work in Denmark, Germany, Portugal, and Iran (with quick trips to lots of fascinating (preferably off the beaten path) spots.

Currently, I work full time as a psychologist for the CA Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. It's my job to determine whether or not inmates coming up for parole are too dangerous to be released back into their community.



Before that taking that position, I was a full time professor of graduate psychology for Pepperdine University.

I am in the process of writing in several genres (novel, short story, play) and write articles for *Splash Magazine*, particularly reviews for plays, movies, etc. Special interests include photography, travel, and anthropology/archeology.

## Patricia Avery—Candidate for Treasurer

**U**pon joining CWC-SFV, Andi Polk, who was President at the time, asked me to be Hospitality Chair and I accepted the challenge. In subsequent years I took on the roles of Secretary, Treasurer and Critique Group Coordinator. I would be happy to again serve as your Treasurer. By agreeing to participate on the Board, I feel I pay back some of the gifts I have enjoyed as a CWC-SFV member.

My skills and confidence as a writer have grown through CWC-SFV monthly programs and, most importantly, my participation in critique groups. When I retired, one of my goals was to focus on writing. As a clinical social worker, I provided treatment to numerous families, individuals and children. At the agency I was working for, I advanced



from therapist to program director and finally Chief of Clinical Service. I retired in 2014 after thirty-five years at the agency.

As head of services, I was instrumental in writing many successful proposals that funded new and continuing social service programs. I enjoyed proposal writing, figuring out how to provide new services, the camaraderie of editing and finally receiving a funding reward to implement our plans. Now, as a retiree, I enjoy the freedom to write for the joy of playing with words and telling a tale (usually a mystery) without the restrictions imposed by proposal writing.



# REALISTIC POLICE PROCEDURES FOR CRIME WRITERS

FROM OFFICER AND AUTHOR ADAM PLANTIGA



By Heather Bradshaw



For the CWC-SFB May 6th zoom meeting, our club welcomed author and police officer, Adam Plantiga, who spoke on writing realistic police procedures. Adam stressed, however, that a crime writer might take dramatic liberties because most police procedures are rather dull. There are days when fixing the photocopier might be the most exciting thing to happen in a shift. “Real-life police work,” Adam joked, “is more like CSI Clerical.”

The first part of his presentation covered five aspects of real-life police work that are crucial to writing a crime-related novel or screenplay. In the last part of his talk, Adam touched on popular plot devices used in the crime writing genre. What follows in this report are the thoughts of a seasoned police officer, Adam Plantiga

## 1. Shots Fired/The Use of Force

Most bad guys can’t shoot. Being an accurate shot requires hours of weapon training and practice at the gun range. Most criminals don’t put in that kind of time and aren’t able to shoot straight at a house and hit it. Often the “spray and pray” method is used. Even with training, bullets rarely fire straight, factors such as; wind, air temperature, gun maintenance and even the shooter themselves –will affect accuracy. When it comes to being shot, the difference between life and death is a very narrow margin. A bullet may ricochet off bone, or travel inside the body, hitting the heart or coming out in unexpected places. Cops always keep their finger off the trigger. Always. Shootings occur in only 0.01% of arrests. An officer involved in a shooting is immediately put on administrative duty.

Contrary to what we see on TV crime dramas, tasers don’t knock a perpetrator unconscious, but they do indeed shock “the snot” out of a perp, who will remain awake, in lots of pain. A pepper-sprayed suspect feels like barbed wire was dragged across their eyeballs, Once hit, someone will hack, sweat, and drip with snot. These symptoms can last for ten minutes to hours. And, a tased person’s contact lenses will be destroyed. Adam half-joked. “It’s better to get shot than pepper-sprayed!”

## 2. Investigations

One popular myth in fictional crime is the private investigator who works closely with a buddy in the police department to get privileged information. In fact, cops and P.I.’s won’t share information from an active homicide case because they don’t want any leaks that could detrimentally affect the investigation. In Adam’s twenty-year experience, a P.I. rarely calls to inform a police department about anything. But if the P.I. planned to be casing a house and didn’t want the police to pull over and question him, blowing his cover, he/she might let the local cops know what’s up. The only time a P.I./cop collaboration might be possible: the P.I. is an ex-cop. If the writer does create this scenario, there should still be conflict and mistrust between the P.I. and his cop buddy.

We’ve often seen a crime drama where a homicide has taken place and the FBI agents swoop in and take over the case, causing anger and resentment in the local police force. Good for conflict in fiction, but in reality, Adam revealed, the FBI are usually invited into the scene by higher-ups and the cops are happy to see the Feds take over a difficult case.

Witnesses are notoriously unreliable witnesses. People seldom remember accurate information when under duress, and witnesses are often drunk. Even Adam, a trained crime observer, finds it challenging to clearly recall details. Memory degrades under stress, he reported, and people all have our individual mental lenses through which we see events. More often than not, “Filler photos” in photo line-ups are often picked instead of the actual accused.

Kicking down doors is an exciting part of TV and movie police raids. In reality it once took Adam twenty-seven tries to bust down a door, and this he knows because his partner was counting. The preferred method is to mule-kick the door—backwards. Shouldering the door, as we often see in films, doesn’t work.

## 3. Police Procedure and Culture

**Back-up:** How many times have we watched a movie where a brave and foolhardy lone officer enters a building to catch the bad guy? In reality, police officers always call for back-up. The number of back-up officers request depends on the number of suspects being apprehended: three officers for one suspect, and if there are three or more perps, then the whole shift will show up. Police officers are exceedingly keen to help their fellow officers; Adam’s seen two collide coming around the corner of a corridor while answering the call. If you’re writing a scene that calls for a police officer to go it alone, you must have a valid reason, e.g. the radio to call for help is busted or out-of-range to make the call. The police department’s success depends on training and numbers. Once when a police officer was asked why it took six officers to take down one suspect, he replied, “Because seven weren’t available.”

**Car Chases:** Police pursuit of a criminal can only occur in violent felony situations. There’s no ramming of the suspect’s vehicle. Spike strips can be used to stop escaping cars. With a tally of 150,000 miles plus on many police cars, they’re not super high-speed vehicles and are sometimes outrun by the criminals. Adam has heard of situations where the transmission breaks or the car doesn’t even start in the station parking lot.

**Miranda Rights:** On TV, the familiar words are recited almost every time a criminal is caught. But in reality, Adam revealed, Miranda Rights are only read if a suspect is in custody and there is to be an interrogation. During the actual interrogation, Adam told us that it’s important to first build rapport with the suspect. For instance, ask where the suspect grew up, which school they attended and learn about their family

*(Continued on page 8)*

and friends. This line of questioning gives the interrogating officers a baseline of how the suspect behaves when he’s telling the truth, how he talks, sits and gestures with his hands. Then, any changes in his demeanor can be noted when he’s asked about the crime. This process takes hours, Adam told us. The only suspects who confess quickly are juveniles and the mentally ill.

Adam suggested that writers ought to have their investigator protagonist revisit the crime scene to note things that may not have been noticed the first time, especially if the crime was committed at night. However, cops usually visit a scene during the day so they can easily spot security cameras. Also, more witnesses usually come forward in the daytime.

### Cop Character Traits

What should your fictional investigator look like? If police officers looked like models, Adam said, they would be models. In truth, many look like they have been hit in the face by a crow bar. Some are so overweight they have to carry their gun in their pocket because the weapons belt won’t fit. One officer, he remembers, could not bend down to tie his shoe laces. His wife tied them in the morning, but if they became untied during his shift, he was out of luck and had to walk around with untied laces.

Adam described several dominant character traits to consider when developing your police protagonists. He told us that cops are patriotic and usually Republican. They may have NRA stickers adorning their lockers. Many cops give back to their community by being sports coaches or church elders. They’re frequently car buffs. They can be crude, childish, but also fiercely loyal. Most don’t mince words when describing their colleagues. As in many fields, there’s mediocrity unburdened by genius and unmerited promotions are all too common. Cops come from all walks of life—even librarians or nursing careers.

### CSI

Unlike the TV show series CSI, real-life police work is not high tech. DNA results may not come back for eight months, though for homicides the results can be obtained in a one to three-week period. If your story needs fast DNA results, then you must have a valid reason for quick results. For instance, maybe the lab received a federal grant.

Fingerprints are lifted from glass, painted wood, glossy paper, metals, live plants and band-aids. They can’t be taken from undressed wounds, bricks, cloth or dusty surfaces. Prints are easier if the weather is humid. Only smooth hands work for prints because gnarled and scuffed hands of manual laborers don’t leave usable fingerprints. Baseball bats are not a good source of fingerprints because the pressure of a grip distorts the pattern. Most firearms have grips are too textured for fingerprints but work for DNA. The magazine clip is smooth and therefore great for getting fingerprints. Incidentally, criminals may wipe their guns clean after a crime but not DNA from the day before.



### Crime Scene Searches

Even if the murderer in your fictional story gives the crime scene a good cleaning with bleach or paints over the evidence, there will still be blood that has seeped into wood surfaces below. Upon viewing blood splatter, we often see a fictional forensic officer accurately describe the order of events in a murder, but Adam told us that most splatter pattern analysis is just guesswork. Aside from the science of DNA and fingerprints, criminals sometimes get caught simply because they dropped their wallet at the crime scene or if a Crime-Stopper reward is offered. Besides blood samples, DNA can be found in saliva, mucus secretions, rootless hair samples and feces. These days, DNA testing that once cost thousands of dollars is much more affordable at \$200 a test. [Crime Stoppers USA 1-800-222-TIPS – CSUSA.org](http://CrimeStoppersUSA1-800-222-TIPS-CSUSA.org)

### The Street Environment

For inner city authenticity, Adam suggests that writers visit an inner city and closely observe the ‘street theater’ in action. Note the filth on the streets, the feces, discarded liquor bottles. You might even see a 9 millimeter shell casing from a recent shooting. Watch the people interact, check out the super discount liquor stores, note the cheap hotel rooms, and read all the posted signs that advertise having narcan for overdoses. Note how people dress, like the hot dog vendor wearing a fur hat on a hot day, or the drug dealers in hoodies on street corners who disperse when a police cruiser pulls up only to regather when the police leave.

Are the people in wheelchairs real or fake? Do they sprint away when they spot a police officer? If there is a playground, note the state of the equipment. Often the seat of the swing hangs broken from one chain. What fast food is available in this neighborhood? Chinese or burgers or? Take in all the details. But remember that there are solid citizens living there too whose kids get robbed of their lunch while waiting for the bus and their apartments gets burglarized.

When it comes to street prostitutes, Adam informed us, most are getting cash to get high. They are not winsome or funny. They are not Julia Roberts. Though fictional investigators are often shown having love affairs with an attractive but down-on-her-luck prostitute who helps them with their investigation, this scenario does not play out in real life.

### Lasting Impressions

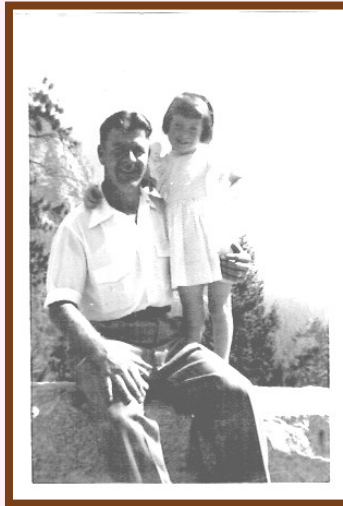
After Adam’s talk, his audience had heard that police work is not as exciting as in crime novels and movies. And crime writers tend to glamorize or often misrepresent cop culture. But Adam had stressed at the beginning of his talk that a crime writer’s unreal plot elements are acceptable. It’s often necessary for a writer to take liberties with cop procedures. An author must build a good plot and to move the story along. “Just make the details as realistic as you can,” Adam advised.

Adam Platinga books, *400 Things Cops Know* and *Police Craft*, offer much more information than he could relay during his presentation. Be on the lookout for his debut novel, *Nothing Like Easy*, that comes out later this year. Follow Adam on [Twitter @adamplatinga](https://twitter.com/adamplatinga)



## Our Silly Half Hour

When I was six years old, my parents and I lived in a rented Victorian in the Richmond District of San Francisco, and my favorite time of day was the Silly Half-Hour. There was no set time when this event would occur, and it didn't happen every day. But once in a while, after Dad and I had cleared the table and left Mom to her nightly task of returning the kitchen to order, we would retire to the adjacent sitting room with the tiny space heater and the radio where on other evenings we listened to dramas, and suddenly it would happen.



cavernous house were empty, affording us a magnificent paddock. Dad would crawl around the sitting room on his hands and knees with me on his back. Somehow he'd managed to turn the doorknob, and burst into the hallway. During that period of my life I was often dressed in my black Hop along Cassidy cowgirl outfit, the one with the silver trim and the white fringe on the skirt. Soon I was whooping and hollering and brandishing my two silver pistols.

During Silly Half Hour I was allowed to be physical and loud, and . . . well, silly -- all behaviors that had been forbidden previously, when we lived mostly in no-children-allowed apartments, and especially during the year and a half we had lived with my grandparents and aunt and uncle and cousin in Australia.

Down the long hall Dad and I would gallop, into the empty parlor, through the long dining room and into the connecting great room with the triple bay window, then back out into the hall. As an only child with few playmates, I was in heaven. The thread-bare carpet runner in the hallway must have hurt my father's bony knees, but he never complained

My mother took no part in this evening ritual except to utter "tsk tsk-tsk" from the sidelines and periodically warn my father to be careful, adding "She'll never go to sleep tonight."

We paid no attention. Dad and I rolled around on the floor together, tickling one another and giggling. We called each other silly names. He gave me piggy-back rides. And I gave him gentle noogies. We laughed. Oh, how we laughed.

Sometimes Dad would ride my tricycle down the hallway. I would jump out of one of the bedrooms crying

*(Continued on page 10)*

These magical times frequently began with Dad telling a story about a little boy in England. He was the boy in the story, of course. He told me how he used to walk for hours on Shipley Glen with his friends, cycle along the Shipley canal, watch cricket games on Sundays after church, and deliver milk on a horse and cart in the dark hours before school.

While my father was concentrating on crafting his tales, I would stealthily take a black comb from his pocket and begin styling his hair, sitting behind him on the flowered sofa -- both actions that were forbidden at any other time. Dad's hair, shiny and fragrant with Brylcreem, was always parted down the middle, and he normally hated to have anyone touch it. Once I had the comb in my hand, however, I would send his hair straight back, trying to make it into a pompadour like the ones I had seen on posters of film stars. When that didn't work, I would comb the strands forward into his eyes, sending my mother, peeking around the kitchen door, into peals of laughter. I can still remember the oily feel and sweet fragrance of Brylcreem on the comb and on my hands.

When he had had enough of my grooming, Dad would play "horsies" with me. Because we'd left all our furniture in Australia, most of the rooms in the

“boo!” and he would feign terror, or I would ride the trike and he would crawl along behind, making wolf noises or pretending to be the Lone Ranger about to capture the bad guy.

At no other time in my life did my father behave like this. Once our lease ran out, we left San Francisco and moved to the suburbs. Dad began to work overtime at the cabinet shop where he was employed, and then until late at night in the garage making cabinets and wishing wells or knick-knack shelves for our friends.

My parents acquired a mortgage, and then a second child, and what had been our silly half hour became a story, a good night kiss, a promise to go fishing on the weekend –

a promise that was kept at first, but that soon fell by the wayside. For the rest of his life, my father remained a dedicated wage earner and a devoted father, but never again did he crawl on all fours or ride a tricycle.

Looking back over his 91 years, I realize that this brief time of silliness is probably what sustained my love for him during the difficult times, when I made life choices he didn't understand, or when he began to slip into the confusion and paranoia of dementia. I know now that in those last years, when he grew suspicious and angered by the merest slight, it was the dementia talking, but his words hurt just the same.

Now that he is gone, I am comforted when I remember him as he was during that brief enchanted time – my very strong, very silly, very loving Daddy.

Ten years ago, this story was sent to me by the late Max Schwartz, an excellent writer who was a WWII veteran, successful reporter, editor, publisher and a lauded historian. Max also sent me the 1928 photo to accompany a very poignant memory of his father, which I reprint below.

—Kathy Highcove

### PATERNAL REASSURANCE

Dear Kathy, My first reaction to your request was how can I remember anything about my father since the last time I saw him alive was when I was six years old? I was crying as he left to return to the hospital, now called the City of Hope. I learned later he died from tuberculosis.

My mother made sure I always remembered and respected his memory. Every year we went to the cemetery, where I listened to her wailing “Why did you leave me, Sam? Why did you leave me?” Then an elderly man in a black hat would come to the grave site and pray in Hebrew to my dad. This was repeated on every anniversary of his death, or Yahrzeit, until I left for the army in 1943.

When our regiment lined up to board an old English merchant ship bound for England, our chaplain's aide passed out Bibles at the gangplank. I got the Jewish version. That's an ominous sign, I thought, as I pocketed the small book. Two days later while on the rough Atlantic swaying in our canvas hammocks in the ships hold and as waves pounded the hull, I saw my father again. He told me not to worry.

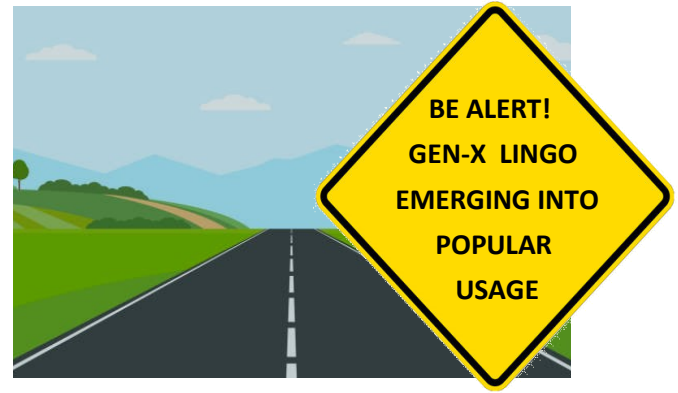
Most of my comrades were intensely reading their Bibles, but I was being reassured by my father's spirit as I was certain a German torpedo would tear through the thin steel hull and explode in our midst. He was my Bible for the entire voyage and throughout the War in Europe and Pacific. He safely returned me home to raise a family, become a grandfather, and write this story about our fathers.

Written by Max Schwartz



Sam and six-year-old Max Schwartz at the 1928 Rose Parade.

I try to think of myself as being a conscientious, respectful and generally adaptable person. I recycle religiously (my blue trash bin runneth over). I follow rules and obey the law. Never, for example, do I intentionally litter. On the other hand, I may have on occasion unintentionally failed to come to a complete stop at an intersection. But perhaps most importantly, I make gallant, if not always successful, attempts to keep a step-in-time with all of the ongoing transformations in the current vernacular, our mode of expression that best conveys our thoughts and observations. One example would be my efforts to decode some of the prevailing language of the younger generation. So far, I've pinned down a few:



Here's a sampling of those that didn't quite make the cut, but nonetheless are quite creative and amusing:

GOAT: GREATEST OF ALL TIME

DOPE: AWESOME

SICK: NEXT LEVEL COOL

LIT: AMAZING OR EXCITING

GUCCI: GOOD OR GOING WELL

SALTY: BITTER OR ANGRY

BALD: FOLLICLY CHALLENGED

STUPID: INTELLECTUALLY IMPAIRED

PROSTITUTE: SEX CAREGIVER

HOUSEWIFE: DOMESTIC ENGINEER

LYING: ECONOMICAL WITH THE TRUTH

LIES: ALTERNATIVE FACTS

UGLY: VISUALLY UNFAVORABLE

UNEMPLOYED: UNINTENTIONALLY AT LEISURE

But I haven't been brave enough to try them out. I cringe at the thought of calling someone a "goat" who may not yet be attuned to the word's latest interpretation. Or worse, "dope". Shudder.

There is one other challenge in keeping up with the evolution of language, and that is adjusting to the concept of "political correctness," a catch-all term that covers language, actions and behavior designed to prevent offending or putting at a disadvantage certain individuals or groups. The description itself came to the forefront in the late 1980's, and the words and phrases it sought to challenge or change progressed from the sublime to the ridiculous. In the first category here are some of those that either became acceptable or at least came close to being tolerable:

And check out this next little collection:

ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT: UNDOCUMENTED WORKER

DRUNK: INEBRIATED

SLUM AREA: ECONOMICALLY DEPRIVED AREA

FOREIGN FOOD: ETHNIC CUISINE

SEX CHANGE: GENDER REASSIGNMENT

CHAIRMAN: CHAIRPERSON/CHAIR

FIREMAN: FIRE FIGHTER

UNEDUCATED: UNSCHOOLED/NO FORMAL EDUCATION

STEWARD/STEWARDESS: FLIGHT ATTENDANT

ACTRESS: ACTOR

PLASTIC SURGERY: COSMETIC SURGERY

CRIMINAL: BEHAVIORALLY CHALLENGED

CRIME RATE: STREET ACTIVITY INDEX

ROBBERY: WEALTH REDISTRIBUTION

WANTED CRIMINAL: PERSON OF INTEREST

MURDER: UNAUTHORIZED TERMINATION OF LIFE

REPEAT OFFENDER: FORMERLY INCARCERATED PERSON

PAROLEE: PERSON UNDER SUPERVISION

CONVICT: CURRENTLY INCARCERATED PERSON

JUVENILE DELINQUENT: YOUNG ADULT IMPACTED BY THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Do you see where this is going? Like anything else, the best intentions can get out of hand and end up being ludicrous. I'm sure it's only a matter of time until new "sanitized" substitutions for other offensive words will be thrust upon us. In the meantime, I'll try to remember that I'm receiving a compliment, not a threat, when somebody tells me, "YOU DA BOMB!"

Oh, please...say it isn't so!



## **THE MALLARD**

**By Michael Edelstein**

**Overhead a mallard  
Flying north for the summer  
A winged bowling pin  
On its way to Canada  
In a clerical collar**

**Below its green head  
White ring around its green neck  
And bright orange feet  
Beneath its tawny belly  
Undoubtedly a male duck**

**Prepared for landing.  
On Alberta tarmac  
Or a shallow lake  
Perhaps in Saskatchewan  
Or British Columbia**

**Squawking at the clouds  
Probably seeking out friends  
For some company en route  
One can get very lonely  
On solitary journeys**

**He's been here before  
Knows why and where he's going  
To mate happily  
In a cool environment  
Without suffering heat waves**

# A SOLDIER'S PLAY

Reviewed by Elaine L. Mura



Sheldon D. Brown, Branden Davon Lindsay, and Will Adams – Photo by Joan Marcus



Howard Overshown, Malik Esoj Childs, Tarik Lowe, Eugene Lee, Will Adams, Sheldon D. Brown, and Branden Davon Lindsay – Photo by Joan Marcus



Norm Lewis as Captain Richard Davenport – Photo by Joan Marcus

Loosely inspired by Herman Melville's novella, "Billy Budd," A SOLDIER'S PLAY was initially performed off-Broadway in 1981, with a cast including Denzel Washington and Samuel L. Jackson. In 1982, the play won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama – along with the Outer Drama Critics Circle Award, the New York Drama Critics Award, and the Obie Award for its ensemble cast. Penned by Charles Fuller, A SOLDIER'S PLAY was adapted into a feature film called "A Soldier's Story" in 1984 and became a surprise hit for director Norman Jewison and many of the cast reprising their stage roles. A revival in 2006 was well received – but it was not until 2020, when the Roundabout Theatre Company again revived the powerful drama on Broadway, that the show rocketed back into the spotlight, winning the 2020 Tony Award for Best Revival. After only 55 performances, however, COVID-19 struck; and all U.S. theaters were forced to shut their doors. When theater performances again began post-pandemic, the Roundabout Theatre Company arranged a national tour for the 2022-2023 season rather than a return to Broadway. The Ahmanson Theatre is proud to present A SOLDIER'S PLAY in 2023.

The time is 1944 during WW II, and the place is Fort Neal, Louisiana, deep in the segregated South. Fort Neal is a military base where most of the soldiers are Black – except, of course, for the command-level officers. But that is soon to change. The base is currently in chaos following the murder of Sergeant Vernon C. Waters (Eugene Lee), a Black platoon leader who was reportedly well liked by his men. Waters was also the manager of the Black baseball team which was assembled at this base from players previously in the Negro Baseball League. As might be expected, the first and foremost suspect in the crime was the Ku Klux Klan. That is, until the arrival of Captain Richard Davenport (Norm Lewis), a Black attorney assigned to the Military Police and sent to investigate the killing. His reluctant counterpart at Fort Neal, Captain Charles Taylor (William Connell), has serious misgivings about the skills of a Black officer and is clear in the opinions he expresses to his white fellow officers – and Davenport.

While the Black soldiers on the base are pleased to see a Black man who is also an officer, they are at best guarded when questioned by an officer. As Davenport digs into the

circumstances of the crime, unexpected information begins to emerge – information which throws earlier ideas about the crime into serious doubt.

A SOLDIER'S PLAY is a suspense-filled tale about racism – but also about loyalty, compassion, camaraderie, and the very real prejudices and barriers which routinely reared their heads barely 70 years ago. It is also a story of distorted but deeply-held beliefs and the unchecked aggression that they might trigger. But has the tense environment and potential violence of the 1940s ended? To quote 70-year-old actor Eugene Lee, "(The play's) truths are still true...not much has changed." Skillfully directed by Kenny Leon, the ensemble cast does a superb job of building the tension, event by event. The artful use of flashbacks keeps the action in the forefront, as does some very clever use of music and dance which both emphasizes the lock-step military mind and the Black cultural values; marches can easily morph into jive and jazz. Special congratulations to Norm Lewis, who has the voice to echo and cajole, and Eugene Lee, the man you may love to hate. And let's not forget the Roundabout Theatre Company, who brought this powerful, moving, and thought-provoking play back for current audiences to enjoy.

Kudos are also in order for the production team, including Derek McLane's nearly perfect set design, Dede Ayite's timely costumes, Allen Lee Hughes' lighting, and Don Moses Schreier's sound. Building that towering stage must have presented some interesting problems.

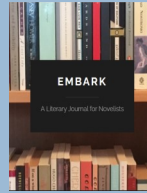
A SOLDIER'S PLAY is recommended for history and mystery buffs, those involved in the military, people concerned about racial issues – and just about everyone else. This is a story about people – flawed, perhaps – but still very human. As such, it will attract and engross audiences.

A SOLDIER'S PLAY runs through June 25, 2023, with performances at 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays, at 2:30 p.m. and 8 p.m. on Saturdays, and at 1 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. on Sundays. The Ahmanson Theatre is located in the Music Center, 135 N. Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90012. Tickets range from \$40 to \$155. For information and reservations, call 213-972-4440 or go [online](#).

The opening chapter of one of my novels, *Taking LeeAnn* was just published in the current edition of *Embark: The Literary Journal for Novelists*. Twice a year they publish the opening chapters of the best ten unpublished novels they can find (from hundreds of submissions), along with an Author's Statement (what inspired the novel, or why you wrote it), and a description of the novel written by the Journal editor. Here are the links to let people know where to find my "Author's Statement" and the opening chapter of *Taking LeeAnn*.

Go to [embarkliteraryjournal.com](http://embarkliteraryjournal.com) and click on the April issue, [Issue 18, April 2023 | Embark \(embarkliteraryjournal.com\)](http://embarkliteraryjournal.com) to view it.

— Edward McBride



## IN PRINT FOR ALL TO SEE: CWC-SFV MEMBERS SHARE THEIR GOOD NEWS

I'm happy to say that my nonfiction work, "Wind, Fire, and Ice: The Perils of A Coast Guard Icebreaker in Antarctica" has been well received since it was published by Lyons Press a year and a half ago. Articles about it have been published in several magazines, including *The Bulletin* and *the Boston Review*. I have received 47 mostly five-star reviews on Amazon. Most recently, I was the featured guest talking about my book on a local radio program, *The Boating Hour*.

For my fellow writers, it's proof that even a 78 year old, no-name writer, who had only two quarters of Freshman English, can get a book published

—Bob Bumes

[Wind, Fire, and Ice: The Perils of a Coast Guard Icebreaker in Antarctica: Bumes, Robert M.: 9781493060344:](http://www.lyonspress.com)  
[Amazon.com: Books](https://www.amazon.com)



I'm sharing that I was published in two outlets in April, 2023. One was a letter to the editor in the Opinion page of the Los Angeles Daily News. I must say, seeing your name as author of a letter in a venue of a large readership is a bit of a high. It almost reaches a level of validation a writer feels when reading a letter of acceptance from a publishing firm.

That same week, Kathy Highcove, editor of the monthly newsletter of CWC-SFV, published my poem, "Last Thoughts" in the Scribe. I consider it an honor to be published in the company of the many talented CWC writers whose works appear in our outstanding San Fernando Valley branch newsletter.

—Yolanda Fintor



## HDCWC to Host Agent on Free June 27 Act 2 Zoom Meeting

By Bob Isbill

Director of Advertising and Promotions at California Writers Club



What are agents looking for? How can an agent help writers? What is required to become an agent? Best general advice an agent would give to writers today. If one does not have an agent, what things can he/she do to get representation? Join us statewide as the High Desert Branch presents prominent Agent, Lucienne Diver at 6 pm on Tuesday, June 27 via zoom.

Lucienne Diver joined The Knight Agency in 2008, after spending fifteen years at New York City's prestigious Spectrum Literary Agency. With her sharp eye and gift for spotting original new voices, Lucienne is one of the most well-respected agents in the industry. A lifelong book addict, she graduated summa cum laude from the State University of New York at Potsdam with dual majors in English/writing and anthropology. She thus came well-equipped for her work as an agent.

Over the course of her dynamic career she has sold well over seven hundred titles to every major publisher, and has built a client list of more than forty authors spanning the commercial fiction genres, primarily in the areas of fantasy, science fiction, horror, women's fiction, romance, mystery/suspense and young adult. Her authors have been honored with the Hugo, Nebula, Colorado Book and National Readers' Choice Awards, and have appeared on the New York Times and USA Today bestseller lists. A publishing veteran, Lucienne has superb industry knowledge, and a keen understanding of the foreign rights market.

This zoom presentation is open free of charge to all CWC members. Registration is not required. However, there will be limited seating for what we feel will be a popular event.

The link to join the meeting may be found on the sidebar "Special Zoom Meetings" on <http://www.hdcwc.com>.



## Can You Hear Me Now?

By Sheila Moss



You heard her, Pepper. Go get your bone!



Republished from the 2016 CWC Literary Review

My husband and I are enjoying our golden years except for one touchy problem. As retirees we spend more time with each other and therein lies the tale. I find myself punctuating my conversations with, “What did you say?” Or, “I didn’t hear you.”

Let me give you a common scenario. Hubby is ensconced in his recliner watching TV and I’m reading a book at the far end of the sectional. How can two people in the same room only four feet apart fail to hear one another?

It’s easy. We’re both focusing, but not on one another. In my case, it would be helpful if he would wave a red flag (which I would happily provide) when he wants to initiate a conversation. As it is, I have to guess, “Are you talking to me?” the answers can vary, “Yes, you gotta watch this touchdown.” Or, “No, I was yelling at the political pundit on cable news.”

Has this ever happened to you? Your husband raises his voice to get your attention, but after a few minutes, his voice drops an octave or even two. Your mind is processing the information and then it hits a stone wall, thus giving a new meaning to “drop call.”

Sometimes I think he does this deliberately. He certainly has me in his grasp while I wait with bated breath for him to turn up the volume again.

And then there’s long distance communication. You hear your husband’s voice. You know where you are—the kitchen. But where is he? You follow His Majesty’s auditory vibrations. Aha, he’s either in the computer room or in the bedroom. Voila! He’s in the computer room. I used to think that this was a battle of wills. My husband explains that he is just being practical. Why should he come out of the computer room when what he needs to show me is on the computer?

I have to admit I am not totally blameless in these encounters as my husband is fast to point out. For example: I’ll be in the kitchen and discover an invasion of ants at the back door. Do I calmly walk to the computer room and deliver the message about the invasion of ants? Of course not. I stand in the kitchen yelling, “OMG! We’ve been invaded by hundreds of ants. They’re everywhere!” It does bring my husband to the scene post haste, but his blood pressure is zooming out of the normal range.

Here’s another example that my husband loves to share: “How can you expect me to hear you when you have your head stuck in the refrigerator?” What can I say? I needed some vegetables and I hadn’t quite finished speaking to him. Maybe I could exhale frozen puffs of air, which he could translate like the Indian smoke signals of your.

If you are truly going to understand each other, experts advocate watching facial expressions. No, you don’t stare at the person’s mouth or the spinach stuck between his or her front teeth. Just look at each other face to face. You can learn a lot: whether he’s tired, wanting to share a joke or anxious over the content of the message.

Sometimes we hear what we want to hear. I will be standing face to face with my husband planning that when we go to the mall we will divide and conquer. “You go to Sears and get the wrenches you need and I’ll go to Macy’s for the wedding gift for Liz and Dan. Then we’ll meet at Penney’s and finish the shopping. It’s across from the Cinnamon Bun.”

Yes, I blew it. Never give too much information or possibly contradictory information. I should have checked his facial expression. The big grin means my husband only heard, “Cinnamon Bun.”

So, if your husband hears Cinnamon Bun instead of Penney’s, cut him some slack. Setting a date for the two of you to meet for coffee and rolls is something worth listening to.



# A Connection In Time

By Rita Keeley Brown



I believe it was St. Augustine who said, in essence, that the past and future are together in the present. I now have a better understanding of what he meant.

On a day like most any other, I was going shopping after work. I went to our industrial-size warehouse “everything store.” I fumbled through my purse for my membership card and was granted entry. Maneuvering my huge shopping cart around the corner, past the 1-hour photo developing and the optometrist, I was suddenly immobile. It was like I had run into a glass wall.

There before me, standing like the Royal Guard attending the Queen was a cadre of beautiful grandfather clocks! How is it that these magnificent creations could be here in this mecca of commercial storage? To me, grandfather clocks have always seemed bigger than life with a deep spiritual mystique about them.

I was bewildered by the incongruity of the situation and the temporary time warp it put me in. I looked with great care and longing at each beautiful clock. They were so majestic. I loved the rich wood of the cabinets, the wonderful clock faces with their rococo hands. Then, there I stood in front of one that seemed to reach out its hands and draw me in. I wanted that clock and it wanted me!

Questions began racing through my head. *Could I possibly afford such a beautiful thing? What was the price? Should I let the salesman know I’m interested? I don’t want to be talked into anything. I need more information.* I found the price sticker. It wasn’t the cheapest of the clocks, but it wasn’t the most expensive one either. I must control myself and think this out. I’ll ask the salesman a few general questions so he won’t know how ravenous I am for this clock. I asked first how

long the display would be there. “Two more days – just a special event showing.” Then I asked, “Where were the clockworks made?” “Germany.”

(My mother’s parents were from Germany.) I asked if I could hear the chimes. He said, “Yes, but you’ll have to stick your head inside the door of the clock because you can’t hear them above all the noise in this huge place.” He unlocked the tall glass door, moved the minute hand to twelve, and I stuck my head in to listen. Oh, dear God. It was like climbing up onto my mom or dad’s lap. I felt like Alice in Wonderland or the children in “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.”

I’ve got to think this over. I’ll come back tomorrow. I took the salesman’s name, delivery information and said I would return. (Of course, I had to go back. I had forgotten all about what I went there to buy in the first place.)

However, before I returned, I went to antique stores, clock shops, and any other place I could think of to learn more about grandfather clocks. I found out quite a bit and it told me, *if you want to be “clock-wise” girl, (pardon the pun) get back there quick! That’s a fantastic deal!* And go back, I did. I looked at each stately timepiece once again and, as before, the same one with its beautiful gold chime shafts, pendulum and the moon dial reached out its hands and took me in.

I sighed, and signed. Now we would be together forever, my granddaddy clock and me! I felt reunited with my father whose business was the repair of typewriters and business time-card clocks. He had a great love of clocks in general. A deep personal resonance was chiming inside me. *Dad, you’re coming home with me,* I thought in my heart.

(Continued on page 17)



Waiting those few days for it to be delivered, I thought, *How did this happen? I have never had a serious thought about buying a grandfather clock and yet I felt absolutely compelled to buy this one whether or not I could afford it.* And indeed, I have had no second thoughts about having bought it, only these ponderings.

My clock had another feature that delighted me. It is a 'curio style' cabinet with little glass shelves down each side for objects d'art or whatever. These shelves called for something special. At a little oriental shop having a closing sale I found several lovely and affordable items to reside on my new shelves. I was delighted. I now had my own grandfather clock, the original shopping did get done, and all was well in my little world.

When my new treasure was delivered, it came with an offer of a gold nameplate with my name and date of purchase to enhance it as a family heirloom. I definitely wanted that. I filled out the form listing both my maiden and married name. Now it would be engraved as mine for all to see.

Later, filing away the paperwork on my new clock, I happened upon the folder where I've kept the mementos and information concerning my parents' deaths. I had not looked at this for a long time since they had passed away over twenty-five years ago. As I lifted up the folder, out fell a picture of a grandfather clock! It looked almost exactly like the one I just bought. It had the same dark

wood; the same clock face with the phases of the moon. The only difference was that there were no little curio shelves down each side of the cabinet. My mouth dropped open! I had no recollection of this clock.

As I puzzled over this, I gradually recalled that several months after my father's death back in Nebraska, a grandfather clock was placed at the Veterans' Home in our hometown as a memorial to him. He was a World War I veteran, had three sons and a daughter in World War II and was extremely active in all the veteran's organizations and never was there a Memorial Day Parade without him proudly wearing his WWI uniform.

As my memory cleared, I recalled that my oldest brother had sent me and the other siblings a picture of the memorial clock. This was that picture. I had not been back there since his funeral so I had never seen the clock and, I am sad to say, had actually forgotten about it.

I looked at it for a long while, then placing the picture back in the folder, my eyes came upon the commemorative Mass Card from my Mother's funeral showing the date of her death — May 28<sup>th</sup>. Lying there on the desk waiting to be filed was the invoice for the purchase of my grandfather clock. Guess what day I bought my clock — May 28<sup>th</sup>.

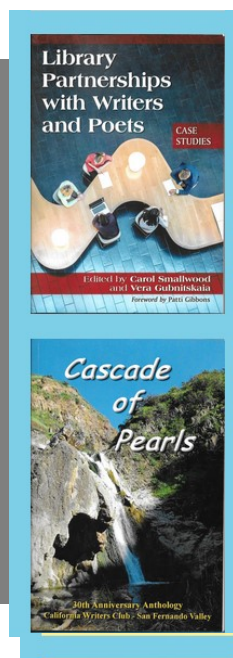
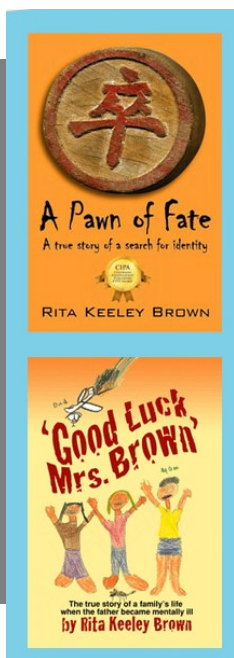
Each time I wind my clock or hear its beautiful chimes, my heart says, "Hi, Mom. Hi, Dad."



Works written or edited by CWC-SFV member: [Rita Keeley Brown](#)



COSTCO CLOCK



ORIGINAL CLOCK



# It's Not the Length that Counts... Or Does It?

By Anat Golan-Wenick



Short stories are more than an art form. For a writer seeking to establish themselves, it's a great way to get their name out there, and perhaps earn a few dollars along the way. Also, being a published writer can open agents' doors when a writer is ready to query their full-length novel.

There are two ways to approach the short-story market: Submit for prestige or for money. Whichever route you take, be sure to do your research. Find out the publication's circulation and follow their submission guidelines. Pay attention if there's a submission fee (Some pubs charge a modest fee that ranges around \$3.00-\$5.00). In recent years, podcasts dedicated to short stories have gained popularity as a new way for writers to get their work out there. The length of stories requested varies from one publication to another, so make sure you either have stories of different lengths to submit or have several versions of the same story. Now that you've written the story, it's time to submit:

## Readers Digest

Accepts short stories of 100-200 words. Prefer humorous pieces

Submission guidelines: <https://www.rd.com/contributorsubmissions/>

## The Lascaux Review

Talk about a beautifully designed website.

Accept all types of submissions (including poetry)

Submission guidelines: <https://lascauxreview.com/submissions/>

## The New Yorker

If you haven't heard of this one – you are in the wrong business.

Very hard to be accepted, but plenty of bragging rights if you do.

Submission guidelines: <https://www.newyorker.com/about/contact-verso=true> (scroll down the page to find the actual instructions.)

## The Atlantic

Another known publication. Notice they have different submission

emails for a myriad of subjects. Submission guidelines: <https://support.theatlantic.com/hc/en-us/articles/360011374734-How-do-I-submit-a-piece-for-editorial-consideration-at-The-Atlantic->

## Story

A tri-annually magazine that has been around for a long time and has published some of the most known short story writers.

Submission guidelines: <https://www.storymagazine.org/submissions/>

## The Sun

Another publication that has been around for a while. They accept poetry as well.

Submission guidelines: <https://thesunmagazine.org/submit/essays-fiction-poetry>

## American Short Fiction

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit literary organization dedicated to the art of short stories. Submission guidelines: <https://americanshortfiction.org/submityourwork/>

## East of the Web

The site is estimated to receive 500,000 visitor each month, so it's worth checking out. Submission guidelines: [http://www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/index.php?p=submissions/20131\\_1](http://www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/index.php?p=submissions/20131_1)

## The Threepenny Review

Unlike many other magazines which only accept online submissions, this publications allows regular mail submissions as well. Submissions guidelines: <https://www.threepennyreview.com/submissions/>

## The Virginal Quarterly Review

Their submission periods are short, but the pay is high. Submission

guidelines: <https://www.vqronline.org/about-vqr/submissions>

## New England Review

Published 4 times a year and is available in both print and eBook.

Submission guidelines: <https://www.nereview.com/ner-submissions/>

## North American Review

Considered the oldest publication in North America. Submission

guidelines: <https://northamericanreview.submittable.com/submit>

## Asimov's Science Fiction

Writing science fiction short stories? Then head to this publication that is all about the subject. Submission guidelines: <https://www.asimovs.com/contact-us/writers-guidelines/>

## Cricket

Writing stories for the young audience? This publication is all about

kids and parents. Submission guidelines: <https://cricketmedia.com/faces-submission-guidelines/>

Before you submit, [The Write Life](#) offers the following advice:

- Read through the literary magazines to get a better idea of the writing style and what they are looking for.
- Keep a submission log to ensure you don't submit the same story to a publication (this is especially important if a fee is required for submission).
- Make sure to submit during the open submission period. Some magazines will only accept submissions during certain times of the year.
- Be patient. It can take months to get a response.

Do you have a favorite magazine to submit short stories to?  
If so, share your information with this newsletter.



## Losing Father

By Pat Avery  
August 2016

My father mused  
I know it's my hallucinations  
But a bird walked through the living room  
carrying a suitcase.

I wonder  
Where was his bird traveling?  
Where was father going?

Gone is the father of my youth.

No more wisdom  
balanced thoughts  
nuanced opinions.

Only fears  
disturbing visions  
beyond his control.



# MY FATHER, WILLIAM ISENBERG: A RIGHTEOUS MAN

By Lillian Isenberg Rodich

**M**y Dad, William Isenberg, was an outspoken leader and tireless worker for charities. He escaped Russia in his teens but eventually joined his parents and twelve brothers and sisters who had found refuge in the United States. Young William earned an eighth grade diploma, worked hard as an adult and eventually became a successful businessman.

At the height of his business career, he was a leader of several charity groups who were the founding supporters of The City of Hope Hospital. This famous institution is renown for its treatment of patients here and around the world conquer cancer, diabetes, HIV/AIDS and other life-threatening diseases.



## My Dad, William Isenberg

A proud man, broad chested  
who flew high, and remained "big"  
He lived in a big house and always  
drove a Cadillac.

Most of all, Bill  
had a big heart  
and never failed  
to give and protect  
family and community.

He was one of the select group  
who founded the City of Hope.  
A story to be told!

Lillian Rodich



William works with his committee making plans for The City of Hope Hospital.



A beaming grandfather

William holds his grandson, David Rodich.





## **Finally Back Home**

**By Bob Okowitz**

**Dad's funeral is over,  
Two thousand miles away  
The world of my childhood,  
So long ago.**

**Now home, Rita holds me tight,  
The embrace healing.  
Tension releases, and releases some more.**

**My kids smile and laugh,  
It's wonderful to see them  
Enjoying their lives**

**I'm still empty,  
Family and friends left behind.  
Issues unsettled.  
Grieving continues.**

**Soon I'll be fully home.  
My heart will catch up.  
I'll be able to cry.**

**I need to cry  
And, smile. laugh,  
Go for a swim.**

**My father is gone,  
But I'm back home.**

# I Didn't Know Him

From *A Life of Stories*

By E. J. McBride

I didn't know him.

He was there, always there, never off by himself,

No business trips or separate vacations.

He had his chair at the head of the table.

But I didn't know him.

He went to work, he came home, on Friday nights he drank.

When he was younger, he drank in bars. He had friends then.

As the first-born, I remember that.

On some of those nights he made Mom cry.

I can remember the sound of that, the pain of that.

On those nights I hated him.

But I didn't know him.

They say he was good looking.

Blond, blue-eyed, as Irish as a Leprechaun.

But a son doesn't notice that. You notice what he does.

He drank. He smoked. He didn't touch. He rarely spoke.

He hated restaurants; he didn't trust the cooks.

At home he ate what he was given, and I never heard him complain.

Or compliment.

Should he have complained?

Would I have known him better?

He went to church on Sunday, every Sunday rain or shine.

But never spoke of God. Or what he believed in.

He didn't read. Never a newspaper, book, or magazine.

He watched TV, sitcoms mostly, stupid things.

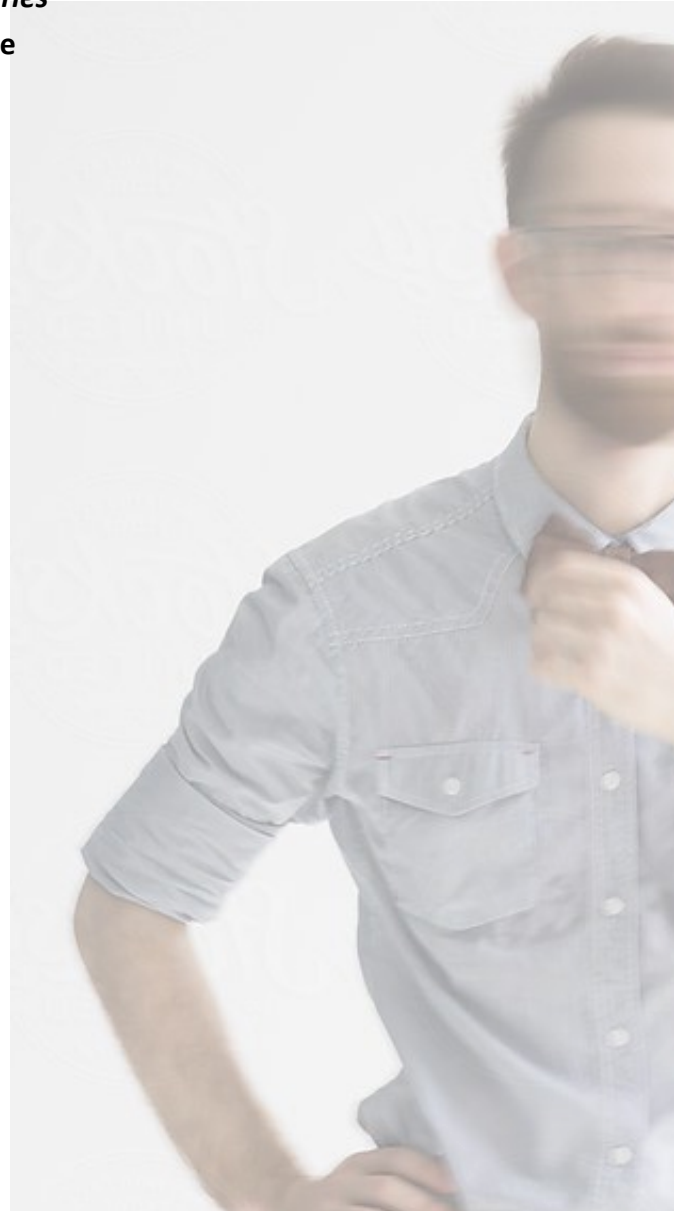
He liked baseball, but I never saw him throw a ball, any kind of ball, to anyone.

What kind of childhood did he have? Was it horrible? Something to be hidden? Something I wouldn't understand?

The fifth of ten born to immigrants, what did he do as a child?

Did he play? What did he like? What did he want?

What did he pray for in his church every Sunday?



He had two jobs – twenty-six years on one, twenty-five on the other.

Did he like his jobs? Did they like him?

With a ninth-grade education, he was happy to have a job, any job.

I believe that.

But he never said it.

He followed the rules, supported the family, never divorced.

When there was a war, he would have gone if called.

I believe that.

Though he never said it.

He is in me, like it or not, an uncomfortable part of me.

Sometimes I feel it.

The part that gets nervous, unbearably tense, in front of an audience of strangers. The part that hates change.

The part that can sit alone for hours at a time, without need for company or interaction.

Yet can't stand the thought of divorce. Or of being really alone.

He was a 20<sup>th</sup> Century Man, full of stoic silences and hidden crevices.

Neither hero nor villain.

He picked up nickels and dimes off the street, saved pennies like they were gold.

When his father left, he worked as a shoeshine boy not for fun but from necessity.

He never told me that; Mom did.

How many years did he do that? How many shoes did he shine, down on his knees in front of train stations with polish staining his fingers?

I didn't want to be like him. I knew that.

But I didn't know him.

They were married at nineteen. Did he have other women? Did he want them?

Would he have liked to visit the old country?

To see the astounding green hills of beautiful Ireland? The jagged rocky beaches of rugged Donegal?

To smell the sea all around him? To sit in a pub where everyone knew his name? And the names of his ancestors?

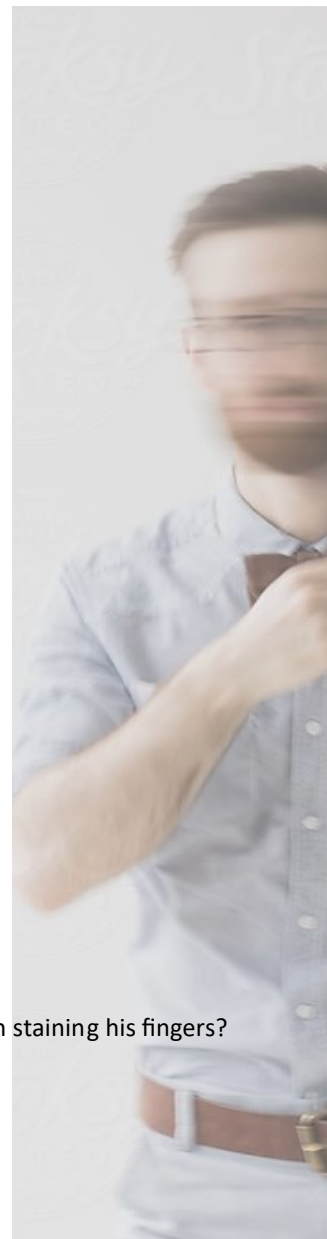
I have been there. I loved that.

Driving along those country roads I could almost see him there, sitting in front of a little white bungalow under gray Irish skies, smoking a cigarette, surrounded by the greenest greens with goats or sheep grazing in the distance.

Would he have loved that?

I believe that he would have. But I'll never really know.

Because I didn't really know him.



There was no sex in Lincoln, Nebraska in the 1950s. Babies arrived bundled in a sheet via a stork with a Western Union cap. I have a number of cards heralding my arrival sent to my parents from friends and relatives with that very image. Babies, as I was to learn some years later, require pregnancy and pregnancy required sex. There were no pregnant women in my little corner of Lincoln, Nebraska, therefore, there was no sex. The word pregnant was never uttered in middle-class households in our neighborhood. At the very most there would be hushed tittering when the phrase “in the family way” was spoken.

When a woman became pregnant and began “to show” she was shuttered away for some months because of her delicate condition. After the proscribed amount of time, she disappeared under cover of darkness and returned a few days later in more or less the same condition and shape she was in when last sighted. The only difference was she’d have a clutch of cards with the image of a stork and a miniature human being in tow.

Even on television, that window to the world beyond our sheltered neighborhood, there was no sex. There were only vague references to sex, but it required an educated and keen ear (something I was slow to acquire) to pick up the secret code words that hinted at conubial activities. The bedrooms of TV-land’s marrieds, when seen at all, always had separate twin beds.

Of course, as we all later found out later, there was a lot of twin-bed-hopping going on, most notably between Lucy and Desi. Lucy was pregnant with her first child during the filming of the pilot. Then, after shooting began for the second season she got pregnant again. The writers and producers had to scramble for a storyline when Lucille Ball started showing the effects of her activities. They finally decided to incorporate her pregnancy into the show except the word pregnant or pregnancy was never used. Lucy was simply “expecting”.

About this time our family switched to *Father Knows Best*.

We certainly knew there was a difference between men and women. One would have had to be blind to ignore the twin paraboloids carefully molded by the manufacturers of bullet bras and the primitive samplings featured in back issues of *National Geographic* magazine. However, these differences had little to do with sex and were more a matter of curiosity.

The inherent curiosity did of course spark further inquiry and for that we’d turn to the older and wiser brothers of our friends (my older brother didn’t have a clue). When we posed our questions to our elder siblings we were met with rolling eyes, smirks and all manner of behavior and insult that signified their superiority over us. This was followed by the admonition that the answers to our questions were not meant for mere children and in the unlikely event that we ever did progress beyond childhood, the day would come when we’d be taken aside by our fathers for “the talk”.

Everyone in our circle knew about the talk. We’d seen it happen to our friends and siblings. It was something to both look forward to and dread. One day our older male friends would go to the secret place with their father and a few hours later they would emerge with the knowledge of the great secret of men and women.

That secret, rather than being a wondrous revelation, turned out to be a heavy burden. After the talk our friends seemed to have lost something rather than gained it. Their steps were a bit slower, their backs a bit more bent. They tried to cover it up with their



smirks and haughty air, but what we saw were boys and young men weighted down with knowledge.

My father, being a man of economy, decided he’d initiate my brother, Dave, who was two years older, and me at the same time. We were told of the appointed date of the talk three days in advance, which gave us time to adequately mourn the loss of our childhood and prepare for the change.

On the big day we were instructed to go to our equivalent of the cave: the basement. The basement of 724 South 45th Street was a manly place with rustic knotty pine walls and chock full of steel tools, stacks of lumber, nails, nuts and bolts and a clanging, belching furnace. And it’s there where my brother and I waited. Waited in silence.

Then we heard the footfalls and saw the shadow of our father on the stairwell slowly lumbering step by step down the stairs. As he reached the bottom stair an earthy belch generated by the contents of a freshly uncapped Storz Triumph lager signaled his arrival. He pulled up a bar stool and sat down.

As we waited in anticipation he looked up at the ceiling, down at the floor and then focused on a point just a bit over our heads and proceeded.

“Your mother and I have determined that it’s time for you to know about men and women and the birds and bees. What I’m about to tell you is something that every young man needs to know, because soon you’ll be getting new feelings. They’ll be different than any you’ve had before and they’ll occur when you’re around girls. Those feelings will happen because of your peanuts and it’s important for you to know that you shouldn’t let a girl have your peanuts until you get married.”

“When I was a young man there were a number of girls who wanted my peanuts, and I wanted to give my peanuts to them, but I knew it was wrong, so I didn’t. Wait until you get married. That is the way you should use your peanuts.”

He paused, looked back toward the floor, and then scanned both of us, seemingly looking at each of us in the eye at the same time. “Any questions?”

Dave and I looked at each other and slowly and almost inaudibly said, “No sir.”

“Good,” said my father. “That wasn’t so bad was it?”

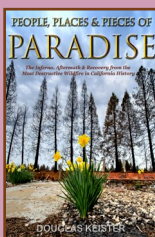
We both nodded in agreement. My brother and I watched silently as our father padded his way back up the stairs. He no doubt felt he had fulfilled his manly duty by passing the ancient torch of knowledge from one generation to the next.

As for Dave and myself, despite a mixture of relief and confusion we knew our lives had changed forever. What we were unclear about was when and where we would be given our peanuts.

©Douglas Keister  
Former member of CWC-North State Writers

**SEX!** Excerpted from 2023 *Heart-Land: Growing Up in the Middle of Everything Expanded Edition*

This story is also published in Keister’s 45th book: *People, Places and Pieces of Paradise* 2018 Paradise/Camp Fire.







## CULTURAL EXCHANGE

By Kathy Highcove

As published in *Voices From the Valley* 2002



He has recurring dreams  
Of an alternate universe.  
A different street,  
Another job,  
Sometimes two children, sometimes one.  
His house has altered,  
So has his wife.



He wonders if sleep slips him  
Into the dreams of  
A cosmic twin, who then dreams  
Of this earthly dimension, seeing  
Familiar pictures in different colors.

And he asks himself  
If he could live in his dreams,  
Would he follow the same roads?  
Or linger in the looking glass,  
Exploring worlds with different colors.



## CWC-SFV CLUB INFORMATION

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**T**he 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 hybrid meetings, in person and via Zoom, on the first or second Saturday of each month, September through June. Please refer to the program calendar for exact dates. Meetings are free for all CWC members from all branches throughout the state.

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.

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 information and reviews on prior monthly speakers please go to [monthly editions of the Scribe](#) at [PUBLICATIONS | San Fernando Valley Writers \(cwc-sfv.org\)](#)

For further information about the CWC-SFV critique groups, contact Marlene Bumgarner at: [marlenebumgarner@gmail.com](mailto:marlenebumgarner@gmail.com)

If you are interested in additional information about our San Fernando Valley branch of the California Writers Club, please check out our website at: [CWC-SFV.org](http://CWC-SFV.org)