



The Valley Scribe



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

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SPEAKER TOPIC FOR MAY: WRITING REALISTIC POLICE PROCEDURES

The San Fernando Valley Branch of the California Writers Club is pleased to welcome police veteran and author Adam Plantinga as the keynote speaker on Saturday, May 6th at 1:00 pm via Zoom, with a presentation titled "Writing Realistic Police Procedures."

Working on a crime story and want to sound authentic? Twenty-one year police veteran Sgt. Adam Plantinga will talk us through the various aspects of real-life police work crucial to writing a crime-related novel or screenplay, including:

1. Shots Fired/The Use of Force.
2. Investigations
3. Police Procedure and Culture
4. CSI
5. The Street.

He'll discuss bullet wounds, eyewitness reliability, Miranda Rights, how hard it is to kick down a door, car chases, the myth of the lone investigator, and much more!

Plantinga was a Milwaukee police officer from 2001 to 2008, and is currently a sergeant with the San Francisco Police Department assigned to street patrol. He lives in the Bay Area with his wife and daughters.

His first book, *400 Things Cops Know*, was nominated for an Agatha Award and won the 2015 Silver Falchion award for best nonfiction crime reference. The book was hailed as "truly excellent"



Adam Plantinga

by author Lee Child and deemed "the new Bible for crime writers" by *The Wall Street Journal*. Members might be interested to know that Adam went through ninety literary agents before he found a publisher for this book!

Next came another nonfiction work, *Police Craft*, then Adam moved on to fiction. His debut novel, *Nothing Like Easy*, about an ex-cop caught up in a prison riot, is scheduled to be released by Grand Central Publishing in late 2023.

For more information on this popular speaker, visit www.adamplantiga.com

Hope to see you there!

All members of the CWC-SFV will receive a Zoom invitation to this presentation. Members of other CWC branches should contact Zoom host, Anat Wenick, at this address by noon on May 5th: SFV.CWC@gmail.com for an invitation to register. Guests may purchase admission at www.cwc-sfv.org by noon on May 5th. After purchasing admission, guests will receive a Zoom invitation. We regret that we cannot accommodate late requests.



Books
by
Adam
Plantinga





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
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



Karen Gorback, Ph. D.—Candidate For President

Karen 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 bylaws 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.



the 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.

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

Patricia Avery—Candidate for Treasurer

Upon 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.



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.

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

The CWC-SFV’s annual election of officers will take place in June via email. We will need a quorum of our club’s members to vote, so please be certain to return your ballot in June. In the coming weeks, please check your email often.



Thank you,
Heather Bradshaw
Kathy Highcove
2023 CWC-SFV Nominating Committee



LUZMARIA ESPINOSA IS LIVING HER DREAM

By Heather Bradshaw



April is National Poetry Month, and this year our club members were fortunate to welcome Ventura County Poet Laureate, Luzmaria “Luzma” Espinosa, to share some of her poetry, life story and activism with us. Luzma recited several poems, often pausing to discuss the inspiration and meaning behind them. Sometimes threaded throughout with serious messages about the environment or social injustice, Luzma’s poetry bursts with emotion

and is steeped in an appreciation of nature, our ancestors, and hopeful possibilities for our future.

She also recited some of her father’s verse. Her father, an agricultural worker, was an avid reader and orator. She described him as a natural poet. He encouraged her to read, which led her to spend many after-school hours at the local library, Young Luzma checked out classic novels, one after the other. It was the poet Robert Frost’s *The Road Not Taken*, that moved her to write poetry and author Helen Keller taught her to capture her feelings into words.

Today, Luzmaria also teaches poetry to fourth and fifth graders. She says she keeps her expectations high for her students so they might rise to higher levels of their own poetic skills. In her SFV presentation, she often stressed the importance of a child’s early exposure to books and words.

She prompts her young students to think about their deepest feelings. She asks them, “What is your dream?”

Using James Joyce as an example, she will copy words out of the lines of Joyce’s poetry and ask her students to put his poetic images and feelings into their own words.

Though Luzmaria is primarily a performance poet, her words and passion came across beautifully during our Zoom meeting. Our club members were fortunate that she shared her precious time and wonderful poetry with us. After her talk, she was open and receptive to the many questions and comments by our members.

As well as finding her performances at local festivals and fundraisers for women and workers’ rights, view her poetry on YouTube.

My thanks to all CWC members who attended Luzmaria Espinosa’s poetic presentation.



Luzmaria recites her poetry to a Ventura audience.

Music is Friend and Foe

By
Luzmaria Espinosa

*Music enraptures my soul
An impetus to my heart
It is living art,
To sing, to dance, to rock and roll.*

*Music gives rhyme and reason,
To the missing pieces in life.
It catapults laughter all season,
Healing spirits wounded by strife.*

*Music kisses the clear blue sky,
Whispering sweet nothings,
As autumn brush strokes,
Paint downtown Sacra* leaves that fly,
Contrasting colors rustle on the ground,
Shades and hues of oranges and browns,
Destined for mictlan**,
Like a pumpkin at our tables,
In the fall.*

*Music transforms you,
Into Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.
It is a time machine.
Whose piano notes,
Transpose Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra,
Billie Holiday, Elvis and Nat King Cole,
By special delivery to our living rooms,
To sing along with Victor Jara,
On an afternoon.*

*Music is a language,
Needing no translation,
It is friend, it is foe.*

* Sacra - Sacramento

** Mictlan – The underworld of Aztec mythology.

© Music is Friend and Foe. Copyright Luzmaria Espinosa. Permission granted by Luzmaria Espinosa.

MAY WORKSHOP OPPORTUNITIES

OFFERED BY TWO CWC BRANCHES



Submit to the 2023 Redwood Writers Prose Anthology One Universe to the Left Open to all CWC Members

Dear CWC members:

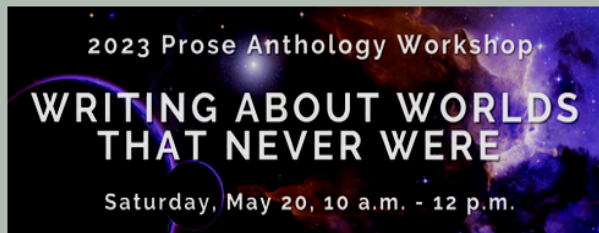
Pointed ears. Pointed teeth. Eyes that glow with magic or electricity. Aliens, robots, magicians, eldritch beings disguised as trees; what else might you find in a world different from ours? You are invited to explore the possibilities in this year's prose anthology, which has a theme of fantasy and science fiction. **Submissions will be open from May 1 to June 30. OPEN TO ALL CWC.** Excitement is in the air. Give us a glimpse of what's happening one universe to the left!

Information at redwoodwriters.org/2023-one-universe-to-the-left-anthology



If you're not sure where to start and would like a multitude of ideas, as well as a breakdown of what makes a good story, then join us at the **anthology workshop on May 20**. Anthology editor Mara Lynn Johnstone will discuss all things speculative fiction. Past anthology editor Roger Lubeck will go over anatomy of an excellent short story. And past editor Crissi Langwell will cover the specifics of submission requirements and how to submit to the website.

[REGISTER FOR WORKSHOP HERE](#)



Got Questions?

Send an email to editor Mara Johnstone at 2023anthology@redwoodwriters.org

High Desert CWC Hosts Writing Workshop on September 30 in Hesperia

The High Desert branch of the California Writers Club announces a special workshop to be held in the Percy Bakker Conference Center in Hesperia, CA, 9333 "E" Ave. The event will take place from 10:30am to 2:30pm. Insanely low early bird prices are available for a limited time at only \$35! Save the date now and make your reservation early to avoid missing out on this fantastically low price for an outstanding workshop valued at \$85.

Finish Your Book in Three Drafts: Crafting Fiction and Creative Non-Fiction with the Book Architecture Method

It's the age-old battle between the outliners and the pantsers – those who meticulously script every writing session, and those who plot solely by feel. Finding your unique approach requires a method rather than a formula. The Book Architecture Method has helped bestselling writers transform their messy manuscripts into polished books. Accomplished and aspiring writers alike will learn the secrets of how to painlessly create a complex narrative such as:

- what "plotting" actually means, and why there isn't one narrative arc but several
- how to make sure your book has one "theme" – and one theme only
- how to separate your work into scenes and use this disassembly to diagnose what's going wrong with your manuscript
- the secret to why some narratives feel like they are all coming together at an emotional pay-off while others do not

This workshop will introduce writers to a process for organization and revision that includes in-depth exercises to be completed throughout the day so that attendees leave with a new perspective on their book's core, its structure, and where the work of revision lies most clearly. The workshop assumes nothing of a writer's previous knowledge of technique, nor how much of their manuscript is complete.

Bio: Stuart Horwitz is a ghostwriter, independent editor, and founder of Book Architecture (www.bookarchitecture.com). His clients have reached the best-seller list in both fiction and non-fiction, and have appeared on Oprah!, The Today Show, and in the most prestigious journals in their fields. He is the author of three acclaimed books on writing: Blueprint Your Bestseller: Organize and Revise Any Manuscript with the Book Architecture Method (Penguin/Perigee), which was named one of the year's best books about writing by The Writer magazine, Book Architecture: How to Plot and Outline Without Using a Formula, which became an Amazon bestseller, and Finish Your Book in Three Drafts: How to Write a Book, Revise a Book, and Complete a Book While You Still Love It. Horwitz holds degrees in literary aesthetics from New York University and East Asian studies from Harvard University. He is also an award-winning poet and essayist. He and his family recently relocated to California from New England, something he should have done years ago.

Due to the very low price of this event, we cannot offer PayPal for the purchase of tickets, and there will be no refunds for this event unless the workshop is canceled by the HDCWC. All requests must be mailed to HDCWC, 17645 Fisher St., Victorville, CA, 92395. Send your check made payable to HDCWC in the amount of \$35 and include your contact email address and telephone number.

Please note: seating is limited and prices are subject to change substantially without notice. Visit www.hdcwc.com for more information or call 760.221.6367.

—Bob Isbill



SAN FERNANDO

Valley Writers

A BRANCH OF THE CALIFORNIA WRITERS CLUB



Whether you're a published author or have always wanted to write, please join our monthly Saturday meetings via Zoom to learn more about the craft and business of writing. Go to <https://cwc-sfv.org/> for membership information and single lecture admission prices. This series is free for CWC-SFV members.

CWC-SFV GUEST SPEAKERS FOR 2022-23



September 10, 2022

Christobel Kent—Best selling author of the "Sandro Cellini" series and several stand alone novels

"Writing Setting from Italy to Britain"



February 4, 2023

Laura Jensen Walker—Author, pantser writer, teacher and podcast host

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



October 1, 2022

Beverly Olevin—Prize-winning author of non-fiction and fiction stories, playwright, memoirist, and director,

"Power of the Pen: Short Stories and Beyond"



March 4, 2023

Mandy Jackson Beverly—Podcaster, author, teacher. and non-fiction and fiction writer,

"Getting Your Book Published in the Modern World."



November 5, 2022

Vincent Virom Coppola—Author, producer, director, writer of screen]plays, plays, philosopher, UCLA professor and lecturer

"The Power of Myth in Story-telling."



April 1, 2023

Luzmaria Espinosa—The official Ventura County Poet Laureate, serving as ambassador to the Ventura community for poetry.

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



December 3, 2022

IDacre Stoker—International best-selling author, researcher, presenter, lecturer, and great-grandnephew of Bram Stoker,

"The Mystery Behind the Research and Writing of Dracula."



May 6, 2023

Adam Plantinga—Author of *400 THINGS COPS KNOW*, a collection of facts, anecdotes, and reflections from police work.

"Writing Realistic Police Procedures."



January 7, 2023

Angie Chatman—Freelance writer, published in magazines, zines, anthologiers, editor and podcast story teller

"The First Drafts Club."



June 3, 2023

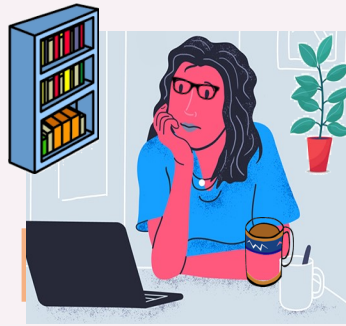
Ross Berger—Author, producer and screenwriter for live-action television, animation, video games, and digital series.

"Writing for Video Games and New Technologies"

In Case You Have A Book You Want to Query

Compiled by Anat Golan-Wenick

Every chance we get, and as a service to our members, we compile lists of literary agents who are currently open for submissions. If you have a book ready for publication, polish those query letters and get to work. However, before you hit that “send” button, there are a few do’s and don’ts to remember:



legit or a scam are Writer Beware (<https://www.sfw.org/other-resources/for-authors/writer-beware/>), Agentquery.com (https://www.agentquery.com/writer_bs.aspx), and Query tracker (<https://querytracker.net/>).

2 Follow the submission guidelines. Don’t give an agent a reason to reject your submission before they even read the first line.

1. We are doing our best to vet the companies we recommend, but it never hurts to check and double check to ensure the company’s reputation. A few red flags to keep in mind: a reputable company will never ask you for money. A reputable company will usually have a list of clients and books they have published, and a reputable company will not call you to say that they just happened to see your book somewhere and wish to publish it. A few places you can consult to see if an agency is

3. Companies often frown on querying more than one agent with the same book, or if you bombard them with follow up emails or calls trying to find out if your submission is still being considered. Most companies will provide a time frame of how long before you hear back. Be patient. They get a lot of submissions.

Now that you ‘re ready to query, below are a few places to consider:

1. [Aevitas Creative](#)

Website: <https://www.aevitascreative.com/contact>

Submissions: <https://www.aevitascreative.com/contact>

This is a full-service literary agency with more than thirty agents in five cities (New York, Boston, Washington DC, Los Angeles, London). Note that the company does not represent original screenplays or screenwriters.

2. [PS Literary](#)

Website: <https://www.psliterary.com/Submissions>

Submissions: <https://www.psliterary.com/submissions/>

The agency prefers to represent brands, so if you are not ready to invest your time promoting and participating in establishing your brand, this may not be the place for you. Categories they are representing include both fiction and non fiction: literary, commercial, romance, women’s fiction, mystery, thriller, science fiction, fantasy, LGBTQ, YA, middle grade, picture books, memoir, business, politics, health, wellness, cookbooks, sports, humor, pop science, pop psychology, pop culture, design, and lifestyle. Note that they do not represent poetry or original screenplays.

3. Gelfman Schneider Literary Agents

Website: <https://www.gelfmanschneider.com/>

Submissions: <https://www.gelfmanschneider.com/submission-guidelines.html>

This is a full service agency that can handle sub-rights like Foreign & Translation, Audio, First Serial as well as Film, Television and online media rights

Note that they do not represent poetry, screenplays or picture books.

4. Stonesong

Website: <https://www.stonesong.com/>

Submissions: <https://www.stonesong.com/submissions>

This socially-minded agency welcomes self-published authors who wish to work with an agent.

Note that they do not represent plays, screenplays, and poetry.

5. John Hawkins & Associates, Inc

Website: <https://www.jhalit.com/#Home>

Submissions: <https://www.jhalit.com/#Submissions>

One of the oldest agencies in the business. The agency does not specify whether there are categories they do not represent, but each agent has a list of what they are looking for.

(Continued on page 8)

6. New Leaf Literary & Media

Website: <http://www.newleafliterary.com/>

Submissions: <http://www.newleafliterary.com/submissions/>

The agency represents authors and illustrators. The agency does not specify whether there are categories they do not represent, but each agent has a list of what they are looking for.

7. Folio Literary Management

Website: <https://www.foliolit.com/>

Submissions: <https://www.foliolit.com/submit>

The agency welcomes first-time novelists. Note that they do not represent plays, screenplays, and poetry.



8. Stuart Krichevsky Literary Agency, Inc.

Website: <http://skagency.com/home/>

Submissions: <http://skagency.com/submission-guidelines/>

This New York based agency was established in 1995 and are on the lookout for fresh voices. The agency does not specify whether there are categories they do not represent, but each agent has a list of what they are looking for.

9. Victoria Sanders Agency (VSA)

Website: <https://www.victoriasanders.com/>

Submissions: <https://www.victoriasanders.com/submissions>

If you are passionate about your craft, you'll love the quote on their home page: "After your spouse, who you pick as your literary agent will be the most important decision you will make in your life."

10. Writers House Literary Agency

Website: <https://www.writershouse.com/>

Submissions: <https://www.writershouse.com/submissions>

This is a large agency that includes a digital department "focusing on the ever-changing technological landscape of contemporary publishing." Note that the agency does not represent screenplays.

11. Liza Dawson Associates

Website: <https://www.lizadawsonassociates.com/>

Submissions: <https://www.lizadawsonassociates.com/submissions>

The agency has offices in New York and Los Angeles with subagents all around the world. Note: the agency doesn't represent screenplays.

12. Fine Print

Literary Management

Website: <https://fineprintlit.com/index.html>

Submissions: <https://fineprintlit.com/submissions.html>

The agency represents established and new authors. Note that the agency does not represent screenplays, stage plays or TV scripts.

13. Gandolfo Helin & Fountain Literary Management

Website: <https://ghliterary.com/>

Submissions: <https://ghliterary.com/submissions/>

The agency has offices in New York, Los Angeles and Nashville. Note that the agency is open to all genres except poetry and erotica. They do represent screenplays as well. They are mainly interested in YA, Adult fiction, and Non-fiction.

14. Transatlantic Agency

Website: <https://www.transatlanticagency.com/>

Submissions: <https://www.transatlanticagency.com/submissions/>

The agency was established 25 years ago and represents hundreds of writers. Note that the agency does not represent screenplays, stage plays or musicals.

15. Liza Royce Agency (LRA)

Website: <https://www.lizaroyce.com/home-page-2/>

Submissions: <https://www.lizaroyce.com/contact/>

The agency is on the newer side and has been in business since 2011, but they have an established track record and are searching for strong voices and plot driven works. Note the different links to query novels and screenplays.

16. Park & Fine Literary and Media

Website: <https://parkfine.com/>

Submissions: <https://parkfine.com/contact/>

The agency is independently funded and have successfully negotiated film and TV rights. The agency does not specify whether there are categories they do not represent, but each agent has a list of what they are looking for. Note that the submission guidelines are on the left-hand side of the page.

17. Blue Ridge Literary Agency

Website: <https://blueridgeagency.com/>

Submissions: <https://blueridgeagency.com/submissions>

The agency is on the smaller side with three agents searching for material, and was established in 2009. The agency does not specify whether there are categories they do not represent, but each agent has a list of what they're looking for.

MY FAVORITE TIME OF THE DAY

By Phyllis M. Butcher

Yes, yes, I'm one of those obnoxious morning people. I roll out of bed, sometimes while it's still dark, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed; which makes three of us, counting the two dogs.

I sneak out of the house in my bunny slippers and snatch the L.A. Times from the driveway. I am now ready to begin my favorite time of the day.

Until I retired, I had no idea how much I would enjoy the luxury of leisurely reading the morning newspaper over a cup of coffee.

There's nothing special about my coffee, other than the fact that I didn't pay two dollars for it plus a tip for the barista just for doing his job. But I like it bold and strong, so after the first couple of sips I'm ready to face the day head on.

I must confess that I have a certain ritual when it comes to reading the paper. To ensure that my day will begin on the brightest possible note, I either dispose of or temporarily set aside everything except the one section that will leave me smiling, sometimes chuckling, lingering with wonder and admiration, or all of the above. So I top off my cup of coffee and settle back with the Obituaries.

I seriously began scanning the Obits a couple of years ago, not necessarily because of any sense of impending doom. In all fairness, I was keeping an eye out for names I might recognize, but I also found myself giving a second look at dates of birth that were the same as mine or very close. It does give one pause if there are more than one or two on a page. I really got hooked, though, when I started reading the small print beneath the photos. It was as if I had been ushered into the lives of perfect strangers. I was introduced to their families and friends and allowed to join them on their life journeys. I was privy to their successes and disappointments, and sometimes even got a first-hand look at their "bucket lists". I marveled at their acts of kindness and generosity and felt overwhelmed by their dignity and grace in the end stages of their lives--all of the above made possible by those who cared enough to write a final chapter for a loved one.

The first sentences usually contain phrases describing the decedent's departure, for lack of a better word. For example: "surrounded by family..." "slipped away gently..." "after a long



and brave battle with..." "passed peacefully..." But some are a bit more creative: "Paul was finally granted his angel wings..." "Betsy remained curious and enthusiastic about this world right up until she left it..." "John traded in his thoroughly consumed and worn-out earthly body..." Here are a couple that get right to the point: "Cause of death: too many birthdays." And: "She lived, she laughed, she loved, and she left." But one that I treasure is: "Larry danced into the light." How could I not want to read on

and know more about Larry? Yes, he was a dancer, a professional, and lived a captivating life. I would have given anything to dance with Larry, just once.

I find it fascinating to track the careers and professions of these new acquaintances as they pursued their dreams and goals. Many never deviated from the courses they chose to follow from the beginning.

Others took a few wrong turns along the way, as the man who "...after being or wanting to be a farmer, newspaper reporter, artist, editorial cartoonist, newspaper publisher, record company owner, writer, public official, television producer, TV newsman, cattleman and government bureaucrat, he settled on becoming a film director and producer and received four Oscar nominations." But I never cease to be amazed at the extent of their achievements, awards, honors and tributes, a litany often consuming several column inches of space. And there are always a few unexpected surprises, little gems that occasionally pop up. Who would have thought that a "gentle giant of a man born and raised in Podunk, Iowa ...," was responsible for inventing the little doodad that keeps the hair out of my eyes? If memory serves, he was the same one who "was an avid hunter although he never shot anything, but he loved the camouflage gear".

Many of the memorial tributes praise the decedents' special characteristics, often leading us into some very amusing territory. Some are simply stated: "She was an all-around good soul." "She moved through the water with grace, drive and determination, just as she moved through her life."

"She believed wholeheartedly in Johnny Mathis and brutal honesty." And speaking of "brutal honesty" here's one: "the more colorful the sequins, the stronger the perfume, the brighter the lipstick, the better. Her blonde, immobile hair stayed perfectly coiffed, even when she took off a helmet after riding on the back of a motorcycle in Aruba at age 82." Not to be outdone, this one's a classic: "He was prone to exaggeration on all matters, which suited him well in his career as an attorney, and he enjoyed his coffee black, his beers Mexican, and his women with a pulse."

Yet the most defining obit moments center less upon the departed and more about their soulmates. Without a doubt, the phrase of choice is: "He (or she) met the love of his (or her) life..." What follows is usually the "how and when" it happened. Some of the images are romantic, others less so. As an example of the latter, "She fell in love

with the back of his head in grammar school." Here's a personal favorite. HE: "I'll give you a ring" (meaning a phone call). SHE: "A diamond?" HE: "Maybe." They remained married for 60 years.

As I finish my coffee I can't think of a better way to start my day than by meeting new people, and I feel as if I've done just that. I'm also left wondering what my obituary might look like. Hopefully, they can dig up a decent photo, not one that looks like those fifty cent jobs taken in a booth at the bus station. Or God forbid, the one on my latest driver's license. When it's my time to move on, whatever gets written about me certainly won't be lengthy or take up too much space. After all, who says someone's life must be measured in column inches? But I do hope they'll mention my perfect attendance certificates from grades one through five. My mom was really proud of those.



When Duty Calls, How to Write an Obituary

By Kathy Highcove



As some of you might be well aware, when a parent, spouse, aunt, uncle, close friend or co-worker passes away, there is an immediate need of an obituary. The family of the deceased, whether your family or a the deceased person's family members, must send to a publication a summary of their loved one's life history. The publication might be a daily newspaper, a church, club, college alumni newsletter or perhaps a trade magazine. Or all of them. The obituary usually appears quickly in the community newspaper or is made public within a few weeks for other types of publications.

If the obituary is going to be published before the funeral, you should also include the date, time and place of the memorial service and whether it will be a public or private service, unless the family requests that there should be no funeral information.

An obituary, in my estimation, after writing several for both family and friends, is a genre unto itself. The tricky part is combining basic information like dates of birth and death, the age of the deceased, his/her hometown, places of education and employment, names of relatives and offspring, and sometimes: cause of death. Also, be mindful that every publication has different word count requirements that must be followed or someone at an editorial desk will make their own cuts and deletions and you may be very unhappy to read the results! Always, always, ask for an editor's word allowance and any other details about content before you start your composition. And then, adjust your text and respect the publication's word limit.

Besides the basic life and death information, an obituary might include a quote that is uplifting, laudatory, poignant, interesting, amusing—in other words—a statement that *celebrates* the life of the deceased. As CWC-SFV member Phyllis Butcher pointed out in her essay on why she enjoys reading an obituary, "It was as if I had been ushered into the lives of perfect strangers. I was introduced to their families and friends and allowed to join them on their life journeys." In other words, Phyllis loves to read a good story.

If someday you're asked to write someone's life story in 900 words or less, don't panic or stress about this task. If you're a writer, you know how to write a good story. You might start your story/obit with the basic details of the person's passing followed by his/her life history. Roll up your storyteller sleeves and create an entertaining story. Touch briefly and tactfully on any physical or personal challenges. Portray the deceased in a positive light; tell your readers why folks loved or respected this person. Finally, after you've written, revised and submitted the obituary, raise a glass and toast a life well lived!

An excerpt from Sylvia's memoir, *Memories Revisited*.

If I asked Mama what she would want me to say about her, I think she would say "I love my family. I am a 'balabusta', a good housekeeper, a good cook, and a good Jew."

I keep a clean house, wash the floors and put newspaper down on them every Thursday. On Friday I cook chicken and chicken soup for Friday night and cut up a Greek salad for Shabbos, then cut up some chicken to put in the salad when Trikala (that's me, Sylvia) and Bernie get home from the movies on Saturday afternoon.

On Monday I wash clothes. I hang them on a clothesline between two apartment buildings when we live in The Bronx, New York. In the country (New Jersey) in the summertime, I wash by rubbing the clothes with Ivory Soap on a metal wash-board in a large basin of rain water, then hang them on a clothesline with clothespins to dry in the sun. Later, in California, things get easier, because we have a washing machine and a dryer, but sometimes I still hang the sheets out to dry, because they smell so good from the fresh air.

I iron on Tuesday. In New Jersey, I have to heat the iron on a kerosene stove, but in our apartment in The Bronx, I at least have an electric iron, and later even an electric mangle. I learned to use it so good that I can even iron shirts on it as well as sheets, pillow cases and table cloths, of course.

Wednesdays I go shopping for groceries. In New York I go to Jennings Street, and first to the fish market. I watch the fishes swim, and when I see the one I like, the one that is the right size and looks healthy, I point to it and say "That one." And then I wait for it to be cleaned and scaled. Sometimes I buy flounder to fry, other times pike and whitefish for gefilte fish balls. If the scaler does a good job, I might give him a penny.



Emma Rubin

Next comes the chicken. After I pointed to the chicken I wanted, the Schake, a special man, who was allowed to do so, wrung the chicken's neck, then slit its throat and hung it up by its feet. Then the plucker plucked out all of the feathers. If she did a good job, I might give her a nickel.

Fresh fruits and vegetables are bought from the fruit and vegetable stands and challah from the bakery.

Morris brings home the milk, butter, cream, sour cream and eggs. He is a milkman, you know. Oye! I have to schlep those bags of food home. I carry two or three big cloth shopping bags about six blocks. Sometimes I pay a little boy a nickel or dime to help me carry the bags home, and upstairs to the third floor. Then I put most of the food into the icebox. The iceman comes three times a week, Monday, Wednesday and Friday. He brings up a big block of ice, a twelve or sixteen-inch cube, and lifts it into the top of the ice box. Later we bought a Frigidaire Refrigerator.

I loved my children, Sylvie and Bernie, and my husband Morris. Taking good care of my family was my life. To cook and clean was how I showed my love. Every day I dusted, and swept and cooked and did dishes.

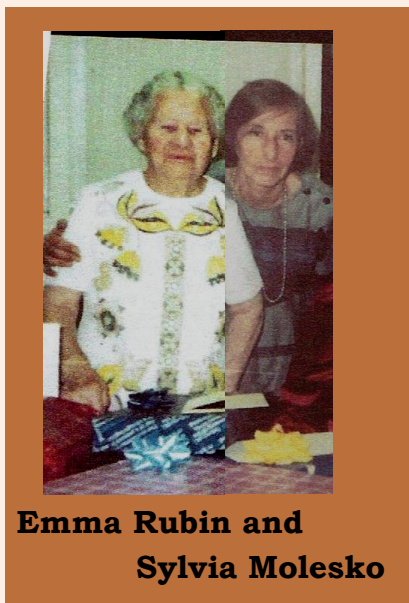
*I cooked very good. Let's see...I cooked oatmeal or farina and made sure that Sylvie and Bernie eat it all before I let them go off to school. I made egg, tuna, or salami sandwiches for them to take to school. Maybe some sugar cookies shaped like hearts **or diamonds** too. For dinner I made 'from soup to nuts'... all kinds of good and healthy foods. Ach, the soups! Vegetable, chicken with noodles or rice or matza **balls, lentil, split***

(Continued on page 12)

pea, potato soup, schav (a cold cabbage soup), and borsht. What kind of soup couldn't I make?

My Greek salad took more than an hour to prepare, on the shredder, grater and cutting board. Carrots, cucumbers, radishes, green onions, bell pepper, celery, some shredded cabbage, all together with lemon juice and mayonnaise, then packed into clean mayonnaise jars. So much, that we would have it for days. I added salt and diced tomatoes just before we ate. The salad kept better that way, and Moe didn't like tomatoes.

Chicken, meats, fish! I ground chuck roast, by hand, in a metal meat grinder that is attached to the table with a vise. After adding egg, grated onion, and matzo meal, I would shape it into little oval cutlets and fry them, or bake a meatloaf with a surprise hard-boiled egg in the middle. I did not buy gefilte fish in a jar - I ground the two or three kinds of fish by hand, mixed with a pinch of kosher salt, pepper, onion, and matza meal ...oye, so good!



Emma Rubin and Sylvia Molesko

Did I mention my lugshen (noodle) pudding, potato pudding and potato pancakes, matza pancakes and matza brie (fried matza)? Not to forget blintzes, and kishka...To die for! Was it appreciated? Maybe. No one ever said, so I had to ask. I could also tell if they ate seconds, asked for thirds, accepted fourths. Ess mein kinderlach, ess. (Eat my children, eat.)

With all that hard work, Mama still 'kept herself up.' She would say, "A little powder and a little paint makes an old woman look like what she ain't." She was proud of her curly hair, which she wore fairly short. "Do you like my new permanent wave?", she would ask a new acquaintance, "God gave it to me." She would then boast. She always wore an apron in the kitchen, or when doing housework, and she usually wore a flower-printed housedress, that buttoned or zippered or snapped down the front.

Mama was a religious person. On Friday night she would 'bench lights', which means light the Sabbath candles. While wearing a scarf to cover her head, circling the air with her arms, she would whisper the blessing to herself **and God. So I never learned how.**

She kept a kosher house, keeping meat and dairy products separate, and she had two separate sets of dishes to use for Passover. Services in the synagogue were attended on important holydays, and in later days, when living in Sun City, California, on a regular

basis in the temple that they helped build there. When I was little, and asked 'why?' questions, I seldom got satisfactory answers, just "God says", or "That's just the way we do it." For Mama, that was enough of an answer.

Mama had a good sense of humor, often using play-on-words, like the teacher asked her class, "Who can use the words commercial and official in the same sentence?" A little Jewish boy raised his hand and said "I can. When Mama calls me to come in for dinner, she sometimes

says 'Come Mershel, eat a fishel.' "

Here's another one of her favorites: "Johnny's mama forgot her keys in the house, so she calls in through the window, 'Johnny, throw my key out the window.'" So Johnny throws his brother, Mikey, out of the window."

Honestly, Mama taught me to pun! She taught me other things as well, but that's another story.

Popular Yiddish Sayings about mothers:

Ein mama dergreykht mer vi a hundert lersers. "One mother achieves more than a hundred teachers."

Vos a kind zol nit der'raiden vet di muter im farshtain. "Whatever a child babbles, its mother will understand."

“What’s next?” my spouse inquired as we leaned against the lip of the Congressional fountain. “We’ve one day left here in Washington DC.”



“Remember the nightly body count on the evening news?” he said while slowly turning pages. “Here they are in black and white. To find Chuck, we must first find the Oregon section, and then the list of casualties for the city, Salem, your hometown’s page. Okay – right here I see listed: Charles Burrell, who died in 1969.”

“I need to find my old classmate, Chuck Burrell. He died in Vietnam in 1969 and his name is on the Vietnam Wall Memorial. Are you up for another long walk tomorrow?”

“No problem,” replied Joe, the former Air Force captain.

“That’s him!” I peered closely at the data next to Chuck’s name.

“Even though the official cause of death is listed as ‘non-hostile,’ I’ve reviewed Chuck’s service record in the National Military Records and interviewed Shelley, his older sister. Chuck died in a C-123 cargo plane that crashed after he heroically delivered ammunition to troops under fire. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross posthumously.”

The next day we walked a mile further than the day before. We found the Vietnam Wall War Memorial situated a few yards off a wooded path and settled into a shallow depression in the park. I stopped at the edge of the clearing and took in the clean lines of the structure and the profusion of green life rising over the wings of black granite. A group of people moved slowly back and forth on the sidewalk that ran the length of the monument. As they walked, adults and children brushed the etched names lightly with their fingertips as if they read stories told in Braille.

“Impressive. That’s a very special medal. C’mon, let’s go look for his name on the Wall. *Charles Burrell* should be etched on the 1969 panel of casualties.”

We joined the crowd’s slow horizontal movement past the wall sections, and scanned the plethora of names. Finally: “There it is! I see his name!” I felt a chill of recognition.

“Hal-le-lu-u-ia, I’ll fly a-way...” a gray bearded guitar player, his rough salt and pepper hair covered by a red bandanna, sang as he reclined under the white birch trees behind us. We remembered our mission, and slowly approached the memorial.

Charles Franklin Burrell – The full name of my grade school classmate, my wise-ass teen-aged buddy, my hometown casualty, was carefully etched on the ‘69 panel.

All Americans should see the Wall. All Americans should run their fingers over the engraved names of young men and women who died in the jungles, or in the air, or on the brown rivers that flowed like thick blood from the torn flesh of rice paddies and rain forest. Everyone should witness the painful resignation of families, gray-haired veterans and comrades who stand with bowed heads as they remember ... so much ... that can’t be put into words, just songs. Some veterans stood at attention and saluted the names of their fallen comrades and some left flowers, a poem and many tears.

Joe snapped my picture as I pointed to Chuck’s name. I closed my eyes and remembered his young face. I thought about his family’s grief when they learned he was gone. The guitar player now strummed a quiet tune. Joe put his camera away and we started walk back to our hotel. The sun was going down; the crowd thinned.

“Let’s go look for Chuck now,” I urged, “I think the kiosk over there contains the Book of the Fallen.’ ”

On the way back we revisited the Lincoln Memorial. We read again the moving speech at Gettysburg, also etched on a wall;

We continued down the low hill and joined the small crowd. We both fell quiet as we neared the solemn groups around the Wall, as if we’d joined a congregation in a quiet woodland chapel. We waited in line and in a few minutes, it was our turn to look through the tome of names.

It is rather for us, the living, we here be dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that, from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here, gave the last full measure of devotion—that, we here highly resolve these dead shall not have died in vain; that the nation, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, shall not perish from the earth.

“Such a thick book,” I said, as Joe flipped through the pages. “And the names are listed in small print. So many casualties!”

We left the Wall, and the great stone visage watched our forms move into the twilight. In the distance, the gold dome glowed, and hundreds of lights lit the dusk before us, like stars on a giant flag.

Long may it wave.

Sara Paints Clouds

Sara paints clouds
They float through
Her imagination
Like friendly ghosts.

Sunlight glows within
Their silvered edges
Scarves billowing
Across an eternal sky.

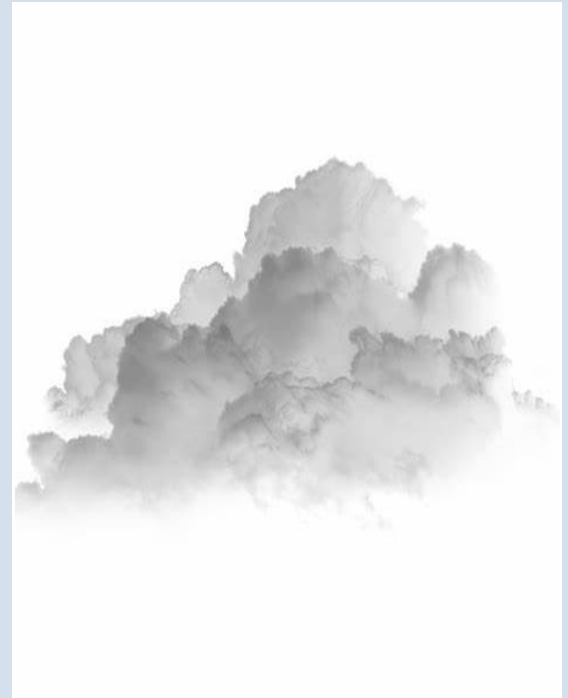
They quiver bravely
in a storm slashed sky
or scatter into wisps
feathering sunset.

Sara's clouds drift
across morning's rim
and waver reflected
in hidden lakes.

Sara sits quietly in her studio
and greets each changing season viewed
through her picture window,
her artist brushes poised

ready to paint clouds.

Lillian Rodich 2023



Weeds Poke, A Spring Poem

By Michael Edelstein

Weeds poke their green heads

From under the Astroturf

They can't be suppressed

Life will have its way again

There may be a hiatus

Through which we wince and wonder

Crying when will there be light?

There's been too much desert drought

And stop the atmospheric

Coming next will be mudslides

Then I'm freezing my butt off

Soon we will wail, "It's too hot"

Through it all the weeds flourish

CWC-SFV CLUB INFORMATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA WEBSITES

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.

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

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

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