



The Valley Scribe



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

NO LUCK MARKETING YOUR BOOK? VANESSA KNOWS HOW TO BE HEARD

By Heather Bradshaw

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The San Fernando Valley Branch of the California Writers Club is pleased to welcome crime and YA author, VANESSA FOX O'LOUGHLIN (aka SAM BLAKE), as the keynote speaker on Saturday, December 2 at 1:00 pm via Zoom with a presentation entitled, "Beating Rejection."

Vanessa Fox O'Loughlin writes crime as Sam Blake, the multiple No 1 bestseller who has been shortlisted for Irish Crime Novel of the Year three times. Her 7th bestseller, *The Mystery of Four*, and her recently published YA debut, *Something Terrible Happened Last Night*, are both in stores now.



Vanessa Fox O'Loughlin

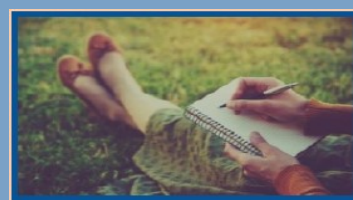
Our guest speaker will highlight what must be done to give your work the best possible chance of getting published and lessen the odds of rejection. She'll explain her blueprint to move your book from a keyboard to a bookshelf. She'll discuss exactly what the industry is looking for – what's hot and what's not, and how best to submit your work. She'll show you how to attract a publisher and build your author platform – and she'll explain exactly what that means. This workshop will give you concrete ways to improve your pitch and give you a thorough understanding of how the business works in a relaxed and informal atmosphere where you can ask all those tricky questions.

Vanessa is the founder of Europe's biggest writing resources website: the award winning [writing ie](http://writing.ie), the Writers Ink online-writing group and Murder One, Ireland's International Crime Writing Festival. Vanessa is a board member of the Society of Authors, and a fellow of the RSA. Having developed a range of initiatives in the writing world, she is a champion for emerging writers, working with agents and publishers, both in the UK and Ireland, spotting new talent. Vanessa joined the Board of the Crime Writers Association in 2021 and takes a dynamic lead in organizing National Crime Reading Month

Just to note that a few months ago, I attended this very informative seminar online and thought it would be a great one to share with the club. Vanessa is one of those writers who truly wants to help other writers. Please have your questions ready for the Q and A after Vanessa's presentation. Find out more at www.samblakebooks.com.

Vanessa will be joining us via Zoom on the big screen at the MPTF. We encourage you to attend in-person to meet and talk with other members about your writing. Looking forward to seeing 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, by noon on December 1st at SFV.CWC@gmail.com for an invitation to register. Guests may purchase admission at www.cwc-sfv.org by noon on December 1st. After purchasing admission, guests will receive a Zoom invitation. We regret we cannot accommodate late requests.



THE BEST PARTS OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

Happy December! Whether you celebrate a special holiday or not, December is a good time to reflect on the past year's journey around the sun and prepare for another! My year was extraordinarily busy, dividing my time between this esteemed writers' community, the California Senior Legislature, a second novel, and several short writing projects.

The most significant event of the past year for our club has been the transition from fully virtual meetings to a hybrid format – fulfilling members' requests to return to in-person meetings, in addition to Zoom. Kudos to Phyllis Butcher and Anat Wenick who have done a Herculean job coordinating with the MPTF to ensure that the space and technology work for everyone. We're still fine tuning our procedures but continue to make excellent progress.

As many of you know, I also volunteer as a Senior Senator in the California Senior Legislature. Each spring, CSL members begin researching potential legislative solutions to problems impacting older adults and people with disabilities throughout California. Then we meet each October to select our top 10 legislative priorities. Following the selection, we contact elected officials to find either an assembly member or state senator to carry our proposals as bills into the upcoming legislative session. Advocacy work is exciting and important. It's how citizens make their voices heard in the halls of government. If you have ever thought, *There ought to be a law* about something pertaining to older adults and people with disabilities, please share your ideas with me. My research begins again in January.

Finally, in my free time, I continue to work on a second novel, as well as a variety of short projects. My novel manuscript is titled "Naomi's Second Chapter" and follows the surprising first year of retirement for an elementary school principal in a small town in the California desert. I also have a children's picture book manuscript titled "Mazel's Mishpacha" which I hope to hybrid-publish in the next several months.

Writing fiction, whether for adults or children, fills me in many ways. I love character development and dialogue, as well as the challenges of weaving together plot lines and inviting readers into an imaginary setting that feels as real as their own backyards. But what I enjoy most is the opportunity to share themes I feel are the best parts of human existence – including the importance of family, the value of education, the joy in work, and respect for diversity, including people of all ages and abilities. I've often said that an engaging story is far more impactful than a brilliant research brief. As an example, my doctoral dissertation explained the merit of postsecondary education for single parents, which was the theme of my first novel *Freshman Mom*. Which do you think had the greater readership and potential impact on people's lives?

I hope you have a joyous December and take time to tell a lot of good stories – either around the table with family and friends or on your computer.

By Elaine L. Mura



Joan Gelfand

At the CWC-SFV November meeting, CWC hosted author Joan Gelfand, who spoke on “You Can Be a Winning Writer.” Gelfand has published short stories, novels, poetry and her latest entry (for authors) and shared her expertise with CWC members. She

emphasized the importance of “who you know” and “hard work,” using the 4 Cs for successful authorship – Craft, Commitment, Community, and Confidence.

She spoke about people complaining that they were having trouble getting published. To quote Gelfand, “It takes a lot of work...a slow and measured approach to building up your reputation and your presentation.” She cited an old business adage: “Plan your work, and work your plan” as a key to successful writing.

She noted that authors must have a systematic approach to submissions. Since the average acceptance rate for submissions is only four percent (with a range of two to six), it will take a lot of work and sending out more and more submissions – and handling rejections as normal for the writer. After all, the author of “Harry Potter” reportedly had dozens and dozens of rejections – until finally she submitted to Scholastic Publishing (which was going under at the time). They took a chance on her, and the rest is history.

Gelfand also discussed how to build your writer’s resume. She suggested that you start where it is easiest to be published – online in various digital publications which are always looking for content. Then gradually branching out to smaller print publishers and finally the Big Five. She also observed that building your platform is critical. To do this, she suggested joining clubs, contacting alumni associations and professional associations, and finally going to social media.

She added that there are many subgroups in social media – and that going to your subgroup works best. At the present time, she noted that Linked In and You Tube are especially popular sites. But she also cautioned that the author should not get emotionally involved with likes: “Just see it as a part of the job...

and don’t forget that age is not a barrier...writers come in all ages.”

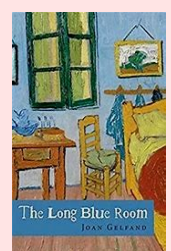
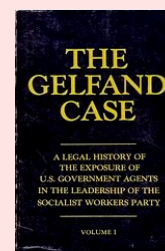
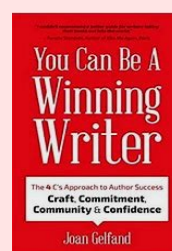
Gelfand also elaborated on Community. She emphasized the importance of getting involved with other writers. She indicated that her world opened up when she joined the Women’s National Book Association, where she was invited for readings and giving talks. Since this is a national organization with 11 chapters throughout the U.S., her name slowly became known.

She added that reciprocity is important. You can both get and give to other writers. She felt that developing ambassadors helps to get your name out. The more fans, the better. The issue of Confidence was also emphasized. Gelfand saw a relationship between confidence and success – the more successes, the more confidence you feel. To help build your success, she suggested that, while writing larger projects, you also write smaller thing (like articles). That way, you keep your name out there and expand your network.

What about fiction and non-fiction? Gelfand indicated the big difference between the two. For non-fiction, the author must establish his/her credentials in that field. Since non-fiction sells three times more than fiction, writing non-fiction is clearly important for the writer’s career.

Finally, Gelfand spoke briefly about promotion after you are published. She strongly suggested that the author let people know what he/she has done. This could be through social media, professional groups, friends and family, other authors, etc. Of critical importance is getting attention for the book. And she cautioned, “Don’t forget that your platform is multi-pronged, and it’s a slow and methodical process.”

Joan Gelfand Books



STATE CWC LEADERS TAKE TIME TO GIVE CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

By Bill Isbill HDCWC member

and Director of Advertising and Promotions at California Writers Club

The Jack London Award is a service award honoring outstanding service to the branch. The Ina Coolbrith is given to those providing outstanding service to the state organization, or Central Board.

The CWC honored Jack London Award recipients from 22 branches on Sunday at the Holiday Inn in Oakland California, and three special awards of the Ina Coolbrith service Award. Those attending were given a great lunch in a semi-formal atmosphere and entertained with a slide show about the evolution of the many branches. Thanks go to Joyce Krieg, who coordinated the event, and to our state President, Roger Lubeck.



Front row, from left:

Tim Flood, SF Peninsula; Diane Vickers, Marin; Carole Wagener, Coastal Dunes; Janis Kunz, East Sierra; Criss Langwell, Redwood; Jill Hedgecock, Mt. Diablo; Karen Gorback, San Fernando Valley; CWC President Roger Lubeck.

Middle row, from left:

Kymerlie Ingalls, Berkeley; Mike Apodaca, High Desert; Constance Hanstedt, Tri-Valley; Donee Harris, Writers of Kern; Gloria Pierrot-Dyer, Sacramento; Lynn Tosello, North State; Pam Van Allen, San Joaquin Valley; Carole Bumpus, SF Peninsula (Ina Coolbrith honoree).

Back row, from left:

Trenton Myers, South Bay; Lenore Hirsch, Napa Valley; Judy Kohnen, Inland Empire; Elizabeth Tuck, Mt. Diablo (Ina Coolbrith honoree); Sandy Moffett, Writers of Kern (Ina Coolbrith honoree).

Missing: Scott Davidson, Fremont; Katherine Brown, Writers of the Mendocino Coast; Nancy Middleton, Central Coast; Mary Vensel White, Orange County.



Several tables of Jack London honorees and their guests enjoyed their luncheon at the Oakland Holiday Inn. After all, it's not often that members of our far-flung CWC branches have the opportunity to meet face to face and exchange interesting news and ideas about the writing craft.

Congratulations to all the Jack London Award winners!



Joyce Krieg served as the CWC Chair of the 2023 Jack London/Ina Coolbrith Awards. She is also holds the position of CB representative for the Central Coast Writers.

It's time for our annual reminders (like them or not) that end of year gatherings and celebrations are just around the corner. We are inundated with ads from every source, catalogs, signage, music and jingles, food and edibles to tempt any palate. In our new normal, these not-so-subtle suggestions will fortunately include cautionary guidelines for good health practices. Safe gatherings, current updates on status of Covid and other new or ongoing threats, masking requirements, etc.

Despite the restrictions and mandated protocols, the freedom and leniency that we enjoy today were nonexistent three years ago. The Holidays in the first year of the pandemic were fraught with fear, uncertainty, disbelief and possibly most devastating of all, isolation. Nowhere was that more evident than on the Woodland Hills campus of the Motion Picture and Television Fund. The residents were literally confined to their quarters, just one of the many constraints implemented to avert the spread of Covid 19. Physical contact with their fellow residents, staff, family, and friends was indefinitely off

limits. This included the incredible number of MPTF Volunteers whom they saw daily and were an indispensable link in the chain for their care and contentment.

Looking back now, as one of those Volunteers I am reminded of the anguish we were experiencing at being unable to fulfill the needs of our residents. As much as they depended upon us, we were being deprived of the gratification and joy we received in contributing to their happiness and wellbeing. We, too, had been unceremoniously isolated with nowhere to go on our assigned days on the campus. It was akin to having lost our jobs with no notice. We grieved along with our charges who remained behind closed doors.

But we fought the battle bravely by following the rules and regulations, refusing to give in to despair, and above all, never losing our sense of humor. Which is exactly what prompted me, at the end of that traumatic year, to contribute this to The Spotlight, the MPTF Volunteer Guild's Monthly Newsletter.

DECEMBER 24, 2020

By Phyllis Butcher

(with apologies to Clement Clarke Moore, author of "TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS")

*'TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS,
AND ALL THROUGH THE HOUSE,
EVERYONE SLEEPING, HUBBY AND SPOUSE;
THE FACEMASKS WERE HUNG BY THE CHIMNEY WITH CARE,
IN HOPES THAT ST. FAUCI SOON WOULD BE THERE.*

*THE CHILDREN WERE NESTLED ALL SNUG IN THEIR BEDS,
WHILE VISIONS OF SCHOOL DAYS DANCED IN THEIR HEADS;
MOTHER AND FATHER, TIRED OF WRAPPING
HAD JUST SETTLED DOWN FOR A FEW HOURS' NAPPING.*

*WHEN OUT ON THE LAWN THERE AROSE SUCH A CLATTER,
I JUMPED OUT OF BED TO SEE WHAT WAS THE MATTER.
I RAN TO THE WINDOW TO CHECK OUT THE NOISE,
HOPING TO SEE A YARD FILLED WITH TOYS!*

*THE MOON UP ABOVE, BRIGHT AS COULD BE,
GAVE THE LUSTER OF MID-DAY TO WHAT I COULD SEE;
WHEN WHAT TO MY WONDERING EYES SHOULD APPEAR,
IT WASN'T A SLEIGH PULLED BY PRANCING REINDEER!*

*A SHINY RED FIRE TRUCK, AN AMERICAN FLAG
AND NOW I AM AWESTRUCK, A HUGE BULGING BAG!
UP WENT THE LADDER TO THE TOP OF THE ROOF,
AND UP WENT ST. FAUCI, OUT OF SIGHT IN A POOF!*

*I RAN IN THE HOUSE AND WAS LOOKING AROUND,
DOWN THE CHIMNEY ST. FAUCI CAME WITH A BOUND;
HE WAS DRESSED IN ARMANI FROM HIS HEAD TO HIS FOOT,
AND HIS CLOTHES WERE ALL COVERED WITH ASHES AND SOOT.*

*A BUNDLE OF GIFTS HE HAD FLUNG ON HIS BACK,
AND HE LOOKED LIKE A SALESMAN JUST OPENING HIS PACK.
HE WENT STRAIGHT TO WORK, HE COULDN'T BE QUICKER,
AND THAT'S WHEN I NOTICED WHAT LOOKED LIKE A STICKER.*

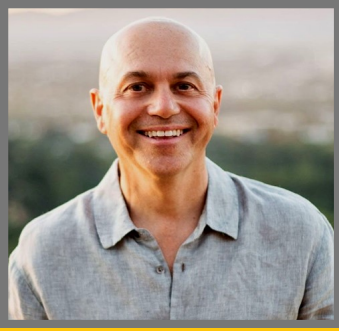
*IT WAS RED, WHITE AND BLUE, TOO SMALL TO BE READ,
I WAS TOO FAR AWAY TO SEE WHAT IT SAID;
BUT THEN I GOT CLOSER AND SAW WHAT WAS QUOTED:
THREE WORDS SAID IT ALL: "YES! I VOTED!"*

*AND THEN HE WAS PLACING SOME THINGS 'NEATH THE TREE,
THE WAY I WAS FACING WAS TOO HARD TO SEE;
NOW, LAYING HIS FINGER ASIDE OF HIS NOSE,
AND GIVING A NOD, UP THE CHIMNEY HE ROSE!*

*THEN WITH A STREAK, I HURRIED WITH GLEE
TO SNEAK A QUICK PEEK AT THE GIFTS 'NEATH THE TREE;
I STARTED TO LAUGH AS I CROUCHED ON ONE KNEE,
AND SAW WHAT ST. FAUCI HAD LEFT THERE FOR ME.*

*A BUNDLE OF FACE MASKS, ALL SHAPES AND SIZES,
TO SHARE WITH MY FAMILY WITH OTHER SURPRISES:
A MESSAGE OF HOPE FROM THE PEOPLE AT PFIZER,
AND TWENTY-FIVE BOTTLES OF HAND SANITIZER!*

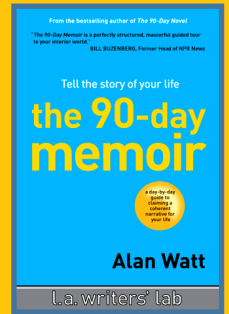
*I RAN TO THE DOOR TO WATCH THE TRUCK LEAVE,
WHAT HAD JUST HAPPENED WAS HARD TO BELIEVE!
AND I HEARD HIM EXCLAIM—WITH LOVE—I COULD TELL:
"MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL, STAY SAFE AND BE WELL!"*



High Desert CWC Offers Memoir Writing Adventure

By

Bob Isbill, CWC Publicity and Public Relations



The high Desert branch of the California Writers Club is scheduled to offer a special Zoom two-part meeting on memoir writing featuring Al Watt, author of *The 90-Day Memoir*. Memoir is the most popular genre of writing in the California writers club. That is why we feel that this memoir Project will be so valuable to our membership, and it is free! There is no charge whatever to participate in this program.

The HDCWC is continuing to do its book club type Zoom meetings featuring books by famous authors and interviews with the writers themselves. This trend began with Chris Vogler talking about *The Hero's Journey*. Then Dean Koontz spoke to the CWC answering questions on writing as he featured his newest book at that time, *The Big Dark Sky*. This continued to September 26 of 2023 featuring John Truby discussing *Anatomy of Genres*. All three were well received and popular with those attending.

To participate in the latest memoir writing adventure, we are encouraging our CWC members to buy the book, *The 90-Day Memoir*, which will be published on December 1 of 2023. We suggest you read the book, become familiar with the process, and then join us on Tuesday, January 30, 2024, at 6 PM to meet with Al Watt. At that time, he will talk further about his 90-day memoir program and respond to questions you may have about memoir writing. Watt is scheduled to begin a 90-day class on February 8, 2024. If you choose to join his class, he has a special offer available only to California Writers Club members, which he will explain at that time.

It is not required that you buy the book, but as we did with Chris Vogler, Dean Koontz, and John Truby, we encourage you to do so to fully experience what this project offers.

Al will meet again with us on June 25, 2024. Again, where those of you who have worked on a memoir during that interval you will be able to submit questions, and or discuss any challenges that you did not anticipate. Al Watt will be available to respond. To begin this writing adventure the only thing you need to do, if you choose to do it, is to buy the book. You can purchase it on Al Watt's website, [L.A. Writers Lab](#) or on [Amazon.com](#). If you are not familiar with this best-selling author and teacher, you may check out his credentials on his website.

Links to the meetings on January 30 and June 25 will be emailed to the membership so that you will have access to the project.

For more information, contact Bob Isbill at <risbill@aol.com>

Four Winter Tankas

By Michael Edelstein

The trees are molting
Our street is filled with brown leaves
That crunch underfoot
Limbs are almost denuded
Spring will be a while coming

The moon is regal
Wearing an ermine collar
Dressed in black velvet
With stars her loyal subjects
Wearing bright shining armor

Red green and yellow
Bright lights are hung from the eaves
Happily flashing
Celebrating the season
Christmas will quickly be here

Brrr tonight is cold
I'll wear a thick wool sweater
In California
That's revolutionary
Tomorrow I stay indoors





Whether you're a published author or "have always wanted to write," please join the CWC-SFV for monthly meetings at the Motion Picture and Television Fund Wasserman Campus in Woodland Hills. Meetings begin at 1 pm. Presenters will join us either in person or via Zoom on the huge screen in The Saban Center for Health and Wellness. You'll enjoy networking with other writers while learning more about the craft and business of writing. For more information and single lecture prices, visit <https://www.cwc-sfv.org>. Presentations are free for CWC members.

CWC-SFV GUEST SPEAKERS FOR 2023-2024

September 9, 2023



Join poet, photographer, author Hiram Sims as we explore the power, history and significance of the Ekphrastic poetry. We will identify homemade images and artwork that will be the basis of writing new poems. (Zoom)

February 3, 2024

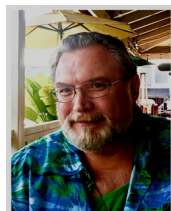
BLACK AND IN LOVE



Romance author, Synithia Williams, will talk about why she started writing romance novels and why she likes to focus on black love in her award-nominated stories. (Zoom)

October 7, 2023

A LONG STRANGE TRIP - A WRITER'S JOURNEY



NY Times bestselling author, Jonathan Maberry, will discuss how writing horror got him started in his writing career, share insider tips, fresh perspectives on the changes in the publishing trade, and strategies for getting in gear and getting in print. (Zoom)

March 2, 2024

THE HERO'S JOURNEY



Inspired by mythologist. Joseph Campbell, screenwriter, author and educator Christopher Vogler, will show us how to use the hero's journey to improve our creative writing. (In-person)

November 4, 2023

YOU CAN BE A WINNING WRITER



Award-winning poet and author of seven books, Joan Gelfand, will talk to us about various strategies to getting published. Her book, *You Can Be a Winning Writer: the 4c's of Successful Authors* was an Amazon #1 best seller. (Zoom)

April 6, 2024

PUTTING THE FUN BACK INTO WRITING



Kirsten Casey is a California Poet in the Schools, creative writing teacher, and the current Nevada County Poet Laureate. She wants you to enjoy writing, even if you feel undisciplined and blocked. (Zoom)

December 2, 2023

BEATING REJECTION



Best-selling author Vanessa Fox O'Loughlin, (aka crime writer Sam Blake), will discuss exactly what the industry is looking for and how best to submit your work. She will show you how to improve your pitch and build your author platform. (Zoom)

May 4, 2024

WRITING TRANSFORMED MY LIFE



Poet, writer, and activist, Luis Rodriguez, will share his poetry and discuss the transformative experience of writing his memoir: *Always Running, La Vida Loca, Gang Days in L.A.* (Zoom)

January 6, 2024

A COMPLICATED LIFE



Author, lecturer and BBC presenter, Paul Lewis, will talk to us about prolific Victorian author Wilkie Collins's incredible work ethic and his colorful private life. (Zoom)

June 1, 2024

COACH WOODEN AND ME



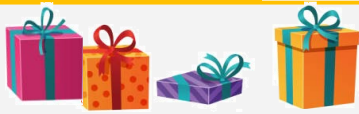
Author and award-winning columnist, Woody Woodburn, will discuss what we can learn from his memoir, *WOODEN & ME: Life Lessons from My Two-Decade Friendship with the Legendary Coach and Humanitarian.* (In-person)



WRAPPING PACKAGES

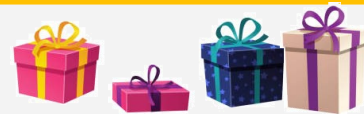
Wrapping packages presents or mail,
no matter the practice I always fail
to choose them so the paper blends
with the colors of the ribbons
which are never the right length
and Scotch tape that has no strength.
The scissors won't cut, the tape twists,
becomes hung up on my hands and wrists.
Now where are those scissors?
They were right here.
I don't know how they could disappear.
The wrapping's too short, too narrow, too worn.
Finally I finished! My heart feels light.
While shopping next Christmas,
I'll pass lighted trees,
go up to the counter and say,
"Gift wrap , please."

First published in the December 2011 Valley Scribe
Composd by the late SFV member Lenora Smalley



A GIFT TO THE WRITER ON YOUR LIST

By Anat Golen Wenick



No matter what holiday you celebrate this festive season, it's fun to find that special gift with your name on it. If you have a writer on your list, here are a few suggestions anyone with a story in their heart would love to get.



First on the list is this author's favorite item, and is categorized under "don't bother to wrap, I'll use it right away." If the doctor tells you to exercise more, but you struggle to just find some free time to write, why not combine the two and be twice productive, satisfying your physician, your body, and your mind. Not on the cheap side these \$499.99 [FLEXISPOT Exercise Bike](#) are currently 30% off on Amazon (i.e., \$349.29) if you are ready to take them on a spin.

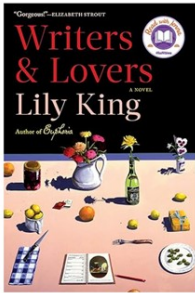
If the writer on your list is a true do-it-yourself type of a person, delight them with one of [VENCINK Bookbinding Kits](#). If anything, it may inspire them to finish the book they are working on. The list price is \$29.99, but they are currently 30% off on Amazon, and the discounted price of \$20.99 can be reduced even further



Much cheaper, and even comes in two sizes to choose from is the [Ultimate Writer Boxed Gift Set](#) for Authors and Book Lovers on Etsy. The medium size is \$48.00 and the large one is \$82.00, but it comes with free US shipping.



For those cold nights when a hot cup of tea and a candle are not enough to keep the writer warm, send them a warm hug in the shape of this cozy 60"x50" [POQUSH Book Lovers Literary Blanket](#) that is currently reduced from \$28.98 to \$26.98 and can be reduced with an additional 5% off coupon on Amazon.



Know a writer who struggles to get his creative juices going? Why not get them a book that will assure them they're not alone. "[Writers and Lovers](#)" by Lily King was an instant New York Times bestseller. It depicts an unforgettable portrait of an artist as a young woman who explores the terrifying and exhilarating leap between the end of one phase of life and the beginning of another. Find it on Amazon for \$11.39 for the hard cover (though audio and Kindle version are available for less).

The scent of a candle can be very inspiring for a writer, and if the one on your list happens to write a period piece, the [Paddywax Library Collection](#) Charles Dickens Scented Soy Wax Candle might be a good choice. Not a fan of this particular author or the scent of the candle? Don't worry, the collection also includes William Shakespeare, Louisa May Alcott, Edgar Allen Poe, and Frederick Douglass. Sorry, but the John Steinbeck one is currently unavailable. Prices range from \$19.82 to \$29.98 on Amazon.



We've featured cool keyboards before, but it never hurts to learn of a new one that would delight any vintage-loving writer on your list. And though at a price tag of \$156.99 on Amazon it is not on the cheap side, it does include the all-important backlit feature. The [Azio Retro Classic USB \(Elwood\)](#) is a wired vintage backlit mechanical keyboard for PC, and it comes in different designs and colors to choose from (price vary by design and color).

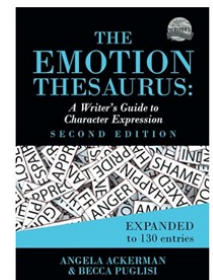


If writing by candle is not enough, consider adding the cool [Vergissm Wooden Book Light](#) to your list. The lamp can open to different angles with the [three-color option](#) costing \$22.98, and the [five-color option](#) \$25.98. See all the different options on Amazon.



If you used our tea recommendation from last year's article, but still need to satisfy your tea-drinking-loving writer with a new option, gift them the [Novel Teas Book Lover's Tea](#) which costs only \$12.95 and contains 25 teabags individually tagged with literary quotes from the world and is made with the finest English Breakfast tea. A [Modern American Classics](#) version is also available for the same price.

Don't feel like a novel, but still want to get a useful book for the writer on your list? Consider going with [The Emotion Thesaurus: A Writer's Guide to Character Expression](#) by Becca Puglisi and Angela Ackerman. This book can come in very handy for writers who "need inspiration for creating characters' emotional responses that are personalized and evocative." The show-don't-tell and easy to navigate guide costs \$17.99 for the paperback.



Tinsel

awakened by the sound
of silver voices floating
through December's frosted dawn
I leave my pristine cottage
with its dying warmth of embers
and wander into Winter's embrace

sky's great gray curtain opens
on the newly frosted landscape
and last night's rain continues
in quivering streaks of silver
over the tinsel trimmed forest

frost settles on my eyelashes
still I join the distant singers
my song quivering like glitter
as I search for hidden tinsel
in newly falling snow

Lillian Rodich December, 2023



Freight Review – A Timeless and Timely Journey

By Elaine L. Mura

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Playwright Howard L. Craft has vividly encapsulated the Black journey through the twentieth century in *FREIGHT: THE FIVE INCARNATIONS OF ABEL GREEN*. Starring J. Alphonse Nicholson as the solo time-traveler on a train bound for the twenty-first century, *FREIGHT* poignantly touches on key moments in Black history for the period. Directed by Joseph Megel, *FREIGHT* journeyed from Broadway in 2015, where the play garnered rave reviews, to Los Angeles. From 1910 boxcar to modern subway, this has been a momentous trip. *FREIGHT* makes its West Coast premiere in 2023 at the Fountain Theatre.

In order to tell its story, we must follow Abel Green (J. Alphonse Nicholson) as he heads into the future through morphing into five different men at different points in time. First, we have a minstrel in 1910 rushing from boxcar to venue, where he lets everyone know that Blacks have always been good actors – even when in blackface which comes off to reveal dark skin beneath—because it was definitely a plus to insure Black longevity. Then we have a faith healer in 1930, a man made rich by the donations of his followers – possibly sporting a bruised conscience in the aftermath. In the 1960s, we have an FBI informant who infiltrates the Black Panthers, again a conscience-challenging task. But the train continues moving along to the 1980s, when an actor turns his back on his HIV positive friend, only to reverse course for the dying man. And finally, Green arrives at the very beginning of the twentieth-first century, a homeless man who recycles cans—but who formerly made a fortune pushing subprime loans on an unsuspecting public.

Even though his conscience twinged and eventually defined his future, his reward for enlightenment seems harsh. Thus Green makes a full cycle through the century—while still tenaciously holding on to the hope that things will keep getting better

FREIGHT is seamlessly helmed by director Megel from Craft’s excellent script. But the star of the evening is J. Alphonse Nicholson, who offers a solo performance that is at once powerful, moving, humorous and gritty. As he journeys through time with only minimal on-stage costume changes and shifting background graphics – while his graceful female assistant rearranges a few items on the spare set—Nicholson offers a brilliant depiction of five men with soiled consciences but an eye to future changes. *FREIGHT* becomes a master class for actors of all colors and persuasions. It is no wonder that the New York Times termed his performance brilliant and the show a “Critic’s Pick.”



J. Alphonse Nicholson – Photo by Johnathan Benavente

The creative team certainly offered a skilled hand to the play, from Joel Daavid’s scenic design to Alison Brummer’s lighting, Marc Antonio Pritchett’s sound, Danyele Thomas’ costumes, Rebecca Carr’s props, and Eamonn Farrell’s video design. *FREIGHT* highlights the production team’s skills in creating five settings worthy of Nicholson’s formidable performance. *FREIGHT* is highly recommended as an entertaining, compelling, timely, and thought-provoking production.

FREIGHT runs through December 16, 2023, with performances at 8 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, and Mondays and at 2 p.m. on Sundays. The Fountain Theatre is located at 5060 Fountain Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90029. Tickets range from \$25 to \$45 (seniors, \$35; students \$25; Pay-What-You-Want on Mondays subject to availability). For information and reservations, call 323-663-1525 or go [online](#).



J. Alphonse Nicholson – Photo by Johnathan Benavente



J. Alphonse Nicholson – Photo by Johnathan Benavente



J. Alphonse Nicholson – Photo by Johnathan Benavente

HUNGARIAN STUFFED CABBAGE ROLLS

A Holiday Dish from CWD-SFV Member Yolanda Fintor

STUFFED CABBAGE ROLLS



HOW TO MAKE THE ROLLS



TRIM THE RIB



FILL WITH 3 TO 4 TBSPS. OF MEAT MIXTURE



FOLD OVER BOTH SIDES



ROLL IT UP

This classic recipe of meat, rice and cabbage is an example of a dish that has been adapted by many cultures over hundreds of years. Food historians believe that the original recipe was perfected by the ancient Turks who incorporated ground lamb and rice with currants and pine nuts, then wrapped the mixture in grape or cabbage leaves. Through the centuries, variations of this recipe evolved until each Eastern and Central European country claimed its own version.

When these Europeans migrated to the New World in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they brought their favorite cabbage recipes with them. I learned to make the stuffed cabbage dish that my mother and grandmother (both born in Hungary) had made for their families. Then my Hungarian mother-in-law gave me a shortcut recipe. It contains all the ingredients of stuffed cabbage but eliminates the need to roll the meat mixture into parboiled cabbage leaves. The rich flavor remains, but preparation time is reduced.

Yolanda FINTORS Cabbage Recipe Serves 6

"I like to serve this with dense crusty bread and a glass of hearty wine." Yolanda Fintor

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 ½ pounds lean ground pork or beef
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 1 cup uncooked rice
- 1 can (27 ounces) sauerkraut, drained
- 1 ½ cups sour cream
- 2 cups chopped cabbage
- 2 cups tomato or ⅓ juice

Heat oil in a large, heavy skillet; sauté onions until soft. Place meat in a large bowl; season with salt and pepper. Mix in rice, add sautéed onions and mix well.

In the same skillet used for cooking onions, layer meat mixture, sauerkraut and sour cream, in that order, one third at a time. Spread chopped cabbage over the last layer of sour cream. Pour tomato juice over all.

Cover tightly and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and cook one hour, or until rice is tender.

KAREN'S BRISKET



My brisket recipe is spectacular. I make it throughout the year, but it's especially good when served with potato latkes on Hannukah.

CWC-SFV President Karen Gorback

INGREDIENTS

- 1.5—2 lbs. brisket—flat cut
- 2 stalks celery cut into sections. (The celery leaves are especially good to add)
- 3 carrots cut into small pieces or a handful of small carrots
- Trader Joe's BBQ Rub and Seasoning with Coffee and Garlic
- Trader Joe's garlic flavored olive oil
- 1 can of French Onion soup
- 1 cut onion
- 1 can Mexican or Italian stewed tomatoes
- 1 big squeeze of ketchup
- 1 can of beer or a half-bottle of red wine for a sweeter brisket
- 1 russet potato cut into small pieces or a bunch of small potatoes are optional
- 1 basket peeled fresh mushroom caps—optional
- 1 cup Trader Joe's frozen pepper pieces—optional
- Several chopped garlic cloves—optional



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Marinate the meat with the dry barbeque rub for one hour.
2. Beginning with the fatty side of the brisket, sear the meat on all sides in garlic-flavored olive oil, using a Dutch oven or a large roasting pan. When all sides are seared, place the meat in the pan, fat cap up.
3. Add all the vegetables, soup, ketchup and canned tomatoes. At this point, the pot is very heavy, so I put it in the oven before adding the can of beer or the wine.
4. Cover and braise at 325 degrees, for 3- 4 hours, until meat is tender and falling apart. If your prefer to slice the meat, braise at 350 degrees for 2.5-3 hours.

Enjoy!

The Hawaiian Style Christmas Cookies

By CWC-SFV Member Anne Hansell

When I was a child, back in 1960's and 1970's, Mother, my sister, and I used to make Hawaiian style Christmas cookies from a cookbook of Maui style recipes. My grandparents were born and grew up in Japan, but they moved to Hawaii for better-paying jobs on sugar plantations. Then, my parents were born and grew up in that American territory (back in 1920's, long before it became a state in 1959). In 1957, they moved to Los Angeles, California where I was born and grew up. While adjusting to the American food and culture, we learned recipes from cookbooks or Mother's Hawaiian friends. A lot of our food was a mixture of Japanese, Hawaiian, and American.

Mother, a liberal Buddhist, encouraged us to bake the Christmas cookies in Hawaiian style. Our original Maui cookbook wore out into torn papers years ago, but its basic ingredients still stay in my memory to this day.

In order to refresh my memory, I searched for a Hawaiian recipe that closely resembles that in my memory. I found one website called mochi mommy.com, and it offered one recipe titled, "Honolulu Cookie Company Copycat Recipe." I'll provide its email address at the end of this article. Its ingredients nearly match those in my memory.

HAWIIAN COOKIE COMPANY COPYCAT RECIPE

1 cup unsalted butter (two sticks) or vegetable shortening.

1 cup powdered sugar (Hawaiian desserts tend to use more sugar than the American ones)

½ tsp salt

2 cups flour

2 eggs

Note: I omitted macadamia nuts and chocolate chips from the recipe because we had never used these things in making our own cookies) These ingredients are optional, in other words.

How to mix them:

1. Cream butter, sugar, and salt in a mixer (in 1960's, we used two knives to soften them up)
2. Add the eggs and mix them together into dough.

Note: I omitted storing it in fridge overnight because we had never used this method. Also optional.

3. Use a rolling pin to flatten it down to ¼ inches thick.
4. Use Christmas cookie cutters to create shapes out of the flattened dough.
5. Decorate them with Christmas red and green sprinkles.
5. Warm up the oven up to 350 F
7. Put parchment papers on your baking sheets.
8. Bake for 15-20 minutes until the cookies' edges start to brown.
9. After taking the cookies out of the oven, let them cool on rack or plates.

The website's address: <https://www.mochimommy.com//honolulu-cookie-company-copycat-recipe/>

As I grew up, I noticed that many of the Hawaiian style dessert recipes called for one, one and a half, or two cups of sugar because that state had a lot of sugar farms; thus, making this ingredient cheaper to use. This factor might be the main reason why Hawaii had the second-highest rate of diabetes in the United States. As a result, I reduce the amount of sugar or substitute with stevia or monkfruit when baking my Hawaiian style desserts.

IRISH SODA BREAD

A Family Recipe from former CWC-SFV President, Bob Okowitz

Ingredients

- 1 ¾ cups whole wheat flour (fine ground)
- 1 ¾ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 tablespoons cold butter, cubed
- 1 large egg
- 1 ⅔ cups buttermilk.
- 1 tablespoons rolled oat



Instructions

- Preheat the oven to 425°F (215°C). Line a baking tray with parchment paper and set aside.
- Mix together the flours, salt, and baking soda in a large bowl. Add the butter and rub it into the flour mixture with your fingertips until it resembles coarse bread crumbs.
- In a separate jug, whisk the egg and buttermilk together.
- Make a well in the center of the dry ingredients and pour in the liquid, hold a little back.
- Using an open hand bring the flour and liquid together to a loose dough. The dough should be quite soft, but not too sticky. You will know then if it needs more of the liquids. (Flour in different places reacts differently to added liquid).
- Turn onto a floured work surface and gently bring the dough together into a round, about 1 1/2 inches (4cm) thick and 8 inches by 8 inches.
- Place on the baking sheet and score the bread by blessing it with a deep cross on top. Poke a hole in the four corners of the bread to release the fairies and stop them from cursing your beautiful bread.
- Glaze the bread with the leftover bit of buttermilk in your jug and scatter the oats on top.
- Bake for 15 minutes, then turn down the oven to 400°F (200°C) and bake for 30 minutes more. When done, the loaf will sound slightly hollow when tapped on the bottom. Remove from the baking sheet and place on a wire rack to cool.
- Once cooled, slice the bread and enjoy with butter, and jam. Store leftovers covered at room temperature for up to 3 days.





A DELECTABLE TOSSED SALAD FOR FAMILY FEASTS

SHARED BY CWC EDITOR KATHY HIGHCOVE



INGREDIENTS FOR THE SALAD

7 cups mixed spring greens

1/4 cups orange segments mandarin oranges, clementines or tangerines

1/2 cup pomegranate seeds can substitute dried cranberries

1/2 cup feta cheese crumbled

1/2 cup candied pecans roughly chopped



FOR THE DRESSING

1/3 cup olive oil

1 tablespoon honey

2 teaspoons Dijon mustard

2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar

1 tablespoon shallot minced

salt and pepper to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place the mixed greens, oranges, pomegranate seeds, feta cheese and pecans in a large bowl.
2. Place all the dressing ingredients in a small bowl, whisk until smooth.
3. Drizzle the dressing over the salad mixture to taste, then gently toss to coat. You may have dressing left over.
4. Serve immediately.

Celebrations call for special dishes. be it Thanksgiving, religious holiday, New Years, the Fourth of July or a birthday celebration.

Special dishes are always expected on these occasions. These dishes are feature meats, breads, pasta, and several cooked vegetables.

My family group, mostly Californians, often request a special tossed salad that can be found [at Christmas Salad Recipe - Dinner at the Zoo](#)

This salad has the usual mixed greens but instead of cut-up vegetables, the main ingredients are seasonal fruits, nuts, and cheeses. But the ingredient that seems to be a year-round favorite: sweet red pomegranate seeds. And the dressing perfectly accents the mixture of green leaves and sweet ripe fruit.

Bon appetite!

Christmas salad flavor variations

This salad is versatile. Feel free to add other ingredients to suit your own taste or for any special family holiday or event.

- Fruit: Instead of oranges, try another fruit such as apples, pears or persimmons, black berries or straw berries.
- Nuts: use whatever nut your group enjoys such as almonds, walnuts, pecans or cashews.
- Cheeses: Instead of feta opt for blue cheese, shaved parmesan, ricotta salata or small mozzarella balls.
- Add-Ins: ingredients such as shaved fennel, red onions, avocado or dried cranberries.



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 meetings at the Saban Health and Wellness Center at the Motion Picture & Television Fund (MPTF) in Woodland Hills 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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