

# The Valley Scribe

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



## CONTENTS

VALENTINE'S DAY  
SENTIMENTS

NEW CWC-SFV  
BOARD  
MEMBER

REVIEW OF  
JANUARY  
SPEAKER  
PRESENTATION

A TRIBUTE TO  
SHEILA MOSS

REVIEW OF  
POPULAR PLAY

NEW MEMBER  
INTRODUCTION

CWC-SFV BRANCH  
INFORMATION

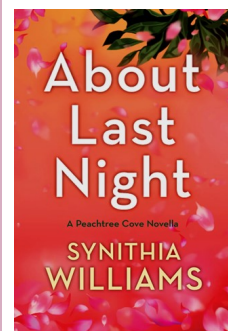


## Award Nominated Author Synithia Williams Speaks on Finding Her Niche in the Romance Genre

By CWC-SFV Program Chair Heather Bradshaw

The San Fernando Valley Branch of the California Writers Club is pleased to welcome award-nominated, romance author, SYNITHIA WILLIAMS, as the keynote speaker on Saturday, February 3rd at 1:00 pm, via Zoom, with a presentation entitled, "Black and in Love."

Synithia has been an avid romance novel lover since picking up her first one at the age of thirteen. It was only natural, then, that she would begin penning her own romances soon after. In 2010 she began to actively pursue her dream of becoming a published author. She completed her first novel, *You Can't Plan Love*, in the fall of 2010 and sold it to Crimson Romance in 2012.



A native of South Carolina, Synithia writes romances as hot as their Southern settings. She's published over fifteen novels since 2012. Her seventh book, *Making it Real*, was listed as one of the Must Read Romances of 2015 in *USA Today*. Her second release with Harlequin Kimani, *A Malibu Kind of Romance* was a 2017 RITA® finalist and she's a two time African American Literary

Award Show nominee in Romance.

Synithia is married to her own personal hero and they have two sons who've convinced their mother that professional wrestling

and superheroes are supreme entertainment.

When she isn't writing, Synithia works on water quality issues for local government while balancing the needs of her family.

You can learn more about Synithia by visiting her website where she blogs about writing, life and relationships:

[www.synithiawilliams.com](http://www.synithiawilliams.com) Synithia is represented by Tricia Skinner at [Fuse Literary Agency](http://Fuse Literary Agency).

While this presenter will be on the big screen at the MPTF, we encourage you to attend in-person to meet and talk about your work with other members over snacks and

*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 February 2nd at [SFV.CWC@gmail.com](mailto:SFV.CWC@gmail.com) for an invitation to register. Guests may purchase admission at [www.cwc-sfv.org](http://www.cwc-sfv.org) by noon on February 2nd. After purchasing admission, guests will receive a Zoom invitation. We regret we cannot accomodate late requests.*

# Karen's Corner



## A Valentine's Gift

As we round the corner into the second half of our program year, I want to remind you about your opportunity to attend monthly meetings in person at the Saban Center on the beautiful campus of the Motion Picture and Television Fund residential campus, located at 23388 Mulholland Drive, in Woodland Hills, 91364.

The January meeting was especially fun, when our speaker Paul Lewis joined us on the big screen via Zoom from London, and members of the Wilkie Collins fan club Zoomed in from all parts of England, as well as from New Zealand. Thank you to Program Chair Heather Bradshaw and to Zoom host and webmaster Anat Wenick for making the arrangements for this terrific event. Please remember that even when the speakers are on the screen, you still have the opportunity to ask questions, whether you're at home or joining us in person. For those who prefer to attend meetings via Zoom, here are a few rules of Zoom etiquette to remember.

- ◆ Keep your microphone muted, unless you're asking a question.
- ◆ Be cognizant of your background while your camera is on. For instance, you don't want to sit in front of an open bathroom door.
- ◆ Enjoying a cup of coffee or other beverage during the meeting is fine. However, eating an entire meal or talking on the phone is not appropriate. If you need to do other things during the Zoom meeting, please turn off your camera while you're busy. Turn your camera back on when you've finished what you needed to do.
- ◆ Finally, please remember that Zoom allows you the option of viewing either a close-up of the speaker or seeing the entire gallery, where each person is in a little box. On my PC, this control is in the upper right corner of the screen. I put my cursor over the area to find my preferred view, which is generally "speaker," unless I want to see the full gallery.

We hope you're enjoying the program year and will invite other writers, or "people who have always wanted to write," to join the San Fernando Valley Branch of the California Writers Club. The price is still only \$42.50. See our website [cwc-sfv.org](http://cwc-sfv.org) and click on "Membership" for details. Such a deal!



You may also want to consider a gift membership to the club for someone special this month!



# THE CWC-SFV BBOARD HAS ADDED A NEW CHAIR:

## MEMBER-AT-LARGE

The importance of a board member-at-large lies in their ability to offer a broad perspective and diverse insights to the board. They bring a wealth of knowledge, experience, and skills from various backgrounds, which can enrich discussions, enhance decision-making processes, and ensure the board considers a wide range of viewpoints. How fortunate we are to have an experienced longtime member, Gary Wosk, in this crucial position.

Karen Gorbach, CWC-SFV President. Ph.D.

### CWC-SFV MEMBERS—GARY WOSK WANTS YOUR FEEDBACK



**GARY WOSK**

**Member-at-large**

I view the position of member-at-large as akin to being a doctor.

I will embark on a journey to find out how best to take care of our members. In other words, meet their needs.

Like a doctor, I will be gauging the temperature, the overall health of the branch, by seeking feedback from its members.

I want to find out how well we are doing as a branch. To encourage others to volunteer. so that we can grow. To share any praise and criticism I receive and share it with the board, so we become more successful at fulfilling our mission.

Good doctors listen, and that is what I will do, instead of me writing prescriptions the members will fill out the prescriptions on how we can get better.

I look upon this position as collaborative and will listen carefully to what our members have to say.

The best physicians evolve by keeping up with the latest breakthroughs in medicine, and so must the branch, so that we move forward and grow.

If any CWC-SFV member would like to contact me. here is my email address: [garywosk@gmail.com](mailto:garywosk@gmail.com) .

Our club, the CWC-SFV, has gained a new board member, someone who was a board member several years ago and has decided to step up again!

Gary Wosk has agreed to be our board's member-at-large. The official name of this office gives no clue as to the duties of a member-at-large. Even if you were to Google this topic, you'll not find a standard list of duties for this position because this board position does not usually have a unique title or standard list of duties, as is true for a president, vice-president, secretary or treasurer. But a member-at-large still serves a key role on a board.

During his years as a member of the CWC-SFV, Gary has served on earlier boards as secretary and media relations chair. He has privately helped with publicity for several members. With this background, Gary will give his fellow board members welcome feedback on topics that intersect with the needs of our CWC-SFV group.

Kathy Highcove , *The Valley Scribe* Editor

**WE LOVE OUR  
VOLUNTEERS!**



# THE FATHER OF DETECTIVE FICTION: WILKIE COLLINS

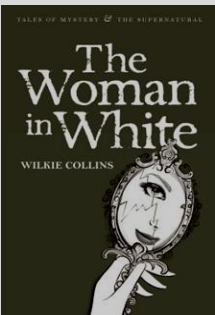
By CWC-SFV Member Elaine L. Mura, Ph.D.

At our January meeting, CWC-SFV hosted author Paul Lewis, who delivered a speech titled, “A Complicated Life” about the life and writings of Victorian author, Wilkie Collins. Speaking via Zoom from London, England, Lewis proved to be the perfect person to speak about Wilkie Collins. Lewis is an editor of *The Collected Letters of Wilkie Collins*, and has written and extensively lectured on Wilkie Collins – the result of studying Collins’ life and works for more than 30 years. Lewis is the secretary of the Wilkie Collins Society (<https://wilkiecollinssociety.org/>). He has impeccable credentials in the UK as a well-known financial journalist and broadcaster of a weekly personal finance program for the BBC; he also writes regularly for periodicals and newspapers. Lewis has won numerous awards for his work and holds two honorary doctorates from English universities.



Referencing 3,400 known letters and 30 years of bank account records, Lewis cobbled together fascinating facts about the prolific Victorian writer. Born in 1824 in England and living a full life until 1889, Collins embodied the Renaissance man of his era – a man able to point to the many cultural values of the Victorian period, values which fostered a hoard of secrets. Paul Lewis regaled the audience with fascinating true tales about Collins’ exploits in the areas of an almost obsessive approach to work - and love. Wilkie wrote 30 novels, more than 60 short stories, over 100 nonfiction articles, and 18 plays, including *Moonstone*, the first detective story, and *The Woman in White*, a sensational thriller and very popular book which has been adapted to today’s film and television screens.

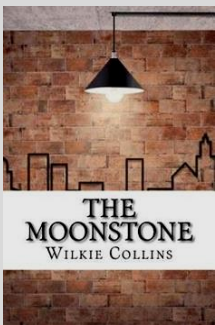
And love? Collins had to work hard to support two households, one for the comely widow Caroline Graves and her daughter, and the other for Martha Rudd and their three children. All the while never marrying but gifting the younger Ms. Rudd and their kids with the family name of Dawson. Collins also was fond of the good life, enjoyed champagne, and obviously had an eye for the shapely misses of his time. Needless to say, this cost a pretty penny, but Collins was never one to shun hard work. Besides, he was a pretty canny fellow who managed to negotiate very good deals with everyone in the business of writing. He was probably one of the best paid writers of his time earning over two million pounds when all was said and done. And he seemed to enjoy every penny of his income.



And let’s not forget another fact in Collins’ exciting portfolio. He was a close friend of Charles Dickens; and, in fact, the two collaborated on a play or two. Dickens first became Collins’ mentor – then his employer – and finally his best friend and confidante. At one point, the two men acted in a play together. Collins’ brother even married Dickens’ younger daughter. Clearly, the two authors relished each other’s company.

To present a balanced view of Collins’s life, it is only fair to point to one of Collins’ habits worth mentioning. Initially, he was given laudanum for painful gout and soon discovered that he really liked it. For the last decade of his life, he was never far from his next dose. Some critics have pointed to this as the reason for the deterioration of his writing during the last ten years of his life.

So what’s all the literary fuss about Wilkie Collins? For authors, it must be his creative and innovative approach to writing. This was the man who invented the mystery/thriller/detective story. His writings also tended to be sensational and racy as he uncovered the discreet secrets in Victorian society with an amoral shrug. To top off his proclivity for the lurid, he also included a sexual assault in one of his books (horrors!). He frequently featured unusual female heroes and anti-heroes—women who scoffed at the mores of the time. In his time, Collins was an immensely popular writer who quickly learned the economic advantages of selling his stories in serial form. Additionally, it is possible that he wanted to reach a wider audience than the well-off patrons who could afford his expensive novels. Serializing his work made his writings available to those with far more limited incomes. Finally, Collins was deeply involved in what is now termed “intellectual rights.” He chafed at the law of the day, which did little to protect the writer struggling to survive. He fought long and hard (and, in his personal case, usually successfully) to insure that his author rights would be protected. Perhaps writers today can thank Collins for starting the copyright laws rolling.



Paul Lewis summarized Wilkie Collins’ life in an hour, to the delight of the audience. However, it also became obvious that Lewis barely touched upon the many dizzying tales which Collins offered. And for lovers of the odd fact: Collins’ children by Martha Rudd continued to use the Dawson name through generations – and there is still a direct heir living today who must give permission for anyone to cite Collins’ unpublished work.

For those who would like more information about Collins, Paul Lewis recommended this journal about the Victorian writer: (<https://wilkiecollins.org/journal/>).

# Thoughts on Valentine's Day

## **A Message To My Children And Grandchildren:**

### ***What is this thing called love?***

**By CWC-SFV Member Brian Muldoon**

**I have been fortunate to feel loved for over seven decades.**

**I highly recommend giving, and getting, as much love as you manage.**

**Not only will you make your own life better, but you will also improve the lives of other people.**

**Which brings us again to the prominent question:**

**What is this thing called love?**

**Love comes about when three elements come into play:**

**caring, concern, and commitment.**

**The first element, caring, occurs when you frequently think about a loved one—their smile, the honesty in their eyes, the way they laugh and the way some might lightly make fun of you.**

**Caring brings warmth to your heart and a lightness to your being.**

**Caring makes every day significant.**

**The second element is concern. Concern is a quality most parents feel on their baby's first day. Several years later, parents may also feel the quality of concern when their former baby reveals whom they have fallen in love with.**

**In short, concern could be worry, but put to a higher purpose.**

**The third element, commitment, is the most important quality.**

**Commitment means being responsible, doing everything, large and small, to ensure the happiness of your loved ones.**

**So, dear ones, that's what I think "this thing called love" is all about!**

**Love, Poppi**





# VALLEY WRITERS



## A BRANCH OF THE CALIFORNIA WRITERS CLUB

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

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



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)

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



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



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 Humanitari-*

FEBRUARY 2024

# Sheila

By CWC-SFV Member Gary Wosk



**Sheila Moss**  
**1940—2023**

I feel blessed to have known Sheila Sullivan Moss, though I am reluctant to use the word “known.” For myself and many others, her spirit will live on forever.

The odds of knowing someone like Sheila is one in a zillion. Your odds of winning the lottery are greater. She was one of the sweetest and kindest persons ever to set foot on the Earth and a huge supporter of our branch ever since she joined in the 1990s. She and I belonged to same critique for years, although she joined earlier. I was the new kid on the block she fully welcomed.

Andrea Polk is the organizer of the critique group which includes myself, Richard Jones, Rich Peter and Christer Schmidt.

It is because of people like Sheila that the branch has remained strong all these years. When she was healthy and could still drive, she attended most if not all of the branch’s monthly meetings. She held various positions on the Board including program chair. Sheila was also a member of a breakfast club that included myself, the late David Wetterberg and Kathy Highcove.

Many of her friends and family as well as teachers gathered at her memorial service at Mount Sinai Cemetery in early January to say goodbye to the woman who always had a smile on her face. I still remember how thrilled she was when her kitchen remodel was completed.

Those in attendance at Sheila’s memorial service spoke of a woman who was always loving, kind, gentle and nurturing, a great wife, mother, grandmother, aunt, friend and co-worker.

It became clear to me at the service that the Sheila we had become accustomed to in the critique group was the same Sheila to everyone. Someone who brought flowers from her yard and dropped off thought-provoking newspaper clippings and books to nearly everyone it seemed. That’s what Sheila was known for, plus other interesting tidbits that came to light, all positive and inspiring. This warm-hearted woman achieved so much.

Although she stopped attending our critique group meetings a few years ago, her presence was always strongly felt. For the most part, Sheila was pixie-like during our usually three-hour, bi-monthly get-togethers, except when we broke one of her cardinal rules, the misuse of the English language. That’s when the grammarian became quite cranky, piped up and read us her version of the Riot’s Act, borderline scolding, but not too harsh. She set us straight in a kindly manner, and none of us were made to feel less for it. She motivated us to do better. She had faith in us. We took it as a learning experience taught by someone who was committed to helping us reach our potential as writers.

And personally, it went in one ear and out the other.

After all, what did I know about grammar and proper punctuation? I was only a writer of short stories and a former newspaper reporter. We don’t know any better.

Particularly entertaining was when sometimes there would be a debate between another longtime member of the group, former English teacher, Dave and Sheila. This went on until a truce was declared. Maybe that’s why our meetings seemed to last so long.

Sheila was the Erma Bombach of our critique group, who learned so much about writing from her mom, who was a nationally known columnist. Sheila wrote about things everyone could relate to, such as the love of family, friends and of all things, peanut butter, the challenges of joining a gym later in life, traveling to Greece, caring for bees, about turning eighty, the importance of listening, when she was a child, COVID, having surgery, and many other topics. The short story character she loved to write about the most was the adventures of the irrepressible and mischievous Tomato Bunny she created.

Sometimes when I wasn’t feeling quite up to attending a meeting, if it was scheduled for Sheila’s house, I didn’t want to miss out on the array of delectable snacks and thirst-quenching drinks she served. She was a great host who went all out to make sure our palettes were satisfied.

As she became older, I nudged her to write a few columns for her hometown newspaper, The Sun-Prairie News in Wisconsin that her mom and dad operated for years. She didn’t quite have the wherewithal to contact the newspaper on her own, so I volunteered to make the effort. She was elated when I informed her that the columns I had sent to the newspaper on her behalf were accepted. She wrote about peanut butter, returning to Sun Prairie for a visit and Valentine’s Day. A national peanut butter organization also published her column.

Sheila and I shared a love for all sorts of peanut butter. When the critique group met at my house, she’d occasionally bring over a large jar of Skippy’s (never crunchy) purchased at Costco just in case I had run out (gift wrapped with a ribbon). Knowing she couldn’t get enough of the tasty treat, I picked her up at her house in Porter Ranch one day and drove to Studio City where we had lunch at a

*(Continued on page 8)*

newly opened restaurant that specialized in all sorts of peanut butter sandwiches. We stuck with the traditional version. It was like Seventh Heaven to her, and now she is in heaven.

From the moment I met her, I realized that Sheila was much more than a fellow critiquer. She quickly became a friend and a muse. I learned that Sheila had been a teacher in the LA Unified School District for 25 years. She always encouraged beginning writers, including those in our SFV critique group, to *never* give up. I can only imagine how many students she mentored and went on to become successful in life.

When weren't meeting in person, Sheila and I would call each other from time to time to see how we were doing. We had both experienced some tough times in life and lifted each other up. The

discussions weren't very long, but long enough to know we shared a friendship. Even though she wasn't feeling well, a couple of years ago, around Christmas she asked her caregiver to give her a ride to my house to drop off a book on how my wife and I could be good grandparents. And how she loved her grandkids.

At our November monthly meeting, former chapter president Yolanda Fintor, who was in the same critique group with Sheila many years ago, informed me that Sheila had moved into an assisted living facility.

I left several messages for Sheila on her iPhone so my wife and I could arrange a visit, but never heard back from her. We decided go by the facility to make sure everything was okay, however, the day before, I received the unsettling email from her son Aaron.

I will always love and dearly miss Sheila, my friend and a friend to all.

### SHEILA'S 2019 CRITIQUE GROUP



**Andrea Polk**

**Colin Gallagher**

**Gary Wosk**

**Sheila Moss**



**Rich Peter**

### RECIPE FOR A SUCCESSFUL CRITIQUE GROUP

*Written by the Late CWC-SFV Member, Sheila Moss, in April, 2019*

Is there one recipe for a successful critique group? you may ask. Well, I would say that these (following) qualities are very important:

- Love the written word.
- Be honest, but don't go out for blood. Nits are nits.
- Be encouraging and be kind.
- Do not take the critique personally.
- Be serious: you want to learn, improve and be challenged.
- Respect the submission deadline as well as the other requirements: font size and number of pages.
- Critique what is on the page, there is no need to cross talk, to explain or defend.
- Contrary to some gossip, critique groups do not (need to) have contests as to which host has the best "snacks."



How do I feel certain of the recipe for the best critique group interaction? I was lucky to have awesome writers and mentors in my first critique group: Dave Wetterberg, Art Yuwiler, Elaine Shevin and Max Schwartz. Dave was a thoughtful leader and an impeccable grammarian.

My second group was again led by Dave with Claude Baxter, an erudite scholar who matched wisdom with humor.

Our present-day leader, Andi Polk, holds us to strict standards. She is exacting, thorough and kind.

Clip art Source: [Book Club Video Experiment - Carole Penfield](#)



## Raising Grandma Sheila

"Grandma, you're not listening to COUNTRY MUSIC, are you?" asked twelve-year-old Ariana as she and her little sister Alyssa dumped their backpacks on the foyer and rushed to hug me.

"Why, yes. I have the stereo set to either country or classical—CC quite easy to remember."

"No offense, Grandma, but we're going to be here for four days and that's not going to make the cut." Pushing some buttons Ariana found FM 98.7 Alternative Rock from iHeart Radio.

To my ears the music was awful. But if music soothes a beast, it can also make my grandkids happy. I'll just consider it Music Appreciation 2018.

"Let's get you settled," I said. "Ari, you get the sofa bed in the computer room."

"Alyssa, you have Uncle Dave's old room."

Alyssa was sporting a bright pink cast on her left foot, having broken her toe while doing a cartwheel in the family room. She would need the extra room the double bed would provide. No, I didn't ask why she was doing a cartwheel in the family room. There are some questions which Grandmas know not to ask.

"What do you want to do?" I asked.

"Make banana muffins, of course," chorused the girls. Whenever the grandchildren visited, we baked. While we were waiting for the muffins to be done, nine-year-old Alyssa pondered the math. "If we want to take home four muffins for our family, how many can we eat during our stay here?"

"Well, start with the twelve and subtract four ..."

"That's old school, Grandma," Ari interrupted. "Now we use the new math. We need to set up an equation."

Wonders! We did come up with the same answer.

What to do next? "Let's play a board game. Your father liked Monopoly and now I had an updated version, the Wizard of Oz. It features Evil Witches, an

enchanted forest, flying monkeys and a popup of the city of Oz."

Alyssa became engrossed but after half an hour, Ari begged out, "Candy Crunch is more fun. We can teach you."

I shook my head. "Those techie games don't interest me."

Luckily it was almost time for my nap.

Their parents had warned them that

Grandma got grouchy if she didn't have her afternoon nap. "I'm setting the timer for forty minutes. You can read or watch TV."

Ari looked down at me and said, "Doctors say that a thirty minute nap is sufficient; otherwise you won't sleep at night."

"It takes me ten minutes to fall asleep so that's not a problem."

Back in the bedroom I dreamed of pink casts dancing in my mind. It wasn't long before I felt a presence. Startled, I woke up to see

Alyssa beaming.

"It's time to wake up."

Just then my cell phone rang. "I'll bet it's our Dad," cried Ari as I fumbled to unearth my phone.

"Yes, we're doing fine. Here, let them tell you all about it," I said.

"Your connection is bad, Grandma. We'll have to text," explained Ari.

Before I knew it, the girls were texting, thumbs flying. Ari noticed that I looked lost.

"It's easy. We'll bring you into our world."

"My thumbs are too fat; I can't type anything."

"Use my stylus, Grandma," said Ari.

Dinner time and we were doing linguini and clams. As I was struggling with the garlic press, Ari said her mom gets frozen garlic pods from Trader Joe's and just defrosts them.

"Now that's a twentieth-first century innovation I can embrace."

Four days later, as we hugged our good-byes, I thought I heard Ari whisper to Alyssa, "Our work is done."

—Sheila Moss





# VALENTINE'S DAY CHOCOLATE ROULETTE

By The Late CWC-SFV Member, Sheila Moss

Also published in Sheila's home Iowa home town pager: *The Sun Prairie Star*

Valentine's Day is right around the corner. The mention of that heart-filled day can send shockwaves of anxiety and consternation through, yes, the hearts of boy-friends, significant others and relatives; hopeful the boxes of chocolates they send to their loved ones will be appreciated.

I recall my husband saying "You can't go wrong with chocolates." But wait; can you?

And Forest Gump's Mother told him true. "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get." Well, that holds true as well for an actual box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get, and this can cause much angst in those who receive such sweet goodies.

Consuming a piece of chocolate, however, should be one of life's most calming experiences, and it has been for me, but not always.

Here is how my love affair with chocolate began in the Midwest. I was born in Madison, Wisconsin, to be exact. In Madison, Whitman's Sampler reigned supreme. Under its distinctive yellow cover is a map identifying what flavor candy resides in its paper nest. Now that the San Fernando Valley is my home; however, I have become an ardent fan of See's candy. My cousin Carol introduced me to my first box of See's candy almost thirty years ago. She was not exaggerating when she said "The candy is rich, smooth and velvety." I agreed but added, "It smells good."

At first I practiced identifying the candy by shapes—wrong. The round ones could be mint (which I detest) or caramel which I love. Then my theory became one of practice and intuition. The toffee was always the same shape. And, of course, the nut clusters were a dead giveaway. I never missed picking out my beloved Bordeaux.

In the meantime I yearn for See's to introduce a candy map. Of course nowadays I guess it would be called an "app." We have apps for many things, why not for picking out candy?

Am I the only one who makes mistakes and strikes out? How do other aficionados cope? I decided to conduct a survey. The first man I interviewed was Tyrell who like me was waiting for a China King carry out. He studied my assorted box of candy and selected a round shaped sample. "This should be a caramel. Noooo," he said disappointed. "It's a chocolate cream."

When I asked the restaurant owner Linda to participate in my survey, she took one look at the possibilities and waved her hand. "I only like the almond nut clusters and they are all gone."

My cousin Lynn in San Francisco said quite frankly, "I keep taking nibbles until I get one I like." She admitted that this method doesn't go over very well unless it's your box of candy.

My friend Kathy uses a more devious approach. Her technique is to scratch the bottom of the candy. Along similar lines my friend Terry who doesn't like the soft centers presses the bottom of the candy to see if it squishes.

The most scientific method was employed by my neighbor Iris who takes a knife and cuts the piece of candy neatly in half. If she scores, she eats the whole piece. If not, there's still an edible half of piece available. Plus the guess work is eliminated for the next person!

Maybe my nephew Lee has the right idea. As a gambler, he suggests "Take a chance. It's only 160 calories for two pieces."

But for me, I still want a See's map.

How difficult would it be to label each piece of candy? Perhaps they could have a contest. Contestants would have to draw a diagram locating where each candy lived. Hmm ... would you put all the soft centers in the top left corner? The caramels marching right next to them? Maybe that's too organized? Appearance is important. I'd like to see the sprinkled ones randomly arranged.

And what do you think the top winners would receive? For sure—a life time supply of See's.



# MEET OUR NEW CWC-SFV MEMBER

## KEN KENDALL

I am very new to writing as I have spent the last forty-five years working in the sign industry. The first fifteen I worked with my Dad, and the most recent thirty years as an owner of *Visible Graphics*. Check out our website at [Visible Graphics – A National Sign Company](#)



through [Reedsy](#) and a beta reader I hired on [Fiverr](#). But as soon as I finished the second book, I started researching the business of being an author and found that I had much to learn about the business and the craft itself. Learning day-by-day how little I knew, I listened to podcasts, read articles, and started reading books on writing.

Fifteen years ago, I married Janine, and now we have eight kids and our tenth grandchild on the way. Janine is our company's CEO, which has allowed me to pursue and learn the writing craft.

Her decision to take up this leadership position, and because she is the most amazing person I have ever known, I hope to retire completely and write full-time in the next few years.

My hobby time is minimal, what with working four days a week, writing twenty hours a week, doing all I can with my seven and nine-year-old boys, my adult kids and their kids, being on the council at our church and mentoring a few people. Still, I try to work in a poorly played round of golf every other week.

I sat down in June of 2020 to write something other than an email for the first time since high school, forty years ago. My first attempt at writing was a business book, *Better Business*, using my pen name, Allen Kendall, that I am currently editing. After completing the first draft in a few months and having so much fun doing it, I decided to try to write a novel. I had been telling people for years that I would do it one day, and I finally made good on it. It was one of the most extraordinary experiences of my life.

I finished that first novel, *Shine A Light*, just a few weeks ago and have received positive feedback from an editor who I hired

through [Reedsy](#) and a beta reader I hired on [Fiverr](#). But as soon as I finished the second book, I started researching the business of being an author and found that I had much to learn about the business and the craft itself. Learning day-by-day how little I knew, I listened to podcasts, read articles, and started reading books on writing.

The one thing that kept coming up was the need to get involved in a writing or a critique group. As I began searching, I found a reference to the *California Writers Club* on my local library's website. And so, I immediately applied for membership. I found that I wanted to be around people who knew everything I hoped to learn about the writing craft.

When I began writing fiction, I was sure that romance would be the genre I would most want to write— there is some sweet romantic elements in my first work of fiction. And though the second novel I am working on now is a little darker, I still see romantic elements coming out. So, I don't know in which genre I will finally land, but I would say it falls between Contemporary and Upmarket Fiction for now—but I also strongly desire to write a series in the mystery/thriller genre.

With all that said, my most immediate desire is to connect to professionals with the experience I lack. I hope the authors and other industry experts associated with the CWC will lead, teach, and inspire me to become a great author.

### A Preview of Ken Kendall's future book: *Shine a Light*

*A story of love, redemption, and the true belief in something more powerful than all of us!*

When Craig and his son Christian go out in the middle of the night to look for their missing dog, Winston, they could never have imagined the secrets they'd uncover in their quiet neighborhood. Hiding in plain sight is an unhoused family who doesn't want to be found, preferring to live in the shadowy underground world of their own creation.

Christian feels the need to do some-

thing to help them out of what he sees as a dire circumstance—will both sides trust each other enough to take a giant leap of faith?

This deeply moving tale will both break your heart and lift your spirits by asking— how much help is too much, and is the price too steep for those who need it the most?



ILLUSTRATIONS BY MATT CASSAN



# Strangers on a Train Review – The Best Laid Plans...

By CWC-SFV Member Elaine L. Mura, Ph.D.

Republished with the permission of Splash Magazine

*Strangers on a Train*, Patricia Highsmith's 1949 novel, has inspired a good deal of interest in the mystery/thriller genre. In 1950, the novel caught the attention of iconic motion picture director Alfred Hitchcock. He concealed his involvement in the projected film project and then purchased the film rights from author Highsmith at a bargain basement price. In 1951, Hitchcock's film of the same name was released starring Farley Granger, Ruth Roman, and Robert Walker. Even though the film drew mixed reviews when first released, attitudes mellowed with time as appreciation for Hitchcock's techniques grew.

In 2021, *Strangers on a Train* was selected for preservation in the U.S. National Film Registry by the Library of Congress as "culturally, historically, and aesthetically significant (December 14, 2021)." For California trivia buffs, please note that the seminal interior scene in the amusement park was filmed at a fairground in Canoga Park, while exterior shots were from a Chatsworth ranch. In 2013, *Strangers on a Train* was adapted for the stage by Craig Warner from Highsmith's novel and premiered in London in 2013. Now this mystery-thriller comes to Theatre Forty in Los Angeles in 2024 to give nail-biters something to chew on.

The time progresses from 1952 to 1954, and the place is assorted locations in America and Mexico. Two strangers, architect Guy Haines (Joe Clabby) and playboy Charles Bruno (Michael Mullin) just happen to meet on a train, each going to different destinations in the Southwest. As Guy tells Bruno that he is planning on divorcing his unfaithful wife, an idea begins to form in Bruno's psychopathic mind, given his poor relationship with his father. Why not kill two birds with one stone and, at the same time, create the perfect crime? The two men come up with a plan: Bruno should murder Guy's wife, while Guy should kill Bruno's pop. Since neither man has met the intended victim and therefore has no motive – and since the person with a motive has an ironclad alibi – the police will remain stymied for all time. What could possibly go wrong?

For starters, Guy can't seem to get on board with the plan – while Bruno merrily goes on to do the deed. In psychological twists galore, the story – like the train – keeps speeding to its inevitable destination. Director Jules Aaron helms the production with a careful eye to the slowly building suspense and psychological tension inherent in the piece. Clabby and Mullin convincingly disintegrate as the tale steams along. Supporting characters like Anne Faulkner (Anica Petrovic), Guy's light of love, and Elsie Bruno (Sharron Shayne), Bruno's very Freudian mother, keep the action moving

The production team does a creditable job, including Jeff G. Rack for set design, Derrick McDaniels for lighting, and Nick Foran for sound. Of special note is the clever incorporation of the murder scene into the mundane home setting. *Strangers on a Train* will definitely appeal to mystery-thriller buffs, who might want to take a peek at Hitchcock's film after viewing the stage production.

*Strangers on a Train* runs through February 18, 2024, with performances at 7:30 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays and at 2 p.m. on Sundays. Theatre Forty is located at Beverly Hills High School, 241 S. Moreno Drive, Beverly Hills, CA 90212. Tickets are \$35. For information and reservations, call 310-364-0535 or go [online](#).



Michael Mullin, Anica Petrovic, and Joe Clabby in *Strangers On A Train* - Photo by Eric Keitel



Ann Petrovic and Joe Clabby in *Strangers On A Train* - Photo by Eric Keitel



Michael Mullen and Joe Clabby in *Strangers On A Train*—Photo by Eric Keitel



Sharron Shayne and Michael Mullen in *Strangers On A Train*—Photo by Eric Keitel



[Alfred Hitchcock strangers on a train - Search Images \(bing.com\)](#)

# White

By CWC-SFV Member Ann W. Lee

Chalky seagulls vanish then  
emerge again through milky fog  
that hangs wet-heavy sheets

Below their ghosting hems  
crested winter waves roll  
their meringue foam

Horizon hinges sea and sky  
folding seamless into  
this morning's porcelain backdrop

A thousand shades of white on a  
stretched canvas reach a greyed  
framework of soaked sand

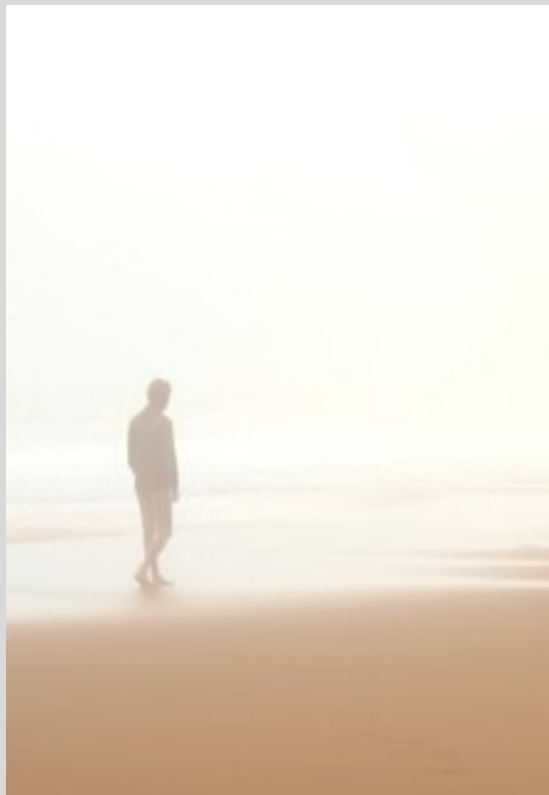
But, for a fleeting moment  
thinnest beams of sunlight  
slice through to the waves

Translucent diamonds drip upon  
this cold sea's white silk collars  
then suddenly vanish

I sit alone, pale with longing  
breath humming with memories of you  
caught in this flattened field of vision

Yet, there is a balmy space  
I hold in this white-washed chill  
where my love waits for you

Come be the contrast, dearest one  
Wrinkle the stretch of my  
red valentine blanket





## **I LOVE TO LOOK AT YOU**

**By CWC-SFV Member Michael Edelstein**

**I love to look at you  
As you lie there nodding  
With light refracted through  
The red edge of God's wing.**

**I view you through my lens  
So different from your own  
Your beauty exceeds sense  
And is to you unknown**

**Could you but see your face  
And know the moon's envy  
Your visage that I trace  
Could fetch Helen's levy.**

**All judgments are specious  
That think you not precious**



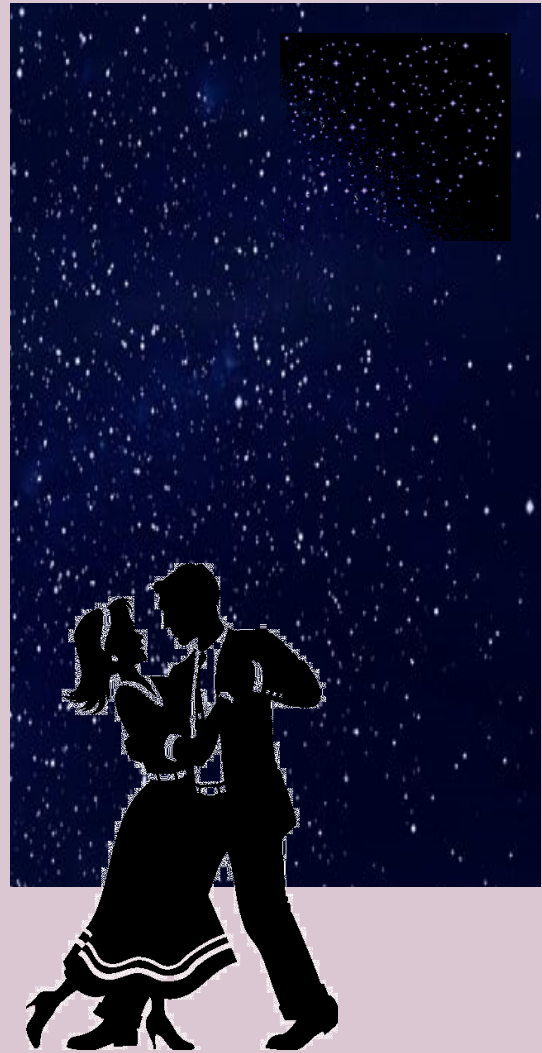


# Lover

By CWC-SFV Member

Lillian Rodich, 2023

so close last night  
I could feel you, touch you  
and the silvery mist of forgetfulness  
drifted away  
heart beating in ...  
perfumed anticipation  
I was  
alive in yesterday's moment  
once my world  
whirling in dance  
later tapping rhythm with a cane  
and now in the moment I linger  
home and content  
my head resting  
on your shoulder  
and we are dancing  
between star clusters



## CWC-SFV EXECUTIVE BOARD OFFICERS, BOARD CHAIRS AND DIRECTORS



**President**  
**Karen Gorback, Ph. D.**

**MPTF Outreach Chair**  
**Phyllis Butcher**

**Vice President and  
Secretary**  
**Elaine L. Mura, Ph. D.**

**Webmaster / Zoom Host**  
**Anat Golan-Wenick**

**Treasurer**  
**Pat Avery**

**SoCal Representative**  
**Karen Gorback, Ph.D.**

**Membership Chair/  
CWC Central Board Chair**  
**Andi Polk**

**Member-at- Large**  
**Gary Wosk**

**Program Chair**  
**Heather Bradshaw**

**Critique Group Coordinator**  
**Vacant**

**Editor of *The Valley Scribe***  
**Kathy Highcove**

## CWC-SFV CLUB INFORMATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

**T**he California Writers Club has been in existence for over 100 years, and the SFV Branch for over 20 years. Our mission is to encourage excellence in writing, fiction, non-fiction and poetry, as well as to reach out into our community and mentor writers at all stages of their writing journey. We hold 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 \(cwc-sfv.org\)](#)

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](#)