

The Valley Scribe

Newsletter of the San Fernando Valley Branch
of the California Writers Club
Supporting Los Angeles and Ventura Counties



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COME HEAR LEE BARNATHAN DISCUSS THE CRAFT OF GHOSTWRITING

By CWC-SFV Speaker Chair Heather Bradshaw

The San Fernando Valley Branch of the California Writers Club is pleased to welcome Calabasas writer LEE BARNATHAN, as the keynote speaker on Saturday, November 2 at 1:00 pm with an in-person presentation about the profession of ghostwriting.



skills required to tell a story in someone else’s voice as well as how to garner the trust needed to help your client open up about his or her life. While sharing the lessons he has learned along the way in developing his craft, including the joys and the pitfalls, Lee will describe how he employs the *journalistic principles*

of honesty, accuracy, clarity and brevity in all of his writing and editing.

To learn more about this presenter’s visit, click on <http://www.leebarnathan.com>, where he runs an interesting blog about his work. Get ready with your questions for the Q & A following the talk. We look forward to seeing you there!

In-person Attendees:

Mingle with other writers and this presenter in the Saban Center at Motion Picture Television Fund, 23388 Mulholland Drive, Woodland Hills, CA 91364. In-person attendees do not need to register in advance. Members are free. Guests pay \$10 at the door. A first visit is free. Please arrive a few minutes early.

Zoom Attendees:

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 November 1, at SFV.CWC@gmail.com for an invitation to register. Zoom guests may purchase admission at www.cwc-sfv.org by noon on November 1. After purchasing admission, guests will receive a Zoom invitation. We regret we cannot accommodate late requests.

For those curious about ghostwriting or perhaps interested in creating a new revenue stream, Lee will discuss the craft, beginning with why people hire ghost writers, how to get started, the differences between fiction and nonfiction, why some stories are worth telling, and how he chooses clients and why he turns down some clients.



A ghostwriter must communicate effectively with a client, ensure that everyone has the same goals, and guarantee that the client has the needed support.

Lee Barnathan

After working in journalism for 16.5 years, Lee tried his hand as a technical writer, a general copywriter, writing websites, speeches, resumes and blogs. It wasn’t until a Philadelphia-area school-teacher asked Lee to **ghostwrite his book, that he realized such a project would** require all the investigative research that he loved as a journalist. Upon completion of the project, Lee found that the emotional reward of helping this teacher tell his story outweighed anything else.

During the presentation, Lee will outline the

HAVE A HEART—SUPPORT YOUR WRITERS CLUB

A Message from CWC-SFV President Karen Gorback

Dear Colleagues:

I wanted to take a moment to thank the CWC-SFV club members who made donations last month, over and above their dues. Heartfelt thanks to Phyllis Butcher, Andrea Polk and Bob Okowitz. We sincerely appreciate their generosity and kindness.

If you have not yet volunteered to serve on the board, you may not know the types of expenses we incur each year as a small, nonprofit organization. Annual expenses include, but are not limited to, the following:

Honoraria for speakers

- Zoom license
- Dues to CWC, our parent organization
- Post office box rental
- Bank fees
- Advertising
- Website hosting fees
- Occasional hospitality and special recognitions



Please consider helping your club meet these expenses by making a donation this month.

There are many ways to help:

1. Sponsor a speaker for \$100. Simply review the Schedule of Speaker on page 4 in this month's Scribe and let me know which speaker you would like to sponsor. We'll be certain to recognize you at the meeting you generously have chosen to sponsor, unless you request to remain anonymous.
2. Honor the anniversary, birthday, or other special day of family members or friends with a donation to our club.
3. During this holiday season, give the gift of membership in the CWC-SFV.
4. Provide a scholarship to a writer you believe would enjoy and benefit from club membership. Your scholarship award extends to nearly all privileges, including submission opportunities, at all 21 branches of the California Writers Club!
5. Remember the passing of someone special with a donation in their memory.

Donating is easy. Make your check out to CWC-SFV and mail it to PO Box 564, Woodland Hills, CA 91365. Or visit www.cwc-sfv.org and click on the "Donations" button at the bottom of the first page.

Questions? Contact me at karen.gorback@gmail.com

Incorporate Mystery, Thriller, Suspense, Romance, and Action into any Work

By Dr. Elaine L. Mura

CWC-SFV Vice President/Secretary, CWC-SFV Member

On 10/5/24, the CWC-SFV hosted Clay Stafford, best-selling and award-winning author, playwright, poet, screenwriter; film, television producer, director, showrunner, actor; book, film and stage reviewer and public speaker. He has sold nearly four million copies of his books and his work has been distributed in sixteen languages. He is also the founder and CEO of the annual [Killer Nashville International Writers Conference](#) and a contributor to *Writer's Digest Magazine* with his online column.

Clay strongly believes that an exceptional story incorporates mystery, thriller, suspense, action and romance—with *one* the focus and *four* appearing in nuanced segments. Utilizing these five approaches will lead to a manuscript which an agent, and ultimately a reader, cannot put down. Clay emphasized that this method applies to all writing, whether it be film, television, plays, novels, memoirs—**anything** that tells a story.

During his varied career, Clay came to realize that these areas spoke to the human brain: “It doesn’t matter what you are writing...it takes writing to a new visceral level. Whether you start from a blank page or a formal outline... everything must call to the reader...we must deal with the past, present and future...the stakes and conflicts must be big.”

The element of **mystery** deals with something difficult or impossible to understand or withheld (events in the past). The element of the **thriller** yields sudden excitement (the *now* in the tale). The element of suspense makes the reader feel anxiety and uncertainty (thoughts of an uncertain future). The element of **action** keeps the story constantly moving. The element of **romance** lends excitement, the feeling of being remote from the everyday, often associated with love. It's also a must to include a plot twist using these five elements.

MYSTERY: This element increases suspense, intrigue, and deals with unanswered questions. Clay recommended withholding the back story and releasing parts of it very slowly using the back story to create an arc. He also recommended slowly revealing a character's secrets in order to foreshadow the final revelation: “Start with a problem or question and keep hooking the reader's curiosity...there must be hidden motives, a secret past...sometimes it's a good idea to use unreliable narrators...keep information flowing, yet control how it is introduced...perhaps with hints, red herrings...you can mislead the reader with false leads or wrong impressions of characters...mysteries are intertwined with atmosphere and setting which should reflect uncertainty about the mystery itself...**MAKE THE READER AN INVESTIGATOR...**let him play detective...you may alternate between time lines, but don't use complete halts like flashbacks.”

THRILLER: An element used to heighten tension and create a sense of danger: “Keeping the reader on the edge of his seat...can include distorted information.” **KEEP CHAPTERS SHORT** and include cliffhangers at the end of every section. **LIMIT DESCRIPTION** since three good descriptors are enough. More tends to bog the reader down. **ADD FREQUENT PLOT TWISTS** to keep the reader involved. **PLAY TO THE CHARACTER'S FEARS AND USE TIME AND OPTIONS:** For example, they are running out

of time or options. Put characters in a closed space with bad things and then keep raising the stakes.



SUSPENSE: Keep the reader on the edge of his seat wondering what will happen in the future. **WRITE SUSPENSEFUL SENTENCES** and **FORESHADOW**. Don't forget to put in red herrings and obstacles, but reveal everything slowly to heighten the stakes. **KEEP THE CLOCK TICKING**. Clay felt that the writer should introduce the threat early on and build an emotional connections between the characters and readers.

Vulnerability and fears are ways to connect. Draw a vivid and tense atmosphere with sounds, smells, touch, etc. But, above all, continue to withhold information.

ACTION: KEEP THE STORY MOVING FORWARD: Clay suggested showing cause and effect and action/reaction. **MAKE IT VISUAL**, not cerebral. **KEEP SEQUENCES SHORT**. Start with a bang and keep the stakes high. Plan out the action in short, fast-paced sentences. Escalate the conflict. Dialog is action. **AVOID OVER-EXPLANATION**.

ROMANCE: Enhance the emotional depth of the story. This is where the beauty of language and the way it is perceived come into play. But romance may not be personal/intimate love but rather **LOVE OF LIFE**. Give the reader something to root for and focus on the chemistry with the world. Create meaningful interactions. For example, Scarlet's romance with Tara in *Gone with the Wind*. Let the reader know what the characters love to keep the reader engaged. Show growth in relationships and don't rush it. Leave some quiet moments so that the reader has time to reflect and absorb.

During the Q&A, Clay indicated that he started the Killer Nashville Conference in 2006. Information can be found at www.Killer.Nashville.com. To peruse the magazine, the link is www.KillerNashvilleMagazine.com. He indicated that an email containing tools and tips is sent free. Clay's weekly newsletter is available at www.ClayStafford.com,

Clay observed that the writer is a learner. While “write what you know” is a good guide, the writer can become expert in almost anything by doing adequate research and linking what he finds out with the natural elements of storytelling. He emphasized that he never saw writers who run out of ideas because there is always something new to learn and explore. He recommended 70,000 word length for novels and 37,000 words for young children's books. He also suggested that one can submit two or three novellas of 37,000 words each in one book. In terms of memoirs, he suggested having a beginning, middle, and end which can turn the memoir into a fiction story. He also indicated that the five elements can exist in a short story. He recommended looking for opportunities to use the five elements by looking at past, present, and future and playing on the character's fears.

Clay Stafford's CWC-SFV audience appeared delighted with his take and eager to follow-up on his suggestions.

THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY BRANCH OF THE CALIFORNIA WRITERS CLUB



PRESENTS OUR 2024-25 GUEST SPEAKERS



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 at 23388 Mulholland Drive, Woodland Hills, CA 91364. Meetings begin at 1 pm. All meetings are hybrid—available online, so you can join from anywhere. 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. Programs are free for all CWC members. Contact us at cwc-sfv.org. For guest admission, visit cwc-sfv.org.

CWC-SFV Program Chair Heather Bradshaw

September 7, 2024

Holly Watson

Book Publicity: The Basics and Beyond

<https://www.hollywatsonpr.com/>

(In-Person)



February 1, 2025

Lisa Teasley

The Art of the Short Story

<https://www.lisateasley.com/>

(In-Person)



October 5, 2024

CLAY STAFFORD

Incorporate Mystery, Thriller, Suspense, Romance and Action into Any Work <https://claystafford.com/>

(Zoom)



March 1, 2025

MANDY JACKSON-BEVERLY

Self Publishing and the Independent Bookstore

<https://mandyjacksonbeverly.com/>

(In-Person)



November 2, 2024

LEE BARNATHAN

All About Ghost Writing

<https://leebarnathan.com/>

(In-Person)



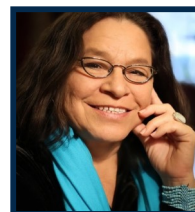
April 5, 2025

MARCIE RENDON

Native American Poetry-Song Writing

<https://www.marcierendon.com/home>

(Zoom)



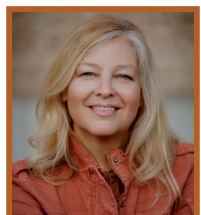
December 7, 2024

SHAWNA KENNEY

How to Write a Winning Book Hook, Query an Agent, and Find Your Place in the Publishing World

<https://www.shawnakenney.com/>

(Zoom)



May 3, 2025

MATTHEW FELIX

A Nontraditional Path to Self-Publishing

<https://www.matthewfelix.com/>

(Zoom)



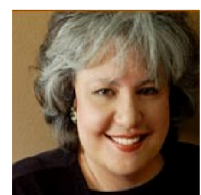
January 11, 2025

DARA MARKS

Story Development

<http://www.daramarks.com/>

(In-Person)



June 7, 2025

THOM HARP

Writing A Low Budget Feature and Getting It Made

www.thomharp.com

(In-Person)



Robbin, From the Hood Review – Sometimes Wrong may be Right

By CWC-SFV Member Dr. Elaine L. Mura



Iesha M. Daniels and William L. Warren in *ROBBIN, FROM THE HOOD* - Photo by Lizzy Kimball



William L. Warren and Enrike Llamas – Photo by Lizzy Kimball

The Road Theatre Company proudly present the world premiere of *ROBBIN, FROM THE HOOD*. Playwright Marlow Wyatt noted that “*ROBBIN FROM THE HOOD* was written as a creative protest to American capitalism. Any system that does not benefit the greater good of the majority must be demolished. May the demolition begin with my pen.” Director Chuma Gault also had some personal thoughts about the play: “...(a) powerful and meaningful piece of theatre...Black director, Black woman playwright, Black female protagonists, father figures, real adult relationships, and a story inspired by a euro-classical, swashbuckling tale of fighting for social equity and representation, all happening on the doorstep of perhaps the most historic election in our country’s history.”

The time is now, and the place moves between a simple ghetto apartment and the corporate headquarters of a huge company. Seventeen-year-old Robbin Woods (Iesha M. Daniels), a math genius, lives with her grandfather (William L. Warren) and is just about to get the most astounding opportunity in her short life. She and her best friend Juan (Enrike Llamas) have been selected for a work-study program in one of the country’s most prestigious corporations. She will train as an accountant under the protective wing of Margaret Brown (Geri-Nikole Love). Artistically talented Juan will spend time in the mail room in preparation for a transfer to the arts department of the company. Her life will soon change in dramatic ways, ways that she could not have ever imagined. While Robbin is overwhelmed by her magnificent surroundings and a glimpse of a life she could only have dreamed of, she still cannot fail to recognize the massive inequities that exist between her everyday world and this capitalist dream world. Can she hope to level the playing field? Is it even possible for one person to make a significant change in society? To do so, do some rules have to be broken?

Director Chuma Gault and lead actor Daniels do a thoughtful job of transitioning this bright, impressionable teenager from eager acceptance to questioning her role in this too-good-to-be-true rags-to-riches scenario. In fact, the entire ensemble cast breathes life into each of the people in Robbins’ life. The production team also contributes mightily to the tale, including Amanda Knehans’ flexible set design, Nicholas Santiago’s lively projection design, Wendell C. Carmichael’s costumes, Derrick McDaniel’s lighting, and John Zalewski’s sound.

ROBBIN, FROM THE HOOD abounds in ethical quandaries and never ceases to ask the serious question: Is it possible to do the wrong thing for the right reason? Audiences who enjoy people trying to find the answers to unanswerable questions will find the play fascinating and intriguing. Those who flirt with activism of all types will certainly relate to Robbin, a young woman on a quest.

ROBBIN, FROM THE HOOD runs through November 17, 2024, with performances at 8 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays and at 2 p.m. on Sundays. The Road Theatre is located in the NoHo Senior Arts Colony, 10747 Magnolia Blvd., North Hollywood, CA. Tickets are \$39 (seniors \$25; students \$17). For information and reservations, call 818-761-8838 or [go online](#).

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Geri-Nikole Love and Iesha M. Daniels – Photo by Lizzy Kimball



Rob Nagle and Geri-Nikole Love – Photo by Lizzy Kimball



Joshua R. Lamont and William L. Warren – Photo by Lizzy Kimball

AN EXCERPT FROM THE NOVEL *FRESHMAN MOM*

Author: CWC-SFV President Karen Gorback

As a kid, I looked forward to Thanksgiving more than any other holiday of the year. The garlicky-sweet aromas of roast turkey and candied sweet potatoes perfumed our little tract house and lingered throughout the evening, as the men played pinochle in the living room and the women picked through turkey bones for leftovers in the kitchen. I always woke up early on Thanksgiving morning to help my mother with dinner preparations; and as I grew, I graduated from polishing the silver to setting the table to the most important job of all – basting the turkey every twenty minutes.

“Pearl, the turkey’s so moist and delicious, even the white meat. What is your secret?” Uncle Murray would ask my mother every year. And every year my mother would look across the table at me and wink, silently sharing our secret knowledge of the extraordinary powers of regular basting.

I still smile at those memories and hope my own children will cherish Thanksgiving as much I did, which is why I was crushed to a pulp when 16-year-old Heather suggested, “Why don’t we just skip it this year.”

“I agree. It’s such a hassle,” added Jason, her 12-year-old brother.

“You aren’t serious, are you? How can we not have Thanksgiving dinner?” My disappointment seeped into the happy memories like sludge from the Exxon Tanker Valdez glopping up the Alaskan coast.

“Yeah, Mom. We know that Thanksgiving is like your favorite holiday and all, but how about we just go to a restaurant or something this year? It’ll be a lot less work,” the Wise One suggested.

“Great idea! How ‘bout we start a new tradition! Maria’s Mexican Restaurant for Thanksgiving!” Jason added.

“Hold it Gang! No skipping Thanksgiving and no Mexican Restaurant. We’re having Thanksgiving dinner right here like we always do. Don’t you look forward to the wonderful smell of roast turkey all day?”

The kids looked at each other for sympathy. Maybe they weren’t so keen on Thanksgiving this year because it would be the first one since the divorce. And while I sensed they might be hurting, I wasn’t quite ready to deal with that reality; so instead, I behaved like a mature adult and attempted to mask the pain with talk of turkey and mashed potatoes.



Oh, brother.

“Ok, Mom. We’ll do the Thanksgiving thing.” Heather rolled her eyes in the manner that all teenage girls must perfect before graduating from high school.

“Great. That’s better. Now who should we invite?”

“Well, definitely Grandma.” offered Jason.

“Good. Grandma.” I put an imaginary checkmark on an imaginary list in front of my face.

“And how about Grandma’s friend Louise whose husband just died. She’ll probably be lonesome on Thanksgiving.”

“That’s very thoughtful of you, Jason. Who else?”

“Well how about your best friend Claire?” offered Heather.

“Perfect. Claire will definitely come,” I confirmed. “Who else?”

Heather and Jason exchanged a glance, that to the trained eye of an experienced mother, spelled trouble.

“Ok, kids. What’s up?”

Silence.

“Sing, or I’m going to have this place crawling with cops,” I threatened in my best Cagney voice, which was completely lost on the two adolescents. “So what’s going on? Are we still discussing the guest list for Thanksgiving, or have we drifted on to another topic?”

“Well, it’s just that, you think it’s important to have friends, right?” Heather stood up and began circling the table.

“Right, so?”

“I mean, Grandma has Louise and you have Claire, and Jason has friends, and . . .

“Heather, the point?”

“Well. . . Sweetheart, what are you trying to say?”

“It’s like. . .”

The poor kid was sweating; and just as she looked toward her brother for moral support, Jason exploded. “Heather has a boyfriend.”

“You creep,” screamed Heather.

“You promised you wouldn’t say anything! You’re lower than pond scum, than moldy, green bread! You’re the microbes that the bugs eat, the. . .”

“That’s enough Heather,” I out-shouted her. “Jason, let me to talk to your sister for a few minutes.”

“Heather has a boyfriend, Heather has a boyfriend.” the little brother taunted in the age-old sing-song that brothers have been chanting to torment their sisters since the beginning of time.

I took a deep breath and turned toward my beautiful teenage daughter with the wavy chestnut hair and big brown eyes, now welling with tears of embarrassment. “So, who is this young man of yours?”

Suddenly I was Tevye in Act II of *Fiddler on the Roof*.

She sniffed back the tears and wiped her nose on the sleeve of her tee shirt.

“Well, first of all his name is Adam.”

“Adam. That’s a very nice name.” I sounded stupid.

“He’s the vice president of the senior class and he scored in the 85th percentile on his SAT’s.”

“Eighty-fifth percentile? Very impressive.”

After several moments of silence, I dove for the rescue.

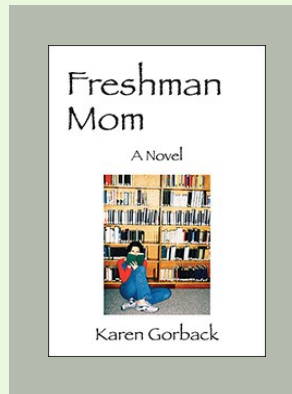
“He sounds wonderful, Sweetheart. Would you, by any chance like to invite him to Thanksgiving dinner?”

Heather’s sigh of relief could be heard throughout the free world. Then she threw her arms around my neck like she hadn’t done since she was six. I reveled in the moment and then slipped back into reality. “But won’t his family mind his being away for Thanksgiving?”

“I don’t think so. His parents are divorced too, so if he comes here, they won’t fight over where he will have Thanksgiving dinner this year.”

Freshman Mom—A Novel

Freshman Mom is a contemporary, fast-paced novel, with themes illustrating the values of friendship, family, education, and moving on. The book tells the story of Meredith's freshman year of college, filled with the angst of parenthood mingled with the challenges of going back to school and the uncertainty of new relationships. [Video Trailer http://youtu.be/eL07HNxoe9w](http://youtu.be/eL07HNxoe9w)

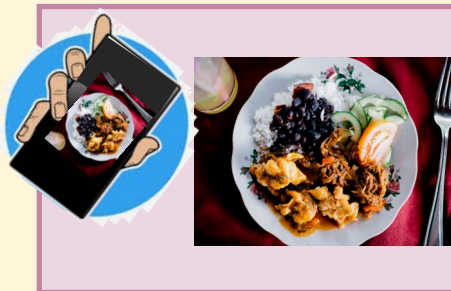


Writers —Try Something New

By CWC-SFV Editor Kathy Highcove

Writing is a creative activity and our speakers have often advised that every writer needs to be challenged by a new genre.

Several years ago, when I was a freelance writer working from home, I occasionally wrote articles for a local newsletter. My assignments were usually interviews with local business owners, like a dentist who ran a large dental clinic or two men who helped their clients plan special parties. I had such a good time learning how they found a comedian, singer or clowns for a party.



When my employer asked me to write a review of a popular Chinese restaurant, I was surprised. I had never written a restaurant review but I agreed to give it a try. When my spouse, Joe, and I showed up that night during a raging rain storm, the restaurant owner was very surprised! We were treated to about 25 tasty dishes (No other customers had braved the rain storm and the chef had lots of time.) My review of the eatery greatly pleased this owner, and so my editor sent me on many more reviews. Most of my reviews were requested by a restaurant’s owner, and scheduled for a designated evening..

For a year, Joe and I dined a couple times a month, at Valley dining spots. Joe learned how to take photos of an entrée and I learned how

to write a restaurant review. Here’s what I learned:

1. Upon arrival, immediately find the restaurant owner. Inform him or her on why you’ve come—usually at their request of your editor—to the establishment. Then, ask to meet the head chef to learn his/her culinary background and philosophy regarding how to run the kitchen for this particular establishment.
 2. Find out what dishes you’ll be served and how to spell the entrée’s name. Take note of the ingredients and learn the variations. Ask the server or chef or owner to indicate on the menu the dishes you will sample and make sure the names and prices are accurate in your review. Keep a copy of the menu, if possible.
 3. At the end of your review, write down the eatery’s website, the hours and the restaurant’s address. Spell everyone’s name correctly. Include the restaurant’s phone number and the operating hours. Do a double, triple check on your text before submitting it.
- Often, Joe and I felt like honored guests. For example, at a Cuban restaurant the owner warmly greeted us and proudly introduced us to all his staff. We were quickly seated and soon the dishes began to arrive. What a feast! All dishes were beautifully arranged for Joe’s camera lens. We enjoyed Cuban wine, rich coffee, wonderful desserts ... Suddenly, another diner came over to our table and said, “We come here every week. Great food.” I put the endorsement in the story. Only one downside of this experience: I had to diet when the job ended. But I learned something new— a plus for this writer!

The Gift

gray and white, abandoned
by the door
her tiny, six month furry form,
so frail, so young
could not absorb the weight
of five to feed once born.
Into my life her babes,
bequeathed to live and
teach my soul to share
and love her helpless, orphaned,
mewling mass.

I turned around,
twelve years had lapsed
and one by one
they all had moved
beyond my reach
to mortal dark and
silence

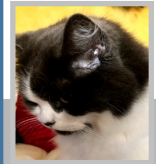
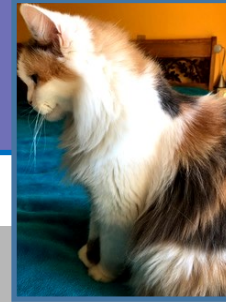
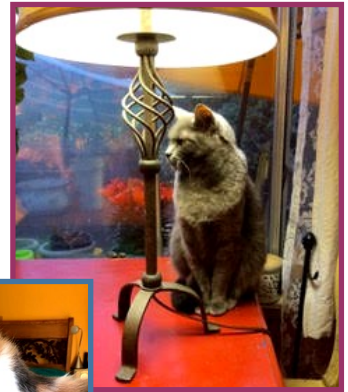
and if I gathered all the light
that passed before their
caring eyes
and knew each sound
by which they knew the day,
each trot across the winter quilt,
the greeting of extended paws,
the mantra of a warm
and purring dawn,

would my tattered heart again
accept the simple precious joy
that every day, was
given me to love them?



Loves Who Are Deep Within Us

Poems by
Ken Mazur



The Leash*

The tiniest of flowers trim the path,
the sky a sunrise blue.
There is patience in beauty.
The green moss, the butternut trail,
the light beneath the bridge in shadows.
We have sectioned and divided time to our peril.
Come Maggie, show me the way.
Show me your eyes, your world in the smell
of the forest, in the paths of living things.
A world without a ticking clock.
A world of paws and leaves,
feathers and roots, earth.
A world that breathes without pause
and doesn't wait, hurry,
or wander seeking ever more
beyond the rising dawn.



*This poem has been published in
the CWC REDWOOD WRITERS 2024
POETRY ANTHOLOGY.

Find Ken Mazur's poem at:

[2024 Poetry Anthology - Redwood Writers](#)

MEET NEW CWC-SFV MEMBER

SHEREE JACOBS

My name is Sheree Jacobs; I'm a teacher, songwriter, mother of twins, widow and a blossoming writer. I have spent many years doting on my family, especially my husband Stuart, who was an agent who represented several writers, producers and actors at the Buchwald Agency.

After my husband passed away, I devoted myself to raising my twin sons as a single mother, while balancing a career and charity work for LLS Leukemia and Lymphoma Society as well as PSP Progressive Supranuclear Palsy. I love cooking, biking, and playing the piano,

I try to be a true follower of the teachings of Buddha. I am committed to making a difference in the world, striving for international understanding taking an active involvement in politics.

Being an extravert gives me the courage to reach out to everyone. Thus, I learn and grow from my many friendships. I have always dreamed of writing a book but thought my ability to write was limited to poetry and song lyrics. But last summer, on my break from teaching, I saw your writing group's online advertisement. Last June, I went to my first meeting CWC-SFV meeting to hear Woody Woodburn's talk about writing skills. He told his listeners, "A writer must catch a reader's attention in the very first paragraph, perhaps the first sentence!"

I remember raising my hand to thank Woody for his inspirational talk. After that first CWC-SFV meeting, I went home, sat down at my computer and started working on my book's first draft. The words flew from my hands onto the computer screen! I was writing a mixture of real experiences spiced with fictional material from my imagination. I am drawn to this way of expressing myself in my songs and poems. I think my book is a both a memoir and a novel. In the past, I had a very painful relationship and I found it cathartic to write about that experience and several other past relationships.

Unfortunately, I am not yet a member of a CWC-SFV critique group. I would very much appreciate peer feedback on what I have written! There is something so satisfying about writing a long story and imagining how a reader might feel while reading my story. I felt confident writing the early chapters of my book, yet sometimes I've struggled trying to decide where to go next. I'm very interested in learning more about the writing craft and I look forward to sharing my work with other SFV writers .



After attending that first CWC-SFV meeting, I went home, sat down at my computer and started working on my book's first draft.

The words flew from my hands onto the computer screen!

California Gold

By CWC-SFV Member Sara Coyle



Nevada City House

Painting by Sara Coyle

*In the “Gold Country”
of central California
I visited my friends,
Jewell and Lloyd.*

*We drove by streets reminding me
of a New England town,
filled with old houses
and giant deciduous trees
that were just changing color.*

*The gold mines
under the ground are gone
but the gold leaves
fill up the sky
and float to the ground.
Gold is all around us,
still bright and beautiful,
returning year after year.*

*May the holidays
light up your life
and bring you peace.*

Kudos to one of our own. Ed McBride's story, "End of the Road," was judged first place winner of this year's short fiction contest sponsored by the San Joaquin Valley branch. The story, an excerpt from Ed's soon to be published novel, *Our Brooklyn*, is available now on their website, sjvalleywriters.com/contest, and will be part of their 2025 anthology. Another of Ed's stories, "Blood," was just published in the *Transitions* anthology published October 13 by the CWC Redwood branch. Please Read the opening pages of Ed's "End of the Road" story below.



END OF THE ROAD

By Ed McBride



"The tropical plants," Penny said, pointing at the thick date palms guarding the entrance to our apartment complex, "that's what I liked best about this place."

It was pretty. Even our neighborhood, a run-down part of a predominantly black section in North Pasadena, was lush with the kind of foliage Penny and I had only seen in botanical gardens. We'd spent a lot of time those first weeks in California walking up and down streets taking it all in.

"It's much greener than I thought it would be."

"And hillier," I said.

We stood looking at each other a moment. Then I went back into the room to get Penny's other suitcase. She stayed outside in front of the van, our Volkswagen camper, looking up at the mountains. The mountains were barely visible, blocked out by a yellow blanket of haze. We hadn't seen the mountains, really seen them, in several days. The smog had gotten so thick that I felt like I was having trouble breathing.

"You want to come in?" I asked after getting the suitcase. "Say goodbye to the room?"

She shrugged. "It's only a room."

It was only a room: a "furnished room" with a tiny bathroom, a kitchenette, an olive-green couch that converted into a bed, a worn green rug, a television. The TV was a twenty-four inch with a picture that looked smoggier than the air outside, but it was Penny's favorite thing in the apartment. We'd spent a lot of time watching late night television, shows like *Saturday Night Live* that were filmed "back home", as she called it, in New York.

"It's not just a room," I said. "It starts out as a room but then you fill it up."

She didn't say anything. She just picked up the suitcase and put it into the van. The van was something we'd bought together a couple of weeks before leaving New York. In the two months we were on the road, it became more than transportation. It was where we slept, where we made love, where we were living our lives. It was our home.

In the van, heading for the freeway, I put my hand on Penny's knee. She didn't respond. On our trip across the country one of the things she would sometimes do was sit naked in the passenger seat while I was driving. She would sit down low with her feet up against the dashboard

so that passing cars would see only her face and maybe her feet, but I could see everything, and it drove me crazy. Everything about Penny drove me crazy.

Penny had been my first love. Six years earlier, when we were teenagers, we spent an entire summer groping and clinging to each other on rooftops and in the backs of garages, under apartment house staircases and even occasionally in one of our bedrooms. At the end of the summer, I went off to college and lost her. Before I made it home for Christmas, she had met Tony Romano. He was 35 at the time; Penny was 17.

During the three years of Penny's marriage, we saw each other only accidentally, but always I would long for her with an ache that was physical and deep, unlike any other pain I'd ever known.

"You better get the brakes fixed," Penny said as we headed down the Pasadena freeway toward the Greyhound Bus Depot. "As soon as you have some money."

Money.

"I will. Unless I sell it first. If I can get a decent price, I'll sell it. I'll send you half the money."

"If you don't sell it, get the brakes fixed. Brakes are important."

She was sitting up straight, staring out at the narrow, twisting freeway, the oldest and most dangerous freeway in L.A. Penny no longer looked comfortable in our rolling former home. She was wearing make-up and a pants suit, things I hadn't seen since we left New York. I reached for her hand and took it in mine. She squeezed back. I held her hand all the way down the freeway until we reached our exit downtown.

"When it was good, it was really good," she said with a little attempt at a smile. "We always had chemistry, didn't we?"

I wanted to look at her deeply, to try to get through those pretty green eyes into her complicated brain. But I had to keep my eyes on the road.

"Florida was fun," she said. "I liked Florida."

She wanted to stay there. To get a house on the beach somewhere. But that was just a fantasy. We didn't have any money. We'd spent a month in Florida, sleeping in the van, bathing in the Gulf, cooking on our Coleman stove in the open air, making love in every way two people can.

One night in Key West, she talked about her mother. We were lying side by side in the back of the van. It was the first time she mentioned her mother since the funeral weeks earlier.

“Mom really liked you,” she said. “She liked to see us together. Did you know that: the way she always talked about you?”

Her eyes were wet and her body started to tremble. I took her into my arms and held her as tightly and securely as I could for as long as she would let me. Penny’s mother had killed herself. Overdosed on sleeping pills. It was to me that Penny came for comfort, not Tony Romano. Their separation was fresh and ugly, full of threats and abuse. So, when her mother died and she needed someone to hold her, Penny returned to me.

“You can keep the spoon rest,” Penny said, with a half smile. “You never know when you might need one.”

“You mean you’re not taking it? On the bus.”

“No, I’m giving it to you,” she said with a straight face.



“Don’t you want my present?”

“Actually,” I said, “I’d rather have your future.”

That got her to smile.

The spoon rest was something I’d teased her about. It was a flat silver thing with places for two teaspoons. Something you might find in homes a lot fancier than any home Penny or I knew in Brooklyn. In our home on wheels, I couldn’t have thought of a sillier thing to bring along.

I watched her pull her hair back away from her face, her amazingly sensual lips set in a playful smile, and realized that even here, at the end of the road, I thought she was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

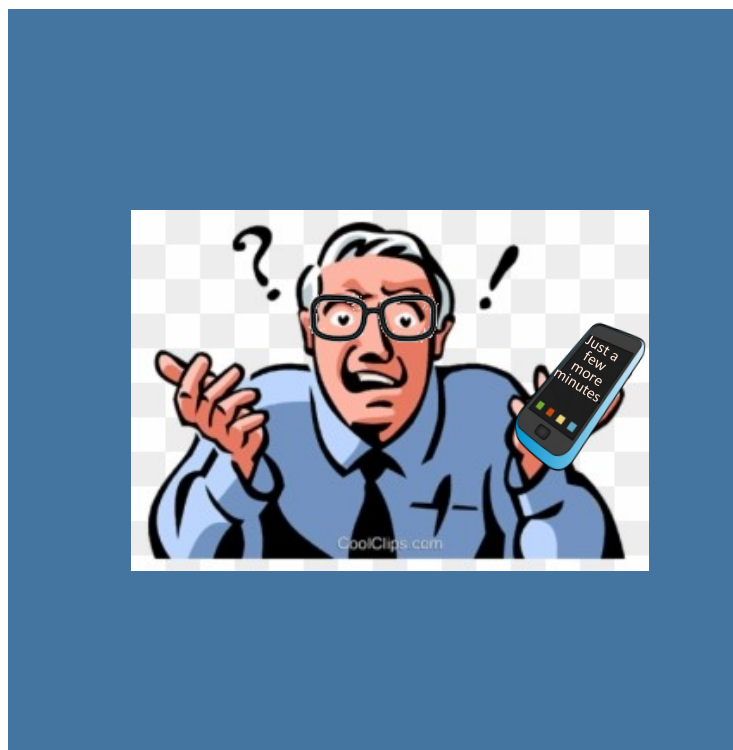
If you’d like to read the end of Ed McBride’s story, go to:

sjvalleywriters.com/contest,

A Moment’s Not A Minute

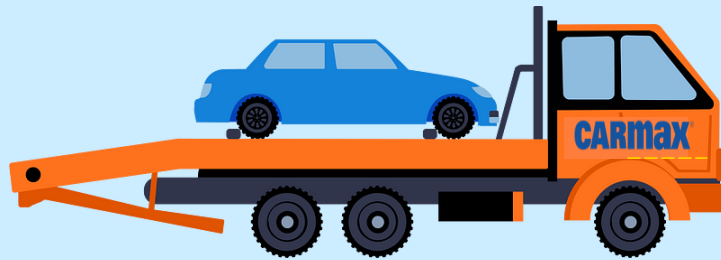
By CWC-SFV Member Michael Edelstein

A moment’s not a minute
When you’re holding on
Time can be infinite
Until the wait is gone
I suppress earned angina
Holding for the manager
How many hours have I spent
Wondering where my contact went
I do wish that I grew wiser
Waiting for their supervisor
Don’t they know they are friendless
When the waiting time is endless
I develop a bitching itch
As I stay for the call to switch
And then it comes, the liars knock,
“Don’t hold on, we’ll call you back”
When defenseless and feeling small
I despise making that call
In my throat I feel such hate
When I phone and sit and wait.



I DON'T CRY OVER NOT DRIVING A CAR

By CWC-SFV Member Norman Molesko



Eventually, my abilities to drive seemed questionable. Folks like me were called unsafe and high-risk drivers. So I decided to sell my car to CARMAX and stop driving.

It was not as difficult as it might first appear.

No more fluctuating gas prices, no more auto insurance, no more DMV notices, no more expensive auto repairs.

Making the decision to stop driving was cost savings

No more driving a car to go for groceries, for basic essentials, to see a doctor, to go to a bank.

Now, family members, neighbors and friends are kind enough to drive me somewhere, sometimes.

I reach out to Uber or Go-Go or Senior Center transportation, for some groceries, for basic essentials, for a doctor, for a dentist, to enjoy myself at a Senior Center.

I can reach out to Instacart, Go-Go or Door Dash, for convenient home deliveries to my very front door.

This has been another transition period in my life for adjusting, to enable me to continue living a healthy and creative life style.

Good luck to all of you when you stop driving.

NOVEMBER

By CWC-SFV Member Lillian Rodich

tree branches wave bare arms
like orchestra maestros
leading Wind's winter melody
dawn crosses the dark horizon
clearing a path for sunlight
to join the chorus
dry leaves dance away
singing long forgotten songs
of love and friendship

Learn more about the California Writers Club

Do you live to write? Write for a living? Whether you're a published author or "just always wanted to write," there's a place for you in California Writers Club! Our 21 branches range from Mendocino to Orange County and include writers of all levels and interests. Our mission: to educate writers of all abilities in the craft of writing and the marketing of their work.

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), located at 23388 Mulholland Dr, Woodland Hills, CA 91364, 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 CWC-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](#)

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