

WriteOn! WriteNow!



Historical novels are echoes of contemporary debates

Contributed by
Ted Witt

Serious writers who venture out to write historical fiction go through an evolutionary journey that changes their perceptions of the past and present.

These writers start out as tourists, become ex-pats, and end up natives, said acclaimed novelist Mary Volmer, who was the guest speaker at November’s meeting of the California Writers Club, Sacramento Branch.

“Historical fiction, crafted well, demands this kind of travel,” she told the packed restaurant on the Saturday that opened the extended Thanksgiving week.

This journey helps writers skillfully craft the context of a story, offering a more convincing illusion of authenticity, she told Sacramento writers. “This is a large part of our goal when writing historical fiction: to create the illusion of authenticity.”

Volmer is the author of two historical novels *Crown of Dust* and *Reliance, Illinois* — books whose protagonists seem to resemble the author: “resilient, educated, street smart, intrepid,” so says the *San Jose Mercury News*.

“It does little good to ask, is the story true?” said Volmer. “Of course not, entirely. The question that matters in fiction is: could it have been true? Given the context created—be it a world of magic, or a leper colony on the Nile—could it have been true?”

On the journey to reach that authenticity, Volmer said, we must follow the traveler’s transformation from tourist, to ex-pat, to native.

As a “tourist” on a research trek, the writer brings little more than “an idea, a question, the germ of a story,” she said.

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Mary Volmer

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She spoke of the traveler in the third person, but her lecture described her own mindset as a historical novelist and tourist: "She has yet to understand that, in this place, she is the oddity, perceiving all through the narrow scope of her own experience."

Volmer explained, "She has yet to venture from well-worn, tourist friendly paths to the primary sources: the journals, letters home, the birth and death records, and receipts that represent the apartments, bedrooms, alleyways, and bars where real people live."

At the next point of the evolutionary journey, the writer sees only sources, Volmer said. "She risks fetishizing the place in time, offering generalizations instead of insights, and reducing the complexity of human experience to a few base drives."

Transitioning to the role of ex-pat, the writer desires a deeper understanding. Volmer explained that in her ex-pat-researcher role, she spent weeks learning lace-making to understand the culture of the time, but lace-making never ended up as a substantial element in her book.

Eventually the writer realizes that the "similarities she shares with the people of this place in time overwhelm the differences." In fact, Volmer explained, historical novels are echoes of contemporary debates. The writer is changed by discoveries she only meant to document.



Mary Volmer, right, and VP Gini Grossenbacher chat with attendees after Mary's presentation on "A Traveler's Approach to Crafting Historical Fiction."

She said, "Our traveler now wishes...to translate raw human experience with enough subtly, compassion, and depth to speak truth across time. To find the spirit of the book she must let go of her intentions and her slavish fidelity to fact."

Perhaps the hardest part of writing a novel, said Volmer, is surrendering original intentions and looking beyond them.

The result is, she concluded, "a book whose subject is the past, whose audience lives in the present, but which exists outside of each."

The author, who received her master's degree in fine arts at St. Mary's College in Lafayette, Cali-

fornia, now teaches some classes at St. Mary's, where she actually lives in the dorms with her husband —also an instructor — and their four-year-old.

A basketball athlete and native to Grass Valley, Volmer did not plan to be a writer until the study of literature changed her ambitions.

She earned another master's from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, where she was a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar. She has been awarded residencies at the Vermont Studio Center and Hedgebrook.

Her short fiction and essays have appeared in the *Farallon Review* and *Mutha Magazine*.

Bringing in the new year: 720-plus daily waking minutes

Contributed by

By Kimberly A. Edwards

CWC Branch President

A writer's work goes on around the clock, doesn't it? Many famous authors have written about the value of observation when not engaged in the direct act of writing. Each day brings 1,440 minutes, more than half of which occur during waking hours. These precious moments allow time for rest and recalibration. For writers, this can mean the opportunity to discover subtleties about human behavior they can later apply to stories.

Recently at an outdoor concert, I observed a man dancing in the aisle, just feet away from two women seated in the row in front of me. He appeared to be in his late 70s and was elegantly dressed in a tailored sweater zipped up to his neck. The couple remained dancing in the aisle instead of moving close to the band where other couples were dancing. Midway through the song, the woman turned away and joined the other women seated in front of me. As she sat down, one of the two seated women stood up and proceeded to finish out the dance with the man. When the music ended, they both joined the seated women.

As the man was starting to sit down, one of the women stood up. She was not one of the women he had danced with. By far, she was the best dressed, wearing a simple, elegant sweater and skirt. From the side, I could see



Kim Edwards

that she was handsome in pearls and silver pageboy. A lovely shawl draped over the back of her chair. She and the man bent their heads together; she used not her hands but her voice, low and determined — this I could tell from my seat — to communicate with him in a brief consultation. I sensed five decades of marriage in this pair. When the next song began, the man danced again, not with

her but with a woman who had come up to greet them. Throughout many more songs, the man danced in the aisle with female acquaintances who approached with salutations.

Before I knew it, I was speculating about the lives of this little group: upbringing, social status, hopes, and tensions. The man and the woman in pearls, in particular, reminded me that, not only do actions inform us about human nature and give clues to relationships, but they also stimulate ideas for developing characters and showing degrees of intimacy. The experience of observation was more memorable than the music. As writers, we always have something to learn, even when sitting.

Happy New Year's to all CWC Sacramento Branch members, and may 2017 be filled with rich observations!

First Friday, December 2: Congratulations, you've finished your manuscript, now what?

Join retired lawyer John Wagner for an interactive discussion about vendors and services available to help your manuscript become a published book. John will offer some suggestions but also wants members to suggest resources they like.

Join us at 9 a.m. Friday, Dec. 2, at the IHOP Restaurant, 2216 Sunrise Blvd, Rancho Cordova for networking and tips.



January 21: Writing coach offers insight to craft of memoir

What is it about memoir that's drawing more and more writers to the genre? And why is it so controversial? We'll take a look at what memoir actually is, how

to do it well, and why it matters so much—despite critics—when professional writing coach Brooke Warner comes to the CWC Sacramento Branch.

She will speak Saturday, Jan. 21, at the 11 a.m. general meeting at Cattlemens Restaurant, 12409 Folsom Blvd. in Rancho Cordova.

This discussion will touch upon both craft and process and will unpack why Brooke and so many others know memoir to be a truly magical—albeit it challenging—genre for writers.

Brooke Warner will take you on a deep dive into the fastest-growing genre that people love to hate.

In this presentation, attendees will learn:

- The five major craft points of memoir writing.



Brooke Warner

- Why memoir is so beloved and so reviled.
- The major challenges (part of process) that all writers of memoir will confront and how to work with and around them.
- Why memoir is, in fact, magical and why all writers of memoir know this to be true.
- How to capture the attention of agents and editors if you're thinking about shopping your memoir.



Founded 1909

Sacramento Branch California Writers Club

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Creativity: Answer a question by picking a random passage

Contributed By

Sandra S. Navarro

Kudos to CWC Sacramento member extraordinaire Larry Mandelberg for successfully moderating November's First Friday get-together! Herd the cats, he did, guiding all 35 of us through illuminating self-introductions, providing space for Ted Witt's "short" on formatting a manuscript (to avoid curses from our book designers), orchestrating a most thoughtful question-and-answer session, and graciously preparing us for the spectacular presentation of Susan Osborn, Ph.D., our beloved CWC Sacramento member and tongue-in-cheek humorist. Phew!

Here are some highlights:

Our wily attendees introduced themselves as writers of alternative historical fiction, legal thrillers, cozy mysteries, adventure poetry, creative nonfiction travel, military action adventure, and more. Such an interesting group! Tips to enhance writing, also offered during our self-introductions and also demonstrating our engaged minds, included: (a) stay off the Internet while writing, (b) study poetry, (c) volunteer widely for knowledge and inspiration, and (d) carry a small black book to collect the dirt (and dust) far and wide.

Ted Witt provided insider information on formatting a manuscript. No return key to put space between paragraphs or titles? No three periods to create an ellipsis? No tab key to indent a paragraph? Who knew? (Speaking for those present, Ted, we will cherish your



handout, "Format a Manuscript that Will Make Your Publisher, Agent and Designer Love You More.")

Moderator Larry demonstrated his stuff during the question-and-answer session. An entrepreneur and business coach (as well as a writer), Larry took us back to the 1970s when responding to a software question, reminding us that Microsoft Word was written specially for writers. In addition to software history, Larry also directed our minds to the gutter (the kind which allows for book binding). We learned from those assembled that authors themselves are not always the most gifted public readers of their works. Practicing before mirrors (and Toastmasters) and watching Ted Talks on YouTube may help to inform a writer about the powers of modulation and of volume when reading in the public arena.

A scrap of paper handed to this scribe during the meeting contained this typed message, "NaNoWriMo: Planning a Novel with Evernote Templates-Evernote Blog." In handwriting, this message, "Scrivener, Microsoft writing program."

After the preliminaries, we were thoroughly warmed up for our main presenter, Susan Osborn. Susan's topic was "Stoke Your Creative Fire: Three Ways to Revitalize Your Writing." Were there only three in Susan's inspirational address?

Susan (author of *The Awful Bosses Coloring Book*) encouraged us to be imaginative and playful in our writing and to never, ever let those many "blocks" stop the awakening of our creative potential. Make it up! Mix it up! Susan's discussion of genre hybrids caught my attention. Why not incorporate letters, testimonies, case records, recipes, clinical documents, press releases, and so on, in one volume? Susan reminded us that the warmth and light generated by creative explosion nourishes the writer's soul. By the way, thanks, Susan, for instructing us in the art of bibliomancy (an attempt to foretell the future or answer a question by picking a passage at random from a book) and for recalling to us Salvador Dali's spoon-dropping technique used to reclaim the inventiveness of dreams.

Progress Report: Club achievements to meet member needs

Thanks to the CWC Board of Directors, the following steps have occurred in accordance with member requests and expectations.

While more is left to be done, the 2016-17 membership year has gotten off to a great start! Please continue to give us your feedback and suggestions for improving our club.

Saturday Membership Meetings

1. Increased attendance at meetings, exceeding the required minimum attendance, thereby eliminating fiscal risk for the branch.
 2. Lowered meeting fee to \$15 for members.
 3. Instituted a drawing whereby one member each month receives free admittance to the next meeting.
 4. Instituted a practice whereby attendees may pay meeting fees by credit card.
 5. Streamlined meetings by promptly starting meal service at 11 a.m. and ending meetings at 1 p.m.
 6. Instituted a more flexible speaker-fee arrangement.
 7. Added value by offering early-bird presentations and informational handouts.
- ### IHOP "Tip" Network Meetings
8. Developed a distinguishing identity for IHOP meeting, lessening confusion between IHOP and the Saturday membership meetings.
 9. Developed a list of genre-alike members.
 10. Instituted the practice of rotating members as facilitators of meetings.

11. Brought back written member write-up of meetings for the newsletter.
12. Added benefit through presentations by the vice president/programs.

Communication

13. Reinstated the monthly branch newsletter and increased its frequency.
14. Increased personal, two-way communication with members through emails and two "CWC in the Community" meetings.
15. Published and distributed branch business cards.
16. Surveyed all members and distributed results.
17. Moved the branch mailbox

address from El Dorado Hills with a minimal amount of disruption.

18. Transitioned and redesigned branch Facebook page.

19. Developed a plan to issue a membership directory in January, 2017.

Board

20. Made an open call to members to consider participating in the board.

21. Held a board orientation on required roles, group decision making, and positive communication with all members.

22. Made a commitment to update the Sacramento Branch Policies and Procedures to build in branch protections and to align with the state organization.

23. Brought more members to the board, enriching the diverse, democratic voice of our branch.

Writing Improvement

24. Strengthened writing improvement as a centerpiece goal for the branch.

25. Encouraged critique groups.

Membership and Relationship to the State Organization

26. Successfully processed a remarkable percent of membership renewals and of new memberships.

27. Attended, as a team of five people, the CWC Building Better Branches meeting, bringing new ideas back for consideration.

Other

28. Brought in two additional display poster boards for a total of five showcasing members' published books.

Open Mic Returns in January

at
Dimple Books

Citrus Heights
7830 Macy Plaza Dr.
Citrus Heights

Under the Leadership of Member Brian Lewis

Time and Date to Come





Members attending the Building Better branches events were (from left) Kim Edwards, Ray Blain, Karen Dunham, Mike Brandt, and Ted Witt.

Delegation represents Sacramento for strengthening branches

Contributed by
Ray Blain, Board Member

You and I join organizations hoping that they will provide us with one or more benefits. This is not self-ish; this is practical and important because we have limited time, specific desires, and distinct interests. Being a member of California Writers Club and our Sacramento Branch is no different.

In October, four of us, including our new President Kim Edwards, had the pleasure of attending a think tank and sharing conference in Fremont sponsored by the NorCal group of CWC Branches and hosted by Fremont Area Writers. The Conference lasted six hours including the breakout, think-tank, sharing sessions. To write about all that was discussed, shared, and learned would take pages.

Let me share just a few ideas that will benefit us all.

Sandy Baker, president of the Redwood Writers, gave the hour-long keynote address. It was jam

packed with good ideas presented under the headings of Authors Facing the Public, Reading to Share, On-Going Writer How-to, Challenging Writers, and Writers Helping Writers. The titles alone hint at how much useful information sprang forth.

We can summarize in a few words that do not give the content justice – that is, the branches that have a lot and varied activities that interest, motivate, improve members skills, and involve writers are the branches that have the best attendance, happiest members, most improved writers, and best contributors to their communities.

Your current leadership commits to building on these ideas and our ninety-one-year history of helping you and writers in all media and genres to become the best that you can be.

You will be able to help, grow, and enjoy as we develop with your assistance, input, and ideas that will make your experience valuable. Please join in our efforts; you will be so glad you did.

More activities and diverse offerings equal better attendance

Calendar At a Glance

Friday, December 2, 9 a.m.
IHOP, Rancho Cordova
First-Friday Networking
John Wagner
“Post Manuscript Services”

Thursday December 8, 11 a.m.
Casa Gardens Restaurant
2760 Sutterville Road
Sacramento
Branch Holiday Celebration
with Celtic Live!

Friday, January 6, 9 a.m.
IHOP, Rancho Cordova
First-Friday Networking
Dorothy Rice
“Writing about Family”

Saturday, January 21, 11 a.m.
Cattlemens, Rancho Cordova
Brooke Warner
“The Magic of Memoir”

Friday, February 3, 9 a.m.
IHOP, Rancho Cordova
First-Friday Networking

Saturday, February 18, 11 a.m.
Cattlemens, Rancho Cordova
Shelley Blanton-Stroud
“Choose and Use a Writers
Conference for Your Advantage”

At CWC branches around the state, trust is strengthened by holiday social gatherings

It takes relationships help to grow a community. Why? Because they build trust, important in a writing community where members share successes and commiserate on frustrations. Trust is strengthened through social events. The Sacramento branch will be having a holiday celebration. What do other branches say about their holiday gatherings?

Eastern Sierra Branch: The club holds a holiday potluck where members bring a variety of dishes. “We treat it was an Open Mic Night. Members get a good meal, have conversations, and enjoy sharing their work. It’s our way of bonding as a club. Every year, newer members get braver and start sharing more and more of their work. It’s a chance for all of us to make friends with fellow writers that can flower into business relationships or critique groups or much more.

San Francisco Peninsula: “This time, instead of a cocktail party and the launch of our anthology, we are going to have readings by members, possibly skits written by members, poetry, and maybe songs—along with a catered afternoon of appetizers and wine at the yacht club. We will also have a table to sell members’ books, enabling us to better promote more of our members than those selected for the anthology.”

Coastal Dunes: Instead of the usual branch meeting, the club will hold a holiday event. “Members in good standing have been invited to sell their books at this event, which will take place at the local library where we meet. There will be goodies and members are encouraged to attend and bring their friends.”

Orange County: This Southern California group will hold a gathering on its regular meeting day. “We all bring finger food and have a three-minute open mic. The members love this. It’s great to hear their work.”

Central Coast: “Through member connections we’ve had potlucks in a couple of truly stunning mansions, last year in Carmel Highlands and this year in Pebble Beach. We often see members who never come to monthly speaker meetings. I think it’s because our social events are in the middle of the day, in daylight, while our meetings are at night.”

High Desert: A member will open their house for a get-together. “This December meeting, we’ll have a catered luncheon in a home. What we get out of it is we just bond together. We know each other better, trust each other, and respect each other more. There’s no pressure, no expectations, nothing to worry about. It’s just a nice time.”



Painters are accustomed to using their eyes,
and it is good for a writer to do the same.

— Patricia Highsmith

Branch Holiday Party

Thursday

11:30 am to 1:30 pm

December 8, 2016

Save the Date!



Our Sacramento Branch luncheon will help support Children's Receiving Home located next door to Casa Gardens

\$20 per person

Send checks to the Branch P.O. Box
P.O. Box 581746
Elk Grove, Ca 95758

Casa Gardens Restaurant

2760 Sutterville Road, Sacramento
Close to Sacramento City College,
Near Highway 99

Celtic Holiday Live!

- Lunch!
- Program!
- Readings!
- New Year Resolutions!
- Live Music!
- No-Host Bar at 11 a.m.

www.CWCSacramentoWriters.org



Founded 1909