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Southern California Writer's Association

The Perennial Writer's Conference

President's Message for June 2020 from Larry Porricelli

Dear Writers,

During the time we are living in right now, I am so happy and so immensely proud to say that the Southern California Writers Association is standing tall with efforts far above and beyond any expectations.

Please see the end of this for a special word of thanks.

Perhaps you have attended our casual Friday night Virtual Happy Hour and have found some comfort just in chatting with other writers and friends, some you have known for a while and some voices brand new to you. It is an inspirational potpourri of voices sharing thoughts on everything important to writers in a very casual setting—cocktails required!

SCWA also sponsored Pub Shop this past week and featured Barbara Howe speaking on Secrets of a Book Reviewer. Every writer in existence should hear this Pub Shop, for Barbara is an amazing reviewer who loves reading and can put a book in front of 80,000 book readers with her review. She's discovered that book readers are book buyers! The recording of this Pub Shop will be available soon. If you were a part of this event and have a book in the marketplace, you probably received a good sales boost this week by enacting even one of Barbara's suggestions.

Yes, we have a fantastic event for our monthly meeting on June 20! We have two dynamic writers, Lisa Steinke and Liz Fenton—it is a wow! Reserve your space online at our website, www.southernwriters.org and you will be a part of a revolving wheel of phenomenal activities that SCWA is putting together for writers to hone and perfect and expand the craft, find an agent, and market your work in new ways with new people.

At the end of the month on June 28, there is a very special event scheduled. Maddie Margarita is producing LIT UP! OC at the Muzeo as part of its Open Book series. It is an online event, free to attend, and will feature writers Ruffi Thorpe, Ivy Pochoda, and Ava Homa, all in conversation with Maddie Margarita speaking on writing on the edge. Three fantastic writers and one helluva interviewer!

We have more events for you, but the most important thing is we are all together as one family. We are facing the biggest global crisis in our history unfolding daily. COVID19 forces us to face life and death every moment.

Writers throughout history have stood together in the forefront against hate and bigotry. Writers have always stood with our arms around each other—loving, supporting, and defending each other against the mindset of hatred from wherever it comes. SCWA is unified in this heritage; we are a powerful family, and no small-minded bigotry of any type can penetrate the strength of this family. If anyone is alone, or afraid, or just needs to talk, we are all here for you. We stand together.

I single out the board of SCWA as phenomenal people with hearts so dedicated to the craft of writing, and even more dedicated in bringing to you such inspirational and special events that can assist you in becoming the best writer on the planet.

Expressions of thanks are given to Maddie Margarita, for rounding up such great talent to share their hearts, their efforts, and even their failures, all for us to learn from and be inspired to go further. To Diana Pardee, for taking the technical aspect of Zoom and Facebook and making SCWA a presence on both with such dedication and flawless work. To Sharon Goldinger, who has led the effort to make our website so well-crafted and helpful. Take the time to enter your writer profile there! To Pam Sheppard, for her hard work at putting a newsletter together and giving each of us an editor's voice on our manuscripts and works in progress. To Don Westenhaver, a great writer of historical novels whose dedication to the task of financial order has made us able to be a valuable part of the Literary World, not only in Orange County,

but we have members as far away as Italy. And to Steve Jackson, who is always the voice of reason, the overseer of our methods, and an originator of many of great ideas that go from germination to production. And I especially thank our scribe, Glenda Rynn, who gives her heart to keeping us on target with her highlights of each speaker's appearance with us.

On a final note, I ask for you to keep Judy Adkins in your heart, Judy's husband passed away this month. He was such a jovial person who encouraged Judy's writing and it was a joy to be with him.

Thank you all, the world is ours! At least in every story!

The road to hell is paved with adverbs.

-Stephen King

SCWA EVENTS THIS MONTH: JUNE, 2020

- ❖ **SCWA VIRTUAL HAPPY HOUR Every Friday at 4:30 p.m.** Join us with your funny hats and Coronatinis for good news and good cheer. Sign up on our website and we'll email you a link and password.
- ❖ **SCWA ZOOM Monthly Meeting:** Saturday June 20. SCWA Presents Lisa Steinke and Liz Fenton: It Takes Two! Collaborating for Success. Sign up on our website and we'll email you a link and password.
- ❖ **SCWA HUMP DAY BOOK TOUR:** See it LIVE streaming on our SCWA Facebook page at 10:00 a.m. every Wednesday. Missed it? It's ready for replay on the FB page anytime. **Matt Coyle** is on deck for June 17th.

New PUB SHOP July 14, 2:30 p.m. PST

Our Pub Shop on June 10th with Barbara Howe on book reviews and book reviewers was outstanding. Don't miss our next Pub Shop coming up in July. RSVP on our website www.southernwriters.org.

Watch Pub Shop on Facebook Livestream on the SCWA Facebook page. We will have Damon Freeman of Damonza, a full-service book design company. He has spent the last five years assembling an all-star team of award winning book cover designers and formatting experts. Damon and his team at Damonza are perfectly placed to make the first impression of your book—its cover—the best it can possibly be.

For more information, visit www.damonza.com



SCWA June 2020

Lisa Steinke and Liz Fenton IT TAKES TWO

Join us Saturday, June 20, when bestselling co-authors **Liz Fenton and Lisa Steinke** talk about writing together, navigating the pitfalls of collaboration, and share tips for writing with a partner.

Liz Fenton & Lisa Steinke have been best friends for over thirty years. They are the co-authors of seven novels, including the Amazon Charts bestseller, *The Good Widow*. Their forthcoming book, *How to Save a Life*, a dark heart-pounding love story with a Groundhog Day twist, will release on July 14th.

In their former lives, Liz worked in the pharmaceutical industry and Lisa was a talk-show producer. They both reside with their families and several rescue dogs in Southern California.

BFFs and co-authors of seven novels, including the Amazon Charts bestselling book, *The Good Widow*, Liz Fenton & Lisa Steinke use biting humor to share lessons they've learned from their thirty-year friendship. Book loving, wine imbibing, rescue dog adopting, Orangetheory addicts, they hope to make you laugh—or even cry—with laughter, but most of all, simply want to make your day better. They'll share stories from as far back as when they met in 1987 and as recent as this year when they had a very public argument outside of their Orangetheory studio. You'll find out why that fight led to shoplifting and a block of cheese in someone's purse, but still, like the many disagreements before it, ended with their friendship as solid as ever. Listen in and hear for yourself why Liz and Lisa have also cultivated a passionate following on social media. They tell it like it is. They laugh—or in Liz's case, snort—at themselves. They aren't afraid to expose their own flaws and failures as they navigate the publishing world, motherhood, their families, other friendships, and their relationship with each other.

Liz and Lisa host the popular podcast *We Fight So You Don't Have To*, and are monthly on-air contributors on their local news with *Liz & Lisa's Book Club*.

Connect with Liz and Lisa at www.lizandlisa.com to read more about them and their novels: *The Two Lila Bennetts*, *Girls' Night Out*, *The Good Widow*, *The Year We Turned Forty*, *The Status of All Things* and *Your Perfect Life*.

Highlights: Ruffi Thorpe, May 16, 2020 The Knockout Queen



Getting to the Knockout

Because of Covid19, SCWA presented its first virtual meeting on May 16, 2020, featuring Ms. Ruffi Thorpe, who discussed the ups and downs of her becoming not just a writer but the author of three published novels by Knopf, an imprint of Penguin Random House. They are *The Girls from Corona del Mar*, 2014; *Dear Fang with Love*, 2016; and the latest, *The Knockout Queen*, released 4-28-20.

Ms. Thorpe started college at sixteen, thinking she'd get a degree in philosophy, become an academic, but write on the side. However, since all her literature classes had been literary, she was baffled by the mechanics of story. Besides the beginning and the end, "what was the difference between a story and a series of events?" She attended a California State Summer School of the Arts where she gained a better understanding. That must be where she encountered Raymond Obstfeld, our 2-15-20 speaker on "All Fiction Plots Fall into These Six Templates."

Mr. Obstfeld convinced Ms. Thorpe that "telling stories is a human core gift—since we were at the fire telling stories. Don't worry about anything; you can fix it later." Thus, she was not to worry about "multiple messy drafts." He also informed her, "It's your fourth novel that gets published."

When working on her MFA at the University of Virginia, Ms. Thorpe still wasn't sure of the structure for novels, so she wrote a series of interconnected stories called *The Violin Case* [not published]. She was told it was like a novel. "I gravitated towards the surreal with characters with big crazy backstories." During this time, someone described her as being funny, "but your work is so serious." Aha! She realized putting humor into stories is permissible.

However, when she was twenty-two or twenty-three, the graduate professor she most admired told her that she "should do something else. You don't have it, kid." This revelation made her cry. Ironically, she learned it also turned out to be a gift. She was too much in love with books to stop simply because she was not good. That criticism decided her fate. She'd been told to give up but didn't.

After graduate school, Ms. Thorpe moved home to California. At that time America's 2008 financial collapse had wrecked many job opportunities. She did, however, find a job working at Ruby's on the pier at Balboa Island.

Meanwhile, she submitted to magazines. Nothing got published. But she “wanted to hurry up and get my first three novels written” while anticipating the success of her fourth as Raymond Obstfeld had predicted. Neither her second novel, *Proverbs from Hell*, nor her third, *Bunny Lampert*, were published.

At this point, major life changes came about. Obstfeld helped her get a teaching job where he was/is a professor, Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa. “Way more satisfying,” she said. She eventually married, had a child, and then moved with her husband and son to Washington D.C. When pregnant with the last child, she finished her fourth novel, *The Girls from Corona del Mar*.

Since Ms. Thorpe had no publishing connections, she “wrote a long, deranged letter” to her dream agent, Molly Friedrich. After asking for the novel, Friedrich sent back suggestions for rewrites. Ms. Thorpe thought these suggestions sensible and made them. *The Girls from Corona del Mar* sold at auction to Knopf ten days later. Jennifer Jackson acquired the novel for Knopf and has remained her editor through all three of Thorpe's novels.

Then fear struck our new author: “What if I can't do it anymore?” She hurried to get another book out: *Dear Fang with Love*, about mental illness. Only 5,000 copies sold. “Pretty bad,” she said.

Ms. Thorpe described herself at that low point as “just a mess.” She decided if you “can't write something good, write just for fun.”

“There's no finish line for writers. What matters is your relationship with the writing.” She completed *The Knockout Queen*, a coming of age story. She didn't give away the the first plot point as it's a spoiler, and comes midway through the book. The protagonist, Bunny, is 6'3” and a high-school star volleyball player who dreams of participating in the Olympics. Her best friend Michael has a secret life hooking up with men he meets online. The book is a story of “friendship, the unruliness of the body, and wanting things you wish you didn't want.”

Next, Maddie Margarita, SCWA's program chairman, interviewed our speaker. The first questions were about **voice**. Ms. Thorpe says voice is central to her writing where finding the POV and the right narrator was especially important for *The Knockout Queen*. “Bunny's point of view didn't work for a long time.”

Ms. Thorpe works on notecards, writing Act I over and over until she feels it's right; then she moves ahead. She loves “weird narrative positions.” She also loves to mimic others in their voices and feels obsessed with the way people talk. Thorpe doesn't feel the other characters' voices are hers but admits they are. “The characters are always in masks; they are you—with your own experiences. I tend not to write autobiographical material.”

Because *The Knockout Queen* was her third book and released during the pandemic, she said, “I felt lucky it was my third book. I didn't feel the excitement of a debut and can just enjoy myself. I get to do online events—more than I would have otherwise.”

Ms. Margarita said, “You are approachable and genuine. What are your expectations in terms of fans? What do you hope to deliver?”

Ms. Thorpe's answer: “It's a childish place. You start off where everyone feels it's good. Then you read negative reviews. You realize you're not writing for everybody—but for people you know. We live in our own bubbles. Authors are not completely well-adjusted people. Taking compliments for me is awkward.”

The next question was about the rewrites of her last book. Ms. Margarita asked, “How many rewrites? What do you add at the rewrite phase? What goes into the mix?”

Ms. Thorpe often throws away the earlier, exploratory draft. Opening a new document to start fresh, she'll remember what was good. She also groups and re-arranges her notecards on a bulletin board—even the themes. Labeling her editor “brilliant,” Ms. Thorp says editor Jennifer Jackson often sees the scene that's missing. Otherwise, Ms. Thorpe *adds* and Jackson *cuts*. Jackson asks, “Do you need this person?”

Now that her children are older, she understands some stages of age better. At this time, she wants to write about early mommy years with marriage, mothers and school-aged kids, with aliens and time travel. She laughs.

What about writing nonfiction? Her response was “I feel a need to be radically open; then I don't have to remember the truth.”

How does she add humor? “I'm always cracking jokes with friends but never analyzed it. A joke is when you tell the truth that surprises and scandalizes.” Ms. Thorpe loves and reads comedic writers.

Ms. Margarita asked if humorous novels are not taken as seriously as they should be. Response: “Maybe 100 years ago. *Moby Dick* is really funny in parts. *Funny* and *light* [are] not the same thing.”

What resources does Ms. Thorpe suggest? The top reference she gives to someone who wants to write novels is to take classes by Raymond Obstfeld at Orange Coast College. Obstfeld's a “big influence in Orange County.” People can repeat his courses. She also recommends any of the *Save the Cat* trilogy by Blake Snyder who “takes apart literary stories, shows the art of subtext. Cerebral and intellectual.”

When does she share her work? Ms. Thorpe replied, “I write a lot and throw away a lot. I get to one-third of the book and start over any number of times. Copyedits are excruciating. Even the bio, I had to check and check. One year of a bad draft, and the last year of all editing.”

Does Ms. Thorpe have a third-person writer to recommend? “Yes, Jane Smiley. She's masterful, has similar obsessions. Writes about small groups of humans, intergenerational stories.” She recommends Smiley's *Greenlanders* and *Horse Heaven*.

Last question: “Are you in contact with that professor [in grad school] who didn't like your work?”
Answer: “No, no contact. And she doesn't work where she did before.”

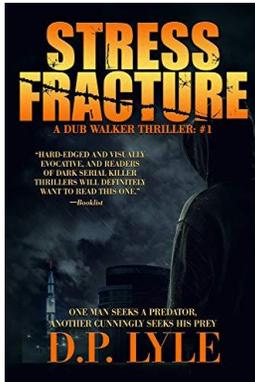
Earlier Ms. Thorpe had smiled when she told us, “Every time I get a nice review, it feels magical and humbling.”

Our speaker has had many reasons for smiling. Her first book, *The Girls from Corona del Mar*, was long listed for the 2014 Flaherty-Dunn First Novel Prize and for the 2014 International Dylan Thomas Prize. *The Knockout Queen* was labeled the Most Anticipated Book of 2020 by *Entertainment Weekly*, *Parade*, and LitHub.

For more information, visit www.rufithorpe.com.

Glenda Brown Rynn, Reporter

grynn@cox.net



SO MUCH GOOD NEWS!

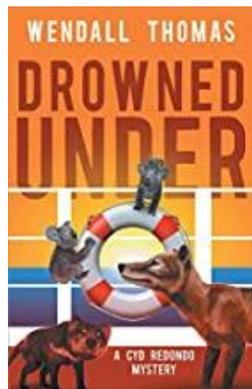
D.P. Lyle's Dub Walker thrillers #1 *Stress Fracture* and #2 *Hot Lights, Cold Steel* are available again! You'll be up all night with Doug's voice in your head with these nail-biters. Available now on Amazon. For more information, visit www.dplylemd.com.

PJ Colando's new novel *Jailbird's Jackpot* is coming soon. Cover finalized. Stay tuned for pub date. For more information, visit www.pjcolando.com.



Steve Jackson's short story, "The Asylum for Rejected Characters" will be published this fall in the anthology, *Masquerade*.

Wendall Thomas has been nominated for Bouchercon's prestigious Anthony Award for Best Paperback Original for *Drowned Under*. For more information, visit www.wendallthomas.com.



Karen Sue Walker's cozy mystery, *Murder in Lavender Silk* the last of her Bridal Shop Mysteries, will be released on June 16. For more information, visit www.karensuewalker.com



LitUp Orange County at MUZEO Open Book Series

Join us Sunday, June 28th for an afternoon of smart, literary chat with **Ivy Pochoda**, **Rufi Thorpe**, and **Ava Homa** in Conversation with **Madeline Tighe Margarita**. This virtual event is a rare opportunity to meet and hear three award winning authors talk about their experiences and writing on the edge. Please check <https://muzeo.org/> for registration information. This event is free and open to the public.

Ivy Pochoda is the author of the critically acclaimed novels *Wonder Valley*, *Visitation Street* and *These Women*. *Wonder Valley* won the 2018 Strand Critics Award for Best Novel and was a finalist Los Angeles Times Book Prize and Le Grand Prix de Litterature Americaine, as well as being chosen as an NPR and Los Angeles Times Book of the Year. *Visitation Street* won the Prix Page America in France and was chosen as an Amazon Best Book of the Month, Amazon Best Book of 2013, and a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers selection. Her writing has appeared in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Los Angeles Times & The Los Angeles Review of Books. Her first novel *The Art of Disappearing*, was published by St. Martin's Press in 2009. She teaches creative writing at the Studio 526 Skid Row in LA. Visit www.ivypochoda.com for more.

Rufi Thorpe grew up in Southern California, raised by her mother and grandmother. She attended Phillips Exeter Academy for high school, but left without graduating to attend Eugene Lang College in New York where she studied philosophy and literature. After college, she spent some time as a waitress at a poorly run French café before being accepted as a Henry Hoyns Fellow at the University of Virginia's MFA program, where she learned to fish and wrote two novels that were not very good. For more information, visit www.rufithorpe.com

Rufi Thorpe received her MFA from the University of Virginia in 2009. Her first novel, *The Girls from Corona del Mar*, was long listed for the 2014 International Dylan Thomas Prize and for the 2014 Flaherty-Dunn First Novel Prize. Her second novel, *Dear Fang, With Love*, was published by Knopf in May 2016. And her latest novel, *The Knockout Queen* was released May 2020. Rufi lives in California with her husband and two sons.

Ava Homa is a writer, journalist, and activist. *Daughters of Smoke and Fire* (May 2020) is her debut novel published by the HarperCollins in Canada & Abrams in the US. Her collection of short stories *Echoes From the Other Land* (Mawenzi, Toronto, 2010) was nominated for the 2011 Frank O'Conner Short Story Prize and was one of ten winners of the 2011 CBC Reader's Choice Contest, running concurrently with the Giller Prize. She is also the inaugural recipient of the PEN Canada-Humber College Writers-In-Exile Scholarship.

She has a Master's Degree in Creative Writing from the University of Windsor in Canada. For more information, visit www.avahoma.com.

Submit your work for Fame or Fortune

Sharpen your pencils, dust off your keyboard, dig around in your deep files!

This June there are dozens of writing contests and submission opportunities calling for every genre and form, from poetry to creative nonfiction to completed novels.

Some of these contests have age and geographical restrictions, so read the instructions carefully. Submission guidelines are important. Follow them obsessively!

- Highway Women is a biannual online magazine seeking submissions of fiction, flash, creative nonfiction, and those that blur the line between genres. <https://www.highwaywomenmagazine.com/submit>.
- You'll find 65 calls for submissions in paying markets at this site: <https://publishedtodeath.blogspot.com/2020/05/42-calls-for-submissions-in-june-2020.html>
- Learn about 23 Publishers that accept Science Fiction or Fantasy novels here: <https://www.authorspublish.com/23-publishers-that-accept-science-fiction-or-fantasy-novels/>
- Here are Fiction writing contests worth your time in Summer 2020: <https://writerunboxed.com/2020/05/22/fiction-writing-contests-worth-your-time-in-summer-2020/>

These are excellent sources for submission opportunities for your work.

Check back regularly, and good luck!

Benefits of SCWA Membership



WELCOME, WELCOME, WELCOME!

- ❖ Active members receive a 30% off admission to SCWA meetings including all-you-can-eat lunch and a speaker.
- ❖ Members are eligible for a Free 30-minute consultation from book shepherd Sharon Goldinger on any publishing contract.
- ❖ Discounts are available for active SCWA members for registration for the La Jolla Writer's Conference, and for early registration for the Southern California Writers' Conference, which is held twice annually in San Diego and Orange County.
- ❖ Critiques of your first 20 pages by an SCWA Board member for \$50.00.
- ❖ Access to professional network of publishing, business consultants and editors.
- ❖ Monthly networking with other published, unpublished authors, and writers in all stages of the writing journey.
- ❖ Participation in SCWA marketing platforms on southernwriters.org and SCWA social media platforms.
- ❖ Access to up-to-date and cutting-edge articles on craft and the business of publishing.

Attend a mini-writer's conference every month, improve your craft, and learn from bestselling authors and highly sought-after instructors.

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The SCWA communication sites should only be used for dialogues related to the craft of writing. Non-writing related topics should be done via other forms of personal communication. Please review the content disclaimer located in the newsletter via the SCWA website www.southerncalwriters.org or on the About page of the SCWA Facebook page. The SCWA does not endorse individual opinions placed of any of its sites.

The SCWA receives information on various services, writing contests, and events. As a courtesy, we will forward the information to our members. Unless otherwise indicated, the SCWA does not discourage, encourage or recommend any of the services, contests or events. Many of these services, contests and events cost money; therefore, we recommend that you evaluate the opportunities based on your individual situation and interest. Because of our membership email protection policy, please do not forward information to the general membership directly. **We request that all members forward any information to the SCWA President for approval and forwarding to the membership.**

SCWA members wishing to share appropriate writing-related information and resources are welcome to do so via the SCWA Facebook page. The SCWA Board members and Newsletter Editor will determine the information to be contained in the SCWA on-line newsletter, which is primarily used for official SCWA information.