



CALIFORNIA WRITERS CLUB BULLETIN

SPRING 2022

How to Build a Literary Agent List

by Lane Igoudin, Long Beach

Is your work ready for the primetime? Where can you find the right agent to represent it, that one crucial keyholder that can take it to the next level, maybe even to the Big Five? How do you know that this potential agent has a proven track of success in your genre?

While searching for representation for my parenting memoir, *A Family, Maybe*, I have tried several literary agent databases, and one of them, with a certain degree of know-how, proved to be quite useful. The primary function of www.PublishersMarketplace.com is to track and report book deals as they happen – in the form of news, daily or weekly digests, and storing and classifying information about these deals and the dealmakers, such as agents, editors, and presses. While the site is slanted towards what they call “40,000 industry insiders” who subscribe and post information there, a writer can utilize it to search for agents with an up-to-date record of success in finding presses for a particular genre of fiction or non-fiction.

How does it work? Publishers Marketplace is a paid service. One can sign up for a hefty \$25 month-to-month membership. Or buy a \$10, 24-hour pass that gives you access to most pages on the site, but only from one accessing source, for example, your laptop.

I opted for the latter. I went into the ‘Dealmaker’ portal, selected ‘Agent’ from the dropdown menu and the category relevant to my work, which is ‘Memoir’. (See graph).

The search generated a list of top 100 agents selling in this category, with ranked by the number of sales, with #1 being, well, #1. I saved the search result list on my computer by printing it into a pdf file. Each entry in this list has the agent’s name, agency, sales figures in this category, the date of the most recent sale, and is linked to their contact information. Some entries include ‘Submission Requirements’. Others don’t, and you’d have to look up the agency’s site and submission information on the Web.

You could refine your search further by selecting another relevant category, as I did, with the subject of my memoir, ‘Parenting’, print out its top 100 ‘Dealmakers’, and cross-reference the two lists.

The \$10 pass limits the number of page views on the site to 50, but it was enough for me to build a list of 25 agents I decided to pursue. If necessary, I can always go back to the ‘save search list’ file to look up more leads. I found this website database useful in my agent search and hope you will find it useful too.



INSIDE

President’s Corner	2
Book Blurbs	3
Publishing Trends	5
Your Online Presence	9
Art of Feedback	10
On the Horizon	12
NorCal, CWC-South	14
Spotlight	15
Roundtable	19
Selling Books	24
Editor’s Desk	26



Lane Igoudin, M.A., Ph.D., is a writer, blogger, and professor of English and linguistics at Los Angeles City College. He writes about adoptive parenting, mindfulness, and spiritual growth in the Jewish and Buddhist traditions. See more at www.LaneIgoudin.com.

President's Corner: Measuring Our Health

by Roger Lubeck, CWC President



This is the first *Bulletin* under our new Editor-in-Chief, Joyce Krieg, and Sandy Moffett serving as our Submissions Coordinator. In this issue Joyce and Sandy have added some new sections. Your feedback will be important. Joyce has taken the helm from Rusty La Grange, whose service to the club cannot be understated. Rusty was the 2021 Ina Coolbrith award recipient for service to the club. An honor she deserved. The Coolbrith award was part of the Jack London Service Awards in October. At that event, I was impressed with the quality and depth of service represented by the honorees. Their merits were evidence of the health and vibrancy of our branches.

Measuring the health of a non-profit organization like California Writers' Club (CWC) is important. For example, in non-profits the liquidity (cash on hand) of the Club, the ratio of expense to income, and cash flow are all important financial measures. Overall, on these measures, the club is healthy. We have adequate financial assets and most branches are operating in the black.

As important as financial measure are, they are trailing measures. Meaning they tell you that you are sick. What the club needs are good leading measures. Measures that take our temperature. For example, membership growth and retention of existing members, the number of publications and other achievements of our members, and the degree to which members volunteer in the branch and on our boards.

This year we have had a good renewal effort (1800+ members) and to date, we have added some 300 new members. However, we lost approximately 300 members in 2021. In my mind, our club must continue to grow and add new people and ideas if it is to be successful. If we are to fulfill our mission we must attract and retain new writers and established authors.

Based on branch newsletters and websites, I am certain our members are writing and publishing. Unfortunately, at this time we have no current measure of member publications, awards, or other achievements. The distinction between Active and Associate member does not adequately serve that purpose. We know that more than half our members are published, however we have no idea how many novels, poems, stories, and articles our members published in 2021, let alone in their lifetime as writers.

It is my goal to create a process to measure member publications and other achievements each year. This will probably begin as a survey. We may also solicit from authors their list of publications with complete citations. I recently updated my publication list and actually

continued on next page



CALIFORNIA WRITERS CLUB

A 501(C)3 NONPROFIT

OUR MISSION: TO EDUCATE WRITERS OF
ALL ABILITIES IN THE CRAFT OF WRITING
AND THE MARKETING OF THEIR WORK.

PRESIDENT

ROGER LUBECK (REDWOOD)

VICE-PRESIDENT

DONNA MCCROHAN ROSENTHAL
(EAST SIERRA)

SECRETARY

ELISABETH TUCK (MT. DIABLO)

TREASURER

CONSTANCE HANSTEDT (TRI-VALLEY)

MEMBER-AT-LARGE

JEANETTE FRATTO (ORANGE COUNTY)


P.O. Box 11212
PLEASANTON, CA 94588-1212

CALWRITERS.ORG

President's Corner: continued from previous page

followed the Chicago Manual of Style rules (CMS) for citations. Time consuming but professionally important. I encourage you to do the same and when the time comes, to participate in any effort we take to quantify and recognize your achievements.

To those who might argue there is no need to quantify what we are doing, I offer this thought. In Organizational Psychology there is a truism, "If you measure it, they do it." By measuring publications and other non-financial measures, such as volunteerism and attendance at meetings, it is my belief we will thrive.

This is a great club. There are exciting things happening in our branches. New ideas and initiatives. New opportunities for our members. New ways of meeting. New speakers. Many of these are listed on our calendar of events on the website <https://calwriters.org/events-month/> and appear in this new format for *The Bulletin*. I hope you will read and enjoy your new *Bulletin* and have a great year. 

How to Write a Killer Book Blurb

by John Byrne Barry, Marin

In the olden days, before self-publishing, websites, and social media, publishers wrote book blurbs. Now, if you're self-published, you *are* the publisher and you need to write a killer blurb so your book stands out in today's crowded marketplace. And if you have a publisher, you're expected to play an active role in promoting your book.

The primary use of the blurb is in the book description on the back cover of the book and on your online sales page. The blurb is more important in attracting readers to your book than anything except your cover and title. And a compelling blurb can be equally important *before* you've written your book, because it can guide you as you write.

Blurbs can be several paragraphs, but no one will read your second paragraph if your first one doesn't grab them. Often you need shorter blurbs for social media or Amazon ad copy, which must be under 149 characters. But how do you distill your several-hundred page book into one or more memorable paragraphs?

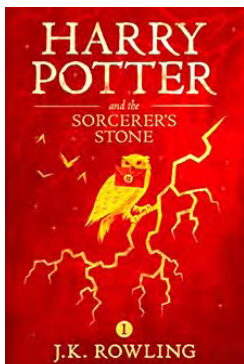
First off, a blurb is not a synopsis, but a *promise* that persuades potential readers they *must* read your book. You reveal enough to entice your readers, but hide enough so they'll pay to find out more. You may also want to share setting, genre and tone. Is it light and funny or dark and tense? But no spoilers. Blurbs are like movie trailers, which never give away the endings.

Let's look at two well-known examples.



An astonishing technique for recovering and cloning dinosaur DNA has been discovered. Now humankind's most thrilling fantasies have come true. Creatures extinct for eons roam Jurassic Park with their awesome presence and profound mystery, and all the world can visit them—for a price.

Until something goes wrong



Harry Potter has never even heard of Hogwarts when the letters start dropping on the doormat at number four, Privet Drive. Addressed in green ink on yellowish parchment with a purple seal, they are swiftly confiscated by his grisly aunt and uncle.

Then, on Harry's eleventh birthday, a great beetle-eyed giant of a man called Rubeus Hagrid bursts in with some astonishing news: Harry Potter is a wizard, and he has a place at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. An incredible adventure is about to begin!

continued on next page

Book Blurbs: continued from previous page

Your book may not feature a dangerous predator or a bespectacled wizard, but you can use a similar formula, which has three parts — setup, hook, and punchline.

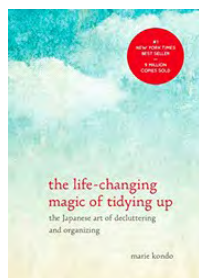
1. Setup. When X does Y, Z happens. Your first paragraph should give readers a clear idea of what the story is about, where and when it's set, and what kind of book it is, like a thriller or a romance, though you don't need to use those words. You introduce your hero at the start of his or her journey. "Harry Potter has never even heard of Hogwarts when the letters start dropping on the doormat at number four, Privet Drive."

2. Hook. Now, with A, X must do B to accomplish C. Your hero must do something brave in order to achieve a goal that changes his or her life, and, if possible, the broader world. You want to distill the plot, more of a teaser than a summary.

3. Punchline. With Jurassic Park, the punchline is, "Until something goes wrong ..." For most books, you want to be more specific, but if your premise is as brilliant as *Jurassic Park*, let readers use their imagination. Either way, you let readers know that something does go wrong, and to find out how the hero solves the problem, you have to read the book. You don't give the "how" away in the blurb.

Non-fiction is often easier because you're solving a problem, but you still want to stand out from other books offering similar benefits.

Here's a good example.



Despite constant efforts to declutter your home, do papers still accumulate like snowdrifts and clothes pile up like a tangled mess of noodles?

Japanese cleaning consultant Marie Kondo takes tidying to a whole new level, promising that if you properly simplify and organize your home once, you'll never have to do it again. With detailed guidance for determining which items in your house "spark joy" (and which don't), this international bestseller will help you clear your clutter and enjoy the unique magic of a tidy home — and the calm, motivated mindset it can inspire.

The formula for nonfiction starts with the problem that potential readers may be suffering from, like too much clutter. This helps readers determine if this book is relevant for them.

1. State the problem. "Papers accumulating like snowdrifts and clothes piling up like a tangled mess of noodles." That's both memorable and something millions of people can relate to. Like me, who is writing this at a desk cluttered with papers.

2. Show what your solution will accomplish, but not how. (Like fiction, you want to entice, but also hide.) The Marie Kondo book does include a teaser about "how" —does it "spark joy?" But no more than that.

3. State how readers' lives will improve as a result of reading the book, and, if possible, why this book instead of others. This is the toughest part. Marie Kondo's blurb touts her book as an international best-seller, but it didn't start that way. Still, "enjoy the unique magic of a tidy home" is a decent selling point.

Even with these formulas, it's daunting to write a blurb that sells books. But it's one of your most important marketing tasks. And it *should* take less time than writing your book.

One last thing. If possible, demonstrate your writing style in the blurb. If your book is funny, don't say it's funny. Show your humor in the blurb.



John Byrne Barry is a writer, designer, actor, crossing guard, and board member of Bay Area Independent Publishers Association (BAIPA). He is author of three novels—When I Killed My Father: An Assisted-Suicide Family Thriller; Wasted: Murder in the Recycle Berkeley Yard; and Bones in the Wash: Politics is Tough. Family is Tougher. Find out more at johnbyrnebarry.com. He will be presenting a program on writing blurbs for BAIPA on March 19 and is available to present a "How to Write a Killer Book Blurb" workshop for CWC branches.



So here we are on a toboggan hurtling down the snowy mountain called 2022. Seems like a good time to take a look at the current state of book publishing, the better to avoid the rocks, tree stumps, and cliffs scattered all over the slope.

What do we see?

The Forbidden City

Looming large, as always, is traditional publishing by the Big 5. Prophecies of their demise, which were legion in the early days of the indie boom, have not come to pass. Not even a global pandemic could take the trad biz out. Yes, there have been mergers and acquisitions, the paring down of staffs, and other moves that market-wide disruption demands. But as explained by Jane Friedman in *The Hot Sheet* (subscription required; quoted with permission):

In 2020, traditional publishing celebrated its best sales in a decade, and 2021 will come in at even higher levels, with 8 percent growth projected by NPD BookScan. HarperCollins CEO Brian Murray claimed the book “pie” has grown by about 15 percent, and thus the company has been aggressive in their acquisitions and release schedule. HarperCollins profits were up 42 percent by mid-year, while Penguin Random House saw its best profits in 19 years, up by a whopping 55 percent during the first half.

Undeniably it has been an extraordinary and historic period of sales in the industry, with no particular books responsible; publishers are seeing strong performance across their entire lists. (Keep in mind that, for traditional publishers, the print-to-digital sales mix remains about 75-25.) The latest report from the Association of American Publishers shows that consumer (trade) publisher revenues are up 14.1 percent through October 2021 versus last year.

Publishers Lunch, which has tracked deal-making trends for more than 20 years, saw a surge in deal-making in 2021. Volume for the first half of the year was about 20 percent higher than in 2020—remarkably in line with the increase in US print unit sales, which were up 18.4 percent during the first half of the year, according to BookScan. Major deals and six-figure deals remain strong.

Who would have predicted this? Perhaps your humble scribe, who opined back in 2013 that traditional publishing was like a boxer who just won't go down.

Now let us consider this from the writer's perspective. For while the industry is still humming, the tune may be less than melodious for fledgling fiction authors. Yes, deals are still being made, but with fewer “slots” for new writers the competition is fierce. Unless one is a celebrity (who is paired with a ghost or co-author), or has

continued on next page

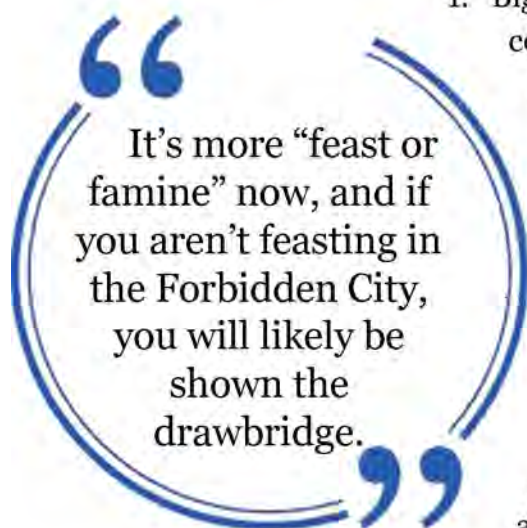
Publishing Trends: continued from previous page

written what a pub board considers a “can’t miss” debut (they’re only right about this maybe 50% of the time) advances are not hefty. In many cases they aren’t even, strictly speaking, advances. As agent Kristin Nelson explains:

In the early 2000s, every contract I negotiated specified advance payments in halves: half on signing and half on delivery and acceptance of the manuscript. An agent earns the commission at the same time a client is paid. Publishers are now citing “corporate mandates” that payments must be structured in four or five installments—and some of those payments aren’t coming in until after publication...which makes it no longer an “advance” ... Not only does this structure impact an author’s financial well-being, it impacts an agent’s ability to earn a living. Imagine negotiating a contract today and knowing that a portion of your commission won’t be paid for two years.

As far as acquisitions, there is a “blockbuster mentality” in big publishing. Nice if your book is one of them and hits. If it doesn’t, your prospects for another contract with the same publisher, or another of the Bigs, dim considerably.

Over the course of the last thirty years I’ve seen a strikingly similar scenario happen over and over again. It goes like this:



1. Big advance from a big publisher. A two-book contract! Huzzah! Everyone is celebrating, popping champagne, hosting the author at conference pub parties.
2. Book #1 fails to live up to sales projections. Author starts getting night sweats. There is no further marketing push from the publisher.
3. Book #1 is deemed a “failure.”
4. Book #2, per the contract, comes out, but without robust support from the publisher or large orders from the bookstores. If the book is hardback, publisher may decide not to do a paperback print run. Instead, it “remainders” the hardcovers in the warehouse by selling them cheaply to wholesalers (and for which the author gets no royalty).
5. Author is not offered another contract from the big publisher, nor from any of the other Bigs.

I must add that I do know some writers who have managed to keep long-term relations with a big publisher without being in the “mega” category. Such writers used to be called “midlist.” But that designation is rapidly disappearing. It’s more “feast or famine” now, and if you aren’t feasting in the Forbidden City, you will likely be shown the drawbridge.

Cast into the dark forest again, what is an author to do? Fortunately, there are two roads diverging in that wood—independent/small publishing and indie publishing.

Independent and Small Publishing

Many independent and small publishing concerns are doing a fine business, and more have been added over the last several years. (I note, however, that business failures happen regularly in this sector and can really mess up the author getting monies owed.) They fall into roughly two categories: those with a traditional model and those that are hybrid.

One of the biggest independents is Kensington. It operates traditionally and pays advances, also Severn House and Poisoned Pen Press.

continued on next page

Publishing Trends: continued from previous page

When you get down into smaller sizes, it's most likely there is no advance, and contract terms vary wildly. Which means doing your due diligence. You'll likely be your own agent, so learn all you can about publishing contracts and get help before you sign anything. The Authors Guild has a contract review benefit. You can also fork over dough to a lawyer to review the contract, but make sure said lawyer knows the ins and outs of book publishing contracts and specializes in Intellectual Property Law. The general practitioner in the strip mall at the corner is not the one to consult.

I won't say much about "vanity" publishing, which usually requires big fees along with faux guarantees like "Your book will be published everywhere on the internet! And it will be available to all bookstores, too!" (Yeah... *available...* thank you so much). Some even say they will make you a "bestselling author" which means playing algorithm footsie on Amazon so your ebook, selling thirty copies, makes it to the top of some obscure category. And if you want their ultra-terrific marketing package, all you have to do is pony up more dough ... four figures, sometimes five.

Yeesh.

I will say, however, there is an exception to the fee-up-front model that may be right for an author of a particular sort. I counseled just such a one. He was referred to me by a family member. He is a recently retired lawyer who had written a novel and wanted advice on how to get it published.

We went back and forth with emails. I laid out the two paths—traditional and indie—and explained the formidable barriers to the former. But that's what he wanted to go for. So I told him what to do to get his novel shipshape (beta readers, freelance editor) and showed him how to put together a proposal and begin the search for an agent.

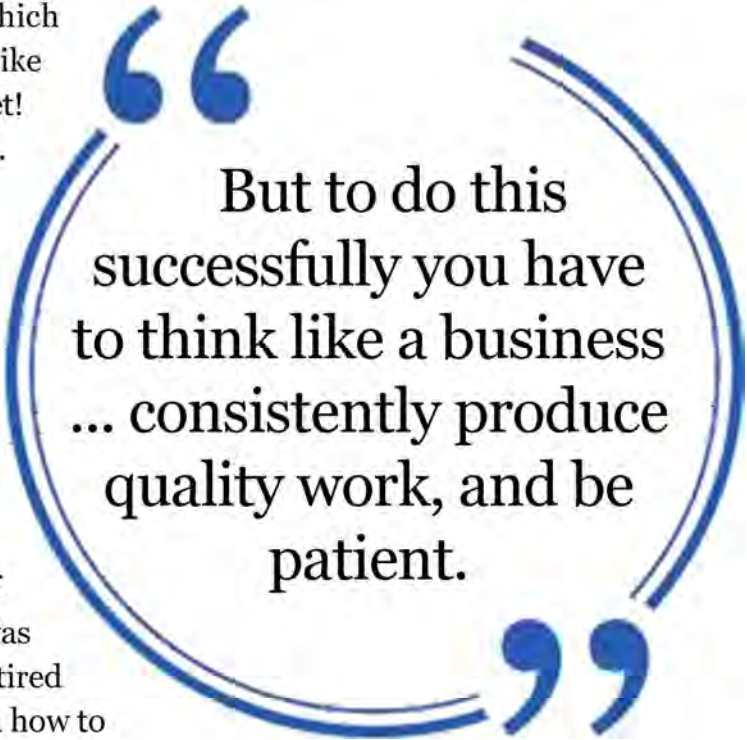
After about eight months he wrote back saying he was ready to go indie. I told him what that entailed, the various tasks he'd have to perform. I also said he needed to think of it as a business. But he was not interested in running a business, he just wanted to get his novel published and made available.

So for such a person (i.e., one not interested in writing as a career, vocation, or serious hobby), there are companies that will take care of things like cover design, formatting and all the rest, for a reasonable fee. One of these is BookBaby. After due diligence, that's what he chose.

Indie Publishing

As we all know, an ever-growing number of authors are successfully publishing on their own. Some have gone indie from the jump, while a multitude of former trad writers have transitioned over, attracted by benefits that include full creative control, generous royalty rates, and seeing their book published as soon as it's finished instead of a year or 18 months down the line.

But to do this successfully you have to think like a business (a simple business plan is presented in my book *How to Make a Living as a Writer*), consistently produce quality work, and be patient. One decision you'll



But to do this
successfully you have
to think like a business
... consistently produce
quality work, and be
patient.

Publishing Trends: continued from previous page

need to make early is whether to “go wide” or “go exclusive.” The nice thing is your choice is not irrevocable. Being indie means you can try new things, experiment, and make better decisions as you grow.

So where are we, O writer? Recognizing that there are exceptions to every publishing generality, let me offer a few words of advice.

- If you are an author who desires acclaim from established venues of literary acceptance and a chance to break out into the rarified air of mega A-List writers, traditional is your shot. Just know that the odds are steep—98% of books published traditionally sell fewer than 5,000 printed copies. It’s a gamble and it may take you years to get a chance at the table. Yet people still play 22 in roulette, and you are certainly free to try. Once your chips are gone, however, you will probably find it impossible to get staked again for another turn inside the Forbidden City.

- A good, independent publisher is an alternative—so long as your monetary goals are modest. The key word is *good*. Do your research.

- Big or small, fight for a fair reversion clause in your contract. By fair I mean tied to a minimum number of dollars (not “copies available”) in a royalty period. Shoot for a high three figures.

- Also get a fair non-compete clause.

- If you decide to go indie because you think it is a fast road to riches, think again. It will take several years to get a good income flow, and even then it may not be a raging river of green. Still, you own all rights to your hard work and you can’t be fired. If you love to write (and you should if you want to make a go of this) then even a modest side income is frosting on the cake.

- Whatever your choice, make it your goal to get better every time you sit at the keyboard. Study the craft, write, get feedback, write, study, try things, get more feedback, write.


- Find your productive sweet spot. Figure out how many words you can produce comfortably in a week. Whatever that number is, up it by 10% and make that your goal, breaking it down into daily production, six days a week. Take one day off each week for rest and recharging.

- Have a regular creativity time. Be like a movie studio and have several projects “in development.”

That’s how I see the publishing biz in 2022. 



James Scott Bell is a bestselling author of thrillers and books on writing, including the #1 bestseller Plot & Structure. He served as the fiction columnist for Writer’s Digest magazine and has written popular craft books including: Write Your Novel From the Middle, The Art of War for Writers and Super Structure. This article is reprinted with the generous permission of the author. It originally appeared in The Kill Zone, a mystery/thriller writers’ blog, killzoneblog.com. Our thanks to Bob Isbill of the High Desert branch for making the arrangements.




Eva Barrows Editing & Writing Services

Confidently publish articles to book-length projects

Developmental editing and copyediting for
Independent authors and authors preparing for representation

eva@evabarrows.com • www.evabarrows.com

What’s New with the Lit Review?

CWC Literary Review Managing Editor Elisabeth Tuck reports receiving 129 prose submissions and 148 poems for the 2022 edition. She and her team are in the middle of the judging process. Plans are to publish in June, so watch your mailbox. The decision has been made to continue with the book format of recent years, as it seems to have a slight edge in popularity over the magazine format with our members. 

Cultivating Your Online Presence

by Eva Barrows, SF Peninsula

As an author, it's essential to cultivate a consistent online presence for you and your current writing projects. This means frequently, at least once a year, checking in on what comes up when readers search for you on the internet. You'll want them to find your latest books and publications, not stuff from ten years ago, although I'm sure those are good reads too!

Keeping track of all the places you've left your digital nom de plume is challenging. Start with your author website, book listing sites, and most often used social media profiles, updating them with your current messaging, author bio, headshot photo and current website links.

Next, Google yourself. Social networks you forgot signing up for will surface and websites you've contributed content to in the past. Some platforms allow you to update your bio and photo yourself, while with others you'll need to request the webmaster to make the change for you.

A Google search might not find all the places your info lives online. Make a list of professional memberships, clubs, networks and directories you belong to, and check your profile listing on those websites.

It may be unnecessary or difficult to update your bio everywhere online. When readers stumble upon your writing from years ago, they understand that the bio with it reflects the time period. Being aware of all the places your profile lives online and updating websites appearing at the top of Google search results will help readers find what they are looking for—your current writing!



Eva Barrows is a San Francisco Peninsula-based freelance writer and editor. She writes food, travel and people profiles for regional lifestyle magazines. She also helps independent authors feel confident in their writing by offering developmental and copy-editing services.



Flex Your Writing Muscles

Character Development and Dialogue

It is important that characters in our stories stand out. We give them unique names, and add distinct physical characteristics like hair and eye color, and different ways they dress. If that isn't enough, we create mannerisms, habits, and behavior. All of this is in an effort to make the characters different and memorable. But if they all sound the same, then they won't be. Instead they'll sound like you, the writer.

In this exercise, create three characters, each with different genders and sexual preferences.

Starting with each person's name, make them as distinct as you can through dialogue. Imagine they have just won the lottery, witnessed a crime, or had their poems accepted by a major anthology. Have them call their best friend to tell him/her the news about this shared experience. In dialogue, make them different and unique by using different word choices, tone, and body language to describe the same event.





by Stacey Dennick, Redwood Writers

Each of us needs to develop a positive relationship with our writing, rather than one of dread, guilt, or fear. All authors need useful critiques to grow their work. Giving your fellow writer feedback is one of the most encouraging and energizing things you can do, and it will improve your writing as well.

Unfortunately, most people have been taught to either say something vaguely polite like, “That’s nice,” or to jump right into harsh criticism, which can be very damaging. Giving helpful notes on any kind of creative work is tricky. The goal is to inspire the writer to greater self-expression, clarity, and fun. When I was enrolled in the University of San Francisco’s MFA in Writing program, each student was required to make notes in the margins of her fellow student’s fifteen to thirty-page work, *and* to submit a one-page letter detailing her or his impressions and thoughts. One of my instructors collected a copy of our letter and returned it to us the next week with feedback on our feedback! This may seem excessive, but it taught us how to help each other.

Guidelines for Discussion

In-person, or Zoom meetings (using screen share so everyone can read along while the author reads aloud) work best, IMHO, until you know each other, then you might exchange documents or use Google Docs.

1) The author should tell us what kind of feedback she or he is looking for.

On a first draft, when you’re finding your way into the story, the focus of feedback should be on praise and questions, without worrying too much about grammar, punctuation, or spelling. It’s also fine to ask your writer buddies to listen and not say a thing. Don’t think it’s better to be brave and take whatever they can dish out. Sometimes we just want to play with ideas and even the insinuation of critique can deflate our enthusiasm. Protect your creative self.

2) The author must sit and listen, fighting the urge to talk or justify. Take in the ideas. Some will be useful, others won’t. Just be open to considering them.

3) In my classes we always start with a round of compliments. The more specific, the better. It’s just as important to know what’s working, what stands out, as it is to find the areas that need polishing.

4) When commenting, call the writer “the narrator,” even if the story is memoir. It’s essential for the author to see herself as distinct from the character in her tale. So, instead of saying “I wonder what *you* were thinking on page 2,” say “I wonder what *the narrator* was thinking on page 2.” This might seem like nit-picky semantics, but it helps the writer to be more objective.

5) When discussing work, always use positive “I” statements, so the author doesn’t feel put on the spot. For example, you might say, “I would like to hear more about the third paragraph on page three,” rather than, “This part is too short.” Stating “I was confused here,” is easier to hear than, “This is confusing.”

6) Avoid overwhelming the author. Don’t go through a list of everything that you think needs adjustment. Pick one, or maybe two of the most important sections to comment on. Leave something for others to discuss.

Remember, everyone has different desires for feedback. Some people don’t want to revise much, and would rather not get a lot of comments. Sometimes we just want to be heard.

continued on next page

Art of Feedback: continued from previous page

Or, they might be ready to submit the piece, and just need help proofreading.

7) If you didn't like the story, ask yourself why. Is it because the subject matter isn't your cup of tea, or is the writing unclear, overburdened with adjectives, or vague and lacking in emotion? If you can't think of anything constructive to say, rely on others to comment.

8) Don't be afraid of moments of silence while people are thinking. Allow the introverts space to formulate their thoughts.

9) Don't get overly prescriptive with your feedback. In other words, don't swamp the author with many bright ideas of how to change the plot, setting, dialogue, or characters—unless they specifically ask for them.

How to Take Feedback

- Be present and receptive.
- Try to avoid launching into elaborate justifications for what you've written. Just listen. At the end of the discussion you may ask questions for clarification.
- Walk the middle ground between thinking your stuff is perfect and your fellow writers can't help you, and wanting to throw everything away and give up.
- All notes are subject to interpretation. It's *your* story. You do not have to change anything that you don't want to. You don't have to answer every question that readers have. Don't compromise yourself or your style with other people's ideas of what's important.
- Put your writing and all the notes you receive on it away for a while to ferment. In three hours, three days, three weeks, or whatever, read through all the feedback before you start revising.

Finally, remember Neil Gaiman's words of wisdom:

"When people tell you something's wrong or doesn't work for them, they are almost always right. When they tell you exactly what they think is wrong and how to fix it, they are almost always wrong."



Writer, editor, instructor, and media maker Stacey Dennick teaches on-going, no-fee creative writing classes through Santa Rosa Junior College. Currently held on Zoom, free classes are open to all adults living in California. Find out more about her media services, or read some humorous memoir on her website: sdennick.com. Email: sdennick@comcast.net.

A Dickens of a Good Time

The southern region, CWC-South, had a booth at the Riverside Dickens Festival over the February 26-27 weekend. It featured books by Victorian authors, books about writing, a Dickens writing game, CWC handouts, a sign-up sheet, and information about joining our 113-year-old California Writers Club.. The CWC enjoyed an added bonus with the decision of the Inland Empire Branch to begin alternating their meetings between Riverside and their original location of Ontario. This meant that we were able to generate a long list of sign-ups for potential new members who live in Riverside.



At right, Assunta Maria Vickers (left) and Sue Andrews from the Inland Empire branch get into the spirit of the festival.





CWC has a long-standing tradition of offering reciprocal privileges to members of other CWC branches when it comes to meetings, workshops and conferences. Now that we've all discovered Zoom, and so many of us offering hybrid meetings, it's never been easier to attend events at out-of-town branches. Check out this sampling of events on the horizon at our branches and hop on board!

CENTRAL COAST

March 15: Christopher Locke from Independent Book Publishers Association on the power of book reviews and how to get them.

April 19: Jaime Cortez will be discussing his short story collection *Gordo: A Steinbeck Country Comedy in 11 Tragic Chapters*.

May 17: Jordan Rosenfeld on evoking emotion in every scene.

Meetings begin at 6:15 p.m. via Zoom and in-person at Juice 'n Java, 599 Lighthouse Avenue, Pacific Grove. No pre-registration required for in-person meeting; \$5 donation requested at the door. Attending via Zoom is free. For the Zoom link, email President Sarah Pruitt, sep23@sbcglobal.net, at least 24 hours in advance. Please put "CWC-Want to Zoom Your Meeting" in the Subject line.

HIGH DESERT

March 22: Pauline Wiles, building websites for writers.

April 26: Christopher Vogler, author of *The Writer's Journey*, insight on archetypical characters.

Visit cwchdwc.com shortly before the event for instructions on how to get the Zoom link. No fee. Meetings are recorded and posted on the High Desert YouTube channel.

INLAND EMPIRE

April 23: Geri Spieler on how to do internet research.

Meeting begins at 11:00 a.m. via Zoom or in person at the Arlington branch of the Riverside City Library, 9556 Magnolia Ave., Riverside. Free admission. For the Zoom link, register on the Inland Empire Meetup page: <https://www.meetup.com/The-California-Writers-Club-Inland-Empire-Branch/>.

On the Horizon: continued from previous page

MENDOCINO

March 20: Readings from *Borders* (Part I), the 2022 anthology from Writers of the Mendocino Coast.

April 17: Michelle Penaloza on “Writing all the Feels: How Poets Render Emotions.”

May 15: Readings from *Borders* (Part II), the 2022 anthology from Writers of the Mendocino Coast.

Meetings begin at 3:00 p.m. via Zoom. For the link, send an email request to writersmendocinocoast@gmail.com.

No fee for CWC members; be sure to identify yourself as such.

MT. DIABLO

April 9: Stephanie Chandler, “Advanced Book Marketing and Launch Strategies.”

May 15: Grant Faulkner, “The Power of Writing with Abandon.”

June 11: Betsy Fasbinder, “How to Be the Best Ambassador for Your Book: Pitfalls to Avoid, Practices that Pay Off.”

The April meeting is Zoom only and lasts from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Cost is \$10 for CWC members and pre-registration is required. <https://cwcmtdiablo.org/current-cwc-mt-diablo-meeting/>. For the May meeting, details are still being arranged. Check back at cwcmtdiablo.org for updates. The June meeting will be Zoom and in-person at Zio Fraedo's, 611 Gregory Lane, Pleasant Hill. \$10 fee for Zoom access. Sign up at <https://cwcmtdiablo.org/current-cwc-mt-diablo-meeting/>. For the cost and registration details for the in-person meeting, check back at the when the time draws closer.

REDWOOD WRITERS

March 19: Diana Pho, “Improve Your Storytelling with Playwriting Techniques.”

April 16: Diane Frank, insights on the craft of poetry.

Meetings begin at 1:30 p.m. on Zoom and in-person at the Finley Community Center, 2060 W. College Ave., Santa Rosa. \$5 fee for CWC members, whether Zoom or in-person. Sign up at redwoodwriters.org/meetings.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY

April 2: Lynne Thompson, Poet Laureate for the City of Los Angeles.

May 7: Anat Golan-Wenick, how to turn your novel into a screen play.

June 2: Pamela Samuels Young, tips for writing a page-turner.

Meetings are Zoom only and start at 1:00 p.m. For the link, email VP Monte Swann at cwcsfvhost@gmail.com.

No fee for members of other CWC branches; be sure to identify yourself as

SF PENINSULA

March 19: Ron Katz, “An Unconventional Path to Publishing.”

April 16: Sally Collings, “The Ins and Outs of Writing a Book Proposal.”

May 21: Five-minute reads by SF Peninsula members.

All meetings begin at 11:00 a.m. and are Zoom and in-person at the Sequoia Yacht Club in Redwood City. \$5 fee. To register and get the Zoom link, go to <https://cwc-peninsula.org/>

SOUTH BAY

After 20-plus months of free Zoom meetings, in February SBW began charging for access. Members pay \$5, nonmembers \$10. Go to <https://southbaywriters.com/> for news of upcoming speakers.

continued on next page


On the Horizon: continued from previous page

TRI-VALLEY

March 19: Mary Rakow: "What a Fabulous Edit Can Do for Your Writing and Publishing."

April 16: Attorney Kelley Way will present "Lessons on Literary Law."

May 21: Nikita Jayaprakash, a previous winner of Tri-Valley's high school writing contest, will inspire this year's winners and their families.

Meetings begin at 2:00 p.m. on Zoom and in-person at Four Points by Sheraton, 5115 Hopyard Road, Pleasanton. Fees are \$14 for adult CWC members and \$6 for student members. Register and pay online at <https://www.trivalleywriters.org>. at least 24 hours in advance. 

Stay updated on calwriters.org.
Click on the Events Calendar tab.

Dispatches from Our Regional Associations

NorCal Group - Carole Bumpus, Chair



NorCal Calendar – The NorCal website has been shut down, so that all CWC members can go to www.calwriters.org for information on all branch activities across the State. Go to the tab "Event Calendar" on the top line, or click: <https://calwriters.org/events-month/> to find out what activities are going on near/or far from you within the CWC.

NorCal Training – Membership Chairs and Treasurers – led by the State Membership Chair, Sandy Moffett, and the State Treasurer, Connie Hanstedt, and/or Tri-Valley President, Jordan Bernal.

BABF – Bay Area Book Festival – Berkeley – Set for May 7th-8th 2022 – NorCal will be hosting a booth as we have done since 2017


SF Writers Conference – now set for July 21-24, 2022 – the date for getting the name in for our winners for the Poetry and Screenwriters free day is June 15th. For people volunteering to help in the booth, that information will be forthcoming from Mt. Diablo branch, as they will be running the booth this year. The panel of CWC writers has not been decided as of yet.

NorCal Leadership Conference – Set for October 1, 2022 – We are in the throes of searching for a location at this time. This event is a training for all branch board members and any volunteers who would like to further their role in the branch. More coming.

CWC-South - Sandy Moffett, Chair

Yes, the SoCal Region does exist! Meeting via Zoom, we gathered to say hello to long-time friends and meet new reps. Branches discussed the good, bad and very ugly side of what the pandemic has done to our folks, but for the most part we cheered each other's spirit and conviction to fight on and "Write On."

Upcoming opportunities were put on the table as well as the resurrection of the "speaker grid" that has served us well in the past. Branch reps were asked to go over the list and update as needed.

We plan to meet again in May. 





Member Spotlight



NEW RELEASES



Ben Alirez (Inland Empire) appeared in the March issue of the Employees Club of California's *Alive!* newsletter. As a retiree with the City of Los Angeles, the article discusses his novel, *Embers of Innocence: A Novel* and the motivation behind his pandemic-related story. <https://aliveemployeesclub.com/a-pandemic-novel/>

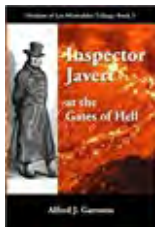


Antonia (Toni) Allegra (Napa Valley) has written/published a chapbook of poetry based on wordplay. Title: *converSAYtions: observations on life*. The book is available at Bookmine in St. Helena or contact antonia.allegra@mail.com

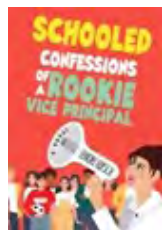
Jo Carpignano (SF Peninsula): *Nadine in the Tenderloin* integrates the author's experiences in San Francisco schools and tells the story of a young girl's experiences while living in deplorable conditions with an abusive mother and a little sister with special needs. Nadine is intelligent and has a strong desire to pursue education and a better life.



Wayne Edmiston (Coastal Dunes): His new children's book, *Ellie and Her Elephant: girl+elephant+piano=magic!*, came out last August. Wayne's debut novel, *Unfatally Dead: to Thaw or Not to Thaw?*, received a first place ribbon from Chanticleer's Mark Twain Book Awards in the category of satire and allegory.



Alfred Garrotto (Mt. Diablo) has received a gold seal 5-star review for his novel *Inspector Javert: At the Gates of Hell*, calling it "an impressive book examining mortality, life after death and the possibility of redemption." Al was interviewed by literary blogger George Cramer, and he's put together a book trailer which may be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wsASP-qq4ZQ>.



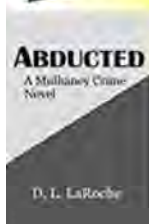
Lenore Hirsch (Redwood and Napa Valley): *Schooled: Confessions of a Rookie Vice Principal* was released by Laughing Oak in November of 2021. This humorous novel shows the new V.P. navigating the hormonally-charged miasma of life on a middle school campus: an obnoxious boss, misbehaving students, entitled parents, hit and miss teachers, snakes, and a bomb scare. A highly readable romp, full of love and heart.



Jeffrey Kingman (Berkeley and Napa Valley): *Beyond That Hill I Gather* contains portrait poems of women who are notable for their achievements. They are strong, accomplished women from various walks of life—authors, musicians, artists, comedians, activists, suffragists. Each poem captures a different flavor based on the unique personality of each individual. Finishing Line Press, 2021. www.jeffkingman.com

continued on next page

Member Spotlight (continued)



Dave LaRoche (South Bay and SF Peninsula): *ABDUCTED: A Mulhaney Crime Novel* has just been published. Those who have read *What Price Charlie's Soul* will recognize the principal character, now some twenty years older but still on the upward climb. Charlie continues to battle the foibles, misdirection, and mysteries we all face with experience.



Jo Lauer (Redwood Writers) has published *The Tooth Faerie*, the fourth in “A Little Old Ladies Mystery” series. *The Tooth Faerie* follows retirees Marion, Amanda, and new friend Gert on more wild adventures as they solve atypical mysteries using a combination of psychic abilities and street smarts. Available on Amazon



Lily Iona MacKenzie (Berkeley): Her hybrid memoir *Dreaming Myself into Old Age: One Woman's Search for Meaning* has been accepted for publication by Shanti Arts and is due to be released within the next two years. Lily's fourth novel, *The Ripening: A Canadian Girl Grows Up*, was released on October 15, 2021 <https://pen-l.com/MacKenzie.php>



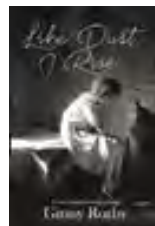
Kelly Miller (South Bay Writers): *Captive Hearts*, a Regency romantic variation of Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, was released by Meryton Press in January. Two of Kelly's earlier romances, *A Consuming Love* and *Mr. Darcy's Perfect Match*, were chosen as recommended reads in the 2022 Author Shout Reader Ready Awards.



Monique Rardin Richardson (Tri-Valley) and published a novelette, *The Unlikely Dreamcatcher*, and a memoir, *When Then Became Now*, both available on Amazon and Barnes & Noble. *The Unlikely Dreamcatcher* comes in paperback, eBook, and an audiobook read by three-time SOFA nominee Daniel Henning. *When Then Became Now* was released in audiobook in February.



Charley Roberts (Sacramento): “*Devil Dog*” *Dan Daly, America's Fightin'est Marine* has just been published by McFarland. The book is about a legendary hero of the Boxer Rebellion, the ‘banana wars’ and World War I who received two Medals of Honor and was recommended for an unprecedented third award.



Ginny Rorby (Mendocino): *Like Dust, I Rise* was released in December of 2021 by Black Rose Writing. It's the story of a girl who pursues her dream of becoming a pilot despite the challenges of the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression, transforming poverty into pride and reflecting the heroism of endurance. www.ginnyorby.org



Kathleen Scavone (Redwood Writers) published a young adult novella, *People of the Water*, in 2021. It is available locally in Sonoma County's Copperfield's book stores as well as on Amazon and IngramSpark. This historical novella is set in a Pomo village on Clear Lake in the 1850s.

continued on next page



Member Spotlight (continued)




“Mark Paul” Sebar (San Fernando Valley): *Captura*, published in June of 2021. A sci-fi tale featuring grey aliens with new tasks to perform amongst many worlds in varying universes. One such task is to go to a planet called Earth and kidnap a healthy young female human to be brought back to the Econ home world.



Michael Stockstill (Orange County): *Transforming the Irvine Ranch* will be launched in June of 2022 by Routledge Publishing. The colorful history of the Irvine family, especially heiress Joan Irvine, intersects with the story of the birth of UC Irvine and the transformation of an agricultural empire in Orange County CA. Contact Michael at stockstill49gmail.com for a 20 percent discount code.



M. Verant (SF Peninsula and Berkeley) has received the 2021 Royal Dragonfly Award for Fantasy for his novel *Miss Bennet's Dragon*. In this retelling of *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet commands dragons, bookish Mary is an activist, and the story has a message—society's prejudices have not changed between 1812 and 2022

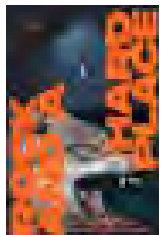


Bernard Wozny (Sacramento): *Girl Electric: Twin Falls*, released on February 18. A thriller in which nanotech goes terribly wrong. “A must-read for any intelligence, artificial or otherwise.” www.bernardwozny.com.

Short Stories, Poetry, Articles, Honors and More



Sheena Arora (SF Peninsula) had a two stories, “To Be a Woman” and “A Simple Transaction”, published in the CWC San Francisco Peninsula’s anthology *Fault Zone: Reverse*. Her essay “Figuring Out My Protagonist” is featured in The Writer’s Spotlight of the Writing Certificate of Stanford Continuing Studies. <https://continuingstudies.stanford.edu/writing-certificate/the-writers-spotlight>



Jim Guigli (Sacramento): Short stor, “Looking for Mishka”, is now in print at *Rock and a Hard Place Magazine*. This story features private Detective Bart Lasiter, who works out of a tiny office in Old Town Sacramento. It is available both in Kindle and paper at Amazon. [Rock and a Hard Place, Issue 7: Winter 2022](#).



Charlotte Kim (Orange County) recently had her poem “Pollution’s Makeup” published in *Reckoning Press*, a creative writing journal based on environmental justice, as the journal’s first published haiku.



Tom Mach (South Bay Writers) published a comedy play called *You're a Real Character*, a modern spin on the magic lamp story. Available at Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

continued on next page

Member Spotlight (continued)

PLEIADES

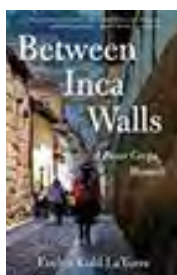



Ron Morita (Writers of the Mendocino Coast) had a short story “Shikata ga nai” recently published in the literary magazine *Pleiades*. This bittersweet romance between a Nisei and an Italian American takes place against the backdrop of the Japanese Evacuation. View it at pleiadesmag.com or ronmorita.wordpress.com

Irene Notaro (Coastal Dunes): Writing as Lauren Napa, her short story “The Ides of October” won first place in the 2021 Coastal Dunes’ Fears and Phobias contest. “The Ides of October” also placed as “adult runner up—most original” in the 2021 Solvang Library’s Ghost Story Challenge. <https://youtu.be/sP4jhB7iRHY>



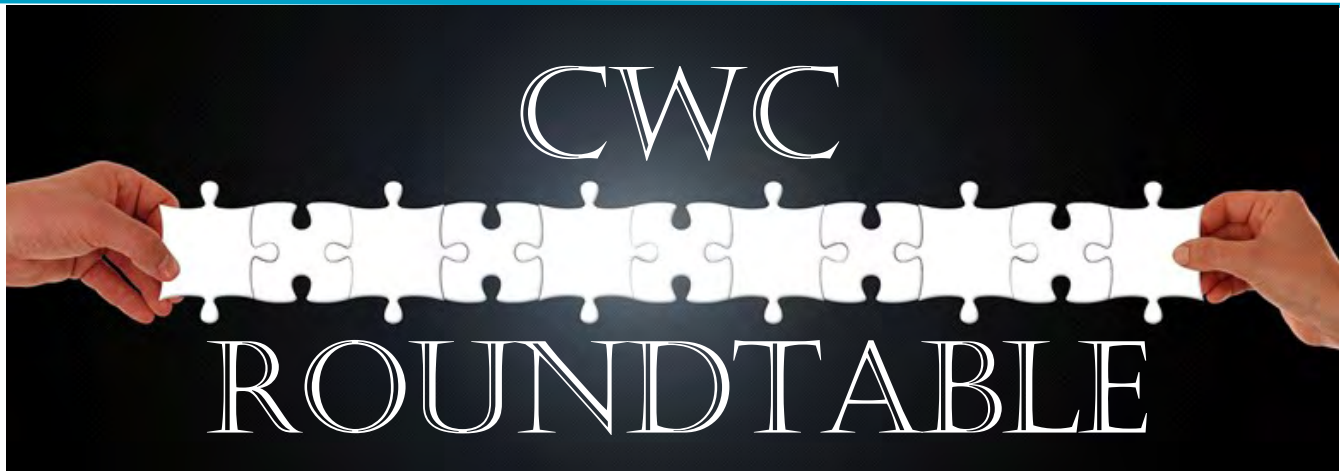
Michele Smith-Johansen (Central Coast): Won first place in the humor prose category of the 2021 Southwest Writers Anthology titled *Ramblings & Reflections* available on Amazon. Michele also had another opinion piece on gerrymandering published in November online and in print in *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, and her person essay titled “Person of Color” was published in December for *BlendedFutureProject.com*.



Evelyn Kohl La Torre (Fremont Area Writers and SF Peninsula) has recently been notified that her memoir *Between Inca Walls: A Peace Corps Memoir* is the winner of a major honor, the 2021 Peace Corps Writers’ Moritz Thomsen Peace Corps Experience Award. Evelyn’s latest book is *Love in Any Language: A Memoir of a Cross-cultural Marriage*. <https://www.evelynlatorre.com> 

Put Your Work in the Spotlight!

Just released a book? Had a short story, poem or article appear in a magazine or anthology? Won a literary contest? Share your good news with your fellow CWC members. Send an announcement, 50 words or less, to editor@calwriters.org. Covers should be submitted in JPEG format as an attachment to the email. Deadline for the Summer 2002 issue is June 1.



The CWC Roundtable is a new feature in which we pose a question or topic of mutual interest to all 22 branches and ask the presidents (or other branch leader) to respond. Today's topic: ***How is your branch handling meetings as we emerge from the pandemic?*** If you've got an idea for a future CWC Roundtable discussion, send your topic to editor@calwriters.org.



Karma Bennett, President, Berkeley: All of our speaker series have been on Zoom and our socials are live. Kristen Caven has been leading live retreats and workshops in the park. We've been fortunate that our two socials happened during the lowest infection dips. We tried once to do a hybrid member orientation but the reception in the park was so poor that we had to split them. Protecting the health of our members is our top priority. Moreover finding a venue is time-consuming. We would rather wait a bit too long and be sure than waste precious time researching venues. Our Zoom meetings are doing well.

We did get some feedback that on Zoom the meetings were too long so we are experimenting with having marketing and craft support groups at a different time of the month.



Sarah Pruitt, President, Central Coast: We started in-person meetings in September. Our January speaker asked to Zoom because of Omicron, but we returned to in-person in February. Everyone loves seeing each other. We are offering hybrid meetings using two laptops, a cardioid microphone for my laptop on the podium, a PA system for the meeting room, and a member who runs the Zoom meeting on the other laptop.



Patrick Sturm, President, Coastal Dunes: We resumed in-person meetings this month. Attendance at the March meeting was 18 online (Zoom) and 14 in-person. In January and February, we held Zoom only meetings. We will continue to have hybrid Zoom and in person meetings for the foreseeable future. The hybrid meetings have been going well thanks to member Cathie Ortiz, who has extensive experience setting up and working with audio visual equipment. Additionally, since our meetings are held at the local (Nipomo) library we have utilized the audio-visual expertise of their staff as well



Terry Tosh, President, Fremont Area Writers: We are continuing with Zoom-only meetings. Many of our members are very COVID-paranoid, and older, so they either don't feel comfortable meeting in person yet, or had a hard time getting to our meetings before COVID and prefer to continue Zooming. After taking a poll, it was determined to stay on Zoom. Another factor is we no longer had a venue for our meetings; our original site had closed down permanently.

continued on next page

CWC ROUNDTABLE (CONTINUED)



Bob Isbill, Programs/Publicity, High Desert: Our first in-person meeting was August 14, 2021. We offered a presentation by one of our own members. This worked well because if a cancellation was needed, we had only to inform our own member presenters. Our audience was optionally masked, and we did social distancing. Audience was glad to get back together. Because of the COVID surge in January and because our planned meeting was to have six tables of people not social distancing, we felt it was prudent to cancel that meeting which we did. We hold Zoom meetings of our in-person events. Fortunately, our VP is technically savvy and uses his laptop to Zoom. Zoom attendees are mostly those who are cautious about attending in person. It is working out well because it gives all our members the option to attend by Zoom or in person. We are also doing one Zoom-only meeting per month which is an extra meeting that we call Act 2. We are therefore technically doubling our monthly meetings. The Act 2 meetings consist of whatever topic we think is attractive and interesting. We invite all CWC branches and have presented James Scott Bell, Dara Marks, and Christopher Vogler as well as other folks not as famous but very interesting. It is a popular innovation that we plan to keep doing from now on. It is one way that COVID has been a blessing because we have had guests as far away as Chicago and Scotland!



Sam Nichols, President, Inland Empire: We began holding hybrid meetings in September 2021, although we were Zoom only in January 2022 due to COVID and staffing shortages at the Ovitt library. Our future meetings are planned to be hybrid. Our hybrid meetings are working well, except October 2021 where we experienced technical difficulties with sound recording. We needed to acquire additional equipment to do the hybrid meetings, including: webcam and tripod, UHF microphone, and three cables to interface with our Fender Passport Conference PA system. Some technical skill is required to make the setup. We were under pressure from our membership to return to in-person, although many members will continue to Zoom only.



Kathryn Atkins, Publicity Chair, Long Beach: We are not holding in-person meetings. We had a trial with the board last fall, but Omicron doused our in-person + Zoom hybrid plans. Our meetings continue to be Zoom-only because our library hasn't reopened yet.



Notty Bumpo, Central Board Rep, Writers of the Mendocino Coast: We are Zoom-only till we can secure a venue that is fully reopened—kind of few and far between here on the coast. We may consider hybrid meetings depending on membership responses.



Sarita Lopez, President, Napa Valley: We continue to meet by Zoom. Due to Omicron being so contagious we have decided to wait until warmer weather in hopes cases will have decreased greatly by then.

continued on next page

CWC ROUNDTABLE (CONTINUED)



Marlene Dotter, Technical Director, Mt. Diablo: The CWC-Mt. Diablo branch first held their first hybrid meeting on October 9, 2021, with 24 members and guests in-person and nine others attending by Zoom. For those attending in-person, we checked vaccination status, required masks, and even gave out masks with our logo and branch name for swag. Hand sanitizer was available for every table, and we required a glove on the serving hand for plating at the buffet. COVID-19 rules for in-person meetings are posted on our website on the registration page, and these are announced again at the meeting. We did need to add a reminder announcement to mask again after eating following the lunch break. We asked for a maximum of four people at each 72-inch round table to help keep social distancing. The president ensured the speaker knew that as long as they were six feet from the audience, a mask would not be needed for presenting. All of this in tandem worked out well.

We are offering hybrid meetings. Our board appointed a subcommittee over the summer, to research needed equipment and set-up costs. It was necessary to procure Bluetooth speakers, microphones, a second screen, wi-fi boosters, a webcam, and extension cords.

No one in our branch had much experience with sound and video equipment, so we set up multiple practice sessions at our venue before going live. During these sessions, we invited board members to attend via Zoom to have feedback on the virtual experience. On the day of the first hybrid meeting, board volunteers performed new duties such as vaccination status checks, CWC-logo mask handouts, and helping with equipment setup. The Vice President served as Technical Director, monitoring the quality of online and in-person experiences on his laptop. Another board member managed the webcam to follow the workshop leader. A laptop camera was trained on the assembled attendees to project their images to virtual attendees. Virtual attendees were projected onto the screen when the presenter was not in “screen share” mode.

We have used this approach for all our meetings this year. We have pulled it off with varying measures of success. There are difficulties with sound which we still have not overcome. We often must interrupt the meeting to spend several minutes trying to correct an issue. In fact, the technical staff works throughout the meeting, with no time to socialize or attend to the speaker. For this reason, we have offered the staff free admission, which includes lunch.

Overall, we have found the process stressful and non-optimal, but we are not giving up. The board will discuss best plans for moving forward during the next fiscal year.



Brian Gaps, President, Orange County: Our branch resumed in-person meetings on January 8th at around 50% our pre-pandemic audience size. Harkening back to our century-old roots when the club founders met inside restaurants to discuss the writing craft, the monthly speaker meeting has moved to a massive, retro food hall in Anaheim. Although open to the general public, the majority of patrons arrive as our meeting concludes. The February meeting experienced a 70% increase, almost reaching previous level. We’re not doing hybrid meetings. The effort to produce a Zoom simulcast did not appear worth the effort. While our Zoom meetings regularly had attendance of 30-40, the recordings available to members on YouTube had only single-digit viewership. Most of the Zoom attendees have moved over to live

continued on next page

CWC ROUNDTABLE (CONTINUED)

attendance. Our venue has ample space for extreme social distancing, if required. So far, all attendees have preferred to sit in the main general seating area for in-person networking.



Crissi Langwell, Newsletter Editor, Redwood Writers: We are holding hybrid meetings, which we started in August 2021. We have a team of board members who coordinate efforts to make sure the experience is enjoyable for those at home and at the meeting in person. It probably took us two meetings to feel very comfortable with the process. We have one person who handles the in-person tech, and another who manages the Zoom call. When anyone speaks, we make sure they are within range of the Zoom camera and that the computer is picking up their sound. The only time we do Zoom-only meetings are when the local laws mandate it. We held our January and February meetings on Zoom only, and the members seemed very flexible with the shift. In March, we are heading back to hybrid meetings.



Kimberly Edwards, President, Sacramento: No in-person meetings as of yet, but we hope to begin soon! We know that many of our members would also like to return to in-person meetings. However, our current Zoom-only practice for official branch meetings doesn't prevent members from gathering for coffee to talk about current projects. We love Zoom because we can bring in speakers from all over the country; even speakers within a few hours of our community like the fact that they don't have to drive. This gives our members accessibility to experts they might not otherwise get a chance to hear. We don't have to get dressed and drive across town to a place that meets our meeting needs. Much less stressful! However, we do recognize that our members are missing in-person meetings and we plan to go back soon! Most likely, we will ease back in – starting the in-person with our First Friday “network” meetings and eventually returning to in-person for our more formal third-Saturday meetings. Now that our members are used to Zoom, we may be able to still feature long-distance speakers at in-person meetings as long as we have access to a big screen!



Kathy Highcove, Newsletter Editor, San Fernando Valley: The CWC-SFV continues to meet in a Zoom room instead of our usual meeting room located on The Motion Picture and Television Fund campus. The MPTF is an organization that provides health care and assistance to people who worked for the local movie and television studios. The campus also contains living quarters for retired movie folk. The MPTF managers are very vigilant about guarding the health of their charges, and have often closed parts of the campus to outsiders during flu season. Since the start of the COVID shut-down, the MPTF has been closed to outside organizations, like our group of local writers. Happily, the viral threat in our area has greatly diminished in 2022 and we hope to be back in the Saban meeting room in the near future. We will continue to offer our meetings on Zoom to members who have moved away or cannot attend a meetings in person, such as members of other CWC clubs.

continued on next page

CWC ROUNDTABLE (CONTINUED)



Geri Spieler, President, SF Peninsula: We are doing hybrid meetings, with our first in-person March 19. Our membership chair and another set up a test for hybrid and yes, we needed additional equipment. Our last all Zoom meeting was in February.



June Gillam, President, San Joaquin Valley: We are still on all Zoom meetings, and we are working with contacts to try to get back to in person at University of the Pacific, where we met before COVID. We decided to continue with all Zoom until we can get back to the excellent location at UOP.



Deborah 'Jordan' Bernal, President, Tri-Valley: TVW went back to in-person meetings in September 2021, including our full-day writers conference in October. When Omicron hit Alameda County in late December, TVW went back to Zoom only meetings for January and February 2022. TVW will present its first hybrid meeting in March. The board has agreed to provide hybrid speaker meetings at least until the end of the current term.



A New Member Makes Connections

by Michael Barrington, Mt. Diablo

What I was looking for when I first joined CWC last November was unclear. After casually conversing with some members at a monthly meeting, I realized, *this is what I need*. Writing is a lonely experience. I wanted to try to create a writers' social group where like-minded people could chat, exchange ideas, resources, and have fun while discussing anything remotely connected to our craft. Although not a critique group, if someone was experiencing a writing difficulty, they could share it with the group.

Our first meeting was held via Zoom to try it out and gauge interest. The group itself was open: people could come and go as needed. Thirteen people attended. Although somewhat limited by being virtual, it was a success. The group agreed to meet again. We called it "Writers Connection."

We held an in-person meeting over lunch, with just over a dozen people attending. The restaurant accommodated with a separate space and turning off their piped-in music. Each person briefly introduced themselves. Then, I threw out a couple of open-ended questions, "Why am I here today? Why do I write?" to help us get to know each other. A lively discussion ensued, and a few members read short pieces of their writing. The net result was an agreement to continue meeting once a month, as all found it enjoyable.

The size of the group was about right for this kind of informal event. One significant change planned is the seating arrangement. Seated at one long table allowed for some personal interaction but hard for those at one end of the table to interact with the other. A square formation is planned, where we can all see each other's faces and body language. Like new groups and books, we are a work in process, and it's fun!

The next meeting with the Writers Connection will be over optional lunch on Wednesday, March 16, 2022, from noon until 2:00 p.m. at the Chicken Pie Shop, 1251 Arroyo Way, Walnut Creek, CA 94596. All CWC members welcome, from any branch! Register at <https://cwcmt Diablo.org/event/writers-connection/> so that appropriate seating will be arranged.



Helping Our Members Sell Books

by Bob Isbill, High Desert

The High Desert branch of the CWC is launching a new website to assist its members to market their books by helping them get guest speaker gigs. The purpose of those speaking engagements is to be able to display and sell their books in “meet and greets” following their talks.

The program, called On-Topic Speakers for You, provides “writers with something to say” and will debut with over 75 topics from which event planners can choose. The website boasts that they will provide a poet, a panel, or a personal presentation.


On-Topic Speakers for You is designed as a resource for organizations looking for affordable guest speakers with a variety of backgrounds and interesting topics. Event planners who visit www.ontopicspeakers.com will find four topic categories: Writing, How-to, Life Experiences and Inspirational.

Clicking on a classification provides the viewer with a multitude of topics in that category. It is linked to the speaker’s page with their photo, bio, and contact information. It is then up to the planner and the speaker to coordinate the details including travel expenses and/or stipends. The one constant in these negotiations will be to arrange an opportunity to sell the speaker’s books immediately following their presentation.

Web developer Mike Apodaca, who is also HDCWC Vice-President, and I were amazed as the project evolved to discover the capacity within our branch to offer such a wide variety of themes.

As an experiment, our February meeting consisted of four of our On-Topic speakers giving four 20-minute talks. Speakers were Emmalisa Hill, Joan Rudder- Ward, Jim Grayson, and Dwight Norris. Themes included dream interpretations, the de-escalation of stressful situations, self-image improvement and how to do a personal presentation you can be proud of. Reviews of the meeting were outstanding.


The only obligation of the members who participate is to be a member in good standing of the High Desert branch, and to dedicate themselves to giving the best performance they can, to constantly strive for improvement and excellence, and to understand and agree that the HDCWC can modify or discontinue the program at any time for any reason.

We look forward to opportunities for On-Topic Speakers for You to assist our members in accordance with the CWC Mission Statement. 



Serving Two Communities? Have Two Meetings!

by Sam Nichols, Inland Empire

Several of our members expressed a desire to alternate our Branch meetings between the Ovitt Family Library in Ontario and the Arlington Branch Library in Riverside. Our membership was polled and the idea was received positively. Thus, in 2022, the plan became to meet in Ontario in odd-numbered months and in Riverside in even-numbered months. The first meeting in Riverside was a hybrid meeting, which occurred on February 26th. As it takes time to set up the equipment for a hybrid meeting, the Arlington branch graciously allowed our members a one-off to set up the equipment in their secured meeting room on Friday the 25th. Thus on Saturday the 26th the meeting room was unlocked and the meeting was ready to proceed. Many thanks to Assunta Maria Vickers for arranging this courtesy and for her and Ben Alirez for taking the time to prepare the equipment. I also wish to express my gratitude to Natalia Corres, who coordinated and led the Zoom portion of the meeting. 



THE CWC BULLETIN

THE OFFICIAL MEMBER NEWSLETTER OF CALIFORNIA WRITERS CLUB
PUBLISHED FOUR TIMES A YEAR: MARCH, JUNE, SEPTEMBER AND DECEMBER
SENT BY EMAIL TO ALL CURRENT MEMBERS

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
JOYCE KRIEG (CENTRAL COAST)

ASSOCIATE EDITOR/SUBMISSIONS
SANDY MOFFETT (WRITERS OF KERN)

ADVERTISING/PROMOTION
BOB ISBILL (HIGH DESERT)

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Member Spotlight: For new book releases, short stories, poems or articles, or news of literary honors. 50 words or less by email to editor@calwriters.org. Put “Member Spotlight” in the Subject line. Send a copy of your book cover in JPEG format as an email attachment.

Articles on writing craft, marketing and publication: Send a proposal to editor@calwriters.org. Contributors will receive a short blurb to promote their books and/or services.

“CWC Roundtable” and “On the Horizon”: Instructions on contributing to these features will be sent to all branch presidents, newsletter editors and publicity chairs approximately one month prior to the deadline. Watch for an email from Sandy Moffett, sm@sandymoffett.com.

Photographs: JPEG format, sent separately (not embedded in a Word doc or PDF). Please provide complete details in the caption, including names of people pictured.

Deadlines: First day of the month prior to publication. March 1, June 1, September 1, December 1.

Advertising Opportunities in *The Bulletin*

- ✓ Reach some 1800 members in 22 branches throughout the state.
- ✓ CWC members are the ideal target audience for anyone with a writing-related business: editors, website designers, publicists, cover designers, book formatters, ghostwriters, and more.
- ✓ Affordable rates—as low as \$30 for a business card-size ad, up to \$200 for a full page.

Details: Go to calwriters.org/bulletin and scroll down to the section on advertising. Or contact Advertising Director Bob Isbill, advertisingcwc@gmail.com, 760/221-6367.

From the Editor's Desk



Welcome to the next generation of the venerable California Writers Club *Bulletin*!

If you've made it this far into the newsletter, you've undoubtedly noticed a few changes, a new look and feel, new features. You may be wondering what happened to the many pages devoted to reports from the branches.

Now, how can I put this in a way that doesn't sound mean-spirited? Well ... to be brutally honest, my instincts tell me most of you simply aren't all that interested in past-tense activities at branches other than your own. I could be wrong. I have no scientific proof, only my own intuition and experience. True confession: I *never* managed to slog through all those branch reports in previous editions of *The Bulletin* and I'm a former president of the statewide organization! At my own Central Coast branch, writing up those reports for *The Bulletin* felt more like a chore, not an activity that "sparks joy," if I may go all Marie Kondo on you.

So I've chosen to devote more space to "news you can use"—articles on writing craft and marketing/publication of our work, upcoming branch activities that may be of interest to other members, and a roundtable discussion featuring topics of common interest to all branches.

It's always been a bit puzzling to me why we're not doing more to celebrate our members who have published books or achieved honors in the literary world. The other writers' club I belong to, Mystery Writers of America, does this in their monthly newsletter, and I'm guessing the other major organizations for writers do the same. Thus a new feature for *The Bulletin*, Member Spotlight.

Details on how to submit articles and announcements to *The Bulletin* may be found in the masthead on the previous page.

This is a new direction for *The Bulletin* and producing this first issue definitely felt like a shakedown cruise. Not all features will prove popular, not all systems will work. Mistakes will be made.

For you geeks in the crowd: This edition of *The Bulletin* was produced on Adobe PageMaker 7.0 on a PC. I know, I know. Adobe hasn't shipped PageMaker since 2001, and haven't I heard of InDesign? I actually have InDesign on my rig, as it came with the Adobe Creative Suite. I have attempted to learn to use it, but ... It's like driving a Toyota Corolla all your life and suddenly finding yourself behind the wheel of a Lamborghini. Okay, the gas pedal is still on the right, but it sure handles differently. Whereas PageMaker is simple, elegant, and gets the job done without a fuss.

The graphic elements that didn't come from CWC and its branches were found on Pixabay, a wonderful online resource for free, no-royalty photographs, illustrations and clipart.

Before signing off, a tip of my editor's green eyeshade to former *Bulletin* editor, Rusty LaGrange, who ushered us into the world of electronic newsletters some seven years ago, to Sandy Moffett, who agreed to stay on to coordinate submissions, and to Bob Isbill, who continues to handle advertising. And to the branch presidents, newsletter editors and publicity chairs who gamely went along with the crazy plans and wild-ass vision of this new editor.

—Joyce Krieg