



CALIFORNIA WRITERS CLUB BULLETIN

SUMMER 2023

ChatGPT Wrote My Query Letter. Sort of.

by Daniel Bacon, Marin

Unless you've been holed up in a Himalayan cave the last few months, you've read about ChatGPT, the revolutionary new AI (artificial intelligence) chatbot that interacts conversationally and can "answer follow-up questions, admit mistakes, challenge incorrect premises, and—" gotta love this—"reject inappropriate requests." Created by OpenAI, a San Francisco-based company, ChatGPT stormed onto headlines and is forcing tech behemoths Google and Apple to play catchup.

Curious, I decided to test it, and to say I was flabbergasted is an understatement. I'm currently sending out queries to literary agents for a recently completed historical novel. For months I've shaped, sweated over, and used all my rhetorical powers to create a query that I hope will pique the interest of a receptive agent. I began my test by asking ChatGPT to write a query letter based on a two-sentence description of my novel's premise. Now here's the crazy thing: when I clicked on the 'start' icon, a nanosecond later a square cursor slid across the screen leaving a trail of words, sentences, and paragraphs in its wake while my wondrous eyes stared in disbelief. In less time than it takes to tie your shoelaces, it wrote a six-paragraph query letter.


Wait a minute, I thought, it might just be gobbledygook.

As it turned out, the query touched all the right bases. It contained an enthusiastic opening sentence with a title (it created), the genre, and a brief description of the premise. This was followed by two paragraphs describing a plausible plot and two more paragraphs on why readers will like it. It even closed with a paragraph thanking the agent and noting that the first three chapters and a synopsis were included (they were not actually included). It didn't cite the word count, which is mandatory, and it was a bit bland, but it described several details not in my prompt, probably because my novel focuses on a well-known event.

My appetite whetted, I wanted to see if ChatGPT could write a query that more closely adhered to my novel. I gave it more details and again it quickly scrolled out another query. However, it still wasn't as good as my hard-earned original version.

Finally, I pasted in my entire query as a prompt and let it rip. One minute later, as I read the result, I felt a twinge of pride that aside from the open and closing paragraphs, Chat had used my text verbatim.

My takeaway: this tool can be useful to begin writing a query letter that can be customized. But be careful.

One important purpose of a query is to show off your writing style and, at least for the time being, only you can do that. 



Daniel Bacon is president of the Marin branch. He is the founder of the Barbary Coast Trail, San Francisco's official history walk. He is the author of *Walking San Francisco on the Barbary Coast Trail*, as well as numerous articles for local and national publications. www.daniel-bacon.com, www.barbarycoasttrail.org This article originally appeared in the May issue of the Marin branch newsletter and is reprinted with permission.

President's Corner: Writers Helping Writers

by Roger Lubeck, CWC President

In one of my careers, I spent twenty-five years working with executives and managers on their leadership and management skills. In non-profit companies, having servant leaders and a trained group of volunteers can make all the difference. People who know their job and want to help others. Isn't that the core idea of Writers Helping Writers?



In June, members of the California Writers Club will elect a new executive board for their branch. At the state level, the slate of candidates for the executive board are voted on in July. The President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary are elected by the members. Additional board members are appointed by the president with the approval of the elected board.

In talking with the branch presidents and the CWC branch representatives I have the impression that getting members to volunteer at meetings or events may not be a challenge; however, getting members to volunteer for the more substantial duties like membership, web management, newsletters, speaker chair, not to mention the elected board positions, has been a challenge in some of the branches. In part, the jobs are seen as daunting, meaning too much work. In truth, many of the essential positions require only a few hours a week or month. What is often lacking is someone to train a member new to the position. Job descriptions may help; however, training manuals and video training are even better. What is essential, in my experience, are mentors to guide a new member as he/she transitions into a job. As a non-profit, we depend on volunteers. The problem is we may be exhausting our most dependable volunteer members.

The branches routinely offer so much to members every month that it might be easy to underestimate the work that goes on behind the scenes. Attending board meetings is something every member should experience. Serving on a board is even more valuable. In many branches, the elected board members have served for multiple years and, sometimes more than once in a position. Serving as a board member, then as vice president, and finally as president is healthy. Having a past president serve later as vice president or repeats as president because no one wants the position can be a problem. New board members bring new experiences, talents, and ideas to a branch. It is up to our branch presidents to ensure that the board is adding new members with the potential and interest to serve in the elected positions.

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The health and success of the CWC and its 22 branches are determined by several factors. The number of publications and the

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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.

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percentage of members with publications and new publications each year are measures of success. Opportunities for writing and publishing, like anthologies and contests, are another. The extent to which we are educating our communities through conferences and workshops also is a measure. Finally, as a bean counter, and having to plan a budget, the total number of members each year, the number of members renewing (retention), and the number of new members are critical measures of health and success.

Keeping a healthy percentage of our existing members and adding a meaningful number of new members should be the goal of every president and board. As of June, we have a total of 1,913 primary member and 87 dual members, making our total 2,003. In 2022-2023, we retained approximately 85% of our 2021-2022 members and we added another 360 members. Eighty-five percent retention is a very good number and a gain of over 15% in new members is encouraging. Having a core of experienced writers helping new members and less experienced writers is at the heart of this club.

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On a different note, this is the summer edition of the *Bulletin*. For me, summer suggests spending a week or two at the beach or sitting by a pool reading a handful of novels. Summer is also a great time to write. In art, there are painters who take their canvases out into nature and paint. They are called Plein Air painters. This summer, take some time off and become a Plein Air writer. Take your laptop or yellow pad, find a cozy, sheltered spot under a shade tree surrounded by nature, and write a poem or start a short story. Where I live, the coast is only 30 minutes away and there are several river and creek side vineyards with beautiful gardens and sheltered spots to sip wine while watching salmon or whales as they migrate. In such a setting, writing poetry is possible even for a fiction writer like me. So, grab a notebook, pen, a snack, and a bottle of water and head out. Plein Air Writing means you are never alone. 

The New Apocalypse for Writers?

by Michael Barrington, Mt. Diablo

Some months ago, a short article on the internet piqued my interest and scared me at the same time: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE. A recent *60 Minutes* program just added to my concerns. And then I saw on the news that “A man widely seen as the godfather of artificial intelligence (AI) has quit his job, warning about the growing dangers from developments in the field. Geoffrey Hinton, 75, announced his resignation from Google in a statement to the *New York Times*, saying he now regretted his work.”

Artificial intelligence (AI) has made incredible strides in its ability to generate human-like text and so it is becoming increasingly commonplace with businesses and organizations. But what about us, the storytellers, we who write because we have to, because if we didn't our lives would not be fulfilled, we who simply share our creativity in words?

With technology that is moving faster than the speed of light, it is not just low-skilled jobs like content writing that are at risk of being automated by AI. Professional writers, journalists, and novelists (so they say!) could eventually be replaced by machines. In fact, one Japanese company has already developed an AI system that it claims **can write novels better than humans!**

How long will it be before AI writing becomes good enough to completely replace human writers across all genres and formats? Across all genres and formats, you ask. Hmm. I believe that as the technology continues to improve, it seems that the day when machines can do some of our jobs better than we can is fast approaching, if not already here. There are programs being developed (GPT-3) that can construct a short story, hold a conversation (Siri, Alexa), and write a news article.

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New Apocalypse: continued from previous page



Eons ago when I was a university prof teaching in a Master's Program, a concern that faculty had was that some really bright students would hire a professional to write their term papers for them or possibly find some academic paper on the internet (a budding worldwide computer network at the time) and rework it. How antiquated that now seems, how passe. Since late last year, AI platforms like ChatGPT have become a growing topic of conversation on college campuses, with students using the technology for everything from class assignments to completing dissertations.

And what about AI and its use in business? "I don't see writing career paths moving forward where AI *isn't* infused," says Paul Roetzer (Marketing AI Institute Founder and CEO). "The technology is getting too good, too fast not to be adopted by companies in some fashion. Generally, that does not mean replacing writers. It means writers will use AI tools in some way in almost every aspect of their jobs. What that looks like will depend on your role and your company, but you *will* need to use AI in your daily work moving forward."

But back to ourselves, we who use words, savor words, play with words professionally and organize them into publications people call stories, flash fiction, novels, and poetry. We who dream up our characters, put flesh and bone on them, develop, live, and sometimes die with them. We who share our most intimate feelings, embarrassing moments, even our secrets with them, what about us? A computer is a machine and can never feel or describe what I have experienced in giving birth to my characters, accompanying them through the vagaries of their lives, experiencing the gamut of emotions as they weave their way through joyous moments, trials, and tribulations. And finally, a machine cannot understand or empathize with me at the heartache of separation, of leaving them when my novel is finished and is reluctantly handed over to another person to be printed, to be shared by the world.

But how far off are we from AI programs being able to produce writing of style and substance that might resemble Scott Fitzgerald, Jane Austen or Ngozie Adiche? I wonder if the AI gurus are as close as they think they are. My computer has neither lived my life nor the lives of the characters who live inside my inventive mind. It might be able to imitate, to copy, but it will never be able to foresee or foretell what even I have not yet formulated. For that is who I am, a creative storyteller, and even I do not know what the next words will be until my brain gives me the code!

It is argued that AI will serve to augment our work by providing writers with improved tools. Time will be saved when writing a historical novel by not having to spend months doing research when AI will deliver it in minutes. That means the writers, the storytellers, can spend more time on the creative aspects of their work. If these last two suppositions hold, then I am definitely 'in.'

I may not be in the same place as the people in rural Ireland and their initial reaction to the introduction of electricity. Whole villages refused to accept the new technology, thinking they'd be fried in their beds!

But maybe I just have a questioning mind and do not want to clutter it with speculation or anxiety regarding technological developments that may or may not help me become more fulfilled as a writer or expand my imagination. In any case all I want to do is tell stories.



Michael Barrington of the Mt. Diablo branch is the author of five books, the latest being *The Baron of Bengal Street*. He blogs at www.mbwriter.net



Tighten Your Writing with Haiku

by Jean Gordon Kocienda, Marin

Why did the Japanese invent *haiku*, that bony-fingered micro poem? Can one say anything meaningful in 5-7-5 syllables? Why not allow ourselves a few more syllables? Haiku writing also requires a seasonal reference (*kigo*) and 'cutting word' (*kire-ji*), making things even harder.

For an impatient writer like me, the seasonal reference eats up scarce syllables, but I must admit that the cutting word has obvious merit. It is a twist, a turn, a contradiction, or a surprise at the end of a haiku (or *waka* poem¹). It is an essential poetic concept: shouldn't the writer *always* surprise his or her reader? If he or she cannot say something fresh and unexpected, why bother? There is a similar device in Western poetry, called a *volta*, or turn.

To appreciate the brevity of haiku and its essential Japanese-ness, consider the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the language. Verbs exist on their own in sentences without subjects or even objects. Much is implied, and much is left to interpretation and context.

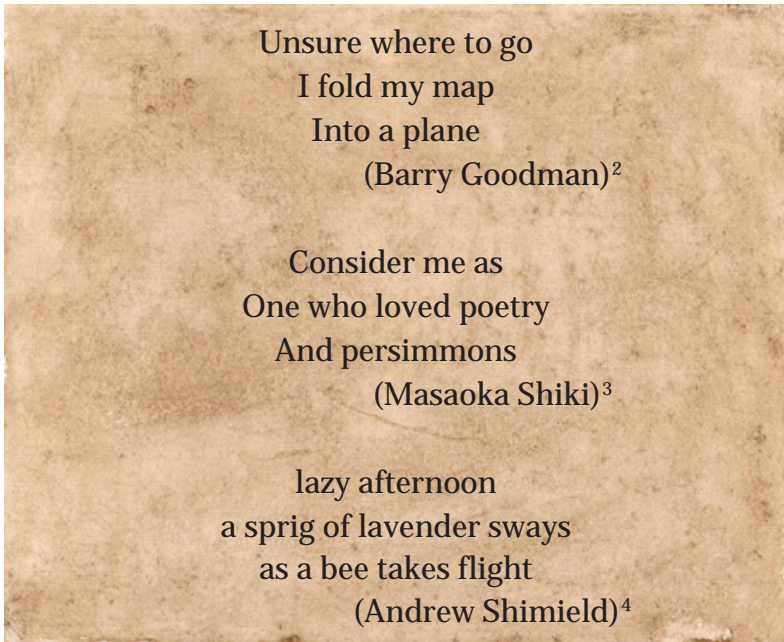
In Japanese, a statement is changed into a question by placing '*ka*' at the end. A statement starts out headed in a predictable direction, but with a one-syllable suffix it is cast into doubt. In other words, the cutting word is an innate feature of the language.

The same goes for negatives. English grammar forces us to show our cards early with negatives statements ('I won't', 'There is not'), but a negative suffix can be chucked on the very end of a long declarative statement in Japanese like a lighted match on a pile of dry leaves.

Cultural diversity poses a further challenge for those who would compose haiku in English. Even within the rich context of a living language, the Japanese collectively share literature, history, and culture in a way that English speakers do not, suggesting that one might have to use more words to communicate a poetic idea in English.

Does that mean that haiku is just too short for Anglophones? Of course not. Does it mean that playing in the haiku sandbox may be fun, but not meaningful? Not necessarily. There are some terrific English haiku out there.

Here are a few:



Unsure where to go
I fold my map
Into a plane
(Barry Goodman)²

Consider me as
One who loved poetry
And persimmons
(Masaoka Shiki)³

lazy afternoon
a sprig of lavender sways
as a bee takes flight
(Andrew Shimield)⁴

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Writing Haiku: continued from previous page

In addition to being enjoyable, writing haiku can help us practice *discipline*. All writing can benefit from that. With limited syllables, one must get right to the point. Haiku relies on shared human experience: the line drawing offered by the poet must deliver sufficient meaning to the reader or the haiku fails. It must be drawn clearly: The scent of tomato plants, for example, might bring dirty knees, fresh chopped basil and grassy drops of olive oil, or a rotten tomato lying on the ground, half-eaten by a squirrel. If the poet is meticulous in his or her craft, the reader will know what is meant, he or she will feel it.

The seasonal reference might be more than an annoyance; it might be an invitation to mindfulness. And the cutting word should exist in all creative writing and thinking. Haiku politely requires us to deliver these things.

So, even if you don't fancy yourself a poet, your writing muscles might benefit from a workout in haiku-style economy and discipline. Pull out a sticky note, flatten the back of a sales receipt or a sandwich wrapper, and give it a try. Use haiku's rules to free yourself, then carry that freedom back to whatever you write about, in whatever form.



Jean Gordon Kocienda of the Marin branch has been studying the Japanese language for much of her life. She has worked as a researcher and geopolitical risk analyst in Washington, DC, and Silicon Valley. She is currently writing a biography about Japanese poet and feminist Yosano Akiko (1878-1942).

Meet the Agent: Exclusive for CWC Members

What are agents looking for? How can an agent help writers? What is the best general advice an agent would give to writers today? If one does not have an agent, what things can he/she do to get representation?

Join us statewide as the High Desert branch presents prominent agent Lucianne Diver at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, June 27 via Zoom.

Lucienne Diver joined The Knight Agency in 2008, after spending fifteen years at New York City's prestigious Spectrum Literary Agency. With her sharp eye and gift for spotting original new voices, Lucienne is one of the most well-respected agents in the industry. A lifelong book addict, she graduated summa cum laude from the State University of New York at Potsdam with dual majors in English/writing and anthropology. She thus came well-equipped for her work as an agent.

Over the course of her dynamic career she has sold well over seven hundred titles to every major publisher, and has built a client list of more than forty authors spanning the commercial fiction genres, primarily in the areas of fantasy, science fiction, horror, women's fiction, romance, mystery/suspense and young adult. Her authors have been honored with the Hugo, Nebula, Colorado Book and National Readers' Choice Awards, and have appeared on the New York Times and USA Today bestseller lists. A publishing veteran, Lucienne has superb industry knowledge, and a keen understanding of the foreign rights market.

This zoom presentation is open free of charge to all CWC members. Registration is not required. However, there will be limited seating for what is sure to be a popular event.

The link to join the meeting may be found on the sidebar "Special Zoom Meetings" on <http://www.hdcwc.com>.



The Question Every Writer Must Ask

by David Goetz, president of CZ Strategy

Each of us writes for a variety of reasons.

Some write to work out their pain. Others write as a creative outlet. Still others write to promote their business or nonprofit. The noble among us may even write because have to"—it's an unquenchable fire that rages within.

What is your reason for writing?

Whatever your answer, if you want to write for more than your mum, your childre the sister that you still talk to—you need to ask yourself this question:

Why would someone want to read my book?

A friend recently was asked to conduct a developmental edit of a memoir written by a woman whose brother died in a car accident on the train tracks near her home. The story had pain. The story relayed her journey in and out of depression. But, my friend (a professional editor) said, "The writing simply wasn't compelling."

That's because the writer had not asked the question, "What makes my story interesting to someone other than me and my family who experienced the loss?"

Here are the two vectoring questions when deciding to write a book, any kind of book:

- Why would someone pay \$19.95 to read 250 pages of my story?
- Why would someone who just read my book gush to her friend, "You just have to read this book! It changed my life."

Bummer or a Well-Told Story?

A lawyer who once defended victims in tragic accidents told me that the majority of the people who want to sue for a tragic loss don't have a strong case. "What they have," he said, "is a bummer. They don't have a lawsuit."

This is so hard to write, but suffering alone doesn't make for a great memoir. Your brother dying (and your coming to terms with the tragic loss) is a bummer. But it's not a memoir.

Suffering is everywhere. (And I don't at all mean to make light of any loss.) To put it less crassly, your success in business or approach to leadership isn't a good reason to write a book. And your idea for a novel about an entrepreneur who had to raid garbage cans simply to survive growing up and then became a billionaire isn't necessarily compelling.

Every commercially viable book idea must be filtered through the question: Why would someone read my book?

Obviously, celebrity books tend to break this rule. For prurient reasons mostly, the masses will consume anything written on the Royal Family or Tom Cruise. But your book? Why would someone read your book?

I don't think you can answer this question in one sitting. I think the question should be the noise in your head during the entire time you work on the book.



David Goetz is the president of CZ Strategy, a strategic marketing agency. He is a former magazine and book editor, and the author of *Death by Suburb*, published by Harper One. He is a writing coach and co-founder of a blog for writers, <https://www.journeysixty6.com> where this article originally appeared. It is reprinted with permission from the author.



When Duty Calls: How to Write an Obituary

by Katherine G. Highcove, San Fernando Valley

As some of you might be well aware, when a parent, spouse, aunt, uncle, close friend or co-worker passes away, there is an immediate need of an obituary. The family of the deceased, whether your family or a the deceased person's family members, must send to a publication a summary of their loved one's life history. The publication might be a daily newspaper, a church, club, college alumni newsletter or perhaps a trade magazine. Or all of them. The obituary usually appears quickly in the community newspaper or is made public within a few weeks for other types of publications.

If the obituary is going to be published before the funeral, you should also include the date, time and place of the memorial service and whether it will be a public or private service, unless the family requests that there should be no funeral information.

An obituary, in my estimation, after writing several for both family and friends, is a genre unto itself. The tricky part is combining basic information like dates of birth and death, the age of the deceased, his/her hometown, places of education and employment, names of relatives and offspring, and sometimes cause of death. Also, be mindful that every publication has different word count requirements that *must* be followed or someone at an editorial desk will make their own cuts and deletions and you may be very unhappy to read the results! Always, always, ask for an editor's word allowance and any other details about content before

you start your composition. And then, adjust your text and respect the publication's work limit.

Besides the basic life and death information, an obituary might include a quote that is uplifting, laudatory, poignant, interesting, amusing—in other words, a statement that *celebrates* the life of the deceased. As San Fernando Valley member Phyllis Butcher points out, "It was as if I had been ushered into the lives of perfect strangers. I was introduced to their families and friends and allowed to join them on their life journeys." In other words, Phyllis loves to read a good story.

If someday you're asked to write someone's life story in 900 words or less, don't panic or stress about this task. If you're a writer, you know how to write a good story. You might start your story/obit with the basic details of the person's passing followed by his/her life history. Roll up your storyteller sleeves and create an entertaining story. Touch briefly and tactfully on any physical or personal challenges. Portray the deceased in a positive light; tell your readers why folks loved or respected this person. Finally, after you've written, revised and submitted the obituary, raise a glass and toast a life well lived!



Katherine G. Highcove is editor of the San Fernando Valley newsletter, *The Valley Scribe*, in which this article originally appeared and is reprinted with permission. Her articles have been published in a variety of community newspapers and magazines. She submits weekly to the online International Writers Workshop and writes reviews for the Internet Review of Books.

When Plots Collide: Create Suspenseful Page-turners by Weaving Multiple Storylines

by John Byrne Barry, Marin and Berkeley

In May, I presented “When Plots Collide — Create Suspenseful Page-Turners by Weaving Multiple Storylines” to the San Joaquin Valley Writers for the first time *since* 2017, and it went swimmingly enough I thought I’d write about it for the *Bulletin*.

Writing formulas are tricky — I find many of them useful, but if you stick to them too rigorously, you end up sounding, well, formulaic.

That said, almost all good stories have formulas and the trick is to write them so they seem fresh, even if the plots are ones we’ve seen before.

You’ve all seen colliding plots in action — it’s a formula used extensively on crime shows like *Law and Order*. The book or the TV show starts with a couple of unrelated stories, but you know they’re going to bump into each other. Other shows that come to mind: *House of Cards*, *Downton Abbey*, *Breaking Bad*.

The trick is to use the formula so each story impacts the others and amps up the suspense. I’ll be mapping out the plot of *Bonfire of the Vanities*, Tom Wolfe’s brilliant 1987 novel about New York City, to demonstrate.

(You don’t have to have read the book, but I highly recommend it.)

The protagonist of *Bonfire* is Sherman McCoy, a white, late-thirties bond trader who makes a million dollars a year, but is hemorrhaging money — on his Park Avenue co-op, his wife’s extravagant decorating, his daughter’s private school, his Mercedes. The story kicks into high gear when he drives his Mercedes to JFK to pick up his mistress and on the way home they get lost in the Bronx. When he gets out of his car to move a tire in the road, he sees two young Black kids approaching. They seem menacing. One asks, “Yo, need some help?” Assuming they’re predators, he throws the tire at them, jumps in the car—his mistress has taken the wheel—and as she fishtails away, Sherman hears a thunk. They escape.

Sherman is distressed. Did they hit one of the boys? Is he hurt? He searches the news reports, wonders if he should go to the police. He screws up one of his bond deals because he’s so distracted.



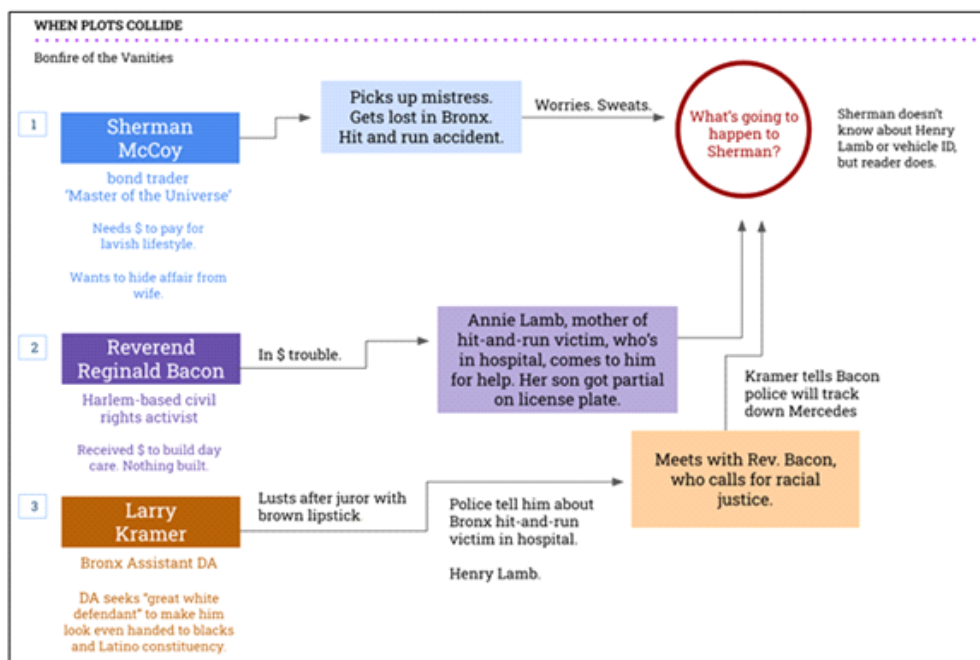
While Sherman stews, the book switches focus to other characters, starting with Reverend Reginald Bacon, a Black minister who received \$350,000 from a church to build a daycare center, but the money’s gone, nothing’s been built, and he’s in trouble.

Enter Annie Lamb, mother of the boy hit by Sherman’s Mercedes in the Bronx. Her son Henry is in intensive care, in a coma. Annie goes to Reverend Bacon for help, and he sees an opportunity to challenge the justice system for always putting people of color behind bars. How about this Mercedes driver who was white? The boy got a partial read on the license plate.

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When Plots Collide: continued from previous page

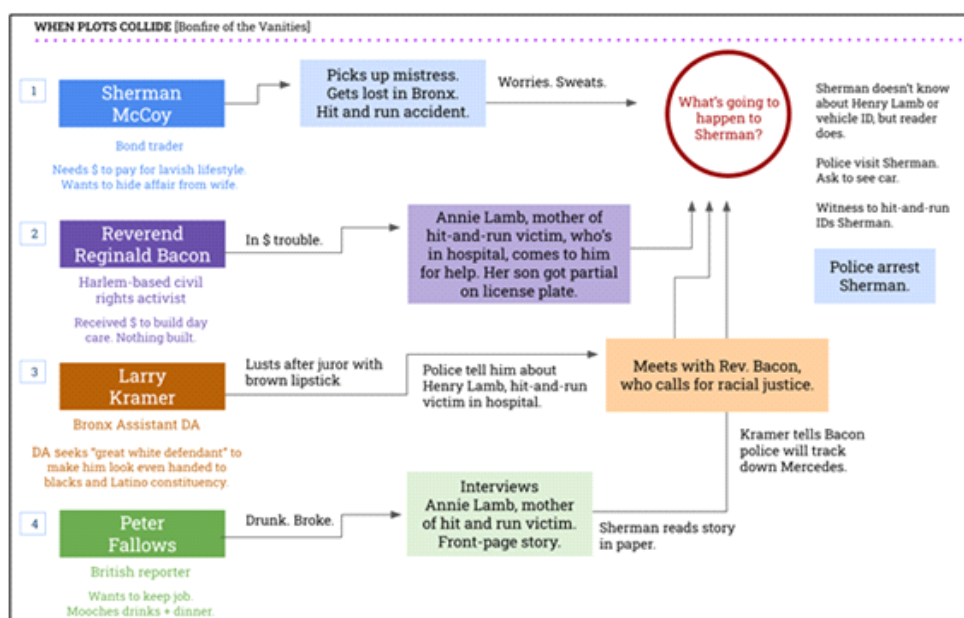
Then we jump to the district attorney's office, where Abe Weiss, white and Jewish, is facing re-election in a primarily Black and Latino borough, and there's nothing that would help him more than what he calls "the great white hope" — a high-profile case with a white defendant. We follow Larry Kramer, a mid-level DA, who starts tracking down the Mercedes involved in the hit-and-run. He's got a crush on a woman on one of his juries, a woman with brown lipstick, and he wants to make a name for himself.



But there's more — a drunk, broke has-been British reporter, Peter Fallows, whose main goal is to figure out who he can cadge drinks and dinner from at his favorite watering holes. He interviews Annie Lamb, mother of the hit-and-run victim, for a front-page story in *City Light*.

When Sherman reads that story, he learns there are 500 Mercedes in the New York City area with license plates that start with RF and that the DA is going to investigate them all.

Finally the police visit Sherman, ask to see his car, and he falls apart. The police "know" it's him. When the DA finds a witness to the hit-and-run to ID Sherman, he's arrested.



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When Plots Collide: continued from previous page

What I love about these colliding plots is how an action in one story causes an action in another. We see Peter Fallows find his journalistic footing and redeem himself with solid reporting and writing. That's *his* story. At the same time, his actions tighten the vice around Sherman.

Peter Fallows, Reverend Bacon, and Larry Kramer have their own hungers and hurdles—they don't care about Sherman per se, they don't even know who he is—but the more success they achieve chasing *their* goals, the more trouble they cause for Sherman. So even though Sherman is not a likable character, I found myself sympathizing with his plight.

There's an old storytelling adage that you should chase your protagonist up a tree and then throw rocks at him. *Keep the trouble coming*, and your readers will keep turning the pages. The crux of this plot-colliding formula is that you're throwing rocks at the protagonist even when he or she is not on the page. It's as if your protagonist has a musical theme, and during those times when you're following the other characters' stories, you'd hear a faint refrain of that riff.

You can see more slides and a handout at johnbyrnebarry.com/when-plots-collide



John Byrne Barry, a member of the Marin and Berkeley branches and the CWC webmaster, is author of three plays and three novels, including *When I Killed My Father: An Assisted-Suicide Family Thriller* and *Bones in the Wash: Politics is Tough. Family is Tougher*.

Learn more at www.johnbyrnebarry.com If you're interested a presentation to your branch, contact John at johnbyrnebarry@gmail.com.

CWC-South Awards Mini-grants

by Donna McCrohan-Rosenthal, East Sierra, CWC-South Chair



Representatives of CWC-South, the southern region of CWC, convened on Sunday, June 4. WC President Roger Lubeck joined us while running the technical (Zoom) end of the meeting. We elected our new board and allocated funds from our 2023-24 CWC regional stipend for four mini-grants to community organizations' projects in partnership with our branches: Apple Valley Library San

Bernardino County Library Adult Literacy Program (High Desert), Hesperia Branch San Bernardino County Library Adult Literacy Program (High Desert), Motion Picture and Television Fund Grey Quill Society activities with residents (San Fernando Valley Branch), and Ridgecrest Branch of the Kern County Library summer "boot camp" for young writers (East Sierra).

We also approved to cover from next year's budget the 2023-24 costs of socalwritersshowcase.com, the magazine-format website of CWC-South. We add content monthly in eight categories, with essays, short stories, poems, and memoirs coming from region members who submit through their branch presidents and newsletter editors.

We concluded with a discussion about AI and the future of creativity, with a view toward developing it into a panel or presentation for CWC statewide



NorCal Leadership Conference Progresses

by Kim Edwards, Sacramento, NorCal Group Chair



Planning continues on the Sunday, September 24, *Building Stronger Writers Clubs* NorCal Conference. Site of the conference will be the Holiday Inn and Suites at the Oakland Airport.

Opening speaker will be Brian Gaps, *How the Orange County Branch Quadrupled Membership in 2½ Years*. Sessions will include outreach to new members, including new and diverse writers. What does an exciting, rounded-out palette of branch offerings look like?

Sessions will cover motivating volunteers and generating income while keeping members actively engaged. It is healthy to inspect our current branch activities to ensure they continue to meet members' needs with the highest level of effectiveness.

The conference is designed for those in current leadership positions or interested in leadership. There will be time for job-alike conversations. Attendees will receive a list of names and contact information for those they meet. They will also leave with a plan for implementing new ideas to keep our club enticing and fresh. Members with facilitation skills or new ideas to share with other branches are encouraged to contact me.

Below please find answers to questions I've been asked:

Q. Do experienced presidents need to attend?

A. That is up to the branch. The conference is not an officer training, but presidents are in a position to exert influence in adopting new practices at the branch. Leaders and potential leaders will have the chance to talk over ideas with fellow leaders.

Q. How many people from each NorCal branch should attend?

A. The conference can handle up to five per branch. The most important thing is to bring attendees who can help to increase the likelihood of implementation back at the branch. Branch service in a professional writing club is a way to build a writing résumé that can open doors to other opportunities such as prestigious writing programs. If a branch wants to send more than five attendees, they can contact me after September 15.

Q. Can SoCal branches attend?

A. The first obligation is to NorCal branches. If room is available, SoCal branches can contact me after September 1.



Bay Area Book Festival

On May 7, the Berkeley branch hosted the CWC booth at the Bay Area Book Festival. A big shout out to Berkeley, especially Karma Bennett and President Keith Gaboury, who coordinated our presence at the event. Thanks also to Richard McCallum from the SF Peninsula branch who shuttled the CWC banner and brochures to the booth.

Some five dozen festival visitors signed up to receive more information from branches near their residence. A long-term solution is sought for financing this exceptional activity, which appears to be productive for marketing our brand.



The Veep Speaks: Reasons to Love Zoom

by Bob Isbill, CWC Vice-President and Director of Publicity and Public Relations



How fortunate we are to be members of the California Writers Club who have so many people working in the background to enhance our knowledge of the craft of writing. (Do you realize that successful writers such as Stephen King, Dean Koontz, and James Scott Bell still study the craft on a regular basis?)

Has there ever been a better time to be a writer with so much education easily accessible? The Internet is loaded with information about writing and that includes what is out there free for the taking from the California Writers Club. You can visit the branch website in the middle of the night or at the crack of dawn. The time you choose is up to you. It's right there available.

One attractive feature found on www.calwriters.org under the event calendar.

Jordan Bernal of the Tri-Valley branch maintains this calendar for the rest of us and you can go there anytime.


The statewide website of the California Writers Club is only one resource. There are 22 branches and I believe all of them have websites. Some offer excellent resources and outstanding information that is invaluable for your investigation. One example, if you don't mind, is the High Desert branch. The website is www.hdcwc.com. Look on the sidebar. There are many interesting things. I would just point out three.

One: special Zoom meetings. This gives the information and how to hook up and attend this free meeting. We have an outstanding agent, Lucienne Diver, scheduled to appear on June 27, 6 PM. It's free and it's going to be fun.

Two, again on the sidebar, check out links for members. On this you will find several interesting links but the one I want to call your attention to is our YouTube channel. We have been doing this a long time thanks to our videographer, Joan Rudder Ward. She has been videotaping many meetings and posting them on our YouTube channel. There are subjects covering about every topic of writing and they are available free.

Three, also on the sidebar, is called *Published? Now what?* By clicking on this link, it will take you to a short video filled with information on what to do after you publish your book. I have been doing the job of programs and publicity for the High Desert branch for 10 years and it is amazing to learn how many writers have no idea what a programs coordinator needs from them. This will give you that information. If you are ever contacted to give a presentation, I think you'll find this video invaluable.

I hope these examples help illustrate what is on hand for you as a potential writer with enough tools at your disposal to make the job doable.

Editor's Note: Still another resource for CWC members is "On the Horizon," a calendar of upcoming events right here in your CWC Bulletin. In this issue, it starts on the next page. 

It's Cool to Renew

If you've not already renewed your CWC membership for 2023-24, now's the time to do it. The membership year is July 1-June 30, so don't delay. See your branch Membership Chair for details.



CENTRAL COAST

June 20: Andrea Firth, “In a Flash: The Art and Craft of the Short-Short Story.”

July 18: Mary Buckham, “Writing Active Hooks--How Many Hooks Are Enough?”

Sept. 19: Stuart Horwitz, “Finish Your Book in Three Drafts.”

Meetings are in-person only, 6:15 p.m. at the Center for Spiritual Awakening, 522 Lighthouse Ave., Pacific Grove. Free admission, \$5 donation requested.

EAST SIERRA

July 5-8: “Boot Camp” for student writers in grades K-12, in partnership with the Kern County Library, Ridgecrest branch, 131 E. Las Flores Ave., Ridgecrest. This free, in-person event will guide students through the fundamentals of strong story-telling, with each student completing a story at the end of the four days.

Aug. 18-19: “Weird Weekend.” This two-day festival celebrates the weird and wonderful tall tales, legends, landmarks, and “strange but true” history of the East Sierra, Death Valley and the Mojave Desert. This year’s event is themed around the 90th anniversary of Death Valley’s status as a National Monument. Events take place from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. both days, while the evening of Aug. 18 will feature a performance of “Tourist Trap,” a road trip comedy written by East Sierra President Daniel Stallings. All events take place at Red Rock Books, 206 W. Ridgecrest Blvd., Ridgecrest. Admission is \$5 for the daytime events, \$20 for daytime and the play, \$15 for CWC members.

FREMONT AREA WRITERS

June 24: Jane K. Cleland, award-winning author of books on writing craft, “Revising Your Own Work.”

Aug. 26: Joselyn Linder, author of *The Family Gene*, on adding humor to your writing.

Sept. 23: Tony Pino, “Demystifying Poetry, Part Two.”

All events are Zoom only and take place from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. Free and open to all CWC members. For the Zoom link, contact Scott Davidson, scottfrombayside@yahoo.com.

HIGH DESERT

June 27: Meet literary agent Lucianne Diver of The Knight Agency, 6:00 p.m. on Zoom. Free to all CWC members. For the Zoom link, go to www.hdcwc.com/SpecialZoomMeetings

continued on next page

On the Horizon: continued from previous page

LONG BEACH

July 10: Open Mic, three-minute readings by members and guests.

Aug. 12: Jeri Westerson, historical novelist, "From Medieval to Modern Marketing."

Aug. 9: Antoine Wilson, "On Revision."

Meetings take place at 3:00 p.m., in-person only at the Los Altos United Methodist Church, 5950 E. Willow Street, Long Beach. Free to all CWC members.

MARIN

June 26: Jean Gordon Kocienda, "Tighten Your Writing with a Poetry Game." 6:30 p.m. at the Mill Valley Public Library, 375 Throckmorton Ave., Mill Valley. Free to all, but seated is limited. Sign up at [Mill Valley Public Library Events/Poetry Writing Game](#)

July 19: Summer Salon, a social/open mic/ask-a-question event, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. Open to all, \$5 admission. Register at www.cwcmarin.com/events. The location will be disclosed after registration is received.

MENDOCINO

June 18: Spotlight on Short Fiction, featuring members Earlene Gleisner, Steve Sapontzis and Philip Zweling, interviewed by Rob Hawthorn.

July 16: Daniel Coshnear, "The DNA of the Short Story."

Aug. 20: Jody Gehrman, "Does It Have Legs and Teeth? Finding the Right Premise."

Meetings take place from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. at the Mendocino Community Center, 998 School Street, Mendocino. Free and open to all.

MT. DIABLO

July 15: Art Embraces Poetry, 1:30-3:30 p.m., Town Hall Theater Lobby, 3535 School Street, Lafayette. Free, in-person event, no-host bar and snacks. To sign up to read your poetry, contact <https://lamorindaarts.org/apply-as-a-writer-for-art-embraces-words/>

June 28, July 26, Aug. 30: Writers Connection, an informal gathering to share writing-related news and challenges. Noon-2:00 p.m., Chicken Pie Shop, 1251 Arroyo Way, Walnut Creek. Free and open to all. Participants are encouraged to purchase food and/or beverage to support the venue.

Aug. 12: Art Embraces Words, local authors reading from their works and selling their books. 2:00-3:30 p.m., Lafayette Library, 3491 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette. Free and open to all. To sign up to read your work, contact <https://lamorindaarts.org/apply-as-a-writer-for-art-embraces-words/>

ORANGE COUNTY

July 1: Dennis Crosby, "Planning and Writing a Series."

Aug. 5: Nicola Harrison, "Writing Fiction--Scene by Scene."

Sept. 2: Jillian Pretzel, "The Secrets of Freelance Pitching Successfully."

Meetings are in-person only, 9:00 to 11:00 a.m., at Anaheim Packing House in Anaheim. Free to members and the general public.

SOUTH BAY

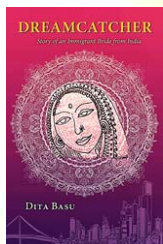
July 16: Annual Potluck Barbecue. 3:00-6:00 p.m., home of President Edie Matthews. For details, contact pres@southbaywriters.com





Member Spotlight

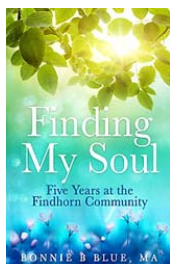
NEW RELEASES



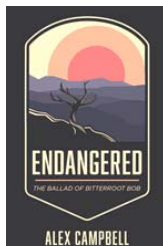
Dita Basu (Mt. Diablo) has published *Dreamcatcher: Story of an Immigrant Bride from India*. The setting of the story is the Bay Area during the 1990s. “The writing style pulls you along like a slow-moving current, going deeper and deeper as you watch the characters grow and mature and come into their own.”—Nanette Littlestone (Author).



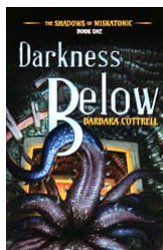
Tenisha Bernal (Redwood Writers) has a children's book *Little Gardener's First 100 Words*, available for pre-sale. From bugs to tools, little ones can learn parts of a plant and different herbs, fruits, and vegetables that can grow in a garden. There's even an urban gardening page for those without yards!



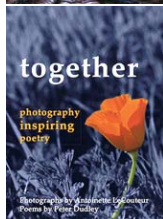
Bonnie Blue (Sacramento) has recently published her memoir, *Finding My Soul: Five Years at the Findhorn Community*. In it, she describes her psycho-spiritual journey while living in the Findhorn Community in Scotland. Her career as a psychotherapist informs the commentary that follows each chapter.



Alex Campbell (Berkeley) has published *Endangered: The Ballad of Bitterroot Bob*. At the edge of the west's Great Basin, Bitterroot Bob seeks a new hope in today's turmoil. He wants solitude. But others threaten his national myths, shake his beliefs for living, and challenge him to stop a disastrous water scheme in this novel of joy, lament, and defiance.



Barbara Cottrell (Redwood Writers) has released *Darkness Below*, the first book in her series The Shadows of Miskatonic. Fall semester is always a challenging time at Miskatonic University. All Ellen Logan wants to do is pass her classes while holding down a bad job at a New Age bookstore. But when a former roommate jumps to her death from the university clock tower, Ellen embarks on her own investigation.



Peter Dudley (Mt. Diablo) has released a new book of photography and poetry. Each week in 2022, Antoinette LeCouteur selected one of the pictures she took from daily life, and Peter wrote a poem inspired by it. The result is a diverse, intriguing, and captivating collection of subjects, styles, and imagery. <https://graybearpublications.com/books/together>



Lynda Smith Hoggan (Sacramento) has published her first book, *Our Song: a Memoir of Love and Race*, with She Writes Press. It's a coming of age story, a sensuous first love story, and a heartbreaking look at some of the spoils of racism.

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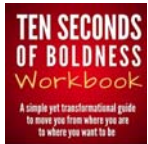


Member Spotlight (continued)

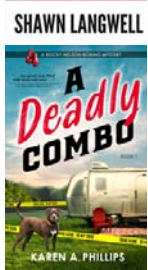
Mara Lynn Johnstone (Redwood Writers) has released a book of writing prompts titled “Story Seeds for Fantastical Trees.” Intriguing ideas for writers of speculative fiction in need of inspiration, gifts for writer friends, and anyone who enjoys micro-fiction and pondering questions like “What would happen to werewolves on the moon?”



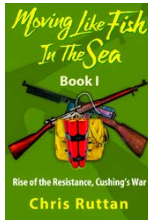
Crissi Langwell (Redwood Writers) has just released *Masquerade Mistake*, a standalone romance novel. It was supposed to be an anonymous one-night fling before Claire headed to college, but a positive pregnancy test upended her plans. Seven years later, a blind date places her across the table from the same man. Now Claire must make a choice. Does she walk away and forget their connection? Or does she stay and let him know he's a father? <https://crissilangwell.com>



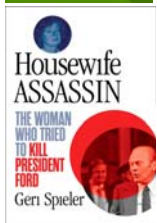
Shawn Langwell (Redwood Writers) announces publication of a workbook companion to *Ten Seconds of Boldness*. This practical, hands-on guide is designed to help people, especially authors, overcome common problems we all face such as self-doubt, low self-confidence, imposter syndrome, etc. www.shawnlangwell.com



Karen A. Phillips (Mt. Diablo) has published her first novel, *A Deadly Combo*, a humorous, fun and action-packed mystery. She has had several short stories published in various anthologies. www.KarenAPhillips.com.



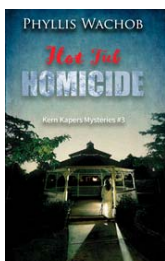
Chris Ruttan (Redwood Writers) announces the publication of *Moving Like Fish in the Sea*, a historical novel based on the true story of an American gold miner, Walter Cushing, trapped in the Philippines during World War II. It is the first in a planned two-book series about Cushing's exploits.



Geri Spieler (SF Peninsula) has published *Housewife Assassin-The Woman Who Tried To Kill President Ford* (Diversions Books). Sara Jane Moore was a doctor's wife and a mother who lived in a country club community of Danville. Geri delves into the curious motivations that drove this suburban housewife from her West Virginia hometown on an unconventional journey to become the only woman who ever fired a bullet at an American president.



Timeout Taumua (Orange County) has released *The Magnificence of the 3*, about the scientific nature of the Bible. It is a non-fiction with claims identifying the Tree of Knowledge, Tree of Life, Garden of Eden and Ark of the Covenant. Main theme focuses God and the ATOM.

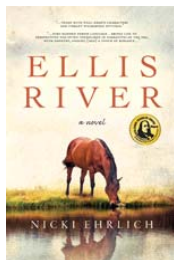


Phyllis Wachob (Writers of Kern) announces the publication of *Hot Tub Homicide*, book three in the Kern Kapers mystery series. Vermilion Blew, 60-something retired teacher and sometime PI, has moved to a new retirement community in Bakersfield. But when Very's new acquaintances keep moving on to the marble forest, she is not sure if it is natural or if there is a killer on the loose.

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Member Spotlight (continued)

AWARDS AND MORE



Nicki Ehrlich's (Central Coast Writers) debut novel, *Ellis River*, won the IBPA Benjamin Franklin Award in the category of The Bill Fisher Award for Best First Book (Fiction). It also received an Honorable Mention for the Eric Hoffer Grand Prize and was a finalist for the Eric Hoffer First Horizon Award.



Lily Iona MacKenzie (Berkeley) posts a piece about writing and reading on her blog every Monday. Shanti Arts Press will be releasing *Dreaming Myself into Old Age* later this year. Check out her blog at <https://lilyionamackenzie.com>.

Bill Van Patten (San Joaquin Valley) has taken the bronze in the Self Publishing Review awards program for his novel, *A Little Rain*. The SPR judges called it “a thrilling and heart-rending tale of a young gay man ... bringing elements of crime and romance to the table.”



Put Your Work in the Spotlight!

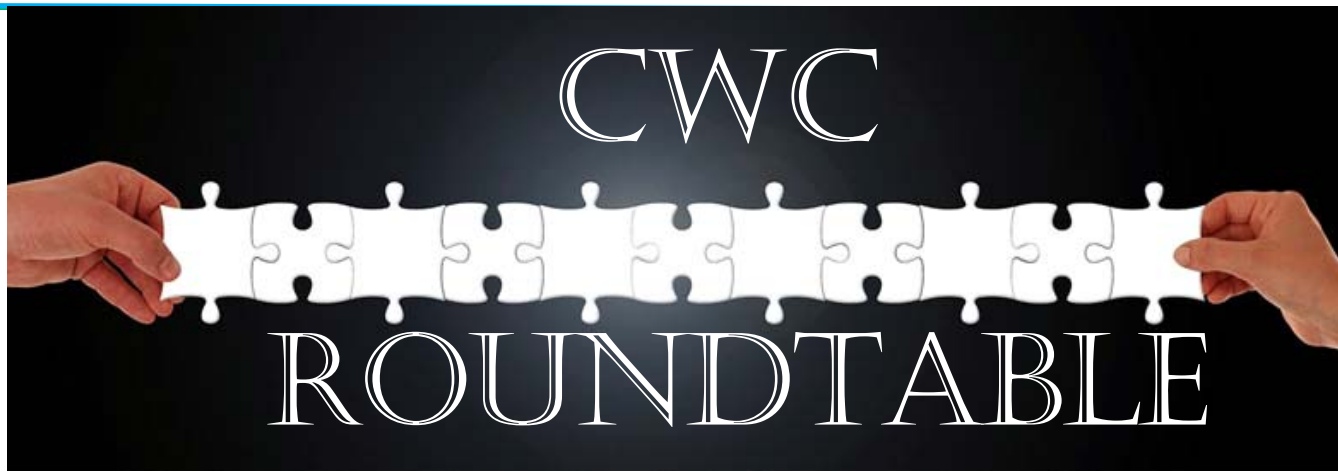
Share your latest book release or other literary achievement with your fellow CWC members. Send an announcement, 50 words or less, to editor@calwriters.org. Covers should be submitted in JPEG format as an attachment to the email. Deadline for the Autumn 2023 issue is Sept. 1.



IF WRITING IS EASY,
YOU'RE DOING IT WRONG.



—BRYAN HUTCHINSON, AUTHOR OF,
"WRITER'S DOUBT" - POSITIVewriter.COM



Our topic for this issue is **Member Renewals**. Specifically, how your branch handles the annual renewal process.. If you've got an idea for a future CWC Roundtable discussion, send your topic to editor@calwriters.org.



Jessi Honard, Membership Chair, Berkeley: We notify our members with email, announcements at the meetings, on our website and in the newsletter. We take renewals up until the Sept. 30 cutoff. We start in the renewal process in June and July. We've found the half-price membership that starts in January is an easy way for new members to see our value prior to renewing.



Maria Skytta, Membership Chair, Central Coast Writers: We start the renewal process in May with announcements at our meeting and in our newsletter. In addition, our treasurer sent an email to the members reminding them to renew and offering them an easy way to renew electronically on QuickBooks. We try to encourage members to renew by June 30, but will take them until the September 30 cutoff. We send snail mail reminders to those who have not renewed by September 1.



Patrick Sturm, President, Coastal Dunes: We utilize our monthly newsletter, website, and announcements at our monthly meeting. We start in May and the cutoff is September 30. As an incentive, we draw a renewed member's name from a hat and that person receives \$45.



Andrew Sound, Treasurer and Membership Chair, East Sierra: I make an announcement at our July meeting and then send out renewal reminders by snail mail to those who do not renew at the meeting the following weekend. Then I usually send a follow-up in mid-August or so. We take renewals up until the state deadline of September 30. We do not offer an incentive, just our wonderful meetings.



Terry Tosh, President, Fremont Area Writers: We start reminding them in January that renewal is approaching, then as each month passes we continue to announce at upcoming events. We get the word out in our newsletter, website, email blasts and at our meetings. We encourage our members to renew by June 30 by having a drawing for one free membership for those who renew by that date. If they haven't renewed by then, we send another email notice, and then follow up with a phone call to determine if they have a hardship, or if they are simply choosing not to renew.

CWC ROUNDTABLE (CONTINUED)



Jenny Margotta, Treasurer, High Desert: We make announcements at multiple meetings, post on our website, email blasts, and when time is running out (usually September), phone calls to those who have not renewed. We start the renewal process in May. If they are paying by check, I must receive them in a reasonable time, say a week, after the Sept. 30 cutoff date. We don't offer any specific incentives, but we do remind them that they must be a current member when our branch anthology is published in the fall.



Sam Nichols, President, Inland Empire: We start making announcements in late April and include a notice in the May newsletter, make announcements at our meetings and send email blasts. We encourage early renewals, but will take them up until the September 30 cutoff. We are trying an incentive for the first time this year. Renew by June 30 for a chance to win a free membership.



Hannah Fliegel, Membership Chair, Marin. We get the word out via our newsletter and a PayPal bill. We start the renewal process on July 1 and will take renewals up until the September 30 cutoff. The Marin board is reviewing the possibility of incentives to encourage early renewals.



Norma Watkins, Co-president, Writers of the Mendocino Coast: We start the renewal process in June by sending an email to the members. We allow them to renew up until the September 30 deadline. We send a cheerful letter spelling out the many benefits of club membership.



Barry D. Hampshire, President, Mt. Diablo: We get the word out about membership renewals through our newsletter, announcements at meetings, and emails. We start on May 1 and allow renewals until September 30. We have a drawing for a free meeting, worth \$25, for members who renew before May 31.



Lenore Hirsch, President, Napa Valley Writers: We make announcements in the newsletter, at our meetings, on the website, email blasts, and before we're done, personal phone calls. We allow renewals up until the deadline, but we don't advertise the cutoff in the first month or so of the new year. This year, we started the process in June. Sometimes we start in May; it just depends on who the officers are. Some years, we have had a raffle at the meetings, drawing from the names of everyone who has renewed. In alternative years, we publish an anthology and contributors are required to be members.



Lynn Tosello, President, North State Writers: We start the renewal process in May and get the word out with emails and announcements at our meetings. We have always allowed renewals up until the cutoff, but we will be encouraging earlier renewals; we just haven't set the date yet. At the present time, we do not offer any incentives to encourage renewals.

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CWC ROUNDTABLE (CONTINUED)



Brian Gaps, President, Orange County: We start in late May or early June and announce renewal reminders in our newsletter and at meetings. We send a renewal notice with payment options via email, with a few exceptions sent by regular mail. We use the September 30 deadline. The club offers a raffle to reimburse one membership fee for one winner, eligible to all early renewals received prior to July 1.



Bonnie Blue, Vice-President, Membership, Sacramento: We start the membership renewal process with our May newsletter. In addition to the newsletter, we get the word out through emails, our website, and announcements at meetings. We take renewals up until the September 30 deadline. We're looking for ideas when it comes to incentives to encourage renewals.



Karen Gorback, President, San Fernando Valley: We notify members at our meetings, through emails, in our newsletter, and finally with phone calls. We start the process in May. Everyone who renews by June 30 is put into a raffle for a drawing to have their \$45 refunded in July. Existing members who refer a new member who completes the application process by June 30 receives a \$20 refund on their renewal. Also, new members who join in May/June begin receiving member benefits immediately; thus, they are receiving 14 months for the price of 12. Such a deal! We cut off membership renewals on September 30 at the stroke of midnight!



June Gillam, President, San Joaquin Valley: We start the membership renewal process on July 1 and end on September 30. We notify our members via email. We do not offer any incentives for renewal.



Edie Matthews, President, South Bay Writers: We start the membership renewal process in the spring and encourage our members to renew early, although we do take renewals up until the September 30 deadline. We spread the word that it will cost them more to rejoin as a new member if they don't renew by September 30.



Sandy Moffett, President, Writers of Kern. We mention renewals at the May and June meetings, as well as sending out a branch-wide email. In addition, we have encouraged renewal in June by offering a gift card opportunity. We encourage everyone to renew on or before July 1; however, we do not cut anyone off until they have broken the CWC timeframe.



Roger Lubeck, Membership Chair, Redwood Writers: We start two months before July 1 with announcements at meetings and in the newsletter. We e-mail all the members about renewals at the end of June, and every month thereafter to the members who have not renewed by September 30. This year, if a member renews in July, his/her name will be entered in a drawing for a free membership. Meaning we refund their \$45.00 fee.





Francine Howard: 1937-2023



Photo by Barbara Vail

The Berkeley branch is grieving the loss of long time board member Francine Thomas Howard.

Vice-president Kristen Caven wrote in the Berkeley branch newsletter, "Her gifts to our organization were endless, from the parties she sponsored to the contests she ran. As a writer, she was a rocket, shooting from obscurity to the NYT Bestseller List. But she always made time to help other writers because of her Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority values of volunteering. Her guidance as our elder was immeasurable, energizing our JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion) values, constantly bringing marginalized voices, stories, and people into our center. She christened our equity program after Virginia Prentiss, Jack London's nanny/mother/benefactor, a former enslaved woman great spark of Oakland's literary contributions."

Francine's books included *Page from a Tennessee Journal*, which achieved bestseller status on the *New York Times* list, and several other works focused on the Black experience in America and in Africa. Her most recent novel, *Scattered Seed*, came out in August of 2022.

Francine was Berkeley's Jack London Award honoree in 2021. Many of us who were there for the awards luncheon will remember the large entourage of family and friends who applauded Francine for her dedicated service to the branch.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Frederick Henry Howard Sr. She leaves two children, Hank and Doug, and two grandchildren. 

Patricia Edwards: 1931-2023

Patricia "Pat" Edwards was president of the Mt. Diablo branch for two years in the 1990s and was the Mt. Diablo Jack London Service Award honoree in 1995.

A native of Minnesota, Pat went to New York City in 1952, where she worked for the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency. She married Reid Edwards in 1953 and after several moves in the Midwest, they relocated to Alamo in the East Bay, where they lived for 50 years.

In her 60s, Pat revived an early interest in writing and created a one-woman show based on California-born women authors, offering performances at university clubs and private events throughout the East Bay. She was also an avid golfer and loved cats.

Mt. Diablo member Elizabeth Kohler Pentacoff remembers Pat as "a real spunky personality." She is survived by children Reid Allen Edwards III, Kathryn and John, plus seven grandchildren and one great-grandchild.





It's Time Once Again to Elect Officers

Just as your branch has conducted an election of officers for 2023-2024—or will do so soon—your parent organization, California Writers Club, elects officers on an annual basis. This year's election will take place at the July 23 Central Board meeting via Zoom. Each branch is allowed to send one representative to the meeting and cast one vote.

Nominating Committee Chair Donna McCrohan Rosenthal (East Sierra) is presenting the following slate for consideration by the Central Board:



President, Roger C. Lubeck (Redwood Writers)

Roger has been a member of the California Writers Club (CWC) since 2014. He was elected president of the CWC board in 2021 after serving as vice president for two years. Roger is the Redwood Writers branch's Membership Chair.

Roger is a past president of Redwood Writers. He is the author of eleven published novels, two business books, dozens of short stories and poetry, and two preformed short plays. Roger is a Psychologist with a background in university teaching and worked for 25 years as a business consultant. Roger is the president and publisher of It Is What It Is Press

Vice-President: Geri Spieler (SF Peninsula)

Geri has written about the only woman who shot at a sitting US president. Using her high-level investigative skills, she got Washington to open the file of what really happened the day she shot at President Ford instead of what the FBI covered up. The result is her breakthrough book, *Housewife Assassin-The Woman Who Tried to Kill President Ford*, (Diversion Books). In this true crime book, Spieler reveals the story of that woman, Sara Jane Moore, who was a mother and doctor's wife who lived in the country club community of Danville in 1975 and in 18 months, she became the first woman who tried to assassinate the president and missed his head by six inches.



Geri is the president of the San Francisco Peninsula branch of the California Writers Club. She has held numerous positions in the CWC over the years including vice president, and hospitality chair, and currently running to be vice present of the state CWC organization.

She has written for the *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Forbes*, and as a Research Director for Gartner, a global technology advising company. She was a regular contributor to the Huffington Post and Truthdig.com, an award-winning investigative reporting website. She is a member of the Society of Professional Journalists, the Authors Guild, the Women's National Book Association, the Internet Society, and Book Critics Circle.

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Election Time: continued from previous page

Secretary: Elisabeth Tuck (Mt. Diablo)



What Am I Doing in a Writing Club if I Don't Write?

Don't write? Oh yes I do. I've started two novels and have written many short stories and memoir pieces. I just have no interest in publication.

Write? I've been writing:

- CWC state Central Board minutes since 2016
- thousands of emails over the 3 years I headed the *Literary Review*
- plenty of feedback judging the *Literary Review* 2014-17
- dozens of agendas as Mt. Diablo branch president for 4 years
- several articles for *The Bulletin*
- lots of emails to entice speakers to Mt. Diablo 2009 -12
- untold articles while producing the *Mt. Diablo Write News* 2014 to present, and
- reams of feedback (and even charts) while editing for private clients and submitters at the CWC 2006 East of Eden Conference and now in my branch as the "Helpful Editor."

Bio? I'm a born and bred Yankee from Staten Island, NY; have lived in Houston, Austin and Ft. Worth, TX; Atlanta, GA; Toronto, Canada; Sydney, Australia; and best of all, the San Francisco East Bay. I have a BA from University of Texas at Austin, and an MSW from UC Berkeley. Last year we celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary, and I cannot believe we have one son who also probably can't believe he's not far from 50, another son four years behind (both accomplished career-wise), and two fabulous grandsons.

Treasurer: Constance Hanstedt (Tri-Valley)



Constance was raised in the Midwest and currently resides in Livermore. She was the co-owner and CFO of a general contracting firm in Pleasanton for 30 years.

Constance is the author of *Don't Leave Yet, How My Mother's Alzheimer's Opened My Heart* (She Writes Press, 2015), which was named a finalist in the Pacific Northwest Writers Conference in 2011 and a finalist in the National Indie Excellence Awards in 2015. While continuing to write memoir, her primary focus is on poetry. Her poetry chapbook, *Treading Water* (Finishing Line Press, 2022), explores the integral aspects of family, loss, redemption, and compassion. In addition, her poems have appeared in numerous literary journals and anthologies, including *Calyx*, *The Comstock Review*, *Rattle*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *The Porter Gulch Review*, California Writers Club *Literary Review*, and Tri-Valley Writers anthologies.

In 2021, Constance accepted the position of Treasurer of the California Writers Club. As an active member of the Tri-Valley branch, she has served as Vice President for two terms (2015-2018) and Treasurer for five terms (2017-2023). She also formed and leads the Poetry Critique Group and enjoys judging poetry for both the California Writers Club *Literary Review* and Tri-Valley's High School Writing Contest.



CB Reps, Save the Date

Sunday, July 23

1:30-3:30 p.m.

Via Zoom

Agenda Items Due by July 7



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

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From the Editor's Desk

Why Her? Why Not Me?




As if AI wasn't enough to keep us awake at night, there's this: Who is Colleen Hoover? And why are her books so damn popular? Over 20 copies million sold. Six titles on the *New York Times* paperback fiction Top Ten. Outsold the Bible in 2022. Named one of *Time* magazine's 100 most influential people of 2023.

I admit I've only slogged my way through one of her tomes. From what I could see, it's the same old-same old: plucky young heroine, perfectly ordinary, in a setting so nondescript it could be Anywhere, U.S.A. In other words, a protagonist who her legions of female readers can easily identify with. Simple sentence structures, non-challenging vocabulary, plots that are not overly complicated, toss in some steamy sex, and the de rigueur "never saw that coming" twist. Plenty of other novels meet that formula. Why Colleen Hoover? (And more to the point—why not me?)

Timing certainly played no small part. In the early days of the pandemic lockdown, when every bookstore and library was shuttered as "non-essential," she made the strategic decision to offer five of her novels as free e-book downloads. Thousands of desperate readers, stuck at home, took her up on it. About this same time, TikTok was becoming a major force in book marketing. Hoover and her fans were quick to jump in and take control of the BookTok community.

I cannot help but reflect back onto another mega-bestseller of 20 years ago. Like Colleen Hoover, *The Da Vinci Code* had many of us authors tossing in our sleep and indulging in far too much day-drinking. Dan Brown's publisher, Doubleday, got behind the book with a publishing push that today seems almost quaint: a cross-country author tour, interviews on radio and network TV talk shows, print ads in magazines. In 2003, Facebook (then called FaceMash) was nothing but a "hot or not" game among Harvard geeks. It would be another five years before Amazon released the first Kindle. Point being—in 2003, this is how you sold books. Author tours, talk shows, print advertising.

Contrast that to Colleen Hoover, who has basically upended all of the rules of publishing. She started out as an indie. She continues to self-publish some of her work, and maintains the e-book rights of her traditionally published print books. She has deals with three different publishers: Grand Central (Hachette), Atria (Simon and Schuster), and Amazon's Montlake imprint. She leaps across genres with abandon, cranking out romances, thrillers, ghost stories, and psychological suspense. Her biggest hit, *It Ends with Us*, came out in 2016 and reappeared on the bestseller lists in 2021, where it has stayed ever since. That, like, never happens. She has no "brand" other than Colleen Hoover—CoHo, to her fans.

It's hard not to be insanely jealous, but as I tell myself, at least she proves it's possible for these things to happen. Colleen Hoover's success should give us hope, not despair. If a 40-something, one-time social worker from a small town in Texas who started out self-publishing can achieve this level of success, then why couldn't it happen to one of us? 

—Joyce Krieg