

August 2025



# *The Bulletin*

CWC News and Notes

## **In This Issue**

President's Message	..... 1
From the Branches	..... 2
From the CWC	..... 4
Members' Highlights	..... 5
Tips, Tidbits & More	..... 7
Featured Creative Work	..... 8
Featured Essay	..... 9
Advertisement	..... 10

## **The Branches**

Berkeley  
Central Coast  
Coastal Dunes  
East Sierra  
Fremont Area Writers  
High Desert  
Inland Empire  
Marin  
Mount Diablo  
Napa Valley Writers  
North State Writers  
Orange County  
Redwood Writers  
Sacramento  
San Fernando Valley  
San Francisco Peninsula  
San Joaquin Valley Writers  
South Bay Writers  
Tri-Valley Writers  
Writers of Kern  
Writers of the Mendocino Coast

## ***The Bulletin***

Editor-in-chief      Bill VanPatten  
Associate Editor  
Associate Editor  
Associate Editor  
Publisher      Roger Lubeck, CWC

Contact us at [editor@calwriters.org](mailto:editor@calwriters.org)

Next issue: December 2025

For branch links, go to  
<https://calwriters.org/cwcbranches>



## President's Message

---

### On Writer's Block

By Roger Lubeck



When I talk to members, I like to ask, “What are you writing?” In 2024, we conducted a survey that determined that over 75% of our sample are published authors. As encouraging as this statistic is, I know that many of the members I talk with say they are finding it hard to write. Some blame it on “writer’s block,” a term coined by Austrian psychiatrist Edmund Bergler in 1947. Writers are “blocked” when they cannot produce new work or have experienced a creative slowdown. Bergler’s concept became part of our common language, in part because of the influence psychiatry had after World War II. Today, Bergler’s explanation of oral masochism and bottle-feeding as causes is considered by most psychologists to be Freudian psychobabble.

Modern researchers understand that feeling unable to write can have an affective/physiological, motivational, and cognitive component. For some writers, the task is too large (a memoir) and they feel overwhelmed. Some wait too long to start, so they never start. The perfectionists among us are too critical.

Strategies to liberate one’s writing include reducing sources of anxiety. Break the writing into smaller tasks. If you can, limit your editing (spelling and grammar) of your first draft, then edit everything. Redirect your self-criticism. Having a supportive peer group can be very helpful. Try activities like freewriting and brainstorming. For example, when you finish reading this *Bulletin*, free write something about your first kiss, your first movie, or your first family vacation. Write a short story for your family or descendants that they will never know about unless you write it. Don’t worry if the story is new, creative or any good. Write the story you tell every Thanksgiving, but this time, write it, don’t tell it. Also, when you write, free yourself from thoughts about agents, publishers or readers. Don’t worry about being published. These can be blockers. Just write. Write not from your head but your heart. Write because it is therapeutic or because it makes you feel creative.

As president of the CWC, my goal is to give our members multiple ways and reasons to write and the encouragement and recognition some of us need to keep writing. July marked the start of a new year for the California Writers Club (CWC). In 2025/2026, we expect branch and statewide writing contests, several branch anthologies, and a new CWC Literary Review. This year, thanks to our poetry editor Les Bernstein and our cover and interior designer Crissi Langwell, a second edition of *Vision & Verse*, our ekphrastic collection of member art, poetry, and prose will be available in the Fall.

The California Writers Club and its wonderful branches give members multiple reasons to write, and they help and encourage them to keep writing. We know you have a story to tell or a poem that needs to be set free. Keep this in mind: writing is a habit. If you can, write a little every day. Write your dreams. Write how you are feeling. Write a poem once a week. Write a story or a short memoir every month. Whatever it takes, get into the habit of writing. The Club is here for you. Remember, use it or lose it.

### One-hundred Years of Writing Excellence in Sacramento

The Sacramento branch invites fellow CWC writers to a special event honoring our 100<sup>th</sup> birthday!

Saturday, October 18, 2025, 12 noon-3:00 p.m.  
North Ridge Country Club  
7600 Madison Ave., Fair Oaks, CA 95628

The event includes featured speaker and Pulitzer-prize winner Jack Ohman, a star-studded lineup of presenters from the fields of writing, journalism, TV news, literary agency, and documentaries, 102-year-old Kiyo Sato, winner of the William Saroyan International Writing Award for *Dandelion through the Crack* (*Kiyo's Story*), a luncheon buffet with cash bar, and much more! For tickets, go to [www.cwcsacramentowriters.org](http://www.cwcsacramentowriters.org).

- New beta reader group(s) for novelists. Charity Romstad and Annette Seiler (**San Joaquin Valley Writers**) are looking for novelists to join beta reader groups. Requirements: (1) a manuscript between 30,000 to 99,000 words; (2) not generated with or by AI. Genres: upmarket, women's fiction, book club, literary fiction, cozy, mystery, historical fiction, science fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, paranormal/supernatural, adventure. Open to all CWC members. No cost to participate. Sign up by August 30. [Link to Application Form](#)
- The **High Desert** branch is pleased to announce its new online magazine, *The Wordsmyth*. *The Wordsmyth* is an online magazine for writers in the CWC. It's a non-profit endeavor aimed at showcasing our writers' skills every two months. High Desert wants to show off what members can do when given a blank page they can fill with words. Submissions must follow the guidelines. *The Wordsmyth* is not the *Atlantic* or the *New Yorker*, but it's also not the Reader's Digest. Somewhere in between, it offers a chance for thousands of readers to see your work. Be brave. Volume 1 was published in June 2025. [Click here to see](#). Submit your work at [oksooner92311@gmail.com](mailto:oksooner92311@gmail.com).
- **Tri-Valley Writers** held its 14<sup>th</sup> annual High School Writing Contest. This popular outreach program received 118 entries from 90 students throughout the Tri-Valley area. An award ceremony was held on May 18. The branch sponsors a need-based writing scholarship at Las Positas College. This year's recipient, Peggy Duncan, plans a career in public relations. The branch also sponsors cash prizes for the Youth and Education Creative Writing submissions at the Alameda County Fair.



Peggy Duncan receives her Tri-Valley scholarship



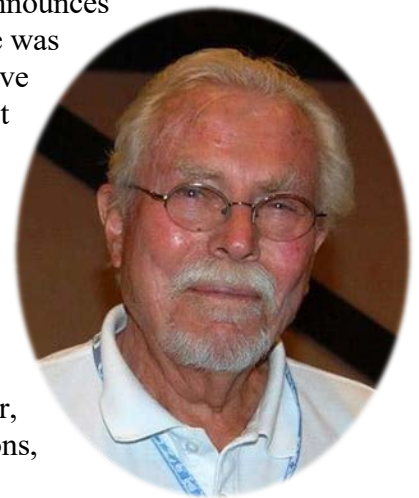
- The **Marin** branch is sponsoring a flash fiction contest. Deadline is September 1. Click on the image to the left to be taken to guidelines and the submission form.

- Early in 2025, **Mt. Diablo** members completed their judging for the nationwide “Scholastic Writing Contest” (grades 7-12). Nineteen judges completed 1,837 reviews. Later, in April, the branch organized the 30<sup>th</sup> annual “Young Writers Contest” for middle school students. Twenty-eight judges reviewed 295 entries. Thirty winners received a cash prize and an anthology of their thirty winning writing pieces at a ceremony held in May.

- **East Sierra** is pleased to announce the new edition of its original 2011 anthology, *Planet Mojave: New Horizons* (October 2025). This collection features family outings, mysteries at the museum, fantastical sci-fi adventures, and poems on everything from

earthquakes to hard water – twenty new pieces together with the entire first edition’s scorpions, vampire, dragon, rockets, the Old West, moviemaking, coyotes, and much more. This resource celebrates the northwestern Mojave Desert with fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and over 100 photos and illustrations.

- To celebrate **California Writers Week**, the **Coastal Dunes** branch is hosting a free literary event on Friday, October 4, from 1:00–5:30 p.m. in the Shepard Room of the Santa Maria Public Library. The gathering features presentations by the 2025 Poets Laureate of San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties, thematic panels with regional authors, and a lively open mic session. Curated under the theme “Our Literary Voices Build Community Across Cultures and Generations,” this event welcomes all to engage in a collective celebration of creative expression.
- **NorCal Group** is pleased to announce a new leadership conference scheduled for April 2026. The focus will be on issues and skills related to leadership positions in CWC branches. Details will be provided in the coming months so be on the lookout.
- With sadness, **San Francisco Peninsula and South Bay Writers** announces that beloved colleague, **Dave LaRoche**, passed away in June 2025. He was a strong leader and his wrangling behind the scenes was legendary. Dave was always fair, thoughtful, and never afraid to speak up. His dry wit and blustering opinions left others in stitches. It was a pleasure to work with him, and there was always something to be learned. Here are some highlights in Dave’s career with San Francisco Peninsula and the CWC: Founder and Chairman, NorCal Group, April 2009-March 2012; Recipient of the Jack London Award 2009; Recipient of the Ina Coolbrith Award for exemplary service 2013; Representative, NorCal Group, April 2009-November 2024; Representative, California Writers Club Central Board, July 2009-June 2015; Founder and Editor, California Writers Club Literary Review, June 2012-2025; Publications, *Fault Zone* Anthology and five other books. Dave will be missed.





## From the CWC

---

- **Election Results.** At the July 2025 meeting of the CWC board, the following candidates were voted into office. Each will serve a one-year term, August 1, 2025 to July 31, 2026. Congratulations to all and we thank them for their continued service to the CWC.

**President.** Roger C. Lubeck, Ph.D. (Redwood Writers)

**Vice-president.** Jordan Bernal (Tri-Valley)

**Secretary.** Crissi Langwell (Redwood Writers)

**Treasurer.** Bernard Wozny (Sacramento)

For more information about CWC elections and governance, visit [Policies and Procedures](#).

- To date this year, the Central Board **has made the following changes to Policies and Procedures**.
  1. **Student membership**, adopted new wording (Article VI.K): *Student memberships are offered to writers from the ages of 14 through 22. Student members will not be eligible to vote or hold office. Exceptions may be made by the central board.*
  2. **Meeting reimbursement**, adopted new wording (Article XVI, B.1.b [1]): *Sunday night lodging for those who travel more than 100 miles to reach the meeting site by any mode of transportation who may not be able to return home at a safe time may be approved by the President (same class of accommodation as Saturday). The extra night will be paid by the traveler and reimbursed in accordance with the reimbursement procedure item and includes on the basic room rate.*
  3. **Jack London Award**, adopted new wording (Article XXI-Special Awards, Section A): *Each branch may select one member for the honor. Under extraordinary circumstances, a branch may select two members to receive the honor in a single Jack London Cycle. The means of the selecting the recipient(s) is at the branch's discretion.*
- **Vision and Verse II** has gone to press. Be on the lookout for it this fall on Amazon. The CWC thanks editor Les Bernstein and all the others who worked on making the volume happen.



- Congratulations to **Roger C. Lubeck, President, who was selected for the 2025 Ina Coolbrith Award** for exemplary service to the California Writers Club as well as to the Central Board.

## Members' Highlights

**Pamela Reitman** (Redwood Writers) has recently published her debut novel, *Charlotte Salomon Paints Her Life*. Exploring how art can heal trauma, the story centers on a young German-Jewish artist exiled and haunted by a legacy of suicides, who is determined to complete a monumental masterpiece as Nazi jackboots approach. [sibyllinepress.com/pamela-reitman/#csphl](https://sibyllinepress.com/pamela-reitman/#csphl)



Hats off, kudos, thumbs up and more for the many recent achievements of CWC writers!

**Marianne Brems** (San Francisco Peninsula) has published her first full length poetry collection *Stepping Stones*. Many of the poems focus on nuances of the natural world while others consider curious but easily overlooked aspects of daily life.

**Lisa-Behrens Smith** (Writers of Kern) has released her first publication, a novella, *Mulberry Seeds: Stories of Youth and Innocence*. The bedside reader features stories of an insecure childhood in 1968 Texas and draws heavily on Smith's own memories of her early years. For more information, visit [lisa-b-smith.com](https://lisa-b-smith.com).

**John Wease** (High Desert) has recently published the improved second edition of *The Horseman, a modern-day Western Fiction*. *The Horseman* is available on Amazon.

**Barbara Pronin** (Orange County) just published *Winter's End*, a WW II historical novel tracing the journeys of three brave women of the Dutch Resistance. A Reader's Favorite 5-Star Award Winner, it is called by best-selling author Faye Kellerman, "a page-turner filled with honest character who capture your heart and soul."

**D.S. Mori** (Orange County) is the 2025 Winner of The William F. Deeck-Malice Domestic Grant for Unpublished Writers. The award for emerging mystery authors was presented at the Malice Domestic convention in Maryland in April, 2025.

**Will Zeilinger** (Orange County) has released *My Friend, the Spy*. In this latest of four novels, Young Sammy Becker has no idea what awaits him when his family moves from the United States to Adana, Turkey, at the height of the Cold War in 1958.

**PJ Colando's** (Orange County) short story, "Paradise is Not on the Menu," was published in the anthology, *California is a State of Mind*, June 2025.

**David W. Donner** (Orange County) has published his debut fiction effort, *The Child on the Playground*, a heartfelt exploration of how a father's influence, childhood trauma, and spirituality affect one man's relationship pursuits. [www.amazon.com/dp/B0FBKR835Y](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0FBKR835Y)  
Visit David at [davidwdonner.com/writing](https://davidwdonner.com/writing)

**Jill Hedgecock** (Mount Diablo) published her sixth novel, *Pizco* in April 2025. *Pizco* reached #1 in New Releases on Amazon in the Teen & YA Ancient Historical Fiction and Teen & YA Teen & YA Exploration & Discovery Historical Fiction categories. Get a free prequel with newsletter signup at [www.jillhedgecock.com](https://www.jillhedgecock.com).

**Eugene Larkin** (Mount Diablo) has had his memoir *Seeking Soteria: Being in Process*, published. It recounts his experience working with diagnosed schizophrenics in Soteria House, a residential setting, without the use of medications. A NIMH funded research study, Soteria is now the generic name for this pioneering mode of treatment.

**Jim White** (Mount Diablo) has recently published his novel, *The First State*, through a small traditional publisher, Rochak Publishing.

**Michael Barrington** (Mount Diablo) published his eleventh novel *Four Mile House* in April and twelfth, *No Distance Between Us* in July. His short story *The Barn* appeared in *All Your Stories* Mag., and *Magic at Pendle Hill* was runner-up for the prestigious Short Story Mercer Cup in the UK.

**Lucinda Jackson** (Mount Diablo) taught a 2-hour course based on her memoirs *Just a Girl: Growing Up Female and Ambitious* and *Project Escape: Lessons for an Unscripted Life* called “Career Transitions: Make Them Your Best Opportunity” at Career Fairs in Wash DC and San Jose (summer 2025).

**Cheryl Spanos’** (Mount Diablo) debut young adult novel, *Bedlam Bewitched*, is a 2025 IPPY (Independent Publisher Book Awards) Winner, garnering a bronze medal in the Young Adult Fiction – Fantasy category.

**Billie Hanson-Dupree** (Mount Diablo) recently published her debut novel *Still Kickin’*. WWII is over, but when African-American Army Veteran Bill Reeves returns to his Central Valley home he struggles to fit back into his community. A woman, fighting her own demons, may help him fight his. Available at [Tuleburgpress.com/books](http://Tuleburgpress.com/books).

**Daniela Fritter’s** (Tri-Valley) memoir, *Downsizing Mom* (Russian Hill Press, 2025), recounts helping her aging mother downsize while discovering the roots of misunderstandings and emotional chaos that have plagued their relationship. Part downsizing manual, part family history, part psychological detective story, it’s available on Amazon. Visit [www.danielafritter.com](http://www.danielafritter.com).

**Monique Rardin Richardson** (Tri-Valley) has a new novel, *Our Last Hello*, published by Forever Present Press in June 2025. The story centers on a possible second-chance romance set in the 1970’s.

**Lynda Smith Hoggan** (Sacramento) has won First Place in *Story Circle Network’s* writing competition for her blog post “What the Stars See.” It appears in SCN’s June journal for members, however you can also find it at [lyndasmithhoggan.com](http://lyndasmithhoggan.com). Lynda’s memoir is *Our Song: a Memoir of Love and Race*.

**Cami Rumble** (San Joaquin Valley Writers) has recently published three poems in the online magazines *Sea and Sky Review* and *The Fjords Review*.

**Carole and William Wagener’s** (Coastal Dunes) memoir, *The Hardest Year: A Love Story in Letters During the Vietnam War*, was featured in the IngramSpark Indie Author Exhibit at the American Library Association Annual Conference held in Philadelphia. Twelve thousand librarians attended the four-day conference in June, looking to purchase books.

**Sheri T. Joseph** (Marin) is racking up the bling for her literary thriller, *Edge of the Known World*. The USA Today Bestseller received First Place in the 2025 Chanticleer International Book Awards for Global Thriller and the IBPA 2025 Gold Award for Best New Voice, among other awards.

**Rocky Leplin** (Berkeley) has published two books in 2025: *Never Kiss a Crocodile, Never Slap a Skunk*, and *The Japanese Man with the Ring in His Nose (A Ghost Story)*. He was also a winner of the Next Generation Short Story Awards for “A Tail of Two Dogs.”

## Tips, Tidbits & More



- Do you wonder **how dialogue works in fiction**? What aspects of writing dialogue do you question or have difficulty with? Editor Kristen Hamilton (Kristen Corrects, Inc.) discusses five essential rules of dialogue writing—everything from punctuation to action tags versus dialogue tags to when *not* to indicate who's talking. [www.kristencorrects.com/5-essential-rules-of-writing-powerful-dialogue/](http://www.kristencorrects.com/5-essential-rules-of-writing-powerful-dialogue/)
- What are **the odds of getting traditionally published**? The Aspiring Author website has a breakdown with some commentary. The statistics are sobering, so steel yourself if you are not familiar with the numbers. You can find the article here: [aspiringauthor.com/statistics-odds-of-getting-published/](http://aspiringauthor.com/statistics-odds-of-getting-published/)
- Looking for ideas for your poetry, fiction, and non-fiction? Reedsy Prompts focuses only on fiction. The site **Poets & Writers** offers **weekly prompts** in all three main categories of writing. Check them out and see if your creativity is tickled.  
[www.pw.org/writing-prompts-exercises?genre=31](http://www.pw.org/writing-prompts-exercises?genre=31)
- The *Orca Literary Journal* has embarked on a new endeavor to **help writers better understand the process that journals use in reviewing submissions**. The editor has established “Beyond Craft,” a blog at [substack.com/home/post/p-165877945](http://substack.com/home/post/p-165877945). In addition to posting thoughts about the submission process, “Beyond Craft” is also accepting short pieces from writers to talk about their experiences. From the editor: “If you believe you have an essay we might be interested in publishing, contact us at [beyondcraft25@gmail.com](mailto:beyondcraft25@gmail.com) with a brief inquiry. Essay word count should be between 750 and 3000.” Check out the editor’s piece “[It’s All About the Voice](#).”
- **When writers hear the word “rhythm,” their minds almost immediately go to poetry**. Think of a classic poem like Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken” or Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Raven.” Poems like that stand out for their use of meter that adds a rhythm we don’t hear in everyday speech. But what about prose, either fiction or memoir? Is there such a thing as rhythm? And if there is, how does it differ from the way poetry deploys rhythm? For a great discussion on this matter, check out Chris Snellgrove’s piece in the *Scribophile*. [Click here](#).
- As writers, we all love books, be they fictional, collections of poetry, or memoir. What do you know about **the history of books**? What is the first known work of literature? [Click here](#) to go to *Interesting Facts* for a brief account of “8 Mind-expanding Facts About Books.”



## Featured Creative Work

---

### A View of Tahiti<sup>1</sup>

Melissa Huntington  
(Orange County)

The small white bird boat  
wends its way  
among the estuaries

The one-man wooden sail craft glides  
following the shores  
of the river delta  
lined with whispering tule grass  
and cattail marsh

My uncle loved boats  
the way girls love horses

The San Joaquin River ripples  
past his house  
that smells like dogs  
and coffee grounds

His workshop cluttered with the remnants  
of left-over sail canvas  
and teak wood

Every evening, as the sun  
casts amber light on  
the curls of the river current  
he'd sit  
and just listen

My uncle was once asked  
how far could he see  
down the river  
from his back porch

"Tahiti" he said.



---

<sup>1</sup> Winner of the 2024 SJVW contest in the category of poetry.

## Featured Essay



### It Blew My Mind

By Daniel Bacon (Marin Writers)

I'm a fan of ProWritingAid, the program that checks grammar, spelling, and syntax, critiques text, and flags suboptimal writing habits. In my own work, it often highlights passive voice sentences and prompts me to use active verbs to strengthen the reader experience.

Its most intriguing feature is the ability to analyze and critique. It can examine one chapter at a time or an entire manuscript. I know this because the company asked me to beta test the critique/analysis function with my current novel. (I didn't receive remuneration).

The result blew my mind.

In about eight minutes, it raced through my entire manuscript and produced a six-page detailed analysis and critique. It started off identifying elements of each chapter: the type of text (expository, action, climatic, or resolution), the POV character, the role of each character (protagonist, antagonist, or supporting), and a plot outline.

Impressive comprehension, but could it go deeper?

It then offered paragraphs entitled First Impressions, The Heart of Story, Emotional Journey, Characters, Climax and Resolution, Pacing, Tension, and Central Conflict. Each paragraph contained specific comments, mostly complimentary, showing it understood the plot elements and character relations.

Impressive again, but could it offer actionable analysis?

Yes. In a section titled Almost Put the Book Down, it identified three places needing improvement. Then it described Original Elements and Cliched Elements, and a section titled Ideas for Improvement. The comments were generally astute and certainly worth considering.

Conclusion. ProWritingAid isn't as insightful as an expert professional editor, at least in its current iteration, but it's substantially faster and a lot less expensive.

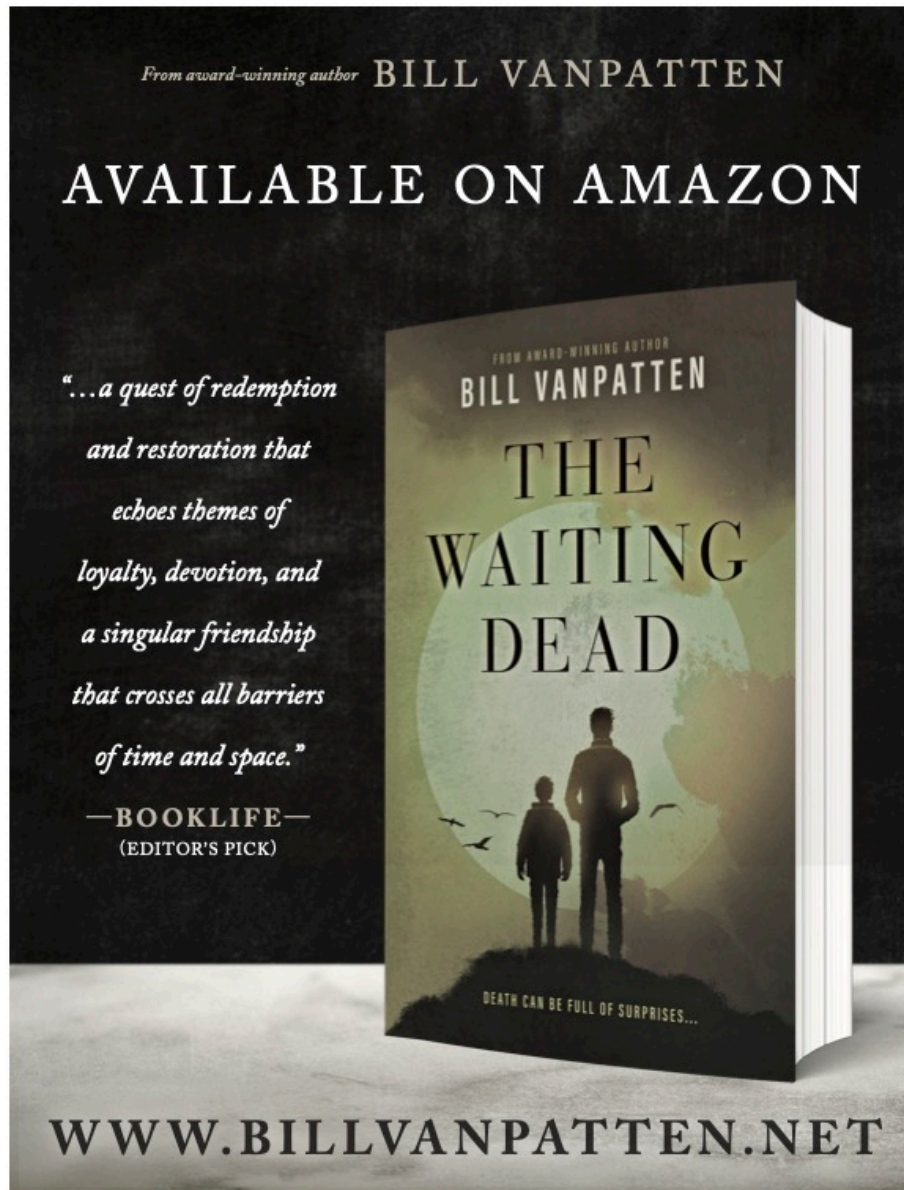
As always, happy writing (and reading)!

Note: Daniel serves on the board of the California Writers Club Marin Branch. He is the author of *Walking San Francisco on the Barbary Coast Trail*. We thank him and the CWCM newsletter for allowing us to reprint his article here, originally published in March 2025.

Have you published an essay related to issues in writing? Do you have an idea for an essay? Contact us at [editor@calwriters.org](mailto:editor@calwriters.org) for guidelines, but the broad strokes are: (1) focus on writing as craft or profession; and (2) 450 words maximum.

## Advertisement

---



Consider advertising in *The Bulletin*. With a reach of about 2,000 members, *The Bulletin* is a great venue to showcase a publication or even multiple publications. And the rates are reasonable and tailored to size of ad. To learn more, [click here](#). And let your friends and non-members know. Anyone with appropriate content can advertise in *The Bulletin*.