

December 2025



*Joaquin Miller*

# *The Bulletin*

## CWC News and Notes

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### **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***

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

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



[www.calwriters.org](http://www.calwriters.org)

## President's Message

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November and December are busy months for many of us. Family, holidays, and travel can make it difficult to have the time to write. If you find yourself on New Year's Day having written nothing recently or nothing in 2025. Do not despair. You are not alone.

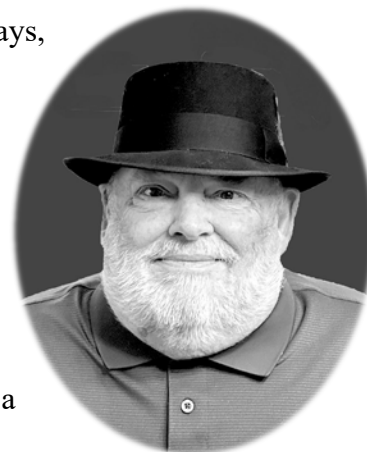
What is important is making a commitment. Set a goal. Give yourself a reason to write and set a deadline. Having a goal, a timeline, and making a commitment (promise) to write every day are essential for me. I am a pantser who needs a bit of external structure to get started. I need push. A reason (like a contest) to write; a topic or theme and a deadline.

For the past 21 years, as a participant in NaNoWriMo, I have written a first draft for a new novel in November. 50,000 words in 30 days. Once again, I am writing a new novel; however, this time I am using ProWritingAid's "Novel November" dashboard to track my progress.

Coming up with a new premise, plot, and characters may be the creative part of writing, but often, it is the editing and revision that turns a rough sketch into a work of art. However, as writer, I have learned that a first draft is exactly what is implied. My writing will need extensive editing, rewriting, and polishing before it is ready to be published. It will need to be read aloud. Read by several beta readers/editors and a proofreader. In my case a very good proofreader. Maybe two.

In 2026, the CWC board and I are committed to bringing you more opportunities to write and be published. Along with the branches, we are planning workshops, new contests, anthologies and other CWC publications, including a Literary Review in 2026.

Join me in making a commitment. For me, that's writing a publishable work in 2026. What is your writing goal for the New Year?



## From the Branches

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- **NorCal** (the group consisting of northern California branches of the CWC) is pleased to announce the leadership conference **Write the Future: Shaping Leaders for the Years Ahead**. The conference is scheduled for April 26, 2026, at Zio Fraedo's restaurant in Pleasant Hill, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Keynote by Tim Flood, "Expand Your Branch Through Outreach, Engaging Programs, and Partnerships that Attract and Retain Members." Themes to be addressed are: 1. how to build user-friendly websites; 2. creating newsletters that will be read; 3. effective planning to market your branch; 4. how to have fabulous meetings. Join us for a day full of inspiration, learning, networking, and more! This is the perfect platform to energize your team, learn from the best, and set your branch on a path of future success! For additional information, contact Geri Spieler [gspieler@gmail.com](mailto:gspieler@gmail.com).
- On October 18, 139 attendees filled the room at North Ridge Country Club near Sacramento to attend **"100 Years of Writing Excellence in Sacramento."** Speakers representing Capitol reporters, a Pulitzer Prize winner, a multi-time Pushcart Prize Nominee with a new poem honoring the branch, an Executive Producer for Film and Audio, a literary agent, and a CBS

local producer took turns at the lectern. More than \$300 was raised for the student jazz band. A hand-made menu of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks offered at a special price raised \$800 in bar fees. A slide show, *From Dog to Blog: History of Writing and Publishing in Sacramento* presented a rich background as publishing made its way from publishing Mecca San Francisco, where most female writers stayed behind the scenes. Not in Sacramento. Engraved crystal awards were given as Greater Sacramento Literary Awards to deserving entities and individuals. On display were 105 books by early members. The event came true thanks to a committee with a vision: projecting deep and wide roots and a lens of trends through the decades to the wider literary community filled with journalists covering politics.

- Congratulations and best wishes to the winners of the "Left Behind" Flash Fiction contest for 2025, sponsored by CWC Marin.

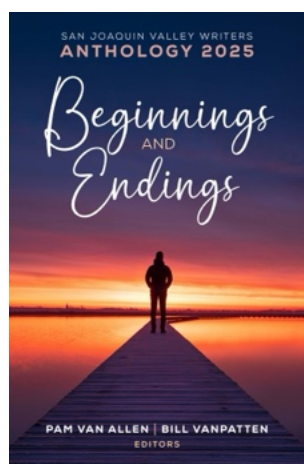


- 1<sup>st</sup> Place: Erin Schalk (Orange County), "Maybe it Was"
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Place: Monique Rardin Richardson (Tri-Valley Writers), "The Weight of Seven Pounds"
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Place: Billie Hanson-Dupree (Mt Diablo), "Left Behind"

Shortlist Honorees (in alphabetical order):

- Mary Adler (Redwood Writers), "The Sound of Beautiful Memories"
- Dana Dakin (Marin), "My Jane Kenyon Birthday Wish"
- Lisa Johnson (San Francisco Peninsula Writers), "Caves"
- Wanda Sue Parrott (Central Coast Writers), "Indian Moses' Farewell"
- Emily Patton (San Joaquin Valley Writers), "Metempsychosis"

For more details, and to read the winning stories, visit the CWC Marin website: [cwcmarin.com/contest](http://cwcmarin.com/contest). Thank you to everyone who entered!



- **San Joaquin Valley Writers is pleased to announce the publication of its 2025 anthology, *Beginnings and Endings*.** This collection of fiction, poetry, and memoir represents the work of writers from all over California. Available on Amazon by [clicking here](#) or on the book cover image to the left. On November 8, SJVW held its annual "Celebrating Excellence!" at Stockton's Valley Brew to honor the achievements of its members. At the same event, SJVW held the launch of the new anthology, and welcomed members from other branches who contributed to the volume. Good food, great engagement among attendees, and entertainment from President Bill VanPatten made the event extra special.

- Advance announcement. **San Joaquin Valley Writers will hold its biennial contest for fiction, poetry, and creative non-fiction in 2026.** Details will appear on SJVW's website in late January, but the focus will be on "Make Us Want to Read More" as we search for great opening lines/scenes in fiction and non-fiction (maximum 300 words) as well as the best in short(er) poetry (two pages or less). Be on the lookout and polish those narrative hooks and poems!

## From the CWC

On September 21, the CWC honored various branch members during the CWC Central Board meeting. The following CWC members are the 2025 recipients of the Jack London Award for outstanding service to their branches.

Ben Alirez (Inland Empire)  
 Heather Bradshaw (San Fernando Valley)  
 John Britto (San Joaquin Valley Writers)  
 Cathie Carroll Ortiz (Coastal Dunes)  
 Una T. Daly (South Bay Writers)  
 Keith Gaboury (Berkeley)  
 Jean Gordon Kocienda (Marin)  
 Barry Hampshire (Mount Diablo)  
 N. J. Hanson (North State Writers)  
 Colleen Janssen (Orange County)  
 Davis Kunz (East Sierra)  
 Shawn Langwell (Redwood Writers)  
 Rose Owens (Tri-Valley)  
 Gary Parker (Central Coast)  
 Kim Parker (Central Coast)  
 Michael Raff (High Desert)  
 Geri Spieler (San Francisco Peninsula)  
 Amber Starfire (Napa Valley Writers)  
 Terry Tosh (Fremont Area Writers)  
 Bill VanPatten (San Joaquin Valley Writers)  
 Bernard Wozny (Sacramento)



"You can't wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club."

As a reminder, in the July meeting of the CWC (and published in the August *Bulletin*), Roger Lubeck was awarded the Ina Coolbrith award for outstanding service to the CWC.

Congrats and thanks to all the folks who help to make the engine(s) of CWC and its branches run. All these folks are unpaid volunteers who give time, effort, and sometimes their own money to help their branches out. They help keep up our inspiration.



Consider advertising in *The Bulletin*. The rates are excellent, and the audience reach is over 2,100 members. We accept advertisements from non-members as well. For more information, visit the advertising page of the CWC website by [clicking here](#).

## Members' Highlights



**Bruce Lewis** (Mount Diablo) has published his fifth novel, *Bless Me Father FOR YOU Have Sinned*, a literary thriller about a dying man who confronts his father's killer—a former cop turned Catholic priest—inside the confessional, where each whispered word becomes a battle between vengeance and salvation. Goodreads: 4.7 rating.

**Michael Barrington** (Mt. Diablo) will release his 13<sup>th</sup> novel, *Colorblind* in January. Video now available on [YouTube](#). It's an untold story. A five-hour gun battle erupted in 1943, in a tiny English village, Bamber Bridge, between Black GIs and white MPs. Thirty-five Black soldiers were court martialed. No whites were tried.

**Julaina Kleist** (Marin) published a journal on Amazon, titled *My Dreams Come True*. <https://amzn.to/4ob2sSY>

**Rosie Sorenson**, MA, MFT, (Marin) won the 2025 NYC Big Book Award Distinguished Favorite for her book *If You'd Only Listen: A Medical Memoir of Gaslighting, Grit & Grace*. She also appeared as a podcast guest on the National Association of Memoir Writers, hosted by Linda Joy Myers.

**Dr. Joan Steidinger** (Marin) has received a contract offer from Bloomsbury Publishing for *Acts of Courage: A Guide to Understanding Mental Health Struggles of Female Athletes* (working title). Furthermore, Elizabeth Kracht (Kimberly Cameron & Associates) has agreed to take her on as a client.

**Amrita Skye Blaine** (Redwood Writers) just received a Pushcart nomination from Redwood Writers for her poem "murder in a tree" and a *The Best of the Net Anthology* nomination from Blue Heron Review for her poem "camaraderie." Her poem "day one" earned first prize and \$250 from *RUNNR* magazine.

**Richard McCallum** (Redwood Writers) published a poem in *Just So*, a story in *MoonShadow* (Redwood Writers), and three stories in High Desert's recent anthology, *Anything Goes*. He launched *SRAR* on KDP, posted three novels to Inkitt, and has published in High Desert's *Inkslinger* and *WordSmyth*. He also hosts *Writers Helping Writers* on YouTube.

**Mara Lynn Johnstone** (Redwood Writers) has published *The Token Human*, a collection of short stories about a veterinarian onboard a courier spaceship. There are space goats to wrangle, cats to rescue, and alien coworkers to introduce to the many baffling joys of having a human onboard. Available everywhere except Amazon.

**Robin Gabbert** (Redwood Writers) received the Fran Claggett-Holland Award for her contributions to the poetry community and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize for her poem, "The Palm Reader." Her new full-length book of poems, "Somehow, I Haven't Drowned" was recently published by Blue Light Press.

**Pamela Reitman** (Redwood Writers) is Winner of the PenCraft Fall 2025 Award for Literary Excellence in the category of Historical Fiction for her debut novel *Charlotte Salomon Paints Her Life*, a tale of fierce determination and the pursuit of art against all odds.



**Mary Vensel White** (Orange County), has published a debut collection of short fiction, *Resonant Blue and Other Stories*, released November 11, 2025. The stories are united around themes of resilience, turning points, and new paths, and in a recommended review, *Kirkus Reviews* called it “a quiet but captivating collection of stories with an affecting view of the commonplace.”

**Bill VanPatten** (San Joaquin Valley Writers) has published his seventh novel, *Ganymede*. “Frank, stylish retelling of the myth of Ganymede . . .”—*BookLife*. [www.billvanpatten.net](http://www.billvanpatten.net)

**B. Lynn Goodwin** (Tri-Valley Writers and Mount Diablo) had an article published by [Story Circle Network](#). She publishes on her own [Substack](#). She writes author interviews, book reviews, and runs four contests a year on [Writer Advice](#). She has won multiple awards for three books.

**Monique Rardin Richardson** (Tri-Valley) won 2<sup>nd</sup> Place in the CWC Marin flash fiction story contest, *Left Behind*, with her story titled, “The Weight of Second Pounds.” She also had two poems published in San Joaquin’s Anthology *Beginnings and Endings*, and two poems in Vallejo’s *A New Season: Poems from a World in Flux Anthology*.

**Joyce Sherry’s** (Central Coast) newly released paranormal fantasy novel, *A Tale for the Shadows*, has been chosen as a Booklife Editor’s Pick: “Sherry’s confident prose enchants all the way to the satisfying end, and readers will be moved by this poignant rendering of love, loss, and hope.”

**Dwight Holing** (Central Coast) received the 2025 Silver Falchion Award for his mystery novel *The Broken Blood* at the Killer Nashville International Writers Conference. It is the 8th book in his bestselling Nick Drake Mystery Series.

**Nicki Ehrlich** (Central Coast Writers) recently won a gold IPPY (Independent Publisher Book Awards) for her book, *Zephyr Trails*, the second volume in the *Ellis River* trilogy. (*Ellis River* won multiple awards, including the Bill Fisher Award from IBPA.) Book number three is due out next year. [www.nickiehrlich.com](http://www.nickiehrlich.com).

**P.G. Knudson** (North State Writers) recently published *Speed Trap Murder: Margo’s Manic Dream*, a mystery novel with a nostalgic 1990s backdrop. Readers enjoy how Knudson puts them into the middle of the action, feeling the excitement of the moment, the urge to laugh when it’s funny, and empathy during tragedy.

**Miera Rao’s** (San Francisco Peninsula Branch) haiku, from the 2025 Golden Haiku Competition, was displayed in Washington DC. There were nearly 5000 entries from 66 countries on the theme “Bridges of Belonging.” Winners’ poems as well as selected haiku were posted on signage around 44 blocks of the Business District during Spring.

**Lynda Smith Hoggan** (Sacramento) presented on the topic of “From the Bedroom to the Page: Writing About Sex” to Sacramento Suburban Writers Club. Lynda is a retired professor of human sexuality. Her work has appeared in the *NY Times*, *LA Times* and more. She blogs at [lyndasmithhoggan.com](http://lyndasmithhoggan.com).

**Editor’s Note:** What a great year for our CWC members. The number of Members’ Highlights from the April issue to now is outstanding! Congratulations to all members for their many achievements. I know 2026 will showcase an equal number of members’ successes.

## Tips, Tidbits & More



- What kind of writer are you? Most of us think in terms of genre or even whether we plot, plan, or fly by the seat of our pants. But there's another way to consider what kind of writers we are: asking the question **"What drives your writing, deep down?"** Melissa Matesic discusses her analysis of four different types of writers. Check it out in this short ten-minute video. [Click here.](#)

- How do you define **pacing in prose writing**? Best-selling author RaeAnne Thayne says this: "Pacing is the rhythm at which your story unfolds—the flow of scenes, information, and tension to maintain reader interest. Pacing is not static. It varies throughout a novel to evoke different emotional responses in your readers." Read about her tips for managing pacing by [clicking here.](#)
- Writers should make use of the many senses to enhance a scene—at least, that's what we hear. But how? And why? Author Wendy Cobrea takes us through some ideas regarding sight, taste, smell, hearing, and touch in an essay titled ["Writing Scenes with Your Senses."](#) Wendy also offers exercises to show how authors might recall senses during particular episodes of their own lives.
- **Is the semi-colon dying out?** This is a good question. In fiction and poetry, the semi-colon makes an infrequent appearance to begin with, but what about nonfiction? There is some evidence that it is being replaced, slowly, but still being replaced. For a quick read on this topic, [click here.](#)
- Wondering about **trends in poetry**? *The Economist* published an interesting article called "Feeling Averse," in which the author traces the move from rhymed and rhythmic poetry to something else. The piece contains a brief analysis of thousands of poems from 1900 to the present day. One thing you'll want to check out is the author's thesis that modernism and academics have had an impact on poetry beginning sometime in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Check it out: *The Economist*, May 31st, 2025. If you have a subscription, [click here.](#)
- *Medium* recently published a piece called **"Ernest Hemingway's Brutal Letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald on How to Write Better."** Here are a few gems from Hemingway in that piece: (1) 90% of what you write is crap ("I write one page of masterpiece to ninety pages of s\*\*t."); (2) don't get caught in a perfection trap ("For God's sake write and don't worry what the people will say nor whether it will be a masterpiece"); (3) write honestly, even if it hurts ("Scott, write truly, no matter who it hurts or what it hurts, but don't make any damn concessions!"). For the full piece, [click here.](#) If you're not a *Medium* member, consider joining!

**Have a tidbit or tip to share?** Keep it simple with 100 words or less and a link to send our readers to follow up. See the examples above. Send us your ideas to [editor@calwriters.org](mailto:editor@calwriters.org)

## Featured Creative Work

### READY FOR THE GRAVE

Susanna Solomon  
(CWC Marin)

My name is Doris. I do hair. All kinds of hair, short, long, layered. I make curly hair straight, and straight hair curly, and I turn brown hair to honey and blond hair to mahogany. Oh, and I do highlights and asymmetrical cuts, the scissors flying. The women leave my chair transformed.

I do magic, they say. But all the time I am snipping, washing, folding foil. I listen and every day am inundated with stories, stories of the human heart, stories of grief, happiness, anxiety, and excitement. As I clip, I listen and nod and say “hmmm” periodically as they chatter on. All the stories enter my mind where I lock them away. But this one story, this one customer, seventy-seven-year-old Mrs. Hamilton, this is a story I must tell.

When she came to my door last Wednesday, I was prepared to hear her complaints about traffic, prices, snotty shopkeepers, and her staff. I’d been hearing those laments for years. Instead she marched through the door, her eyes wild. She was wearing a green jacket, purple skirt, mismatched brown shoes, one with buckles, the other with laces. As a woman of a certain age, she usually paid close attention to her appearance. That day, I was a bit confused about her choice of clothes.

She stomped her feet. “Doris,” she said, “My hair, cut it off. Every strand.”

“Now, now, now, Mrs. Hamilton.” I helped her into a chair and looked at her curls that I’d set a few days before. Her face was full of crow’s feet. She had lines along her brow, around her mouth, and brilliant blue eyes that flashed with anger or pleasure. She was wearing her favorite pearl earrings and peach lipstick.

“What seems to be the matter, Mrs. H.?” I asked, fluttering out her smock and laying it over her slender frame.

“I hate my hair,” she complained, her lips tight as she looked into the mirror with determination. “My body’s going to hell, I can’t get my shoes on without help, I creak when I get out of bed in the morning. Get me ready for the grave, Doris, I’m going there anyway.”

“You’ll be cold without any hair, Mrs. H.,” I cooed, bringing her over to the wash basin where I smoothed her scalp with shampoo, rinsed it, and patted her head dry with a towel. She moaned as I massaged her temples.

Back in the chair again I slowly ran the comb through her thin hair. I never pulled — never made my customers wince. Today I was extra careful. Mrs. H. opened and closed the clasp of her handbag repeatedly until I asked her if I could put it on the counter. Still, with her hands free, she fidgeted, her fingers making knots in her lap.

“I’m all alone now, Doris.” She grasped my arm. “My husband’s left, my children moved to Hell and gone to Nova Scotia. Just me and my little dog Fred, and he’s got mange. Can I bring him in?”



[Published in *Harlot's Sauce*, September 2011. [Click here to read the entire story.](#)]



## Featured Essay

### HANDLING THE TRUTH IN MEMOIR

By Evelyn LaTorre  
(Fremont Area Writers)

When writing about real people in negative ways, there are different perspectives. Memoirist Anne LaMott says, “If people wanted you to write more warmly about them, they should have behaved better.” Lawyers say authors can be sued for making false statements about a living person when the memoir causes serious damage to another’s reputation. A *private* party must demonstrate that the writer was purposely negligent. A *public* figure must show the writer had malicious intent.

I wrote my first memoir, *Between Inca Walls*, about a boyfriend in the 1960s. During the writing, it became apparent to me that he was probably gay. If I published my observations, I risked “outing” “him. I wasn’t sure what to do. I decided to be direct. I met my colleague for lunch to discuss what I suspected. He verified my description and gave me permission to publish what I’d written.

Another issue in writing memoir is that people often experience the same moment or conversation differently. Say the memoirist exposes more about their subject’s bad conduct than that person wants. Exaggeration can be claimed, but if it’s true, it’s not legally actionable. What’s written needs to reflect the author’s *emotional* truth. Dialogue need not be stated verbatim. However, the writer risks hurt feelings, reputational harm, loss of trust, and alienation. Those who write about their trauma may purposely write unkind things. It takes courage to share a difficult truth and accept the negative consequences.

The memoirist’s objective is to convey universal truths that resonate with readers, rather than writing about bad conduct for retaliation or exposure. I sent chapters I wrote to friends and relatives prior to publishing narratives about them. One or two didn’t want their names used, which I honored. Most wished I’d written more about them!

Individuals have varying levels of desired privacy and sensitivity. I am very open about my life, but my husband is very private and didn’t want me to write about him. I teased him. “You don’t want anyone to reveal even something as benign as the color of your socks!” Both my memoirs contain a great deal about my husband, though not the color of the socks he wears. I couldn’t leave him out of stories about my life, but I also didn’t want to alienate him. In the end, we compromised. I changed his name.

In summary, when writing about others, consult with the named person, change names or otherwise disguise the identity when necessary, and write your emotional truth. In general, consider the personal, social, and professional consequences. Then write honestly, with compassion—even though misbehavior is so much more interesting to read and write about.



## (Important) Note from the Editor

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We hope you enjoy the two special sections, “Featured Creative Work” and “Featured Essay.” Below are some guidelines for each section if you are considering sending us something. And we hope you do! We are a network of over 2,100 writers of all stripes. There is much talent to share!

### Featured Creative Work

The Featured Creative Work section of *The Bulletin* highlights a creative work (fiction, poetry, memoir, creative non-fiction). This is a one-page feature (about 400 words if prose). Submitted pieces should already be vetted elsewhere and edited (e.g., were contest winners or runners up, were published in a magazine or on-line anthology). The posting on a personal blog doesn't count as vetting or publishing.

All submissions must be Word docs, Times New Roman 12 pt font. Author must include their branch affiliation.

For pieces that don't fit on one page, we accept them if there is a link to a site where members can go to read the entire piece. That is, we take the first 300-400 words (or several stanzas of a poem) and include those, then add a link for the reader to go to a site to see the entire story or poem. You can see how this works in the current issue as well as in the April 2025 issue.

The idea here is to showcase members' creative work that is published or honored but may not be known by CWC members. For example, Mary Smith published a poem in an on-line magazine in September 2024. According to the rights for the site, after one year she is free to republish. So Mary sends in her poem to *The Bulletin* with a link to the site where it was published. NOTE: Mary does not send in the link alone and expect the editor to extract it from the site somehow. She sends in a Word doc of the final version along with the link. The editor can then easily format from the Word doc.

Submission does not guarantee (re)publication in *The Bulletin*.

Deadlines: March 10, July 10, November 10 of each year.

### Featured Essay

The Featured Essay section of *The Bulletin* contains pieces that speak to the profession of writing in some way. They can be about getting published, tools for writing, issues in plotting, trends in poetry, what agents look for (don't look for), matters related to self-publishing, and so on.

Unlike Featured Creative Work, these do not need to be published elsewhere (although they can be as long as the author has the rights to republish) and do not need to be vetted. These should be pieces original to the CWC member; that is, we don't reproduce something a member finds on a writing blog or site somewhere (unless, of course, it is the member's own blog).

The maximum length for an essay is 400 words, and must be submitted as a Word doc with Times New Roman font, 12 pt. The editor reserves the right to edit and make suggestions regarding style, punctuation, and structure as needed. If you have a blog and have a longer piece, then we will take the same approach as with Featured Creative Work: publish the first 300-400 words and include a link to your blog for people to read the rest.

Deadlines: March 10, July 10, November 10 of each year.