

September 2026

CWC Bulletin



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CWC President's Message

Welcome to our new July 2026 through June 2027 term. It's our 117th year as the California Writers Club. Over the years, many CWC members from the various branches have “walked the walk and talked the talk” before me, and I’m in awe of these extraordinary volunteers who gave of their time, energy, and knowledge.

Today I want to express my gratitude to those who have volunteered to serve on this year’s Executive Committee Board. Crissi Langwell from Redwood Writers has stepped into the VP position and will also keep the CWC website (www.calwriters.org) up to date and relevant. Evelyn LaTorre from Fremont Area Writers has agreed to be our secretary. She has been a valuable team member for the NorCal group. Bernard Wozny will continue as treasurer. He served as the president of the Sacramento Branch from 2022 to 2025.

Sandy Moffett from Writers of Kern will continue as member-at-large and the state membership chair. She brings her extensive knowledge of the old Member Records Management System (MRMS) and is excited to assist branch membership chairs in their duties.

President's Message

And Roger Lubeck from Redwood Writers, as immediate past president, will serve as a non-voting member of the EC. Roger's vast knowledge of all things CWC will be invaluable to the board.

I am honored to work with this term's team as your president. I've been a member of CWC, Tri-Valley Writers since January 2010. I've served in a variety of roles at the branch level, and as CWC VP for the past two years. I believe in the power of teamwork to nurture robust discussions and work toward the benefit of all.

Speaking of accomplishing a great deal, lots of changes that have been in the works for several years are coming to fruition this term. CWC is retiring Ray Malus' MRMS for a new, more robust Member Directory system.

While there has been a delay in rolling out the revamped CWC website and Member Directory due to the complexity of setting up all the Stripe accounts and testing, CWC wants to assure its members that the new system is fully tested and the kinks (inevitable in every new software system) are worked out.

When it does roll out this fall, our members will have greater opportunities for exposure as writers via their profile pages (which includes bios, social media links, and books with buy links) and a searchable Member Bookshelf — a project I've worked on for the past two years.

Our motto is "Writers Helping Writers." Writers helping writers is more than a slogan. It is the culture a writer encounters when she/he attends a branch meeting. Stephen King wrote, "Writing is a lonely job. Having someone who believes in you makes a lot of difference." At California Writers Club, we believe in our members.

As president, I am committed to meeting and exceeding the needs of our members. My goal is to not only help our members write and publish more, but to showcase their works to the public. I also believe that our members should understand they belong to an historical club and that CWC has more than 1,700 members within its 20 branches.

Keep the Written Word Alive!



CWC Executive Committee. From left to right: Crissi Langwell, Evelyn LaTorre, Jordan Bernal, Bernard Wozny and Roger Lubeck. Not pictured: Sandy Moffett

Jordan Bernal
CWC President

Branch News

California Writers Week Sacramento Branch

California Writers Week encourages the people of our state to reflect on the contributions of California writers. This October 11-17 celebrates the 23rd anniversary of this special week created by a California Assembly resolution.

The CWC Sacramento Branch is taking this celebration community-wide, sending teams of writers to visit assisted living residences. CWC members will read excerpts from their writing and answer questions about the writing process. Some authors are planning to give away copies of their books.

Reading to seniors during California Writers Week is something other CWC branches might consider. What better way to showcase who we are and what we do, while giving back to our communities? Contact sacramentowriters@gmail.com to learn more.

Julie Snider

CWC Sacramento Branch member

Panel on Joan Didion

Lane Igoudin, Ph.D. (Orange County Branch) will be speaking on a panel, *Joan Didion: Writing California, Defining a Voice*, at the upcoming 29 Palms Book Festival (November 13-15, 2026 | www.29pbf.com) in San Bernardino County.

Lane is the author of *A Family, Maybe*, an emotional journey to fatherhood against many odds. He is a professor of English and Linguistics at Los Angeles City College. See more at laneigoudin.com.



Fall 2026 Conferences, Contests, and Publications

Conferences

Cuesta College Central Coast Writers' Conference (September 25 & 26) in San Luis Obispo. This conference will bring writers of all backgrounds and experience levels together, and allow attendees to enjoy insightful dialogue, networking opportunities, and unrivaled access to an esteemed staff of presenters.

Sonoma County Writers' Conference (October 17th) in Santa Rosa. A full day of craft, publishing, and marketing sessions. Whether you're holding your first blank page or your tenth published book, this is a room built for you. Discounts are available for all active CWC members and those who register early!

Writers & Illustrators Day (October 24th) in Camarillo will be hosted by The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. Publishers, agents, and authors will present and network. There is also a Pitchfest via Zoom on the 31st.

Napa Valley Book Festival (November 14) This year's festival moves to a larger venue, Blue Oak School in Napa. Keynote Speaker: Rex Pickett, critically acclaimed author of *Sideways*. The festival will also feature author tables, an open mic, a children's story hour, independent bookstores, food trucks and additional programming.

Contests

The Gabriele Rico Challenge for Nonfiction (Deadline: Oct 1). The contest invites submissions of creative nonfiction, such as personal essays and narratives, under 5,000 words. Winner gets \$1,333.

Publications (open to all CWC members)

The Wordsmythe (Deadline: the 15th of each month). This e-magazine by the High Desert Branch is looking for short stories, flash fiction, poetry, essays, op-eds, and excerpts from member's books as well as artwork and photography. 5,000 word limit.



CWC Bulletin Editorial Page

Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers:

Thanks very much to everyone who submitted their work to the California Writers Club *Bulletin*. And thanks to those who have helped in any way during these past months of preparation, especially our President, Jordan Bernal, and our editors -- Ed Albro, Mara Johnstone and Rick Rayburn.

A couple bits of news: First, we are returning the *Bulletin* to a quarterly publication with issues scheduled for December 15, March 15, June 15, and September 15. Deadlines for submissions will be one month before those dates. We also have a couple of new editors coming on board -- Michael Barrington (CWC Mt. Diablo) and Ken Mazur (CWC San Fernando Valley). Our entire editorial team will be introduced to you in the next issue.

We had even more submissions this time around, and of course, as always, it was difficult to choose. I hope you enjoy our selections. If you were not featured in this issue, however, please do not be discouraged. We have several more issues coming out over the next months that will offer more opportunities for publication.

If you feel inspired to do so, please submit new selections of your poetry, short story excerpts, novel excerpts, flash fiction pieces or essays to editor@calwriters.org. Your work will be considered with thought and care. Please see the guidelines for submissions on our website, www.calwriters.org, under Publications.

Besides submitting your work, we could use your help in other ways. As you'll see in the sidebar next to this letter, the CWC Bulletin's Editorial Staff still has a number of open positions: Branch News Editor; CWC News Editor; and Member Publications Editor. Please consider filling one of these spots by again contacting me at editor@calwriters.org.

All the best to you!

Susan Marquez Owen
CWC *Bulletin* Editor-in-Chief

CWC Bulletin Editorial Team

Editor-in-Chief

Susan Marquez Owen
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Flash Fiction Editor

Long Prose Editor

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Conferences, Contests, and Publications Editor

Mara Johnstone,
Redwood Branch

Poetry Editor

Rick Rayburn
Sacramento Branch

Branch News Editor

CWC News Editor

Member Publications Editor

TBD



Author Spotlight: Joan Didion

Chronicler of the Golden State's Shadow

By Lane Igoudin
Orange County Branch

Joan Didion is often thought of as the quintessential Californian writer. Much of the seven decades of her inquisitive writing centers on the perennial boom and zeitgeist of her native state. Is California, with its unparalleled immensity, diversity, and opportunities of fulfillment, the proverbial Garden of Paradise, “a dream teaching the dreamers how to live,” as she once wrote? Or just a front, a ramshackle stage set, behind which there is nothing but disconnect and solitude?

Didion probes California’s contradictions in her now classic essay collections *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* and *The White Album*, the memoir *Where I Was From*, the novel *Run River*, and her movie scripts for *Play It As It Lays* and *A Star Is Born*. Born into a Sacramento family of wagon-train-pioneer background, Didion graduated from UC Berkeley and moved to New York, but returned to live in California throughout her life.

California shaped Joan Didion, and she, in some ways, shaped the way we see the state. Her style mixes personal and political, scholarly and judgmental. It goes beyond the surface events to explore larger connections, seek deeper truths.

Here is one example. Didion’s 1969 essay “Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream” brings us into San Bernardino Valley to report the story of a mother of three, who took a drive to the supermarket in the middle of the night and whose car caught on fire.

“For 75 minutes, Lucille Miller ran up and down Banyan [Street] calling for help, but no cars passed and no help came. At three o’clock that morning, when the fire had been put out and the CHP officers were completing their report, Lucille was still sobbing and incoherent, for her husband had been asleep in the Volkswagen. ‘What will I tell the children, when there’s nothing left, nothing left in the casket,’ she cried to the friend called to comfort her. ‘How can I tell them there’s nothing left?’”

This horrific incident soon morphs into a murder investigation. A love quadrangle, with the widowed Lucille in its midst, seems to offer the clue.

To Didion, this crime drama is deeply Californian, set against a desolate landscape of highways, churches, motels, and coffee shops, that empty out into the desert where “the subdivision flags whip in the harsh wind.”

The VW fire is a natural starting point for Didion’s essay. To Didion, fires are an integral part of California. They regularly burn down houses, strip malls, and the chaparral, but also the California Dream itself. “The city burning is Los Angeles’s deepest image of itself,” as she writes in *Los Angeles Notebook*.

Dreams are always about the future. They have no history, no sense of memory. Didion’s writing dissected the California Dream, illuminating its dark side, making something elusive into something permanent.



Joan Didion in Los Angeles on August 2, 1970
Kathleen Ballard, *Los Angeles Times*

The Craft of Writing

I'm a Fraud: Please Don't Tell Anybody

By Michael Barrington
Mount Diablo Branch

It has always hovered at the edge of my thoughts, usually subdued by caffeine. Then, during a holiday in Mexico, my wife told two sympathetic strangers that I wasn't working on vacation, I was writing. Within hours, the news spread through the resort. Drinks mysteriously appeared. People smiled knowingly. I was asked the dreaded question:

"So, you're a writer?"

The timing was unfortunate. I had just finished another novel, which might sound impressive, but was at the editing stage where optimism quietly dies and a darker thought emerges: Today they'll discover I'm a fraud.

Not because I don't write. I do, daily. But because calling myself a writer feels absurd, like introducing myself as a concert pianist after mastering "Chopsticks." When faced with the question, my stomach knots and I scramble for a way to change the subject.

Cormac McCarthy said, "I don't know why people write. Maybe they're bored or failures at something else." That line should comfort me. I write persistently. Words become sentences, paragraphs occasionally cooperate, but somehow none of that seems sufficient to earn the title.

Every other profession has qualifications. Doctors, teachers, even plumbers must prove themselves. Writers simply ... declare themselves. Surely there should be an exam. In my imagination, there is.

Charles Dickens peers over his spectacles. Jane Austen raises an eyebrow. George Orwell asks whether I've told the truth. Margaret Atwood cuts through my nervous explanation with, "Nobody is making you write. So quit whining." Then dismisses me, telling me to try again in a few decades.

I know that literary giants suffered similar doubts. Jane Austen criticized her own writing. Maya Angelou confessed that after eleven books she still feared being "found out." Hemingway famously observed, "The first draft of anything is shit." Yet I still can't imagine them editing a paragraph thinking, "Why does this sound like nails on a chalkboard?"

Perhaps feeling like a fraud is not evidence that you shouldn't write. Perhaps it is part of the job. The secret handshake!

The mythology of writing tells us great authors produce effortless prose. Reality is messier. Every sentence is uncertain, every paragraph negotiable. As Kurt Vonnegut admitted, writing made him feel "like an armless, legless man with a crayon in his mouth."

So, what is the answer? Waiting?

Margaret Atwood reminds me the perfect moment never arrives. John Steinbeck argued that writers must believe their work matters, even while doubting it. Stephen King insists professionals simply show up. Samuel Beckett offers the best consolation: "Try again. Fail again. Fail better."

I still wish there were an official letter granting me permission to call myself a writer. There isn't. There is only the work.

So, I return to the blinking cursor, placing one word after another. The doubts remain, asking, 'Who do you think you are?' But the impulse to write remains too. Perhaps being a writer is not a title bestowed by others, but a habit of returning to the page despite never feeling entirely worthy of it.

Essay

Liv's Quilt

By Vivian Yongewa
Redwood Writers Branch

I pictured my daughter en-wombed in a quilt of black and pink as she crouches over her laptop in her college dorm room. I imagined fairy lights twinkling over her head and the San Francisco fog swirling beyond her window as the quilt enfolds her shoulders.

So, I bought pieces of black and pink cotton cloth and cut them into ragged squares. I stitched them into columns. Struggled through broken needles (two of them!) and bobbins running out (behind my back!) to sew strips into a huge rectangle before machine-sewing the unwieldy mass to a layer of stuffing and a backing.

Then I discovered I missed a step, fundamentally misunderstanding how quilts work. I was supposed to sew all three layers together along the strips, not along the outside edges.

I have no idea how I would have done the former, but I know doing the latter is how I broke my needles and left my room dusted with black and pink threads.

The quilt sits in the back seat of my daughter's car. Is it a quilt, though? Patched and sewn over in places -- is it a quilt?

Yes, but mostly it is a tendril of mother-love, graceless but earnest, awaiting fog and fairy lights.



Short Memoir

The Love My Father Gave Me

By Joyce Sherry
Central Coast Branch

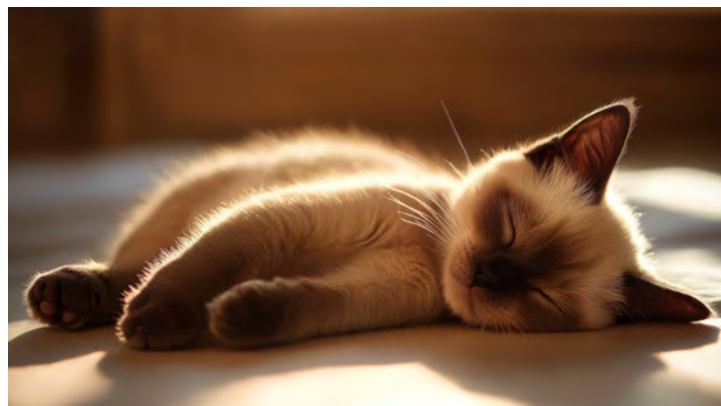
I fell in love for the first time at my grade school carnival. I was five years old. I can't imagine why it took me till the end of the day to see her, even to register that she was there. Maybe I was too absorbed in noshing penny candy or creating spin-art. Whatever it was that kept me occupied, I didn't see the crate of kittens until the fair was nearly over.

They were the offspring of a prize-winning Siamese show cat and an unplanned-for suitor who slipped in through the bathroom window. By the time I saw them, there was one left. I ran a finger over her elegant silver forehead, and she opened a green-golden eye, then yawned hugely showing minuscule teeth and a tiny pink tongue. The ache in my heart to hold her and love her and take her home was a pain I had never felt before.

"Do you want her?" asked the woman tending her. "She's free. The fair's almost over, and I want someone to take her."

This kitten was perfect. Soft and lovely, warm, fragile, and potentially mine to care for. But I couldn't just take her. There was a gatekeeper. "I have to ask my dad. Please don't let anyone have her before I get back."

I ran. The idea of someone else taking my kitten was too painful to bear. I don't remember finding my dad. I don't remember dragging him back to the kitten. My next memory is of the kitten lady looking up at him and saying, "That'll be five dollars."



My heart dropped into the soles of my feet. Even at my age, I knew that was a lot of money.

"Five dollars?" my dad asked. "I thought it was free."

The woman, a friend of Dad and Mom, grinned mischievously. "That's before I knew it was you buying her."

Dad threw back his head and roared with laughter. He handed over a five-dollar bill.

"What are you going to name her?" she asked me. I appreciated the huge responsibility, the first of many I knew would come with loving her. "Every kitten in the litter is named with the same starting letter. This litter, the names start with F."

Well, that was easy to my five-year-old mind. It was the Plain and Fancy carnival after all.

As Dad drove us home in the family station wagon, Fancy curled up in my lap and slept the sleep of the deeply trusting. For twenty-one years, she played with me, listened to my adolescent secrets, caught my tears, purred me to sleep, followed me to school through the snow, peed in my suitcase when I left for college (showing her true feelings about being left behind), and made my life immeasurably better.

Years after Fancy moved in to become Empress of the Household, I learned that Dad didn't particularly like cats. But that didn't matter to him. He loved me.

Flash Fiction

The Call

By Ken Mazur
San Fernando Valley Branch

So mad, so full of rage, pacing the room, swearing, planning and scheming ways to get back at her for such a breach of faith and trust. And to have heard about it from her best friend ...

My head hurt, my back hurt, my heart ached, my soul withered.

No one had ever gone behind my back, had an affair, shattered the bonds that made a relationship a harbor of safety and trust.

Outside, rain fell in sheets like a soundtrack to my pain. My dog approached with caution, sad eyes reading my agony. His head brushed my knee as if to say, 'I'll always love you.'

I wanted to cry, scream, throw things. Wrench from her life every bit of joy and cauterize the cause of this vile transgression.

Oh, to make her pay!

I'd write a scathing e-mail and send it to everyone we ever knew. By the time it was read by all, she'd be hard pressed to find a friend to have a drink with.

I crafted a masterpiece of such daggers and darkness that I was almost afraid to read it. I printed it for a better look. Made some artistic changes and settled into my reading chair to breathe. The dog sauntered over again wagging his tail, hoping that I might change my mind.

No way.

I copied the letter and pasted it into an e-mail, fingers trembling with venom and rage, savoring my instrument of revenge. This would settle the score and give me peace.

I combed my contacts and piled them into the 'send to' and 'cc' lines. The email sat poised on my desk top, ready to be sent. Oh, this would be a marvelous stroke, a coup de gras and I gloated, satisfied that my work was ...

The phone rang. I trembled as I hit the answer button. It was her best friend. I could feel the tears, hear the sobs. My heart froze.

Please don't tell me more.

Her voice was ragged, tentative as she admitted it was all a lie, that they'd had an argument and she wanted to get back at my wife. She'd concocted the whole thing.

I was mute, shocked. Not certain if I felt relief or murderous anger at this 'friend' for her childish but devastating fiction.

"Do you have any idea how you've made me feel?" I asked, my boiling anger redirected.

"I am so sorry... really. I didn't mean to hurt you ... I was so mad at her. It was horrible of me."

I rudely cut the phone connection and leaned back in my chair.

My world was alive again. My cherished marriage was intact. Eyes lifted reverently to the ceiling, I reached blindly for my open laptop with a sigh of relief.

What? Oh NOOOOOOOO!

I'd hit send ...



Flash Fiction

Pocket Square

By Robert Brewer
Mt. Diablo Branch

You stop to watch when Tony leads on vibraphone, two mallets in each hand. Every night, we see him shake his dreadlocks as he syncopates Caribbean classics. Back in Spanish Harlem, his virtuoso father thrilled his uptown audience. After migrating west to Oakland, Tony rules the stage.

Despite all this attention, Tony pines for Valeria, the head server at Sebastian's. Today, she bewitches him even more since Bruno has left town on business. As a brother of the jazz club's owner, Bruno claims whatever he fancies in his social orbit. Valeria yielded to his gravity when she arrived from Venezuela ten years ago. Bruno assumes he owns her, and Valeria obeys him without complaint. So far, at least.

"Hey, Val," Tony offers before his set, "How 'bout a casual bet on next week's football game? I'll take the Giants if you take the Raiders."

Valeria turns from the cash register and laughs, "New York's favored by a touchdown. Ten bucks for you if Oakland loses. Twenty for me if we tie or win."

"You're on, baby."

Their conversation lets Tony admire her honey-toned complexion without staring bug-eyed like a dumbass. He improvises phrases, mimicking jazz chords, meant to captivate an audience of one. "You dig American football? A league of gladiators! Does football count in Caracas? Baseball dominates there, right?"

"American fans, Tony." She points to the regulars at the bar. "I watch the NFL with them and read *Sports Illustrated*. That's key for my success. Same as you, tracking your public's taste in music. What do they want tonight: mambo, salsa, merengue ...?"

"We'll start off easy: old faves from BV Social Club, so I can read the room and build on their reactions."

"On mine, too." She winks.

From the shadows behind a potted tree fern, Bruno steps forward, his dark, three-piece suit accented by a gold-yellow pocket square. Shiny cufflinks and slicked-back hair complete the mobster look. He's seen enough to identify Tony, a punk musician, as an invasive species in his territory.

"Valeria, Table 6 needs more water. Is this guy distracting you?" Bruno interjects.

For once, she finds the nerve to counter, "Nope, we're just discussing music for tonight."

Tony backs her up. "Yeah, like reviewing the game plan before kickoff."

Bruno puffs out his chest and challenges his rival. "Shut your trap, or I'll punt you through your vibraphone!" Nearby, four customers, sensing chaos, break for the exit. Bruno relishes the moment, landing a fist on Tony's jaw. Valeria glares at Bruno as Tony falters, one knee on the floor.

She elbows her way between the men, grabs the bully's pocket square, tosses it in the air, and shouts, "Personal foul, unnecessary roughness! Fifteen yards! First down, New York!" Some partisans applaud.

Bruno backs off, wide-eyed. Tony shakes his head and rubs his chin, telling Valeria, "Good call, ref, but they need me on stage. See you after midnight?"

Then, to Bruno, Tony sneers, "Penalty declined."

Just Down the Street

By Jeffrey Kingman
Napa Valley Branch

I've passed this church many times
but never entered. Today, my nanny
brings me. I'm offered a snack
from a golden bowl but only allowed

one piece, a crisp like a white
silver dollar, only thinner.
The hollow room smells like
cracked wood and oil soap.

I notice the man's sleeves
hanging down as he feeds it to me.
Why can't I choose my own piece?
My hands are clean.

I've heard that a watermelon
will grow in your stomach
if you swallow the seed.
And the cracker? Will it change me?

There's a line of girls in white nightgowns,
waiting their turn, looking glum.
Why didn't they get dressed?
Will he let them go home?

People don't turn to each other,
all their heads are straight.
I don't want to spend my life in a church
without my mom and dad.
I'd get so lonesome.

Beyond a Table in the Shade

By Lawrence Sherman Cohn
SF Peninsula Branch

From a distance outside the paling fence,
The Golden hour warms the lake
And you wish yourself seated at the weathered
Table with its slight cleft resting by the shore.
The Forest beyond begins with a bright glade
And I am compelled to watch and sit
By the table in the shade.

How do you frame paradise in a lens
When everything afar lies across the yellow lake?
Even the table you could almost touch from yards away
Is framed up close in your camera's sight.
Unable to reach out and hold creation
With that distinct and vague otherness
That heightens a sense of individuation.

What a glowing color of sacred we perceive
Reflecting a solemn surface like something resolute.
Its magic confounds the natural science
As a butterfly that tempts the hawk
Darts across the unapproachable scene.
Then the blue hour cools the lake
And life beyond the table is unforeseen.



If I Could Be Your Instrument

By Nanci Lee Woody, Sacramento Branch

If I could be your instrument
enraptured you would cling to me.
Such sweet, sweet music we would make,
always in perfect harmony.

Your fingers fondly on my keys
we'd be as one, together grow.
Our passion would be plain to see.
Play me! Play me! Your piano.

I'd love to be your clarinet --
the sounds we'd make -- oh, so sublime..
Poets would swoon and grab their pens
and put our gorgeous notes to rhyme.

If I could nestle in your arms,
your mind and heart I'd surely win

as back and forth you slide the bow
on me, your cherished violin.

Or, I could be your bass trombone,
hands polishing my lovely bell.
Sensuous lips on me each night,
you'd ever be under my spell.

Yet, maybe fame we two could share —
our names in lights — famous rock stars!
And nightly you would pluck my strings
and hold me close as your guitar.

Percussion, brass, woodwind or strings —
it matters not at all to me.
It's your devotion that I crave,
your heart I want my own to be.



Novel

Tim Schooley's novel, Circus of the Vanishing Elephant, draws on his experiences in his first job out of high school as a clown with the Ringling Bros., and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Here's an excerpt.

Circus of the Vanishing Elephant

By Tim Schooley, Sacramento Branch

Any circus would trade its fat lady for an elephant. Once it got its mitts on a pachyderm, it would march the gray giant down Main Street to raise a rumpus and draw a crowd. And sell a boatload of tickets. Most run-of-the-mill circuses could drag an elephant into center ring with a sequined showgirl perched on top. But only the King Minos Circus hustled an elephant into center ring—surrounded by thousands of paying guests—dimmed the house lights, brought up the spotlights, and made the elephant disappear.

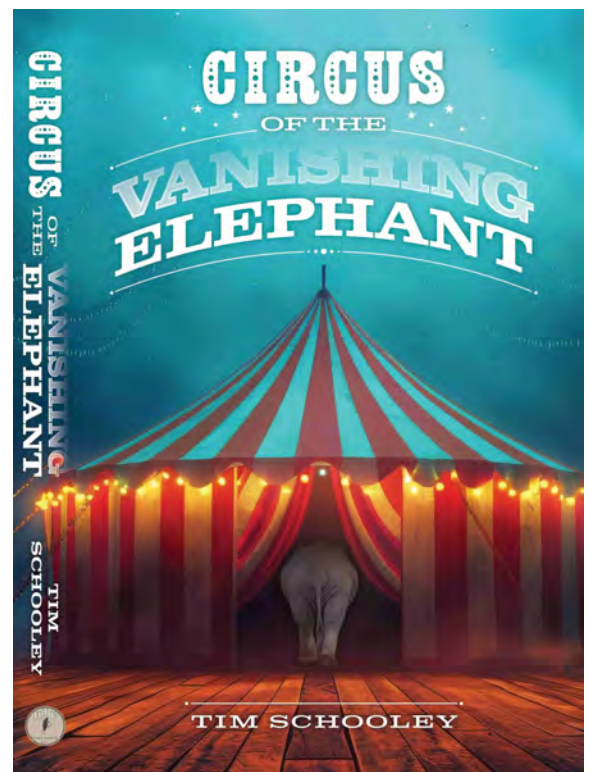
Minos glanced at his watch. Showtime. No point in waiting any longer for phantom patrons to appear. He raised one arm and twirled his hand in a circle. The house lights dimmed as a spotlight found the ringmaster, a tiny man in a top hat. Minos tuned out the ringmaster's bellowed greeting to "ladies and gentlemen, children of all ages," his promises of miracles made like an evangelist in a tent meeting. Something felt off to Minos, but he couldn't put his finger on it ...

Just before intermission, the elephant handler called North pulled up short of the performers' entrance with an Asian elephant at his side. Henrietta was half the size of the other elephants in the circus herd, her skin a light gray. North, sandy-haired and dressed in blue coveralls, nodded his head to Minos as he tried to push past him. But Henrietta had other ideas. She stopped to swing her trunk toward Minos for the elephant equivalent of a handshake ...

Minos chomped on the stub of his cigar as North and Henrietta reached the center ring. A box painted in swirls of blue and gold waited for them, resting on a low wagon. Spotlights lit up Henrietta as she turned in a circle. Minos waited for her to raise her trunk and trumpet. Henrietta knew her job: she performed the act twice a day, three times on Saturday. But this time she froze. The pang in Minos's stomach returned.

North moved toward Henrietta but she turned away from him. She stretched her trunk toward the audience, sniffing, directing her trunk toward a section of seats in front of her, ten rows up, pointing with her trunk as if making an accusation ... Henrietta smelled something in the tenth row, something that transfixed her, and she seemed to shudder.

The circus band continued to play "Baby Elephant Walk" in a loop. The bandleader stared at North as if confused by the delay. North pulled a banana from a pocket of his coveralls and offered it to Henrietta, who swallowed it whole. Seeming to remember her task, she raised her trunk above her head. As the circus band paused, Henrietta trumpeted. On cue, the four sides of the painted box dropped. One side lowered to the arena floor to form a ramp. Henrietta trotted into the box as its sides rose to enclose her. In a flash, smoke pots went off around the wagon, floor lights came up, and the four sides of the box dropped again. Henrietta was gone, vanished.



Memoir

*Natalie Gould's memoir, **Enough Feathers to Fly**, talks about her life on a small farm in Sonoma County and how the land and wildlife helped her rebuild her health and "way of being." Here's an excerpt.*

Enough Feathers to Fly: Stories of a Farm and a Life Made Whole

By Natalie Gould
Redwood Branch

I believe Grandma Gould would be horrified at the undignified habit I've acquired. I bring a bucket to family meals. I pass it around the table to collect scraps to feed my hens.

"Remember the chicken bucket!" I shout at attempts to scrape plates into the garbage can.

Chickens, omnivores with enthusiastic appetites, will happily eat about anything. I once observed Lucille squawk, scurry, and dive at an unsuspecting lizard. She tossed it about until she managed it down her throat. Chickens will steal any unattended lunch item. They'd eat chicken if you gave them chicken. This is where I draw the line.

My first year at my parish Lenten fish fry, it became apparent that no one finished their baked potato. I asked those around me if they would let me take their scraps home. One couple, in their nineties, originally from North Dakota, squealed with delight at my chicken-feeding project.

I told them my Czech family once lived in North Dakota and the wife replied, "Oh, my brother married a bohunk girl from Pisek." I found this amusing. The term had been an insulting way to refer to people from Eastern Europe, but my grandfather had once called me a "bohunk" with a twinkle of love in his eye.

We piled their potato halves onto my plate. Others at the table followed until I had an unwieldy mound.

The next year I brought a better procurement device: a large Tupperware. I collected bits from any willing chicken-bucket participant.

With some space left in the plastic tub, I gazed at the rows of tables next to me. They were filled with an assortment of half-eaten delicacies for my girls. I managed to maintain some level of decorum and stuck to the offerings from my table companions.

Last night, my third year at the fish fry, I discovered the organizers had added compost bins for the food scraps. The potatoes I did not save found a home. Still, following my request to my eating companions, potatoes, bits of fish, and coleslaw tumbled into my trusty bucket in one messy slop.

My joy today is spreading out this unappealing array of food scraps onto a cookie sheet. I put on my farm boots and raincoat and deliver the tray, like a waiter carrying a gourmet meal, to bored hens stuck inside the coop on another rainy day.

One person's waste is a hen's feast.



Short Story

Deer Story (excerpt)

By Ericka Lutz
Mendocino Coast Branch

By October, after the sweet wild apples are gone and before the rains bring mushrooms, there's little left to eat in the high hills, only yellow grasses (wheatgrass and rye tips still chewy) and twigs of woody shrubs. The deer filter down through the neighborhoods; in the front yards of the slopes, the browse is better. They saunter-clop, singles and families, down the center of Raven Street, asphalt hard under their hooves. Some yards are safe, neglected and overgrown, they provide shaded places for the littlest autumn fawns, still spotted and wide-eyed, to nestle alone during the day, cuddled around themselves while mama forages. Some yards are scary, and they clop on by, avoiding dogs or loud music. Until shooed off, the deer linger in the tasty, watered gardens ruminating on honeysuckle, roses, daylilies; they ignore the bitter rosemary, monkeyflower, salvia.

Deer are prey, eyes on the sides of their heads, like rabbits, like horses, driven by fear. When the ground of San Andreas rumbles and moves, they freeze, stand still, ride the rocking rock. When approached and shooed by humans or threatened by dogs, wildfire, mountain lions, they flee. Sometimes they fight. But even fawns don't fawn.

Marina watches the young deer through the kitchen window. The young buck scratches his neck with a hind hoof. He's alone and thin, his fur brown gray, a dusting of white on his face. His underbelly is white, too, between his meager haunches. His black tail wags, his tongue slurps his black nose. He scratches again for fleas.

Marina is seven, and her sister Saraby is eleven. They, and their parents Maxwell and Paula, live in a partially-renovated carriage house halfway up the canyon. The deer eat anything tender in their garden so they live with bare land and grasses and a few trees near the back, a sandbox visited only by the neighborhood cats, a rusting wheelbarrow where Paula and Marina once planted marigolds. Inside the house, books and handmade wooden dolls and organic cookbooks clash with computer screens and old stereo equipment. The girls share a room, but Saraby is older so she has a private walk-in closet with an ironic shag rug, a desk with a lava lamp, a small window, poster paint artwork on the walls, and a hat rack draped with dress-up clothes.

Marina and Saraby are asleep on Friday night when Maxwell injures himself, an accidental cut to the base of his left thumb with an X-Acto knife. He grabs the skin together with a washcloth, feeling himself go white. He walks into the living room where Paula reads on the couch. "I'll be back in a few minutes," he says, holding his injury behind his back, and steps outside. He almost falls, bites his teeth against nausea. Unsafe to drive. He waits only a few minutes at the bus stop three doors down. The TRAN bus descends the canyon road. Maxwell presses his wound against his chest to hold the washcloth on as he digs for his wallet, leaving a stain on his t-shirt the shape and size of his heart.



Short Story

Ten Years After the War (excerpt)

By Barry Garelick
Coastal Dunes Branch

It was in the late fall that Nora took the train from Chicago. She sat most of the time in the observation car, looking out the window at a never-ending landscape of cornfields and farmlands. When the train stopped in Iowa City, she saw a tall man boarding the train and thought, “Well there’s a tall glass of lemonade.” Later she saw him in the observation car and waved to him.

“Do I know you?” he asked.

“I saw you get on the train in Iowa City. I’m from that area. So maybe we know the same people. Or each other, for that matter.”

“You lived in Iowa City?”

“No. Cou Falls. My parents had a farm.”

“Don’t know anyone from there,” he said. “My name is John by the way.”

“Nora,” she said.

In fact, there were very few people that they both knew from Iowa City, but then again, Iowa City was fairly large. “Did you ever go into the hardware store? The one across from the locksmiths?”

“The one by Johnny’s Lock and Gun?”

“Johnny’s Lock and Key I think it’s called now,” she said.

“Lock and Key. Yes. I think I know the hardware store you’re talking about. I worked in an accounting office near there.”

“Did you know a man who worked in the hardware store who was kind of short with neatly combed hair and always wore a jacket and tie?”

He looked thoughtful. “Well, that could be a lot of people. I don’t remember anyone who worked in the hardware store. What about him?”

“You look like him.”

“Do I act like him?”

“I don’t know. We never got around to talking.” She laughed at what she just said, and he joined her. She added, “The only conversations I had with him were imaginary.” Now he was silent; that worried her.

“I’m not crazy in case you were wondering,” she said.

“I wasn’t. I’ve had my share of imaginary conversations.”

“Where you laugh out loud?”

“Sometimes. And sometimes I get angry. I hit the wall with my fist once.”

She wanted to ask what made him so angry but decided that if he wanted to talk about it, he would. When the conversation started up again, it turned to the war. He and his brother had enlisted in the Navy together. His brother died.

“I’m very sorry,” she said.

“I sometimes have conversations with him. And others I know who died.”

“What about?”

“Various things.” He looked out the window at the harvested farmland now golden in the setting sun. “Mostly, I tell them I’m sorry.”

Now she wanted to ask what he was sorry about but there was no need to say anything more. The war was a marker. Before the war and after; two different times. She was convinced it would merge into one with time; a dot on a line and everyone would move on.

Member Publications

Sue Andrews (Inland Empire Branch) [*A Killing in the Keys: A Novel*](#) (Outskirts Press 2026). A stand-alone sequel to her debut novel, *Jacksonville Judas*. The book's protagonist, Wade Nevlin, finds himself embroiled in another murder mystery in his new retirement city of Key West.

John G. Bluck (Fremont Area Branch) [*To Die in Livermore*](#) (Rough Edges Press, 2026). When a nuclear physicist connected to the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory is found dead after a late-night robbery, Kentucky Deputy Sheriff Luke Ryder is called west to assist an FBI task force investigating what appears to be far more than a simple homicide.

Dot Brovarney (Mendocino Coast Branch) [*Mendocino Refuge: Lake Leonard & Reeves Canyon*](#) was recently honored with three first-place book awards. The International Firebird Book Awards chose it as the top book in the category of Western non-fiction. It also earned first place awards in two design categories, one for its cover and the other for its interior. Kirkus: "A captivating homage to a wilderness sanctuary marked, but not spoiled, by human presence."

David Ira Cleary (Berkeley Branch), [*"The Case of the Lost Busker," Asimov's Science Fiction*](#) (Must Read Magazines, September/October 2026 issue) In a noir alternate Oakland, Marius the private eye cat helps a nervous calico find her missing human.

Marlene Cullen (Redwood Writers Branch) [*Connections: Inspiration to Write*](#) (M. Cullen Enterprises, an imprint of Wordrunner Press, 2026). *Writer's Digest*: "A wonderful collection of essays that touches the spirit with joy. This is a well-organized and fascinating book. The images of the authors' younger selves along with letters to their younger selves add another layer to the book, and much interest."

Deanna, aka D.K. Zier (Marin Branch) [*The Urban Legend of the Gold Key*](#) (She Writes Press, March 2027). A paranormal coming-of-age mystery that reveals how curiosity can be a superpower and demonstrates that no matter what demons we face, finding happiness is always possible.

Elizabeth Denison (Redwood Writers Branch) [*Shawnan Spirit Speaks: Love is the Forever Adventure*](#) (Merry Dissonance Press, September 2026) This memoir begins with a tragedy, the death of a young man, which catapults his mother on an extraordinary journey with the spirit of her departed son as her guide. *BlueInk Review*: "This is a tender, thought-provoking guide for learning to forgive, love oneself, and live with purpose."

Linda Drattell (Redwood Writers Branch) [*The Peccadilloes of Filamena Phipps*](#) (Stairwell Books, October 2026). A literary satire about suburban small-mindedness and obsessiveness. An immigrant woman from an unnamed country is snubbed by both her abusive American husband and the community she lands in. She struggles to find her way and in that struggle builds a community around her.

Member Publications

Barry Garelick (Coastal Dunes Branch) "[Winter Light](#)" (*Cafe Lit*, January 6, 2026). A beat writer in San Francisco in the 1980's avoids seeing his ex-wife, who is in town visiting.

["Reacquaintance"](#) (*Freedom Fiction Journal*, April 20, 2026). A therapist's blindness deepens her emotional insight into others.

Karen Gorbach, Ph.D. (San Fernando Valley Branch) [Mazel's Mishpacha](#) (Red Penguin Books, 2025). The picture book tells the story of a lost schnoodle seeking a home and finding a family. A 2026 winner of the National Indie Excellence Awards and the International Impact Book Awards, it has also received five stars from Readers' Favorite Books.

Natalie Gould (Redwood Writers Branch) [Enough Feathers to Fly: Stories of a Farm and a Life Made Whole](#) (Sparrow & Crow Press, 2026). Told in journals entries, letters, and stories, this debut novel creates a mosaic picture of how to love an unpredictable world and come home to yourself.

Roberto de Haro (Marin Branch) [Mariner of Destiny](#) (Gatekeeper Press, 2026). *Hollywood Book Review*: "Readers who enjoy historical fiction novels, especially those that feature WWI and WWII history, romance, and international intrigue and suspense, will absolutely love this story."

Jill Hedgecock (Mount Diablo Branch) [Silence in the Orchard](#) (August, 2026). Jill's seventh novel is a K-9th grade mystery focused on the plight of honeybees. It's for readers who enjoy female amateur sleuths, suspenseful eco-thrillers, and adorable dog sidekicks.



Member Publications

Mohit Juneja (SF Peninsula Branch) [*Satish's Kitchen*](#) (Regent Press with Meridian Press Works, 2026). This cookbook/memoir is filled with old, homemade Punjabi and Indian food recipes from Juneja's mother. Dedicated to her memory, *Satish's Kitchen* contains photos of her and her wonderful, cooked recipes.

Paul Karrer & Harry Briggs (Central Coast Branch) [*101 Dinosaur Do's & Don'ts*](#) (Park Place Publication). This 101-page manual on the care and proper treatment of your dinosaur is clever, funny and cute. For 5 to 50-year-olds.

Ericka Lutz (Mendocino Coast Branch) [*San Andreas: Short Fiction on Shaky Ground*](#) (Landslide Books, October 2026). Unseen fault lines—between lovers, families, humans and animals—shift and rupture beneath ordinary lives in a fictional Northern California town.

Sunil Mehta (South Bay Writers) [*The Compass: A Novel*](#) (Azimuth Books, August, 2026). David Laws, semiconductor curator of the Computer History Museum: “A fascinating book. Sunil Mehta does an outstanding job of bringing to life the pioneers who transformed our world over the last century. Novelizing their lives is an interesting way to introduce these remarkable innovators to readers who might otherwise never take the time to get to know them.”

Korie Pelka (SF Peninsula Branch) [*Get Unstuck. Get Clear. Get Going. A Guide to Discovering and Planning the Next Stage of Your Career Journey*](#) (ECW Press, September, 2026). Business career planning. For anyone seeking to reclaim agency over their corporate and personal life, this book is both an invitation to get unstuck and a roadmap to get clear and get going on a plan to make change in your life. Based on the author's personal story of career transitions and the actionable exercises she uses in her coaching practice.

Evan Pellervo (Central Coast Writers), [*Short Happy Stories, Volume 2*](#) (Manaatti Books, 2026). An unpredictable collection of fifty compact stories. Inspirations include Tolstoy and Salinger.

Barbara Pronin (Orange County Branch) [*A Moon at the End of the World*](#) (Black Rose Writing, 2026). World War II historical adventure/romance based on the birth of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAACs) in May 1942. “Masterfully written and full of heart” - Cynthia McGroarty, author of *Clara in a Time of War*.

Esmail Rahimian (South Bay Branch) [*No-Mind: The Path Beyond Thought*](#) (May 2026). An exploration of Mushin, the state of No-Mind, through Zen, martial arts, neuroscience, and everyday life. The book offers a practical path toward greater presence, clarity, and freedom from unnecessary mental interference.

[*I Was There Before: Stories Without Names*](#) (May 2026). A literary novel told through interconnected voices that explores war, displacement, memory, and resilience. Without naming a specific country or conflict, it invites readers to witness the universal human cost of violence while affirming the enduring power of compassion and hope.

Member Publications

Monique Rardin Richardson (Tri-Valley Branch), [*The Evolution of My Smile*](#) (Kelsay Books, August 2026). A full-length poetry collection exploring the linear journey of shadow and light, proving that healing isn't a sequence to finish, but a circle to embrace.

Valerie Saul (Marin Branch), [*The Badass Widows, a Mystery*](#) (Sibylline Press, 2026). A clandestine sisterhood of widows. Their targets are predators who've slipped through the cracks. Their methods are bold, and the rush of secret justice becomes dangerously addictive.

Tim Schooley (Sacramento Branch), [*Circus of the Vanishing Elephant*](#) (History Through Fiction Publishing, September, 2026). City Book Review: "Tim Schooley draws on his own experience as a Ringling Bros. clown to craft a vivid, propulsive novel about loyalty, spectacle, and the cost of holding on too tight. Historical fiction with real sawdust under its nails."

Mark Shaw (South Bay Branch) [*Girl Around the World*](#) (CrossLink Publishers, September 2026). In her own words, the inspiring story of young journalist Dorothy Kilgallen's courageous 1936 adventure and her compelling account of why close friend Amelia Earhart was mysteriously lost at sea in 1937.

Kary Joseph Shender (Sacramento Branch), [*Angélica's Way*](#) (Amazon, July 2026). A tween novel that spans three tussle-torn years in the life of a young girl who is determined to become a bilingual librarian despite her family's counter plans. Find out what happens when Angélica resists her mother's favorite proverb: "In the closed mouth, no flies enter." She instead opens her mouth to loudly proclaim her truth.



Member Publications

Joyce Sherry (Central Coast Branch) "[Moose and Other Miracles](#)" (*Sally Port Magazine*, October 2026). A middle grades fantasy short story set in Pacific Grove, CA. Two young ghosts find meaning in helping stray dogs return home.

Lisa Towles (Peninsula Branch) [The Weight of Cold Things](#) (Indies United Publishing, August 2026). *Yellowstone* meets *The X-Files* in this psychological thriller – where neo-Western grit meets a decades-long government conspiracy buried beneath the Arctic ice. *Literary Titan*: “Reading this book felt like watching a slow-motion avalanche: quiet, heavy, and utterly unyielding.” Winner of the Readers' Choice Book Awards Silver Medal in the Adult Fiction category.

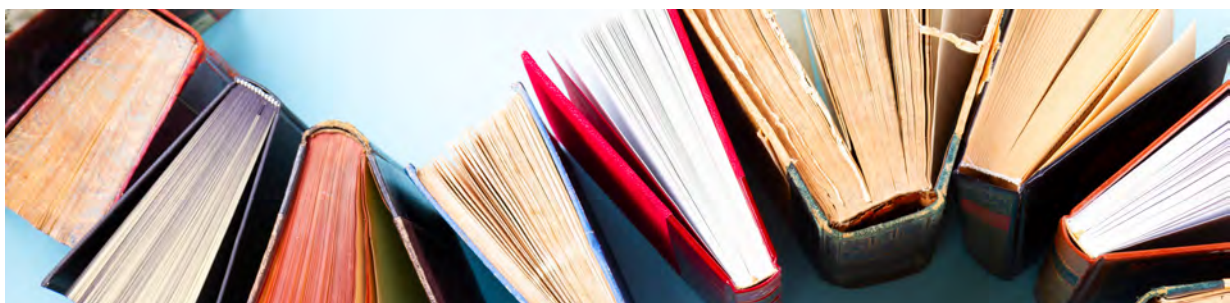
Karin C. Uphoff (Mendocino Coast Branch) [Wild Heart](#) (Finishing Line Press, 2026). Poetry chapbook. The poems on these pages invite you into the natural landscape and its many portals for discovering how we can access our shared humanity and connection with all life.

Carole Wagener (Coastal Dunes Branch) [Wildflower Awakening](#). In 1968 Wisconsin, a college girl is torn between love and loyalty as she navigates the loneliness of her husband serving in Vietnam and a local draft dodger who challenges her passion and ideals within the chaos of a turbulent era. The screenplay was a quarter-finalist in the Santa Barbara International Screenplay Awards in July and was also selected to be in round two of the 11th Canada Independent Film Festival. In June, it was an award-winner in the Hollywood International Indie and Screenplay Awards.

Billy Warren (South Bay Branch) [Beyond Good and Evil and Murder](#) (IngramSpark, October 2026). Murder mystery set in a 1970 South Brooklyn neighborhood that also confronts conventional notions of good and evil. *Midwest Book Review*: “Original, deftly crafted, and a riveting read from start to finish ... ideal for the suspense thriller murder mystery genre.”

N. E. White (Redwood Writers Branch) [The Rescue of Damndrake](#) (self-published, May 2026). Epic fantasy focusing on adventure, found family, political intrigue, and dragons. Amazon reviewer Douglas Sawyer: "Wow! Book one was fantastic and this one built on that one. Continues to delve into class and race, greed and corruption.”

Nanci Lee Woody (Sacramento Branch) [There's a Reason Flowers Are Not Gray](#) (March 2026). In this collection of poems, "the ordinary becomes luminous and the private becomes universal," says Geri Spieler, past president, CWC Peninsula Branch. “With lyrical precision and emotional clarity, Nanci Woody captures what it means to remember, to forgive, and to keep loving across the decades. This collection is a moving meditation on the ties that shape us and the ways they continue to live within us long after voices are stilled.”



CWC Leadership & Policies

CWC Leadership

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CWC Policies and Procedures

The California Writers Club reserves the right to edit submissions for length and content.

It is CWC policy that the *Bulletin* will not print gratuitous vulgarity, obscenity, explicit sexual content or political or religious rants or proselytizing.

The CWC encourages individual branches to honor and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion through any means by which they interact with their members and communities, including but not limited to programming, publications, board representation, and outreach.

More CWC Policies and Procedures may be found online [here](#).

Board News

At a board meeting on July 26, 2026, the CWC board of directors voted to approve a change in the current membership year from July 1 until June 30 of following year to a member-based anniversary renewal. From now on, a member will renew on the anniversary of the date they joined or last renewed. The new Member Directory that replaces MRMS is able to handle an anniversary renewal easier than the multiple time categories for renewal, late renewal/rejoining at full rate, and the half-year rate.

The board also voted to approve adding the immediate past president as a non-voting member of the Executive Committee (EC). The immediate past president is the knowledge holder of all CWC business in the past year(s), and is in the best position to provide guidance to the current EC. Communication is a key factor in transitioning from one EC to the next. With the EC comprised of CWC members spread over various geographic areas, some pertinent information takes longer to impart to the new EC.

Due to the complexity of handling membership fees within Stripe, determining how to handle any ad hoc memberships, and the longer-than-expected testing phase of the new Member Directory and CWC website, their roll-out is postponed until fall of 2026. This will allow the designers to address any issues the testing team finds before we launch to the whole membership. Also, this gives CWC time to set up training for specific board positions (presidents, treasurers, system administrators, and membership chairs). Thank you for your patience; it will be worth it.