



WRITERSTALK

Volume 31
Number 01
January 2023

Monthly Newsletter of the South Bay Writers Club™

Powerful Plot Workshop

Jordan Rosenfeld

Saturday, January 28, 2023

9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Plot is a journey of transformation

Plot is a journey of transformation for your characters as well as the method in which you write a page-turning tale. Structuring your story into a best seller requires knowing and understanding the essential elements of a powerful plot. This workshop demystifies the components such as action, emotion, and theme, as well as scenes, backstory and front story, increasing the stakes, building the tension, creating causality and believability, assessing your pacing, exploring a variety of plot structures, and more!

Jordan E. Rosenfeld is the author of three novels and two books for writers, *Make a Scene: How to Craft a Powerful Story One Scene at a Time* and *Write Free: Attracting the Creative Life*. She is a contributing editor to *Writer's Digest* magazine, a book reviewer for KQED Radio, and has been published in *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The St. Petersburg Times*, *Marin Magazine*, and more. She's a popular instructor at writing conferences across the country.

Register on our website!

COST:

Member: \$85, and Nonmember: \$95

Early Bird Registration: January 15.

Member: \$75, Nonmember: \$85

Sign up early and save!

Go to southbaywriters.com to register.

Use PayPal or mail a check made out to South Bay Writers to
South Bay Writers, PO Box 3254, Santa Clara, CA 95055

WHERE:

Headen-Inman Historical House Museum
1509 Warburton Ave, Santa Clara
(Located behind the Triton Museum)

No regular general meeting in January.

Next regular meeting Monday, February 13, 2023.



Jordan Rosenfeld Teacher, Coach, Writer

by Marjorie Johnson

As a teacher and coach, Jordan Rosenfeld has spent more than 20 years working closely with writers to strengthen, grow, and refine their skills in fiction and memoir writing. She has taught writing at numerous writing conferences, including the prestigious *Writer's Digest* Annual Writing Conference, the Mendocino Coast Writers' Conference, and conferences of most chapters of the California Writers Club. She has published six books on the craft of writing, including *How to Write a Page Turner*, *Make a Scene*, and *Writing the Intimate Character*.

She is also the author of three novels, most recently *Women in Red* and *Forged in Grace*, and her work can be found in national publications such as *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, *Scientific American*, *The Washington Post* and many others.

Read more about Jordan on <https://jordanrosenfeld.net/>

Between the Lines

Edie Matthews
President, South Bay Writers



Onward and Upward

As much as we look forward to the holiday season, by the time January 1st is behind us, we're often relieved. Now you can take down the tree, pack up the ornaments, remove the

Christmas lights, and return to your routines.

This relief especially applies to writers. The goals and projects that have been set aside, can now be resurrected and pursued. It's time to fish out our novels, chapters, stories, and figure out where we left off.

I suggest rereading the previous chapters to get you grounded. While we have been distracted with the holiday hoopla, your subconscious mind is likely to have conjured up ideas that will enhance your work.

Consequently, this is why South Bay Writers has scheduled the Powerful Plot Workshop for January 28th. The object of the workshop is to inspire your work, provide information that you haven't considered, and remind you of essential details that will strengthen your writing.

The workshop will be taught by Jordan Rosenfeld. She has spoken to our membership in the past, but never on Powerful Plots. She is a popular speaker at conferences and a published author. She has written books of fiction, including *Woman in Red* and *Forged in Grace*, as well as books on craft, including *Writing the Intimate Character* and *How to Write a Page Turner*.

SBW has always tried to keep the costs of our events within reason. The registration fee includes the workshop, a continental breakfast, and lunch. Since we're not meeting in a restaurant, there will be a menu passed around for attendees to choose from. We'll have Door Dash deliver the meals.

The new location will be an adventure. The Headen-Inman Historical House Museum provides a cozy setting. Our workshop will take place in the front room, adjacent to the dining room and spacious entry. The house also has a working kitchen, convenient for the continental breakfast provided that morning.

Even though the address for Headen-Inman is 1509 Warburton St., the house is closer to Lincoln St. There is a spacious parking lot that can be reached on Warburton Street. After parking, stroll across the grounds past the Jamison-Brown House.

It's serendipitous that SBW of California Writers Club, which traces its history to Jack London, is meeting in Santa Clara. London was a frequent visitor to Judge Bond's estate, now the site of the Carmelite Monastery. So impressed was London with the location that he used the setting for the beginning of his book, *The Call of the Wild* (1903). The estate originally included a prune orchard, vineyard, winery, stables, and artesian well.

During the Klondike Gold Rush (1896), London became friends with the judge's sons. His experience in Alaska and his visits to Santa Clara greatly influenced his first bestselling book. Although Judge Bond's house was demolished, the distinctive pillars and extensive balustrade on the Jamison-Brown House were originally part of the Bond home.

Good chance that Jack London sat on the balustrade while chatting with his friends during his visits to Santa Clara. Stroll over and check it out. You may feel Jack London's vibe and return home with inspiration. — WT

California Writers Club
South Bay Branch
www.southbaywriters.com

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SBW Mission

Educating writers of all levels of expertise in the craft of writing and in the marketing of their work.

Join Us

We have a membership category that fits you. Dues are \$45 per year plus a one-time \$20 initiation fee. Note: California Writers Club uses a fiscal year that runs from July 1 through June 30 each year. Dual membership: \$25. Contact Membership Chair, Inga Silva, or sign up online at southbaywriters.com Or, send a check to CWC-South Bay Writers, P O Box 3254, Santa Clara, CA 95055

WritersTalk

is the monthly newsletter of the South Bay Branch of the California Writers Club.

Managing Editor (Interim) Marjorie Johnson
newsletter@southbaywriters.com

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Brigitte Doss-Johnson
Carolyn Donnell
Marjorie Johnson
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Marty Sorensen

Submissions

Members of the South Bay Writers Club are encouraged to submit their creative works for publication in *WritersTalk*. Please prepare your work as carefully as you would for an agent. All submissions will be copyedited. The Managing Editor decides which submissions to publish.

Submission deadline is the 15th of the month.

Electronic submissions should be attached MS Word files sent to newsletter@southbaywriters.com. Use Times New Roman 12-font, no tabs, no colors, no page breaks. Send graphics separately as jpg files.

Creative Works

Short Fiction (1000 words)
Memoir (1000 words)
Poetry (300 words)
Essay (1000 words)

Creative Works

newsletter@southbaywriters.com

Member Achievement and News:

membernews@southbaywriters.com

An announcement is information of interest and value to writers that does not provide direct economic benefit to its originator and is published free of charge.

Advertising of workshops, conferences, and events is accepted from other Branches of California Writers Club. Because California Writers Club is a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation, *WritersTalk* does not accept advertising of events or services that benefit an individual. Also, we cannot accept political advertising of any kind.

Authors retain all rights to their work. *WritersTalk* gratefully acknowledges the authors' permission to publish their submissions here. Contact individual authors for permission to reprint their work.

Our Mission

Encouraging writers at all levels of expertise to hone their skills in the craft of writing

Change of Address: Send changes of address to membership@southbaywriters.com or use MRMS.

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Words from the Editor

by Marjorie Bicknell Johnson
Managing Editor (Interim)



Plot Potholes and Pitfalls 2.0

Many members of South Bay Writers list novels or short stories as their main writing interest. This column is devoted to identifying problems you may have with your plot or story line.

You have finished the great American novel, the most memorable memoir, or the winning short story, but something's wrong: it just doesn't pop. Maybe you have dropped into a plot pitfall. Here are six traps for you to avoid.

- **It's predictable.** If your readers know what's going to happen, maybe you have some overused plot points. Are you telling your own story or retelling someone else's?
- **It's all action.** If your protagonist has no time to think and reflect, you're writing an account of a marathon race, not an interesting story. Great books have pace and rhythm.
- **It's too shallow.** Do your words evoke emotion, or do you create beautiful prose and perfectly formed sentences? Readers would rather read a fantastic story written in plain prose.
- **It's illogical.** Do your events follow a logical time sequence? Make sure the timeline has an inner logic that flows through the whole book. Make an outline, one sentence for each chapter; are the events in the right order? Does your character put on his shoes before his socks? Do you hop from 1999 to 2003 and then back to 1997? Are your transitions smooth?
- **It's too farfetched.** Do you stretch your readers' suspension of disbelief too far? In science fiction, you can go a long way without readers calling you out on the details, but you will hear about it if you get the science wrong. However, you can be too farfetched without writing sci-fi. Would attorneys really act like that in court? Could a cop really take the law into his own hands without consequences? Sure, it's fiction, but above all, it has to be believable.
- **It's too complicated.** Do you have too many characters or too many subplots? Can you describe your storyline in one or two sentences?

Read more on writersdigest.com. If you can suggest how to climb out of such traps, please share your wisdom with us in an article for *WritersTalk*. —WT

Revised and reprinted from May 2017 *WritersTalk* to coordinate with January 28 workshop: Jordan Rosenfeld, "Powerful Plots."

New WritersTalk Editor, Brigitte Doss-Johnson, will begin with the February 2023 issue. All submissions after December 15 will go to Brigitte.

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NOVEMBER SPEAKER RECAP

Hallie Ephron: Crash Course on Writing a Mystery

Bill Baldwin

On November 14, South Bay Writers was honored to hear Hallie Ephron's insights on mystery writing.



Mystery is similar to other fiction. The rules of good writing, plotting, and characterization apply – with a few additional provisos.

There are many types of mysteries (the Cozy, the Police Procedural, the PI, Suspense), each with its own expectations. You can have a series or standalone works.

Mystery conventions include a puzzle (and why you should care), a sleuth

(with a reason to investigate), surprising (but credible) plot twists, a ticking clock as the stakes rise, a climactic scene, an explanation and – unless you want to make it *very* dark – the triumph of justice.

Mysteries involve a *crime*: someone gets hurt. The backbone of the story is the search for the culprit.

A mystery also involves *secrets* – both the main characters' and others'. Choose a story and secrets that interest you – then you can enjoy your research as well as the writing.

A mystery needs *suspects* – and it should not be obvious who the culprit is. More suspects increase the interest.

What's at stake? The more complications, the more pressure to solve the crime. And if the crime is *not* solved? How will the reader feel if the resolution is *not* what was expected (if the presumed hero turns out to be the villain, for example)?

Plot and structure owe much to standard fiction, but a mystery involves both solving the mystery and the personal journey of your sleuth.

A three-act structure is advised, with a second act twice as long as the others. The end of the second act represents the low point of plot, the "Dark Night of the Soul." The climax should arrive about 10% before the ending, allowing a brief time (ten or fifteen pages) for the wrap-up.

As for your main character (your "sleuth"), you must care about them from beginning (and before!) to the end (and after!). Give your readers a compelling reason to care. Begin with an opening incident, increase the action and tension, throw in complications, bring the sleuth to the point of despair – the "Dark Night" – then sweep into the climax, the final revelations, the resolution, and the mop-up. Classic plot-structure.

Classic challenges for the writer: Where to begin the story? How to avoid "back story dump?" Pacing (you might visualize your story as a TV show: at what point would you expect the commercials?)

Don't make your sleuth perfect – make them *flawed*. Provide a supporting cast of sidekicks, adversaries, mentors, and love-interests.

Make the villain worthy of your sleuth and make the crime fit the villain. We need to understand the villain – and what it would mean if the villain succeeded.

Outline your novel *after* you have completed it. Where do you have action, where are you rising to the action, where are you recovering/evaluating? Do a timeline of your scenes. Aim for around fifty scenes total, with ever-increasing action.

Edit, crank up the tension, repeat. Eliminate unnecessary characters. Avoid zigzagging in time.

Can you pull off the Perfect Crime (novel)? You can try! – WT

South Bay Writers

Marjorie Johnson

Announcements:

In-person SBW meetings held in 2023 will be at the Headen-Inman Historical House Museum pictured below.

Headen-Inman House



1509 Warburton Avenue, Santa Clara
(Located behind the Triton Museum)

Further announcements:

At the December SBW Board meeting, President Edie Matthews introduced incoming *WritersTalk* Managing Editor Brigitte Doss-Johnson.

The next SBW Board Meeting will be on Zoom at 7 p.m., January 10.

Send suggestions for 2023 to Edie at pres@southbaywriters.com

Because of the January 28 workshop, there will be no general SBW meeting in January.

In February, normal life will resume. South Bay Writers general meetings will be on second Mondays at 7 p.m. SBW Board meetings will occur at 7 p.m. on the Tuesday before the second Monday.

Some meetings in 2023 will still be on Zoom. Some meetings will be in-person, God willing, if'n the creek don't rise.

– WT



Member News

Marjorie Johnson

Wen I Chang writes: English is my second language, and I'm the earth's last computer idiot. So every week I twice read my ideas to my amanuensis in Maine, and he replies with further editing. A fun aside: my given name, Wen I, means perseverance in literature.

My book, *First LEED Gold*, intertwines and integrates the multi-disciplines of science, music, art, ecology, and aesthetics into the development of the Gaia Napa Valley Hotel – a lifetime dream of mine. At the suggestion of two trusted reporters with their sensitivity and sense of justice, this 235-page book branched out from my June 2022 book, *Dance of the Butterfly*, (on Amazon), and is expected to be in the market before the end of January 2023.

Editor's note: Wen told me that the science used in his book includes the Golden Ratio, of Fibonacci fame. The Golden Ratio occurs when the ratio of the two numbers is the same as the ratio of their sum to the larger of the two numbers. That works out to $(1 + \sqrt{5})/2$, an irrational number with approximate value 1.618. The Golden Ratio is connected to nature and the Fibonacci sequence 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, ... Exactly how that happens is beyond the scope of this newsletter. Dan Brown uses it in *The Da Vinci Code*. Euclid and Pythagoras used it in classical times. — WT

First LEED Gold



Author and Developer
Wen I Chang

View from the Board

Bill Baldwin

The South Bay Writers Board met via Zoom at 7 p.m. on December 6, 2022.

Present: Edie Matthew (President), Inga Silva (Membership), Marjorie Johnson (MRMS), Carolyn Donnell (Facebook), Bill Baldwin (Open Mic, Central Board, NorCal), Brigitte Doss-Johnson, Kymberlie Ingalls

President's Report (Edie): No speaker this month because of our Holiday Party on December 11. In January, instead of a regular meeting, we will host a Saturday workshop, January 28, where Jordan Rosenfeld will speak on plotting (9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.) at the Headen-Inman Historical House in Santa Clara (space limit of fifty people).

Central Board (Bill): The Central Board met November 13 via Zoom. They discussed the *Literary Review* and the *Bulletin* (to be published December 15).

NorCal (Bill): NorCal met November 16 via Zoom. They will again participate in the San Francisco Writers Conference in February. They are considering incorporating future NorCal Leadership Conferences into the biennial Central Board Jack London Awards meeting.

Facebook Report (Carolyn): Continuing to try to resolve issues we have had with Facebook and references to our website.

Membership Report (Inga): Our branch membership is currently 85.

Open Mic Report (Bill): Our first and third Friday open mics continue to go well, with eight to ten readers per event. Because we continue to host via Zoom, we have readers from San Diego and even Mumbai!

Newsletter News (Edie, Marjorie): Brigitte Doss-Johnson will be taking over as Editor with the February issue. Marjorie will serve in the meantime. Many thanks to Gerri Forté for her work with *WritersTalk* this year!

Kymberlie Ingalls (a meeting guest from CWC) suggested forming a writers' support group that could meet monthly online, discuss common writing challenges, and offer general encouragement to participants. Kymberlie can be reached at kymberlieCWC@gmail.com

Stay tuned. — WT

Silenced

It seems
this arm
has lost
its strength
to lift the
heavy
wood,
where
hand
can reach the
proper place, where
strings meet with ebony to
form melodic lines of grace.
Bow no longer strokes
the strings to flow
vibrations
to my ears
and back into my
heart. My viola's silenced
now, no more to merge, to
coalesce with others' notes and
beats and breaths. They create
the music now and I cannot
participate in making
sweet symphonic
sound



— Carolyn Donnell

The poem "Silenced" appeared in *WT* in 2012. It's repeated here as an example of a good poem and to remind you that April is National Poetry Month. So, get that pen flowing with musical words.

TAKE OFF YOUR SHOES AND ENJOY!



Good Food





OPENING PRESENTS



WATCHING EDIE



Great party--Thank you, Edie

SBW Writing Contest: Pets



President's Writing Contest

Subject: Pets

Write 100 to 150 words describing your pet. It may be the worst pet you ever encountered, your favorite pet, the most interesting pet, the zaniest pet, or perhaps a combination of characteristics. Describe the animal in prose or poetry.

First place prize \$50. Top four runners-up will receive a Barnes & Noble's Gift card. No entry fee required.

You **MUST** be a member of South Bay Writers (or a dual member) to be eligible to submit to the contest. If you're not already or you need to renew, do it now! (Go to southbaywriters.com).

Contest deadline: February 15th.

Email entry to: pres@southbaywriters.com

Off the Shelf

— Edie Matthews



"He's getting ready to pitch his new book."

Did You know?

by D.L. LaRoche

DID YOU KNOW that as a member of South Bay Writers, you are a member of the California Writers Club, founded one hundred eighteen years ago — its beginnings the result of a few seasoned writers talking craft while picnicking on the side of a hill in Oakland?

DID YOU KNOW that our club, the CWC, is a tax-exempt corporation with a charter, constitution, bylaws, policies and procedures, and that each branch — there are 22 — is obliged to operate in accordance with these documents — that it's the law?

DID YOU KNOW that there is a Central Board of directors — one director from each branch — that sees to the execution and compliance with these governing documents, and that adjusts the rules therein set forth to accommodate the changes that living in this world tends to suggest, even mandate.

DID YOU KNOW that we, South Bay Writers, have bylaws ratified by the Central Board, and are obliged to follow, and that these local bylaws are consistent with the governing documents of the Central Board and thus the founding charter, all of which serves our continuance as a non-profit corporation and maintains our tax-exempt status?

DID YOU KNOW that our bylaws govern our behavior in areas thought crucial such as elections, committee appointments, meeting frequency, dues and money management, board decorum, records management — essentially how we operate — and that they are available upon request and on the website.

DID YOU KNOW that South Bay Writers has a set of Policies and Protocols that assist each Board in planning events and dealing with problems so that consistency, year over year, is maintained, that the wheel is improved but not reinvented with each need to move us along? These policies deal with duties and responsibilities for officers, meeting comportment, workshops, newsletter, service awards, monthly programs, and so forth.

AND HERE'S THE THING — we have a club wherein membership is valuable to writers, new and accomplished, because one hundred and eighteen years of stumbling and learning, trials and enhancement, failures and abandonment have been evaluated, adjudicated, and the better results recorded as governing documents so that each new year our mission is better achieved, each new year we become better writers. — WT

Author Support Group — maybe

Kymberlie Ingalls

Kymberlie Ingalls, a dual member and an SBW Board guest, suggested forming a writers' support group that could meet monthly online, discuss common writing challenges, and offer general encouragement to participants.

If you have an interest, Kymberlie can be reached at kymberlieCWC@gmail.com

Contests, Markets, and Resources

by Carolyn Donnell



Carolyn Donnell
Contributing Editor

Let us know if you have any success with any of the contests listed in *WritersTalk*. Or any other contest, for that matter. Send your writing victories to member-news@southbaywriters.com You can also check other branches for their current contests, submission, anthology, etc. requests. See a list of other CWC branches at www.calwriters.org/cwcbranches/

Members of our Facebook group — **South Bay Writers Club** — see contest postings and notifications on the Facebook group.

Listings are for information only. **NO VETTING** has been done by South Bay Writers Club. Some contests have been around for a long time and the reputation is known but some are newer. Please read all guidelines carefully before submitting. And please share any experience you have with them. Good or bad.

WRITERS BEWARE site. Check out this website for warnings about contests and/or submissions. <https://www.sfw.org/other-resources/for-authors/writer-beware/>

LOCAL PUBLISHERS AND EDITORS AND OTHER CWC BRANCH RESOURCES:

SF/Peninsula Branch. See their website <https://www.cwc-sfpeninsula.org/writers-resources/writing-contests>

Redwood Writers. Sometimes welcome other CWC branch members. Check <https://redwoodwriters.org/contests/>

North State Writers. They are planning a fourth anthology. The last one accepted all CWC members. Keep an eye on <http://www.northstatewriters.com/nsw-anthologies.html>

Fremont Area Writers. Writer Resources at <https://cwc-fremontareawriters.org/resources-writers/>

Catamaran Literary Reader. West Coast quarterly literary/visual arts journal. Fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, and fine art. Submissions year-round with quarterly production cycle. www.catamaranliteraryreader.com/

The Literary Nest. A local online publication. See submission details at www.theliterarynest.com/ Also visual art in high res .jpeg, .gif, or .png format to the literarynest@gmail.com

MWA NorCal Chapter, Mystery Writers of America. See www.mwanorcal.org/

Women's National Book Association: San Francisco Chapter www.wnba-sfchapter.org

OTHER CONTESTS AND SUBMISSIONS:

Writer's Digest Contests. Annual writing competitions and book awards. www.writersdigest.com/wd-competitions/writing-competitions-pricing-and-deadlines

WOW! Women on Writing has two quarterly contests: www.wow-womenonwriting.com/contest.php

AWP Association of Writers and Writing Programs. See at <https://www.awpwriter.org/contests/overview>

West Trade Review. Our Kelly Harrison is an associate at <https://westtradereview.submittable.com/submit>

Palette Poetry. See submissions calendar at <https://www.palettepoetry.com/calendar/>

Water Dragon Publishing. <https://waterdragonpublishing.com/submissions/>

Sequesterum Literary Journal: Theme Reprints. Fiction, non-fiction and poetry. Previously published sometimes accepted. Check out at <https://www.sequesterum.org/>

Winning Writers. Next 24 hour contest 21 Jan 2023. Check out contests at <https://winningwriters.com/our-contests>

Chicken Soup For The Soul: <https://www.chickensoup.com/story-submissions/story-guidelines>

Literary Mama. Open for submission year round. Submissions by anyone who identifies as a mother, including those hoping to conceive and those who have lost a child. Occasionally publish work by fathers. Only previously unpublished. Details at <https://literarymama.com/submissions>

The Writer Magazine: Contests, articles, resources. See www.writermag.com/contests/

SITES THAT LIST CONTESTS/SUBMISSIONS:

Freedom With Writing <https://www.freedomwithwriting.com/>

Authors Publish. <http://www.authorspublish.com/>

Poets & Writers: www.pw.org/grants and www.pw.org/content/upcoming_contest_deadlines

Funds For Writers. Contests, submissions, grants, etc. See www.fundsforwriters.com/contests/

The Write Life: 31 Free Writing Contests: <http://www.thewritelife.com/writing-contests>

The Best Writing Contests curated by Reedsy www.blog.reedsy.com/writing-contests/

Fanstory: Requires a subscription (paid) but have many activities <https://www.fanstory.com/contestsall.jsp>

Trish Hopkinson. A blog with many resources.

www.trishhopkinson.com/where-to-submit-reprints/

Writer's Relief. Ongoing contests at writersrelief.com/featured-listings-contests-journals-calls-for-submissions/

NewPages.com has news, information, and guides. www.newpages.com/classifieds/writing-contests

Are you on **Facebook**? South Bay Writers has a Page and a Group. The Page name is California Writers Club – South Bay. An internal group, SBW members only, called South Bay Writers. Other branches have Pages on Facebook as well, where you can keep track of their activities. Use California Writers Club- as a prefix. For example: California Writers Club – Poetry Center San Jose goes to PCSJ.

Some local **Facebook** poetry groups:

- Poetry Center San Jose (PCSJ)
- Poetry Exchange
- Willow Glen Poetry Project
- Cupertino Poet Laureate
- Santa Clara County Poet Laureate
- Los Gatos Poet Laureate
- Poetry Lounge
- National Poetry Month-write a poem a day
- Coffee House Perculator Writing Group
- California Poets
- The Academy of American Poets
- Poetry Pacific
- SF Creative Writing Institute-drop-in poetry
- Open Skies Poetry

Look for more next month. Many sites omitted — lack of space. If you hear about an intriguing contest or market, please share at newsletter@southbaywriters.com — **WT**

CWC Resources for You

Kymerlie Ingalls

CWC Representative and Program Chair,
Napa Valley Writers
kymerlieCWC@gmail.com

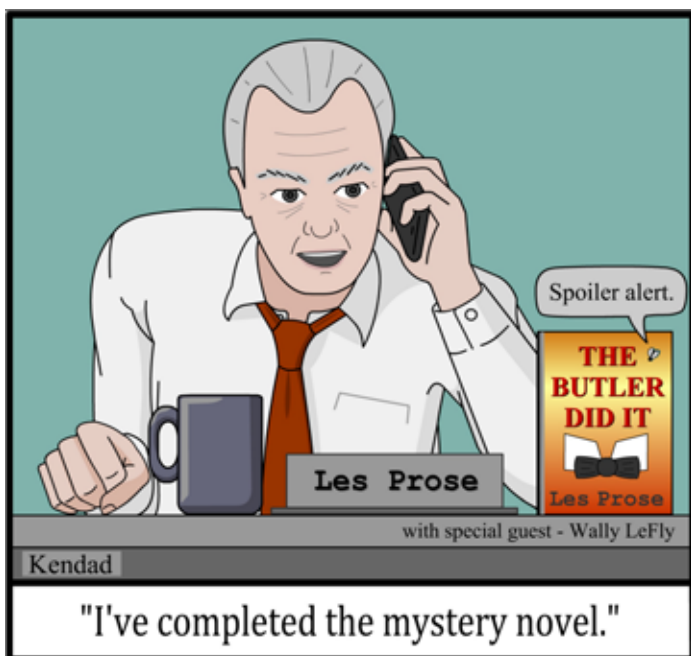
Did you know that, as a member of South Bay Writers, you are welcomed as a member to all of the 22 branches of the California Writers Club? We are more than just a gathering of friends and colleagues in our branches. We are a larger family of 1700+ members statewide.

This means that if you live in the vicinity of another branch and have the means to travel, you can extend your writer's support circle. For those far away or unable to travel, some of our branches are still virtual or doing hybrid meetings and online extracurricular groups to keep us bonded beyond the pandemic. To join an additional branch is not required but only \$25 per year which is just enough to lend support for their offerings.

People have often asked me why I've belonged to so many branches at one time, and my answer is simple: each has its own unique vibe! I've been fortunate to learn and be encouraged by so many, to see more wonderfully informative speakers and to build a strong platform, and, more importantly, the opportunity to lend my own supportive hand. I've also had a wider net for publishing, speaking, and learning.

I've been fortunate to lead marketing support and accountability groups and to mentor writers of all levels and genres (Berkeley, Tri-Valley, Napa Valley). I invite you to join us; we meet monthly. You can find information on each of their websites. Find all branches at our parent site, calwriters.org — WT

Les Prose by Kendad



The Value of Volunteerism

By Bob Isbill

CWC Vice President

Director of Publicity and Public Relations

Experts generally agree that the best way to succeed is to surround yourself with great people.

How best can we do that?

You may think you know someone at the office (whatever "office" may mean in this context) or in your branch of the California Writers Club. Whether you are considering forming a business partnership, developing a professional project, or just contemplating the thought of hanging out together more often, one way to find out more about people is to volunteer with them. Immersing yourself in a temporary project can reveal flaws as well as talents you otherwise would never encounter in a relationship. The simple act of working together to complete a goal can be beneficial in many ways. We bond (or not) in a more meaningful way with the mutual joy of accomplishment. When I have related with others to achieve something together, I have been astounded several times to discover they knew something or knew how to do something that I otherwise never would have been aware. Discovering the abilities of others is just one byproduct of volunteering. Another obvious reason to "show up" is for our own personal development. It is a safe way to explore your own abilities. Giving time to do something for the general good of a project can be fulfilling in many ways.

I remember a dozen years ago when our High Desert CWC had enormous growth. We went from 14 to 100 members in 26 months. The reasons? Determination not to fail but to excel was one reason. Another was not caring about who got the credit. Another key factor was establishing to visitors that we were looking for members, not dues payers. We expected them to contribute to our growth and achievement. It was something of a rite of passage. Newbies were expected to join in our success story by sharing their talents and abilities. The outcome was outstanding relationship building. Even today, years later, the close bonding that took place through massive volunteering is present now. Friendships formed are solid and growing stronger. And our branch is still thriving.

One of the things I love about the CWC is the concept of the Jack London Awards. They are something of a barometer of how well a branch is doing. For example, if there is a year where no Jack London is given, it is a red flag that either nobody is doing anything or that people are doing a lot without recognition. The Jack London is awarded only once per lifetime, but have you noticed that JL Award winners just keep doing exceptional things over and over again? I recently contacted one of our former members, who was a Jack London Award winner. I was not surprised to learn that years later, while working for an internationally famous company, she had been awarded that organization's equivalent to our Jack London Award. She knows the value of volunteering, and it has paid off all her life.

I find myself writing this on the anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, who is famous for his challenge: "Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country." Find a need in your branch and fill it. You will discover the value of volunteerism. — WT

The Mango Orchard and the Chickoo Tree

Shipra Shukla

From *Collected Tales of Jungle Land*

<https://junglestories.blog/>

Once upon a time there was a huge mango orchard with many, many trees in it. There were many kinds of mangoes, mangoes of many shapes, sizes and colors, but all very beautiful—and juicy. In the same orchard it so happened there was also a little chickoo tree standing in one corner. Have you seen a chickoo fruit? It's round and small and brown and not very pretty. When it's young, its fruits are very hard. Yes, it's not a good-looking fruit, even though it's very sweet when it's ripe.

Anyway, let's go on with the story. The poor chickoo tree was very lonely. None of the mango trees would talk to him. The mango trees were friends with each other but whenever the chickoo tree tried to talk to them they told him to go away. They laughed and said, "Look at you! So small and round and brown. And look at us. We are golden in color and so shapely. You don't fit in our crowd. Don't you try to come near us. Just run away."

Well, you know very well trees can't run so the chickoo tree just stood in his corner with a long face and felt sorry for himself. How he wished he had a few friends. He was so lonely.

One day, a party of humans came into the orchard for a picnic. They sat under the shade of the mango trees and ate and drank. Then, they decided to have some tea. So, they collected some dry sticks, added some dry grass, and lit a fire. They made tea and everyone, except the children who had some hot milky cocoa, had tea. Then, they put out the fire and went away.

But, the fire was not quite out, even though they had stamped on it. Just a little spark was hidden under the twigs and that was enough to light the fire again. Soon, the fire started to spread, burning the grass and the dry leaves on the ground. Very soon it would reach the mango trees which, when dry, can burn down very fast.

The mango trees saw the fire and were frightened. If even one mango tree caught fire the whole orchard would burn down. The mango trees shouted, "Help! Help! Save us!" but there was no one around to hear them. The watchman of the orchard had gone home for lunch. By the time he would come back the orchard would be on fire. What a disaster! And anyway, who can hear the sound of trees calling for help except other trees.

But it so happened that the little chickoo heard the mango trees shouting for help. He saw the fire and understood the great danger. He thought, "It's true that the mango trees do not want to be my friends. They are also very rude to me. But, we are all trees. I must do something to save them."

Can you guess what the chickoo tree did to save the mango trees? You know trees can't run or shout for help because they are rooted to the ground and no one can hear them. Did I not tell you that the chickoo fruits are very hard when they are young? So what the chickoo did was to drop all his fruits to the ground at one go. A shower of chickoo fruits hit the ground. They made such a racket!

Hundreds of chickoo fruits hit the ground at one time, just like a hailstorm. It was so sudden and noisy that all the birds



flew up and started to squawk. The crows went "caw, caw," the birds went "cheep, cheep," and the squirrels chattered. Even the few goats roaming around bleated. Hearing them, the cows lowed, "moo, moo," the stray dogs barked, and the cats started mewling and hissing. It was a very noisy event.

Some passersby heard the animals and looked towards the orchard. They saw the plume of smoke above the trees and knew, at once, that the orchard was in great danger. They all shouted. Some of them ran to get the watchman. Some ran to get buckets of water. And some called the fire station. Everyone worked together and put out the fire.

After the people left there was silence in the orchard. The mango trees thought about the sacrifice the chickoo tree had made to save them by throwing all his fruits to the ground. The mango trees waved their branches and saluted the chickoo tree and said, "You are very special, chickoo tree. We are just ordinary in front of you. Will you be our friend?"

The chickoo tree was happy to hear this. He said, "I will be honored to be your friend." Now, the chickoo tree was never lonely. He had many, many friends who loved and honored him for his good qualities and did not care how he looked.

Yes, it is what you do for others that is important, not how you look. — WT





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