



WritersTalk

Monthly Newsletter of the South Bay Writers Club™

Volume 31

Number 06

June 2023

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June Keynote

Isidra Mencos: Creative Book Launches that Draw an Audience

Jamal Khan

NEW TIME & PLACE

When: Monday, June 12, 6:30PM

Where: Triton Museum, 1505 Warburton Ave. Santa Clara

Admission: \$15 for nonmembers, \$10 for members. (Includes refreshments.)

What if you held a book launch and nobody came? It has happened quite often, even to authors who are now household names. Margaret Atwood dryly recounts, "I did a signing to which nobody came, except a guy who wanted to buy some Scotch tape and thought I was the help." Stephen King fondly reminisces, "At my first 'Salem's Lot signing, I had one customer, a child who asked where to find some Nazi books."

But a sparsely attended book launch is by no means inevitable. Many authors have mastered the art of drawing a sizable crowd. You can do it, too. In our June 12th meeting, Isidra Mencos will offer a behind-the-scenes look at how other authors have launched their books with creative flair, resulting in notable success. She will present seven detailed case studies, with precise content and marketing data, that demonstrate the efficacy of a unique approach to launching a book.



Isidra Mencos is the author of *Promenade of Desire—A Barcelona Memoir*. She holds a PhD in Spanish and Latin American Contemporary Literature from the University of California, Berkeley, where she taught Spanish language, literature, and creative writing. Her essays and articles have been published in *Diálogo*, *WIRED*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Front Porch Journal*, *The Penmen Review*, and *Stirring Literary Journal*, among others. Her essay, "My Books and I," was listed as Notable in *The Best American Essays 2019*. Originally from Spain, Isidra lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

President's Message

Edie Matthews

Money!

At a recent meeting a member asked about a treasury report.

Here's the story: When I first joined in 1999, SBW met in a small banquet room at Hometown Buffet in Santa Clara. I wasn't aware of the financial issues. However, I did notice that only 13 people attended the April meeting that year.

The VP, Tina Glasner, was looking for a replacement and asked me if I'd be interested. When I agreed to take the position, I said I also wanted to do publicity. The current publicist had health issues, and consequently, PR was sporadic.

Although the treasurer, Susan Mueller, never made an issue of it, I learned that she often covered our expenses. I was shocked. Also, our membership was dropping.

I had a BA in journalism and worked in all three news media: radio, TV, and print. I'd opened press releases on the job. In addition, I did PR for my comedy show (Mothers and Other Goddesses) and landed stories in numerous newspapers from the LA Times to the Seattle Times to the Vancouver Sun. I appeared in Seattle's Morning Show and been interviewed in numerous radio shows—remember Alex Bennet in San Francisco?

My first task was to book some interesting speakers.

To say I was passionate is an understatement. I often heard potential speakers before booking them.

Second, I needed to publicize our events.

At that time, the San Jose Mercury News dominated. The hefty Sunday edition even had a separate Book Section. I made sure our meetings were printed in their upcoming events. Each month I mailed PR and a photo of our speaker. One poet sent me a provocative profile of her in a spaghetti-strap dress. It seemed inappropriate—but I suspected it would be published. Sure enough it was.



I learned the Merc offered discount ads for non-profits. We began placing small 1 x 2-inch ads (\$40) in the Book Section.

To help our declining membership, I started an email list that eventually grew to over 700. The internet was still in its infancy, but one of our board members, Dave O'Neill, asked if he could create a club website.

Attendance and membership grew and money increased. Susan was thrilled. In a few years we became the largest branch of CWC, over 220 members.

When the Central Board stopped hosting Writing Conferences, we picked up the slack. With no seed money, we advertised early-bird specials and collected over \$1,000. This was enough to book the Salinas Conference Center (Sherwood Hall), the Steinbeck Center, Steinbeck's childhood home for Sunday brunch, and Doc Ricketts' Lab in Monterey. We flew in agents and speakers.

Eventually, we sponsored four East of Eden Writing Conferences in 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2008—each one a success. A mountain of work! These conferences boosted our funds, which we have managed to maintain.

Then the economy dropped, and conferences ended.

Since then, we use the extra funds for contests and award prizes to offset expenses for our summer BBQ and the Holiday Bash.

In 2020, COVID hit. After a few months, we began holding meetings on Zoom. We weren't charging but we still had expenses. When our funds dropped \$2,000, we began charging for Zoom meetings and regained our footing.

Our biggest expense is the newsletter. I'm proud to say SBW is one of the few clubs that still

mails out a printed copy.

Other expenses include Meetup, Constant Contact, Host Gator, Zoom, fee for Headen-Inman House, continental breakfast, dues to Central Board (who pay for insurance), and miscellaneous items like name badges, etc. We usually pay our speaker a \$100 stipend. On occasion, we've paid more. We pay our workshop facilitators \$300+, depending on signups. However, the workshops are money makers. BTW, everyone on the board is a volunteer.

Between dues, entry to the meetings, and occasional workshops, we've remained financially solvent.

I'm particularly frugal. I like having a comfortable reserve. However, for more details and a full monthly treasurer's report, join the board!

Les Prose by Kendad



View from the Board

Chris Weilert

Edie Matthews, President

Upcoming speakers:

Angela Pneuman: Reality into Fiction

Andrea Stewart: Fantasy Writer

Jill Lublin: Publicity

Nominees for the Jack London Award were discussed.

The Groups annual summer potluck is scheduled for July 16th.

Marjorie Johnson, MRMS

Discussed the need to begin sending out renewal notices.

Trenton Myers, Treasurer

Account Growth: 1.2% since March

Bill Baldwin, Open Mics continue on the first and third Fridays. (Zoom)

Recent Open Mic stats:

April 7 - 9 readers, 11 readings

April 21 - 10 readers, 10 readings

May 3 - 10 readers, 10 readings

We are still doing all our open mics via Zoom

Central Board:

The next meeting on July 23.

The Jack London Awards will be presented on October 22 in Oakland

Nor Cal:

The Bay Area Book Festival was held last Sunday in Berkeley. CWC Berkeley managed the CWC booth.

NorCal discussed several issues of concerns to our branches:

How to evaluate our speakers for other branches to use as a resource.

How branches can raise money.

Tatyana Grinenko Member-at-Large/Web editor/PR

Our Constant Contact list is growing: 573 Contacts total as of today of which 452 are subscribed contacts.

Inga Silva. Membership: As of April 30: We have 98 members 94 active members, 2 lifetime members and 2 students.

The next board meeting will be on June 6, 2023 on Zoom. SBW members are always welcome at Board meetings. To attend a board meeting, send an email to Edie Matthews at pres@southbaywriters.com

MAY RECAP: ELLEN KIRSCHMAN

Bill Baldwin



Ellen Kirschman knows a lot about PTSD, having become a clinical psychologist long before she began writing mysteries. Her specialty, treating first responders for work-related traumatic stress, gives her writing a nuance not always present in mystery novels.

Kirschman provided an overview of brain biology, the role of the (thinking) cortex and the (feeling) amygdala, and how negativity bias can lead people to always assume the worst in a situation and become suspicious of everyone. Someone approaches along a dark stretch of road, you see a glint of metal in their rising hand. Gun!

A moment later, the sixteen-year-old is dead, metal comb in their hand. Next day, you're on TV, surrounded by angry demonstrators.

"But I had to assume the worst?!" Perhaps, based on your past, you did. Or did you?

Understanding possible past traumas enables the author to create deeper, more complex characters and plots. Appreciating the past—especially childhood trauma—can be critical to creating a convincing character.

We know the best fiction involves complex characters at odds with one another and often themselves. First responders, especially police, inherently experience tension and conflict, thrown often into impossible situations with no satisfactory resolution.

Remembering this essential background can help you create complex, gripping characters for your mysteries.

On the one hand, police must be problem-solvers who can handle stress, control themselves, and achieve a positive resolution of a dangerous situation. On the other hand, they function in an environment of sordidness and threat where they cannot always reach a satisfactory resolution, and where many people, sometimes even society at large, may fear and even hate them.



June Writing Prompt: Style, Man!

A Hole in One

Shipra Shukla

Our aunt married a businessman and suddenly the alien concept of style entered our lives.

We were wide-eyed at this vision in white pants and what was in those days the epitome of fashion, the terylene bush shirt that screamed “Japan.”

On my twelfth birthday, he arrived with a well-known actress in tow. He then handed me his terylene shirt and asked me to iron it. Big mistake, because twelve-year-olds do not know the settings in an iron and before I knew it, whoosh, there was a hole on the right side.

Guiltily, I took the shirt to him and said, “Why not have another pocket on the right? It’s in fashion.”

He was stupefied till he spotted the hole and understood that I was suggesting a solution to the mishap. He also understood that novice nieces can often, inadvertently, make a hole in his pocket!



Man Purse

Brigitte Doss-Johnson

“Mom! Dad’s got a murse!” My teenage children shouted as we were gathering to go out.

“What?” I approached the hullabaloo to see why everyone was taking so long.

“It’s for my iPad!” My husband’s body language flittered through crouching to hide something light olive, swatting at our son who was trying to grab it, and standing like a don’t-mess-with-me bull.

Ten years later, my husband still sports his green murse. He loves the pockets in the front and it has outlasted a few generations of iPads. As much as the rugged duck canvas, cotton braid belting, and metal hardware invoke a masculine vibe, the murse is still a purse. Whenever my husband isn’t taking his fifty-pound backpack full of whatever a software engineer carries, you can see him sporting his murse across his body. I’ll never understand why he thinks a murse is ok but a man-bun isn’t.



Off the Shelf

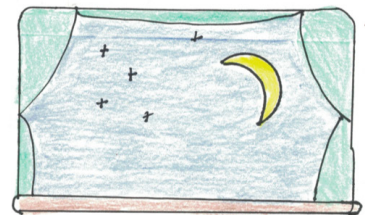
Edie Matthews

A Visit From The Muse

“WAKE UP! I’m here to inspire you.”



A VISIT FROM THE MUSE



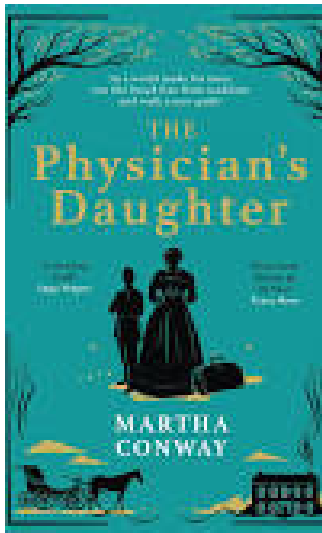
“WAKE UP!!! I’m here to in inspire you.”

Off the Shelf
by Edie Matthews

BOOK REVIEWS

***The Physician's Daughter* by Martha Conway**

Marjorie Johnson



Martha Conway spoke to South Bay Writers on plots and sub-plots at our March meeting. Whenever SBW has a speaker, I read something they have written to see what else I can learn. Martha Conway teaches creative writing at Stanford and has won awards for her historical fiction.

The Physician's Daughter is historical fiction at its best and shows an immense amount of research on the role of women in society after the American Civil War and the state of medical knowledge then. In those times, few universities admitted women to study medicine, and medical practice was primitive, even frightening, in the light of present-day knowledge.

Every chapter begins with a quote on the role of women, such as:

"Ladies are all very well in their place, and that is looking after the latest Paris fashions and making tea at home." (*The Medical Press and Circular*, 1870)

"There are many arguments against the female doctor. In the first place, in the majority of cases, she is an unnatural being." (*St. Louis Medical Mirror*, Editorial, 1892)

As to the major plot, Vita Tenney is determined to pursue her lifelong dream of becoming a country

doctor like her father. But he tells her: "There are quite enough men in the world to serve as doctors. You're eighteen years old now, and the war is over. The time has come for you to accept your station in life. To marry, to have babies. That's every woman's duty after a war. To replace the men we've lost."

Of course, Vita is not going to stand still for that. The book is compelling and inspiring.

The Buzz about A Bug on the Internet

Luanne Oleas



"One morning I woke up and felt something was amiss." That's the opening line from *A Bug on the Internet: How to Succeed in the World After Turning into a Giant Bug* by Yulin Wu. (Aka Alice Wu, an SBW member.) This modern-day twist on Kafka's *Metamorphosis* turns the original on its antennae.

How would you react if you woke up and found yourself transformed into a human-sized beetle? I liked Gregory's reaction. "In a panic, I ran in circles on the ceiling for three minutes ..." It only gets better from there.

Gregory, aka The Bug Guy, is nothing if not resourceful. He starts winging it, applying all the rich philosophy he has learned from reading self-help books. With some positive thinking and ramped up confidence, he goes in to work on the

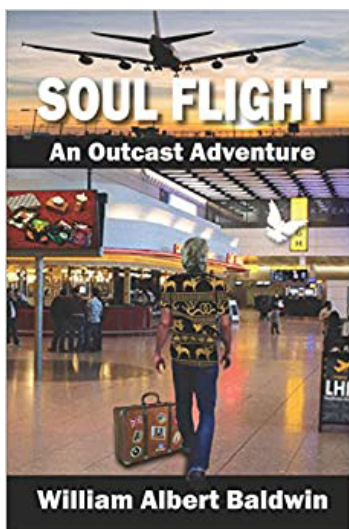
same day he becomes a bug. Unlike the original Kafka's Gregor, Gregory proceeds into a world that doesn't want him ... until it does.

Whether it's Gregory's drunk-bug video going viral on social media or his unfortunate comment about Domino's pizza, he's soon an antennae-waving, tuxedo-wearing superstar with a taste for well-rotted garbage.

How to deal with such an alarming transformation is all laid out with deliciously dry humor in this book. Each page contains another gem that pokes fun at our present existence. Would the Human Resources department require diversity training for employees to be sensitive to Gregory's plight? Would management really hide him in the basement?

It's a brisk fun read that had me laughing all the way through—as well as pondering the metaphysical side of our current culture. The wit and irony of this novella will creep up on you. Scurry over to the internet and order your copy.

***Soul Flight* by William Albert Baldwin**
Luanne Oleas



What an eye-opener of a book! I wasn't sure what to expect when the back cover said, "Alan Horne's soul has walked out on him" and he wonders if he can persuade it to return.

So starts the quest of the protagonist of *Soul Flight: An Outcast Adventure* by William Albert Baldwin. The journey Alan takes includes a myriad of

characters, all unique in his/her/their own way and a lesson in acceptance that goes beyond what most readers ever encounter.

Alan Horne leaves the US and flies to Germany, probably the last place he felt truly connected to his soul. As someone who was raised mostly in the Christian West, I had learned to live by the main mantra, "You live in a body, you are a spirit, and you have a soul." I wasn't familiar with the concept of misplacing your soul. Soul-searching was something you did within, but not Alan.

Alan's journey taught me that finding your lost soul begins by connecting with people who come your way. Avoid them and you won't find your soul. This philosophy leads Alan into a thicket of new friends and a high-stakes game of being yourself at all costs.

As a woman and mother of a queer offspring, I know a little about the safety of venturing out alone when you are from the LGBTQ community. *Soul Flight* teaches us that no one is normal. Most of us are quite as different as the book's polyamorous, bisexual, pagan priest, cross-dressing, human rights advocate, and Unitarian main character, Alan Horne. Face it, someone is going to disagree with at least one of those beliefs/lifestyles/vocations/philosophies.

The intricacies of the plot almost seem random at times, but the author never quite lets us get lost. He's a master at laying out all the threads of the plot, then pulling them together to make a cohesive fabric with a dazzling pattern.

If you experienced life before 9/11, you'll recall the historic events mentioned in this tale. If you didn't, it's important to learn them now. They are signposts of what we learn from history if we stay aware.

If you are a Wagner fan, you have double the reasons to read this book. Even if you aren't (and many characters weren't,) you're still in for a treat. It's like no other books I've ever read, but it might be a cross between *Trinity* by Leon Uris with its culture clashes and John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charlie in Search of America* where the author ventures into his past to understand his present. Neither of those books have a leg up on the issues explored in *Soul Flight: An Outcast Adventure*.

Member News

Marjorie Johnson

Valerie Estelle Frankel

just wrapped up online kids' classes including "Write and Publish a Book." Some finished their books, some didn't, but all learned how much effort a whole book takes. This summer, Valerie is teaching Star Wars Camp, Superheroes! Magical Worlds Book Club, Worldbuilding, Public Speaking through Jackbox Games, and SAT Reading. All online and still available (with others in the fall). <https://athenasacademy.com/all-courses/> Tell your friends! Sign up your older kids and teens. Give them all a summer to remember. Further, if you know anyone needing a quick easy English 1A, Valerie is teaching asynchronously at Mission College: ENG-001A-53251 Summer 2023 (free textbook!). https://missioncollege.edu/class_schedule/



[edu/class_schedule/](https://missioncollege.edu/class_schedule/) It's the easiest and most fun and "pop-culture" basic English you can take! And her books are continuing—*Jewish Fantasy Worldwide* is the latest.

Alfred Jan contributed a catalog essay for Eve Page Mathias' Triton Museum of Art exhibition called "The Big Red Chair Project" running from May 6 to August 13. The reception was on May 20.

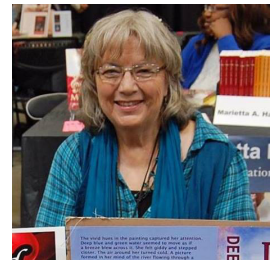
Robert A. Garfinkle came to our May 13 meeting especially to tell us that his book, *Luna Cognita, A Comprehensive Observer's Handbook of the Known Moon*, Vol 1, 2, 3 (2020), has surpassed 5000 sales on Amazon. On Amazon, beneath that book, I also viewed *Star-Hopping: Your Visa to Viewing the Universe* (1997), *Backyard Astronomy*. Nature Company Guides (2021), and six more titles also written by Bob.

Fantastic! What more can I say?

Please share your writing news by sending it to membernews@southbaywriters.com.

Contests and Markets

Carolyn Donnell



CWC BRANCH RESOURCES See branches at <https://calwriters.org/cwcbranches/>

Fremont Area Writers		https://cwc-fremontareawriters.org/resources-writers/
North State Writers fourth anthology		www.northstatewriters.com/nsw-anthologies.html
Redwood Writers 2023 Poetry Anthology & 2023 Prose Anthology	Deadline June 1 & 30	https://www.redwoodwriters.org/
SF/Peninsula Branch		https://www.cwc-sfpeninsula.org/writers-resources/writing-contests

LOCAL PUBLISHERS AND EDITORS

<i>Catamaran Literary Reader</i>		www.catamaranliteraryreader.com/
Red Wheelbarrow Poetry Prize & Poetry Center San José	Deadline July 31	https://www.deanza.edu/english/creative-writing/red-wheelbarrow.html
The Literary Nest publication & art		www.theliterarynest.org

OTHER CONTESTS AND SUBMISSIONS: JUNE OR LATER DEADLINES

Blue Light Poetry Prize	Chapbooks until June 30	bluelightpress@aol.com
<i>The Fairy Tale Magazine</i> . Flash Fiction & poetry	June 30, 2023	https://www.fairytalemagazine.com/contests
2023 Leigh Weimers Emerging Artists Award poetry, prose, stage or screenplay		https://www.weimersawards.com/
Winning Writers		https://winningwriters.com

POETRY CONTESTS AND SUBMISSIONS:

Academy of American Poets		https://poets.org/academy-american-poets/american-poets-prizes
Authors Publish. Poetry manuscript publishers. No reading fees.		www.authorspublish.com
Everywriter, The Best Poetry Prizes		www.everywritersresource.com/best-poetry-prizes/
<i>Gyroscope Review</i>		https://www.gyroskopereview.com/welcome/guidelines
Palette Poetry. Sappho Prive for Women Poets	June 15	https://www.palettepoetry.com/current-contest/
Poetry Foundation		www.poetryfoundation.org
<i>Poetry Pacific</i> . Literary ezine		www.poetrypacific.blogspot.com/
Poetry Society of America		https://poetrysocietyofamerica.submittable.com/submit
Poetry Soup. List of free contests		https://www.poetrysoup.com/poetry/contests/
<i>Poets & Writers</i> . Lists poetry and other contests		https://www.pw.org/grants & www.pw.org/literary_magazines
REEDSY. List of contests		https://blog.reedsy.com/guide/chapbook/how-to-make/
RockPaperPoem	June 30	https://rockpaperpoem.com/submit.html
Southern Arizona Press		https://www.southernarizonapress.com/current-submissions/
<i>The Thimble Magazine</i>		www.thimblelitmag.com/submissions/
<i>Up the Staircase Quarterly</i>		www.upthestaircase.org/
West Trade Review. Ecobloom Spaces poetry contest	June 1 - Aug 1	https://westtradereview.com/ecobloomspacespoetryofplace.html
Writing Matters. 30 publishers of poetry books & chapbooks		www.randalssanctuary.wordpress.com/2020/08/11/publishers-of-poetry-books-chapbooks/

The writing contests and markets listed serve as information. South Bay Writers neither vets nor endorses any listings. Please practice safe handling of your stories and information.

WRITERS BEWARE

Warnings about contests, submissions, etc. <https://www.sfw.org/other-resources/for-authors/writer-beware/>

Editor Talk

Brigitte Doss-Johnson



My four-year-old grandson asked, “Grandma, do you have kids?”

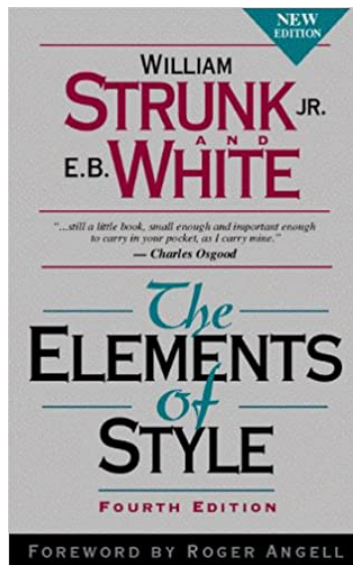
Ah, what a neat glimpse into his brain. He doesn’t quite understand generations, but he did want a peer to play with and he knew kids come with adults.

I think about my learning process with writing. After I wrote my first novel in a storm of creativity, I knew I then had to develop a way to self-edit. My first stop was my daughter’s book from a Mission College English class: *The Elements of Style*, the fourth edition by William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White. The book is tiny, not intimidating, almost inviting. I was determined to understand every word in the 105 pages. The part about active tense ... well if it were a record, I would have worn it out. I re-read the two example sentences repeatedly, then I

finally stared at it. Staring works. I finally got it! I re-wrote my entire manuscript guided by the lessons in *The Elements of Style*. The problem now is I see so many instances of not good style in everything I read. But, I’d rather have this problem than writing without style.

Since then, I’ve bought a Kindle edition of the book. There are free pdfs and even a Project Gutenberg version of the first edition. E.B. White was the author of *Charlotte’s Web* and William Strunk, Jr. was his professor at Cornell. This book is such a treasure, rich and compact.

I think about Wilbur in *Charlotte’s Web* and his learning arc. I think about my grandson and all he’ll learn to understand genealogy. I think about my progress as a writer. None of us would grow without good guides.



Rotating Editing Team:

Marjorie Johnson, Ken Roberge, Carolyn Donnell, Dave LaRoche, Marty Sorensen, Edie Matthews, Bill Baldwin.

If you are interested in being a part of the editing team, please email newsletter@southbaywriters.com

Submit writing to WritersTalk using this form:

<https://tinyurl.com/writerstalk>

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Web Master TBD

SBW Mission

Educate 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. 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
Note: California Writers Club uses a fiscal year that runs from July 1 through June 30 each year.

Contribute to WritersTalk

Members of the South Bay Writers Club are encouraged to submit their creative works for publication in WritersTalk. Submissions are now being accepted on this form:

<https://tinyurl.com/writerstalk>

Submission deadline is the 15th of the month.

Inclusion of graphics are by the discretion of the editor.

Short Fiction (1000 words)

Memoir (1000 words)

Poetry (300 words)

Essay (1000 words)

Send information about your news or achievements to membernews@southbaywriters.com.

Information should be of interest and value to writers that does not provide direct economic benefit to its originator and is published free of charge.

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MAIL TO

Address Correction Requested

Writing Contest: Childhood Vacation

Write 100-to-200 words describing a childhood vacation. Did you go to the beach or the mountains? Water ski or snow ski? Did you camp in the backyard or stay in a castle in Europe? Describe the experience in prose or poetry.

First place prize \$50. Second and third place runners-up will receive a Barnes & Noble's gift card. No entry fee required.

Contest open for members of South Bay Writers (or dual member). If you're not already or you need to renew, do it now! (southbaywriters.com).

Contest deadline: June 15.

Email entry to: pres@southbaywriters.com

July Writing Prompt: July 4, Foodie

Write 150 words or less about what you eat on the Fourth of July and the significance of it. Do you enjoy "American" food? Dishes from your heritage? Favorite eatables that ancestors made? Why do you look forward to sharing and eating these special foods on Independence Day?

Call open only to members of South Bay Writers (or dual member).

Submission deadline: June 15

Send submissions and optional images through this form: <https://tinyurl.com/writerstalk>

Save
the
date:

Summer Potluck BBQ
Sunday, July 16, 3-6PM