



WRITERS TALK

Monthly Newsletter of the South Bay Writers Club

November
2024

November Speaker: Heather Haven

Journey to Becoming a Published Author

Shari Clare



Hooray! Heather will be here in November!

Real life can have as many unpredictable events as a mystery novel. In August, a broken wrist and severe laryngitis proved too much, even for the heroic Heather, and so she wasn't able to speak to our branch. Fortunately, our meeting was rescued by an extraordinary "the show must go on" presentation by Edie Matthews. This gave Heather the time she needed to recover her voice (and possibly her sanity). Heather is now more than ready to perform her postponed presentation at our November meeting.

Publishing a novel can be an elusive dream, even for the most dedicated of writers. Although she always had a passion for writing, her journey to the publication of her first novel contains as many twists and turns as one of the 18 published mysteries she now has under her belt.

Starting out in Florida, with a long stint in New York City as an actress, wardrobe supervisor, and writer of pretty much everything except novels, Heather acquired a husband and moved with him to California. There she began living a different sort of dream, at the Stanford University Graduate School of Business, working as a faculty recruiter. In her spare time, she put everything she had into completing a sensational cozy mystery. Unafraid of being non-traditional, Heather boldly went her own way and self-published, a practice that was looked down upon in the bad old days of the 20th century.

Fortunately, we live in a more enlightened time, where self-publishing can lead to fame and fortune, and sometimes a future on television. In fact, you might soon find adaptations of Heather's murder mysteries on one of the major cable networks known for its cozy "killer" content.

Join us to hear Heather's hilarious adventures through her publication journey, which, in the manner of her witty mystery novels, leads to an unpredictable ending.



- **What: Heather Haven - Becoming a Published Author**
- **When: Saturday, November 9, at 10:30AM**
- **Where: Maker Nexus, 1330 Orleans Drive, Sunnyvale**
- **Admission: \$10 for members, \$15 for nonmembers**

Map and directions to Maker Nexus on back cover

October Recap: Jill Hedgecock

Compelling Endings

Bill Baldwin

Have you ever been sailing along on a project, then suddenly realized you had no idea how to end it? The story may be riveting, your language entertaining and stylish, but... "Where was I going with this?" Um...Gulp!

Jill Hedgecock, our October speaker, provided a myriad of possible answers, based on her analysis of a dozen or so well-known books (mostly novels).

Who wants to disappoint their readers? You don't want them to reach the final page and snort: "You ended it like that?"

Endings are difficult, but there are many ways to avoid this, many options. Don't be discouraged! Hemingway wrote forty different endings for *A Farewell to Arms*.

Jill mentioned books by well-known authors that actually disappoint: an entire book builds up to an event that is going to happen...then doesn't.

Consider these possibilities:

- Some authors have ended books with incomplete sentences.
- The beginning and the ending of a book can connect. Some authors have ended a book with the opening sentence, or a variation of it.
- *Native Son* ends metaphorically, *Tuesdays With Morrie* provides a full circle literal ending, including nuggets of wisdom.
- *For Whom the Bell Tolls* offers a cinematic ending.
- Some genres demand particular endings. Romance readers expect a happy conclusion.
- Science fiction often builds on a "what-if?" premise. Provide an answer to the what-if!

(Continued on page 4)

President's Message

Una Daly

President, South Bay Writers



The Writing Season

"If you find a book you really want to read but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it." — Toni Morrison

Fall is finally here after California experienced its hottest summer on record, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Days are growing shorter and nights colder. Now that everyone is spending less time on outdoor activities, we should all have more time for our writing, right? Here are my thoughts to help us use that freed up time to finish that book, or maybe begin one:

- NaNoWriMo (*see page 4*) is a fun, empowering approach to creative writing and runs from November 1-30. The challenge: draft an entire novel in just one month. Why do it? For 30 wild, exciting, surprising days, you get to silence your inner critic, let your imagination take over, and just create!
- Critique Groups - South Bay Writers has just launched two new critique groups, thanks to the leadership of Marwa Sabry and Amanda Senior. Those groups are now closed, but more are anticipated as demand from our membership grows.
- Several CWC branches are planning open anthologies for 2025, so please monitor the [California Writers Club BRANCHES](#) page to stay up-to-date on submission deadlines.

State of the Branch:

The South Bay Branch stands strong at slightly over 90 members heading into 2025, and we have many award-winning and published authors among us. Four branch members' works were featured in the juried California Writers Club [Best of the Best: 2024 Literary Review](#). Congratulations to Carolyn Donnell, Reena Kapoor, Dave LaRoche, and Edie Matthews.

And thank you to all who participated in our branch's California Writers Week contest. Each well-written entry focused on unique California attributes. Entries were stripped of the author's name by Tina, our WT editor, before submitting for judging. If you'd like to volunteer to judge in the future, please let us know.

The winning entries not only combined interesting subject matter with writerly skill but also added creative elements such as dialogue, descriptive language, or unique endings to surprise the reader (*see page 5*).

Congratulations to:

- 1st Prize: Loureen Giordano Murphy for "Burn Scar"
- 2nd Prize: Shari Clare for "We've Come A Long Way"
- 3rd Prize: Amanda Senior for "Mount Madonna"

Board Update:

Please welcome Gerri Forté back to the South Bay Writers' board as secretary. Many of you may remember Gerri serving as WritersTalk managing editor during the pandemic and we're so pleased to have her back. Also, a big shout-out to Chris Weilert, our wonderful secretary of many years, who thankfully continues on the board as Technology Committee Chair.

As the year draws to a close, the board is in planning mode for 2025, and we're looking closely at the suggestions many of you provided in our recent Members Survey. You will be hearing from us soon on how, together, we can make those great ideas come to life.

Wishing you and yours a happy Thanksgiving!! — WT

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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.

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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. The Managing Editor decides which submissions to publish, and submissions may be copyedited for clarity or brevity.

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

Electronic submissions should be MS Word files. Use a plain font, no tabs, no extra spaces or returns, no page breaks. Send graphics separately as jpg files, with placement notes as desired.

Authors retain all rights to their work. WritersTalk gratefully acknowledges the authors' permission to publish their submissions here. For any reprint, contact individual authors for permission.

Submission deadline is the 20th of the month.

Submit to: newsletter@southbaywriters.com

Member Achievement and News

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.

Submit to: membernews@southbaywriters.com

Change of Address: Send changes of address to membership@southbaywriters.com, or you can edit your own entry in the member's roster (MRMS).

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Tina Glasner
Managing Editor



Mature or Immature?

I take just about anything life hands me as fair game to write about. The following is an example. (Warning: I've included a couple of expletives here.)

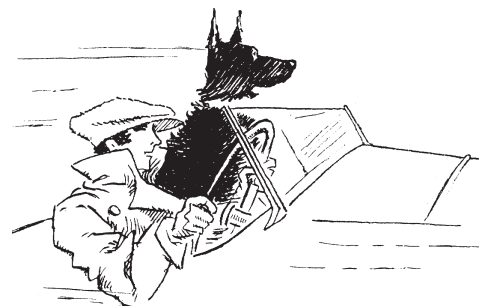
Did you know that if you're 55 or over you can take a driver education course that, if you pass, can lower your car insurance rate? I thought taking "California Mature Driver Improvement" would be edifying. Well it was, but not in the way I expected.

I thought it was going to be a review of the Driver Handbook. However, I'd say the true essence of the course, as stated politely, is "Accept your impending status as a nondriver." In plainer English: "Hey, face it, the day is coming, know when to get your ass off the road!!"

For most of our adult lives, driving equalled independence; it's hard to pry those steering wheels out of our grip.

How do you know you're getting too old?

- Slower reactions.
- Missing your nap time.
- You probably can't rotate your neck well enough now to change lanes.
- You drive too slow, not too fast.
- You never learned to drive on a steep mountain road, in heavy fog, or on black ice, so why try it now?
- Ditto for teaching you what to do if your hood latch suddenly gives way (this actually did happen to me), but what are the odds?
- Your peepers are giving out. The little interactive video to show you the effects of glaucoma actually faded to black. I think I'd notice that. Should I put my seeing-eye dog behind the wheel?
- Your drug cocktail. No criteria is implied in their list as to where you got your stash: from your friendly MD, your back-fence pot plantation, or your crack cocaine dealer. I was glad the course writers think that we aging boomers are still turning on. But, now it's by prescription!



I'm reminded of my ex-husband, who behind the wheel was quite a "Type A." He used to yell at any driver he spotted wearing a hat. A hat, especially a fishing hat, was an obvious tip-off, he claimed, that the driver was an old person. "Hey," he'd blare at them, "you drive like old people f---!"



Now I am finally one of those old people. I think of him still and shy away from driving while wearing a hat. Silly. As to whether I still engage in the other activity he referred to, I'm not telling. —WT

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(October Recap, continued from page 1)

- Mystery/Thrillers want solutions/explanations.
- Horror stories sometimes provide a false ending.
- Non-traditional stories can experiment with unusual narrative styles and structures.



Jill Hedgecock

You also need to remember that not only books have endings. Sections and individual chapters have them, too. The same goes for books in a series. The final-book ending is one thing; the other endings have to satisfy the reader but also leave them wanting more.

You can end chapters with cliffhangers, or a character shift, or a question answered. You can have something or someone new appear. Endings can provide revelations about the human condition, thematic conclusions, surprise endings. And remember Hemingway: you may have to rewrite that ending dozens of times.

Jill Hedgecock ended with a writing exercise. Consider a current project and write three different endings. Think a bit, then expand that to ten. Then decide which of your endings works best.

Maybe now you can finish that project! — WT



Giving Thanks — November 2018

Carey Doheny Steffee

“Those who learn...teach; Those who get...give”
— Maya Angelou

In the spirit of the current season, beginning with Thanksgiving. A holiday that sets the tone and table to close the year.

We celebrate,
We gather,
We become a community of like-minded people.

If it's too overwhelming, break it down and focus on one or the other — Giving or thanking.

Set the table without room for toxicity.

Find small or simple reasons to be grateful.

— WT

November is National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo)



NaNoWriMo

National Novel Writing Month: write 50,000 words of a novel in thirty days. Each year on Nov. 1, hundreds of thousands of people around the world begin to write, determined to end the month with a first draft.

"NaNoWriMo believes stories matter, and we're here to help you write yours."

For more information, see NaNoWriMo.org. — WT

View from the Board - Gerri Forté, Secretary

The Board met the evening of Oct. 9 via Zoom. Present: Una Daly, Alfred Jan, Gerri Forté, Tina Glasner, Alice Wu, Bill Baldwin, Carolyn Donnell, Marjorie Johnson, Edie Matthews, and Joe-Ming Cheng.

We welcomed incoming **Secretary, Gerri Forté**. This was followed by brief self-introductions by board members.

We discussed forming committees, broader than the board itself, to implement: critique groups, membership outreach, speaker recruitment, a writers conference, or an anthology.

Una asked what our policy is regarding sharing announcements from other branches. She also suggested we be proactive in describing the duties of the board to the general membership, especially regarding positions that need volunteers.

Alice Wu, Treasurer: \$300+ was collected during the last chapter meeting. \$100+ in membership fees has been received.

Bill Baldwin, Open Mics, Central Board & NorCal Rep: Bill is considering hosting a hybrid open mic meeting once a month. More details will follow as the quirks are worked out. The Central Board Executive Committee will meet October 27th.

Carolyn Donnell, Contests & Facebook Admin: Members are encouraged to share ideas of what other topics can be included on the Facebook pages.

Shari Clare Vice President/Membership: Shari previewed the agenda of the general meeting that she will host in place of Una. The agenda includes Halloween costumes and winners, a reminder to enter the California Writers Week contest, the intro of our speaker Jill Hedgecock, and a preview of November's speaker. Shari is also actively in the process of booking 2025 speakers. Our branch currently has 90 active (paid) members. 32 previous members opted not to rejoin.

Tina Glasner, WritersTalk Editor: The cumulative index is still under discussion. Carolyn and Joe-Ming are assisting.

Edie Matthews, Publicity & Public Relations: Gift cards for the Halloween costume contest were purchased, and PR announcements were sent out re the upcoming general meeting, the costume contest, and the California Writers Week contest.

The next board meeting will be in-person, Saturday, Nov. 3, at 2pm - 4pm. Members are welcome. To attend and receive details, email Una at pres@southbaywriters.com. — WT

South Bay Branch Contest Winners ~ *Theme: California*

FIRST PRIZE

Burn Scar

Loureen Giordano Murphy

Wire shelving showcases some of California's unique wonders

wrought by nature's fierce artistry.

In this museum of oddities,

a rusty nail pierces a teapot adhered to a cup filled with once-molten glass.

A stack of saucers fused together sports a massive tail of glass and sparkling stone.

"Take anything you want," my stepdad says.

I select a small vintage shaker, its floral pattern weepy. Appropriate, somehow.

"It's amazing how some of these survived," he goes on. Most breakables crashed to the concrete basement when the main floor of the Berry Creek house burned.

Though fascinated by his finds, my stepdad is the true survivor.

Knowing neither the proximity of the blaze nor the wicked speed of its advance,

he worked at the Berry Creek property into the night.

A fire crew waved as they drove by, saying nothing about evacuation orders, then about-faced and drove out.

Had he known, he would have taken a valiant and hopeless stand

to defend his 40-year forest home and all its antique treasures.

But he headed down to Oroville for the night, saving himself.

Flames devoured the house in two minutes, leaving only the stone staircase climbing into the ashen sky.

A month later, nearby tree trunks still smoldered.

Life's infernos re-sculpt us, bonding us to people and events, rendering us like those morphed china pieces, forever changed.

Yet survivors draw from the depths, thrusting green foliage from blackened trunks, defiant.

SECOND PRIZE

We've Come a Long Way

Shari Clare

Driving through the Central Valley in 1959, the young newlyweds spotted a road sign that indicated they were approaching their destination: "Merced: Gateway to Yosemite."

"What's that awful smell?" Jan asked her new husband. The odor grew stronger when they drove past a livestock pasture. Having just arrived from New York City, neither had ever seen a live cow, and the stench took them by surprise.

Holding his nose, Bob quipped, "I'll never look at a steak the same way again."

Fast-forward to 2009. Although Jan and Bob never made it to Yosemite, they had been back to Merced to visit their grandson at college. The small town had grown into more than just a gateway to somewhere else, it was home to the newest UC campus. When First Lady Michelle Obama agreed to give the commencement address to the inaugural class, Bob and Jan drove to Merced for the ceremony. They watched their grandson receive his college diploma, then listened respectfully while Michelle Obama marveled at the natural beauty of California's national parks, noting how far we have come since Yosemite was founded more than 100 years ago.

When the applause died down, they caught a whiff of a long-forgotten odor emanating from the nearby meadow where some cattle grazed. Bob poked Jan mischievously and said, "She may be right about how far we've come, but I get the sense that some things will never change."

THIRD PRIZE

Mount Madonna

Amanda Senior

Mount Madonna conjures a reverent glory. As the sun rises from the East, golden rays cast their glow upon her pinnacle, adorning the sacred mother with a radiant halo. A visible manifestation of God, so some would say.

Deserving of her namesake, for hundreds of centuries she has nursed her charges well. From the East she suckles San Juan Bautista, never discriminating between the native Ohlone tribe who paid their respects to their mountain mother, and the men who enslaved her children in adobe brick prisons. The spot marked with a cross.

She gave of herself when wounded by men, who peeled away her magnificence for money with the glistening teeth of their axes. Silently, unmoving, she looked on as the gentle giants were felled. A blemish across her cheek. Now they come to scorch her face, leaving her with twisted and blackened scars.

From her craggy face spring forth her tears. Holy water that nourishes Monterey Bay's marine inhabitants, from the ever abundant anemone clinging to the inside edges of rock pools, to microscopic krill, sole fodder of the immense blue whale.

A proud mother, where the mere man, inflated with his own self importance, can be rendered mute, brought to his knees in awe by the expanse of her redwoods, and the insignificance rendered when underneath the protection of her canopied love.

She has been. She is. She will be. Mount Madonna. Long before you and after me.

— WT

(See more contest entries on pages 8-9.)

SBW October 12: Jill Hedgecock - Compelling Endings & Halloween Contest

Photos by Joe-Ming Cheng





South Bay Writers Contest Entries

Here are the remainder of the entries for our contest. Enjoy!

Los Angeles City Hall

Edie Matthews

For forty years, the Los Angeles City Hall towered over the City of Angels and was visible from the upstairs window of our Craftsman-style home.

Two TV shows featured it. "Superman": "leap tall buildings in a single bound," and "Dragnet": "This is the city, I work here, I'm a cop." In addition, it's appeared in numerous movies and is depicted on LA's police badges.

Built in 1928, the architecture is a blend of Art Deco, Romanesque arches, and Corinthian columns. The two wings at the base have a Spanish terracotta roof. The upper section is modeled on the Classical Mausoleum at Halicarnassus (the last destroyed wonder of the world), crowned with a pyramid, and topped with the Lindbergh Beacon dedicated to the aviator.

From the decorative rotunda to a brass elevator, my mother took us to the observation deck on the 27th floor. We didn't have funds for the telescope, but it was smoggy, so you couldn't see far anyway. Although on a clear day, you can see across the Pacific Ocean to Catalina Island, 26 miles away. Eventually, the building moratorium was lifted, and new skyscrapers dwarfed the city hall.

In the 90s, the structure was being retrofitted. Only the first three floors were accessible by elevator. But I found a stairway and climbed to the top. During my exploration, I discovered a hidden fire escape sandwiched between a second outer layers. If I ever write a thriller, I'll use this knowledge for a get-away.

Not Yo Semite, but My Semite

Katy Boyd

Yosemite was one of my family's favorite places. As a child I remember saying it was not Yo Semite, but My Semite! We were there when they were still doing the Firefall. On one trip we watched as they pushed an actual bonfire over the cliff at Glacier Point. The falling red-hot embers looked like a glowing waterfall. This practice was stopped in 1968 because the Firefall itself was a hazard, and spectators were trampling the meadows.

My father belonged to the Sierra Club, and the club offered a bike ride through Yosemite. I was a teenager and was optimistic about how good a bike rider I was. My parents drove me and my bike to Yosemite. I think we started at Tioga Pass. My parents waited in the campground while I rode with the rest of the bike riders all day. My legs hurt so much, however, that I got more and more behind. Daddy wondered where I was and came back with the station wagon to drive me the last mile or so to where the group was camping for the night. I looked across the valley, and it looked like we had ended up at the same elevation as when we started. The next day it was almost totally downhill, and I was able to coast most of the way. That one bike ride in Yosemite was enough for me!

Dry Heat With a Helping of Friendship

Shari Clare

"Oh my god, is it always this hot here?" I asked my dad when we passed an electronic sign that showed the current temperature at 100 degrees. It was my first day here, but he had already been in California for a few months, arriving ahead of the rest of the family to start his new job. Triple digit temperatures generally caused extreme misery, so I was surprised that this heat was not oppressive. "It's a dry heat," he explained. "We don't get the same kind of humidity as they do back east."

Hot and dry, that was what my friends back in New York thought of California. Also, Disneyland and movie stars. I wrote letters, lots of letters, in the days before email, back when long-distance phone calls were prohibitively expensive. I complained that Disneyland was seven hours away, and that my only sighting of stars were the ones in the night sky.

Good news came a few days later when our neighbor came over to meet us. Sue was a recent graduate of the high school I would be attending, and she took me under her wing, advising me about the clubs to join and the teachers to avoid. She generously included me in her family's frequent pool parties, and I basked in the warmth (without the humidity) of both my first California summer and my first California friendship.

Frank and Nora's Visit to the Hotel Del Monte

Tonya McQuade

In 1905, my great grandparents, Frank and Nora Traugher, went on a four-week honeymoon adventure. Their first stop was the Hotel Del Monte in Del Monte, California, in modern-day Monterey. Part of the hotel's original grounds now make up Pebble Beach Golf Course. Visitors arrived at the nearby "Del Monte" train stop, then carriages took them to the resort.

Sitting on 126 acres of cultivated ground, Hotel Del Monte opened in 1880 and was advertised in *Sunset* magazine as being "in every detail and in all its environment ideally Californian," and as having "the most magnificent hotel, the most expansive landscape, the most varied forests, the most delightful temperature, and the most superb flowers IN ALL AMERICA."

Frank and Nora definitely seem to have taken advantage of the hotel's many offerings. Their album includes photos of them sitting under the giant date palm; strolling in the Flower Garden and Arizona Garden; enjoying the Lover's Driveway; finding their way through the Mystic Maze; and sitting in a boat at the water's edge. They also enjoyed the scenic 17-Mile Drive, which opened in 1881 and began and ended at the hotel.

(Continued on page 9)

(South Bay Writers Contest Entries, continued from page 8)

The Arizona Garden was designed by noted landscape gardener Rudolph Ulrich and included a combination of desert and subtropical plants. The Mystic Maze was a large, ornate shrubbery on the hotel's grounds. Today, the Hotel Del Monte serves as the Naval Postgraduate School. I know I'm curious and plan to check it out the next time I'm in Monterey!

California Gold

Marjorie Johnson

In 1848, James Marshall found shining flecks of gold. The gold discovery site, located in the still visible tailrace of Sutter's sawmill in Coloma, is one of the most significant historic sites in the nation.

The Gold Rush of 1849 was one of the largest migrations in American history. Within a decade, the new metropolis of San Francisco sprouted and prospered. While merchants made the most money, miners extracted more than 750,000 pounds of gold. Upon arrival in California, immigrants learned mining was the hardest kind of labor. They moved rock, dug dirt, and waded into freezing streams.

In 1895, cries of "Gold! Gold! Gold in the Klondike!" sent 100,000 hopeful miners sprinting toward Alaska and the Yukon with their eyes on riches. My grandfather, Jonathan Thomas, went there, along with Jack London, although they did not know each other. Most of the miners gave up, or drank a lot, and went home broke. Only 4,000 found gold.

My grandfather brought home his stake and moved to Downieville, Sierra County. He purchased a claim for the Blue Banks Mine, a one tunnel hard-rock mine, the gold in veins in white quartz. He crossed the river every day in his "Flying Dutchman," a bucket on steel cables running through pulleys, designed much like the clothesline where my mother used to hang her wet laundry.

Jonathan liked strawberries and planted them in an ore cart. Every morning he pulled out his berry cart before entering the mine, always a temperature above freezing.

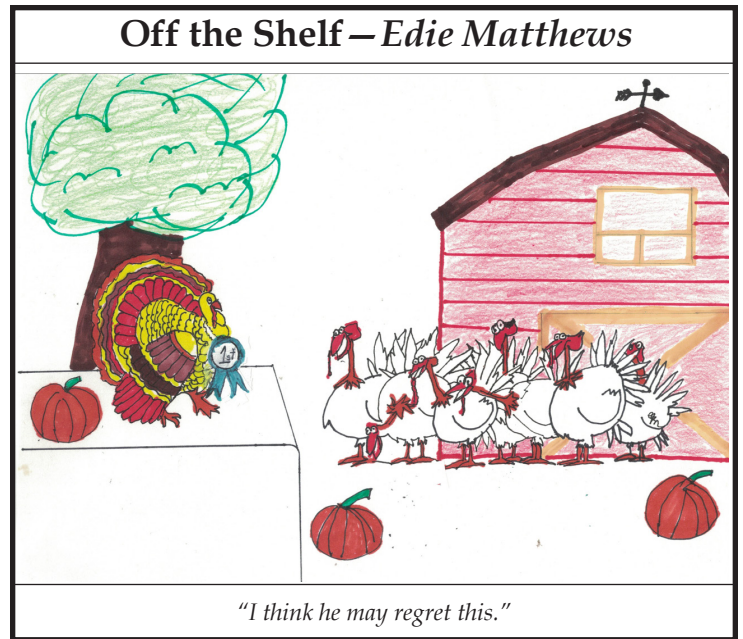
California Counter Culture

Tina Glasner

When I think of someone who epitomized California, it was my mother's sister, my aunt Rhea, who was actually born in Michigan.

In my childhood she lived in Pasadena, then Santa Barbara. Rhea took up painting, giant dreamy fantasies featuring huge odd geese, stairways, tropical plants. Years later, long after Rhea's passing, my cousin Amie offered me my pick of any of them. But they were all far too large and I had to decline.

My aunt read our auras and adopted a macrobiotic diet. One time she brought a loaf of her homemade bread to our house. But we literally could not slice it. Our dog, Rusty, a red Doberman, liked to carry around sticks, rocks, you name it. He was very pleased to carry around that loaf, but we never told Rhea.



Later Rhea moved to Garberville, where she owned a bookstore named "Orange Cat Goes To Market." The summer after my graduation from high school, I rode Greyhound all the way up north from LA to visit.

She took me skinny dipping. It was my first experience swimming in any natural lake. The water seemed so murky. Camping, Rhea read us bedtime stories. She hadn't started at the beginning of whatever it was. Years later, I realized she was reading from *The Chronicles of Narnia*. I later read it myself, in the usual way, but it just didn't have the same mystique as lying in a tent, listening to my aunt read.

– WT



How to Live With Courage, Resilience, and Joy! – Marjorie Johnson (Part 1 of 2)

Reena Kapoor

I met Marjorie Johnson almost immediately after I joined our South Bay Writers branch over a year ago. As I got to know Marjorie, I discovered her abiding love of mathematics – particularly her fascination with Fibonacci numbers (a sequence observed repeatedly in nature, defining a spiral) – and of piloting small planes! Perhaps because of my own engineering education in the '80s in India, when very few women chose that field, I was intrigued by Marjorie's life story. So when Marjorie invited me to her "new digs" in a senior residential community, I couldn't help but ask her about her life's journey in the 50s and 60s. The more Marjorie told me, the more fascinated and impressed I became, so I asked her for permission to record her account, and happily, Marjorie said yes!

So I offer you Marjorie's story with the hope that you'll not just enjoy it but also gain some inspiration from reading about this woman mathematician, real estate investor, mom of four, writer, and pilot. As you'll see, Marjorie's life is shaped by a relentless drive for self-development, a deep love of mathematics, and a remarkable ability to persevere with joy through the many challenges that life threw her way.

Marjorie Thomas was born in 1938 in Santa Rosa. In 1944, as Marjorie entered first grade, her family moved to Nevada City. Her childhood was spent in a rural community, where her father worked for the California Division of Forestry and her mother managed their home with resourcefulness and thrift. Shortly after graduating from high school in 1955, Marjorie married her high school sweetheart, Wayne.

Unfortunately, Wayne, who suffered from mental illness, was unable to provide stability for their growing family. Marjorie soon found herself juggling raising kids and managing a household, while supporting her husband through his struggles. Their financial hardships became a constant, and Marjorie worked wherever she could find employment. This included a tuberculosis sanitarium where she leveraged her sharp math skills. As part of her duties at the sanitarium, Marjorie meticulously calculated the dietary needs of diabetic patients with great precision.

Despite her dedication to family, Marjorie's marriage ended in divorce. Wayne's mental health had further deteriorated, and his infidelity compounded their challenges. This being the 1950s, divorce was a significant event for a woman. Left to care

for two children alone, Marjorie knew she needed to rebuild her life. So with her indomitable spirit, Marjorie took the bold step of pursuing higher education – a rare move for women of her generation, even more for those with young children and without a supportive spouse. Further, in an era when women were often discouraged from scientific fields, Marjorie enrolled at San Jose State University to study mathematics.

Marjorie's time at San Jose State was marked by both achievement and adversity. She was one of only a handful of women studying mathematics in the male-dominated environment of the university's STEM departments. In fact, there were so few women in those fields that the engineering building didn't even have a women's restroom. Yet, her love for math, which she describes as "solving wonderful puzzles," drove her to excel. She benefited from the kindness of her professors and the financial aid and scholarships available to students.

Her success at San Jose State set the stage for the next chapter of her life. In 1960, while still a student, Marjorie met Ben Bicknell, a fellow math major. He lived in a men's rooming house that Marjorie cleaned as one of her get-through-college jobs. Ben would often take Marjorie's children on a walk for ice cream to make it easier for her to complete her cleaning duties. Marjorie says that Ben needed help with his aging mother, while she needed help raising her two children, so when they married in 1961, it was more of a pragmatic arrangement to help each other. When Ben's mother went to a nursing home and Marjorie's children finished high school, they dissolved their marriage in 1975.

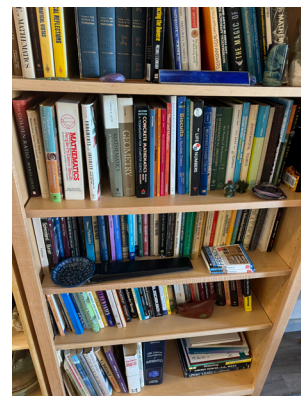
Meanwhile in 1968 Marjorie had met Frank Johnson, a new teacher in the math department where she was department chair. Frank also taught classical guitar. Frank's first marriage had ended in a divorce from which he had two children. Marjorie and Frank married in 1976. Now they each had two children and two stepchildren. Blended families are always a challenge, but Frank and Marjorie made it work through commitment, a shared professional bond, and their passion for mathematics. Through all this Marjorie continued her education, eventually attaining a PhD in Mathematics in 1983.

See the next WritersTalk for Part 2 – WT



Marge being awarded the CWC's highest honor, the Jack London Award

Marjorie's bookshelves are still lined with books on mathematics – and more!



2024 NOVEMBER

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1 Open-Mic - 7:30p (see note*); NaNoWriMo (see pg 4)	2
3 SBW Board Meeting 2-4p	4	5	6	7	8	9 SBW Meeting 10:30a
10	11	12	13	14	15 Open-Mic - 7:30p (see note*)	16 Writer's Digest Short Short Story Contest (and more)
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28  THANKSGIVING	29	30

*Open-Mic - Register in advance at southbaywritersopenmic@gmail.com by 5p the Thursday before, and you'll receive a Zoom link on Friday afternoon.

Save The Date: Events and Contests

Name	Date	Comments
West Trade Review	ongoing.....	Reading period until Dec 1
FundsforWriters newsletters.....	ongoing.....	Pitch a 600-650 word piece, pays \$200 or 10¢ per word and up
California Writers Club Bulletin	Dec 1.....	Submit articles or announcements to the state membership
Fractured Lit Micro Prize	Dec 1.....	Enter any time up to deadline, 400 words or fewer stories
South Bay Writers Holiday Bash.....	Dec 8.....	Will be 5-8 pm at Edie's home, details to follow
Palette Poetry "Previously Published" Poems	Dec 8.....	1st, 2nd, 3rd place prizes + broadside of winning poem
Sequesterum Science Fiction & Fantasy	Dec 15.....	Multiple genres accepted, "your best fantastical writing"
Silicon Valley Reads kickoff event.....	Jan 30.....	At De Anza College, full schedule available after New Year's
Catamaran - Fashion Issue	Feb 1.....	Fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, art

Member News

Marjorie Johnson

Member **Reena Kapoor** was invited and presented her poetry at the 2024 South Asian Literary and Arts Festival (SALA) held at Stanford on September 28th and 29th. Details are [here](#). Two of Reena Kapoor's poems were selected and published in the recently published [Redwood Writers 2024 Poetry Anthology: One Day](#).

Marjorie Bicknell Johnson: The July meeting of the Fibonacci Association stimulated interest in the Fibonacci Quarterly. My mathematical articles, mostly appearing in *The Fibonacci Quarterly*, had 58 more citations last week as reported by Research Gate on October 17. That means they were used as references in mathematical papers, and I find out who shares an interest with me.

Let's hear from more of you, members of South Bay Writers. Your successes make my heart glad and encourage other writers. To share your writing news, send an email to membernews@southbaywriters.com – WT



California Writers Club

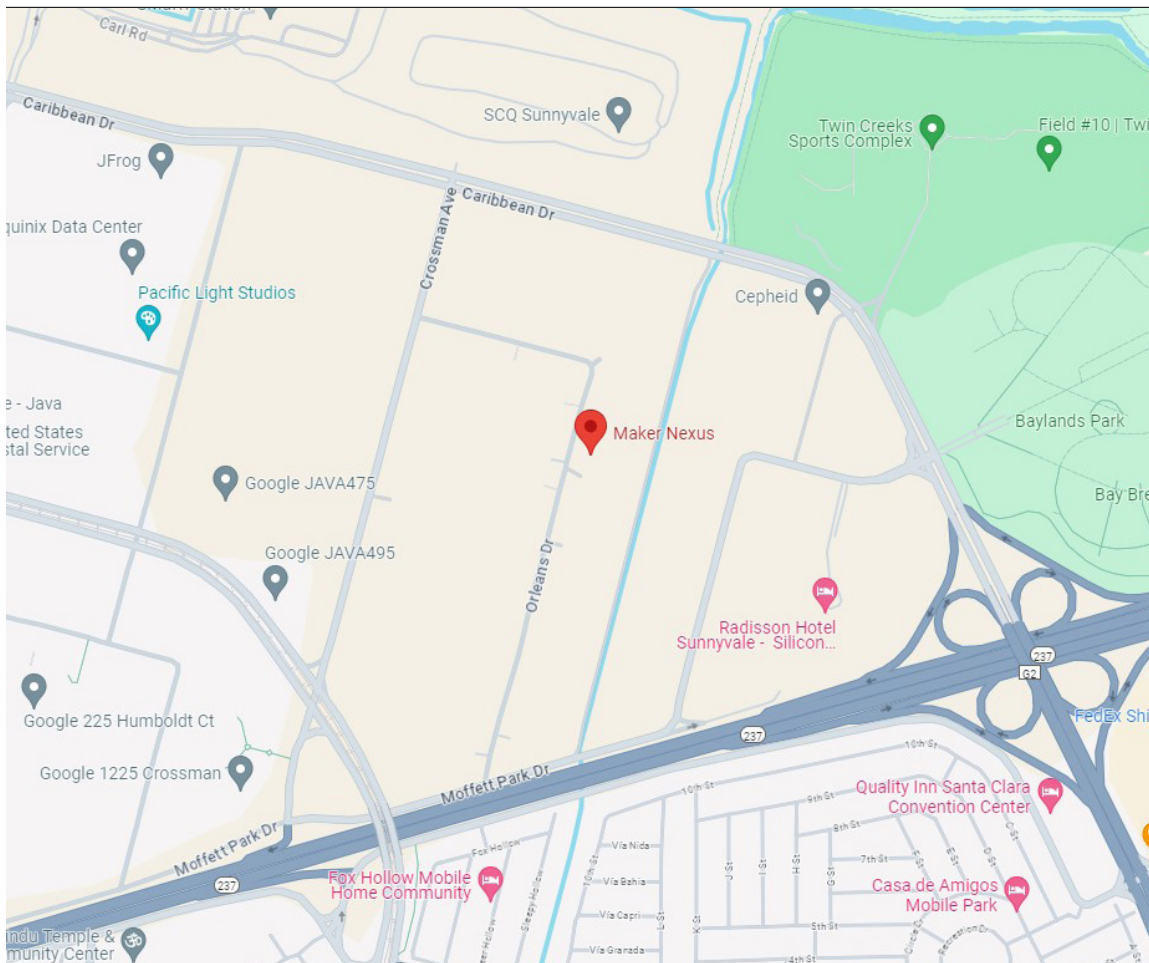
South Bay Branch

P.O. Box 3254

Santa Clara, CA 95055

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Address Correction Requested



Directions:

Maker Nexus

1330 Orleans Drive
Sunnyvale

From Fair Oaks Ave, go north to Crossman Ave, turn Right. To Baltic Way, turn Right. To Orleans Drive, turn Right.

From Lawrence Expy, go north, name changes to Caribbean Dr. To Crossman Ave, turn Left. To Baltic Way, turn Left. To Orleans Drive, turn Right.

**Saturday, November 9,
10:30 at Maker Nexus**

**Come EARLY to
allow for the security
check-in and finding
a good seat**

**Heather Haven:
Becoming a Published
Author**