



South Bay
WRITERS

Silicon Valley's Premier Writing Group



February Newsletter

Happy February Everyone!

I hope your New Year is going well and you have had a chance to write something new. Perhaps a special letter to Valentine for a holiday you definitely didn't forget?

This year I'm writing a slightly different kind of letter for Valentine's Day, one to all of you. Sadly, this will be my last Newsletter/Newsblast for South Bay Writers. It's been a great pleasure to spend these last months as the Managing Editor for WritersTalk, reading your memories, your craft and your stories with me so that I could share them with the rest of the group. It was a great opportunity, and I learned much from all of you. I hope you received something in return.

While I am no longer the Managing Editor for the WritersTalk, I will still be part of the board as a Member-at-Large and attending the monthly meetings, so feel free to reach out to me. If you are interested in taking over as the Managing Editor, please reach out to Una (pres@southbaywriters.com).

Good luck and keep writing!

-Ryan Davis-Marsh



Building A Resilient Writing Community By Una Daly

Freshly inspired by our January workshop, *Sound of Story* with Jordan Rosenfeld, I'm reflecting on what it means to build community. Wikipedia shares this:

"Community building is a field of practices directed toward the creation or enhancement of **community** among **individuals** within a regional area (such as a **neighborhood**) or with a common need or interest."

At South Bay Writers (SBW), "writing" or "publication of writing" is the common interest and our practices include:

Monthly meetings and workshops with best-selling authors, award winning journalists, editors, and writing coaches that inform aspiring writers on discipline and skills for success.

Critique groups and open mics to provide individualized feedback from other writers in preparation for publication.

Opportunities to learn how to submit work for publication through our newsletter or branch anthology.

These practices that "enhance our writing" are made possible by members who volunteer their time and know-how. Together we create a sense of belonging, develop trust and

resilience, and learn new skills to benefit our community. In June we will elect a new slate of officers and committee chairs (see below). Consider what unique interests and skills you can develop at SBW while improving your writing!

Find out more about these positions on March 14, immediately following our member meeting:

President

Conducts the affairs of the branch with the advice and consent of the board in accordance with SBW policies, procedures, and bylaws. This includes: presiding over board and general meetings, appointing committee chairpersons, holds fiduciary responsibility to the branch with the support of the treasurer, seeks out partnerships with external organizations for the benefit of branch membership.

Vice President/Program Chair

Responsibilities include recruiting and scheduling speakers for our general meetings, writing up information about upcoming speakers for both our newsletter and website, introducing and welcoming the speaker at the beginning of each meeting, and providing any additional assistance requested by the club president.

Secretary

Responsible for keeping a record of all board decisions and club actions in the form of minutes of board meetings and other meetings as requested.

Treasurer

Responsible for maintaining accurate records of all financial transactions affecting the branch, and has fiduciary responsibility and liability for the safekeeping of branch funds. Receiving income and paying for expenses is a core activity. Also works closely with the membership chair to keep track of a list of current members.

Members-at-large

Represent interests and concerns of the general membership and communicate those to the board of directors. In addition, one may take on special branch projects.

Membership Chair

The membership chair collects new applications, sends welcome documents, maintains online membership records, attends board meetings, and coordinates with the treasurer on money collected.

Publicity Chair

Writes and distributes press releases about South Bay Writers' activities to both print and online outlets.

Hospitality Chair

Organizes snacks and drinks at monthly meetings with help of other board members. Welcomes guests and answers questions about the club and membership benefits.

WritersTalk Managing Editor

Produces a monthly newsletter that raises members' awareness of the branch activities and connects members to resources and information that aim to help them succeed in their writing career. Newsletters include details of upcoming meetings, board members news, branch contests, articles for professional growth or writing trends, member and other writerly news, a calendar, and features other contributions from members.

CWC/NorCal Representatives

The CWC representative attends central board meetings and is the liaison between SBW's board and the other CWC branches. The NorCal representative attends

NorCal meetings and is the liaison between SBW's board and other NorCal branches.

Open Mic Host

Schedules and facilitates the open mics, both online and live. Currently two are hosted per month, on the first and third Fridays.

Facebook/Social Media

Utilize Social Media to share news of club activities and events.

SBW Photographer

Capture photos of member activities for sharing in branch communications.

MRMS Admin

Maintain the current board officers and chairs in the statewide database to facilitate interbranch communications.

Web Editor/Master

The web chair maintains the overall appearance and cohesiveness of the SBW website and oversees the website team. Other duties include: monthly updates, maintenance, and investigation of new platforms to support branch goals.

March Meeting Preview: Roundtable

By Shari Clare

For our March meeting, instead of a featured speaker, we will have a panel discussion on the publication process, including information about traditional publishing, hybrid publishing, small presses, and self-publishing. Stay tuned for more information.

February Meeting

Kathleen Founds speaks on writing novels while battling the American health insurance system

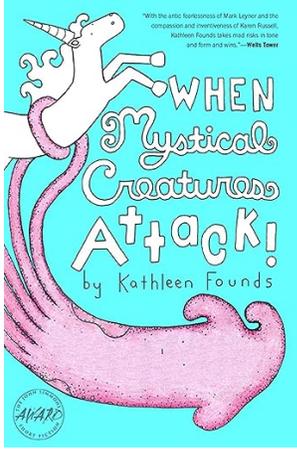
By Shari Clare

Our February speaker will be Kathleen Founds, who will talk about making decisions regarding when to continue or when to pause a work in progress, in her presentation titled "Holding on and Letting Go: A Timeline for Writing Your Novel."



Founds' first novel, *When Mystical Creatures Attack!*, is a cleverly-written "novel in stories," about an idealistic teacher who has a nervous breakdown, then corresponds, with her former students, from an inpatient psychiatric facility. Some stories within the novel were inspired by her experience teaching writing to women at Hope House, a halfway house in Redwood City for women struggling with addiction. The novel, published in 2014 by the University of Iowa Press, was listed as a New York Times notable book, and received the University of Iowa John Simmons short fiction award.

Based on the favorable response to her first novel, agents were eager to see more of her work, and she began a second novel, *The Ghost Mom's Guide to the Afterlife*. However, she didn't have the time, space, or money to express her ideas adequately, so she made the tough decision to set it aside. With a sense of thwarted potential, she didn't see a path for how to finish writing it. However, instead of giving up altogether, she turned her attention to a more personal project, which ultimately became the graphic

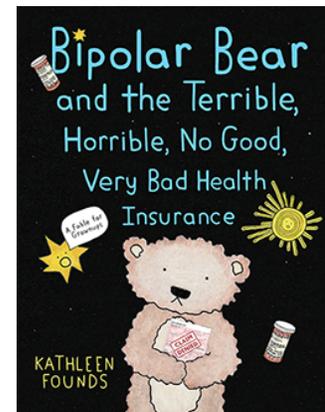


novel *Bipolar Bear & the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Health Insurance: a Fable for Grownups*. The events of the novel were largely based on her experience fighting for the treatment she needed for her bipolar disorder. Following that novel's publication in 2022, and after a long journey of writing, letting go, and overcoming obstacles, Founds was finally ready to complete the novel she had started almost a decade earlier. *The Ghost Mom's Guide to the Afterlife* is now on its way to publication in the coming year, and the members of her critique group, the Rough Drafts, are confident that it will be worth the wait.

Founds grew up in Santa Cruz county, the daughter of two nurses who worked at Watsonville Community Hospital. She attended public schools before receiving a scholarship to Santa Catalina High, a private Catholic girls school in Monterey. She received a BA in Creative Writing and Religious Studies from Stanford, where she studied with many renowned authors. Tobias Wolff was among the first to take notice of her potential as a writer. Upon graduation, she joined a year-long service program, landing as a dropout prevention counselor at a middle school in southern Texas. Her experience there served to derail her original plan to become a social worker who does writing on the side, and she instead decided to become a full-time writer. She was accepted at the prestigious creative writing program at Syracuse University, where she studied with one of her favorite authors, George Saunders. After receiving her MFA, she moved with her husband to Ohio, and began teaching at the local community college, which was fulfilling in a way similar to how she felt when volunteering at Hope House. Upon moving back to California, she took a position in the English department at Cabrillo College, where she has been teaching fiction writing and basic English for the past 14 years.

In addition to her novels, Founds has written many shorter works, which have appeared in publications such as *The Sun*, *Good Housekeeping*, *The New Yorker Online*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *The Rumpus*, *Salon*, and in the anthology *My Name Was Never Frankenstein*. As if she weren't already busy enough with writing and teaching, she is now the PTA president for the middle school her older daughter attends .

Join us on a fascinating journey with the fabulous Kathleen Founds, in which she recounts navigating the dual challenges of writing fiction and wrangling with the American health insurance system. The meeting takes place on **Saturday, February 14 at 10:30 a.m. at the Saratoga Senior Center, located at 19655 Allendale Ave in Saratoga.**



Member News

- **Amanda Senior** was selected as a finalist for the very first Guernsey Short Story Anthology Competition. *Out With The Tide* is her first piece of historical fiction, and will be published by Blue Ormer in the spring.
- **Karen Sundback** is looking for an additional member for their Critique group.

"We are a group of experienced and award-winning writers focused on short stories, creative nonfiction, and novels.

We Zoom the second and fourth Tuesday of every month from 7 - 8:30pm PST. Interested? Please contact Karen at sundback@gmail.com"

- Join **Tonya McQuade** for a "History Happy Hour" talk at the Ainsley House on March 13. Click [HERE](#) to learn more.

- The **National League of American Pen Women's Santa Clara Branch** will be holding its annual "Celebrity Luncheon" on March 7 from 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. at Michael's Restaurant at Shoreline in Mountain View.

The event serves to honor local women achievers in Art, Writing, and Music, as well as to raise money for the \$1,500 "Excellence in the Arts" awards NLAPW gives to high school seniors. In addition to a delicious lunch, the event features a Silent Auction, Costume Jewelry Sale, Basket Raffle, and fantastic entertainment. Several of our South Bay Writers members are Pen Women and would love to see you there. Visit the website - www.nlapwsantaclara.org - for more information and to purchase tickets.

- **Carolyn Donnell's** Poem "*I Am Blue*" was selected to be published in Red Penguin's upcoming book, *Blue -- Anthologies for The World Vol. 2*
- **Shambhavi** is seeking beta readers for a literary fiction with thriller elements, set in the Bay Area. The story follows Shanty, 25, whose failed job search takes a dubious turn as he struggles to survive in Silicon Valley. Looking for honest feedback on story, characters, and pacing. If interested, contact shambhaviroy@gmail.com.

Finding Your Voice

By Bill Baldwin

It was an honor and joy to welcome Jordan Rosenfeld back to South Bay Writers—we've known her a long time! Not only did we hear her wise writing advice on a sunny Saturday, we each received a copy of her book *The Sound of Story: Developing Voice and Tone in Writing*.



Before lunch Jordan talked about "Voice." The "Voice" of a piece of fiction emerges from the characters, including the narrator (if you use one): expressing their personalities, the deep-down Who They Are.

You develop Voice via Lexicon and Syntax. How does a character express themselves? Voice evolves from a character's personality. What is their social and family background? What sort of life have they had growing up? What kind of social environment do they live in now? A Gen X California woman will express herself differently (and behave differently) than a Boomer Dude from the Bronx!

How do your characters speak? Do they use unique words and expressions? Do they hold strong opinions that set them off from one another?

Such questions apply to Point of View as well. Does your narrator participate in the action or watch it from a distance? Is your narrator omniscient? If not, what is their own background and perspective? This all affects their Voice.

After the lunch break, Jordan dealt with "Tone"—how a reader reacts to your writing.

"Tone" is how readers react to your characters and story. Consider the emotions your story may evoke. Your thoughts may evolve through multiple drafts.

"Tone" is also a product of your writing style, which you must carefully consider! How can you manipulate grammar and word choices? Consider the choices you make constructing a sentence! Do you use action verbs? Do you exploit specificity with your choice of nouns? Do you select particular adjectives as you write?

What can you (or a character) interject into the narrative to startle the reader through humor, irony, or juxtaposition?

This all affects how your readers react. You can exploit alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, and other devices to keep your reader involved. Consider sentence length: you can deploy long, complex sentences or short, blunt ones. You can move between one and the other to keep your reader reading (expressing a character's Character as well)! Consider all this as you write!

Consider how long you spend presenting your story. Can you shorten the manuscript? Shorter may be more gripping, more riveting, more "to the point."

To dive deeper into these topics, I recommend Jordan's book! It plunges much further, with much more detail, into how to develop your characters and story.

*The Sound of Story: Developing **Voice and Tone** in Writing* provides a wealth of information to liven up and deepen your narrative. Find a copy and dive in!

Writers Corner

Structure, Phrasing, and Word Choices

By Ken Roberge

In our review group, one member will revise a chapter fifty times before submitting it for editorial review. And, it shows. I'm often so immersed in his work that I forget to edit. His focus on quality remains a key to exceptional writing.

We have all been seduced by writers who clutch our souls with immersive prose. They skillfully sequence words so you *cannot* put the book down. It's like gazing across Yosemite's breathtaking expanse from Glacier Point, with no will to hike away from the respite view.

A story narrative should flow effortlessly and allow the surrounding scenes to unfold naturally. Just as a mountain path cluttered with mud and boulders can distract a hiker from the scenery, an unpolished paragraph can cause a reader to stumble, forcing them to backtrack and lose the story's rhythm.

People learn to write at a young age and continue to do so throughout their lives. This leads an unpublished person to believe that writing for publication is a straightforward task. I retired eight years ago with a background in technical manuals. Surely, I can write a novel. In the process of typing my first book, the tone followed—this happened, and that happened, I gained the remarkable expertise of eating humble pie.

My embarrassment spawned an idea. Visit Barnes & Noble and sample the "New York Times Bestsellers." I could certainly gain knowledge from the "Great Authors" of our time, right?

Ugh! For most books, I couldn't read past the first page without feeling a disappointment that fostered an unfortunate revelation. In my opinion, many NYT bestselling authors are substandard writers.

I still struggle to improve my craft, and I've often been told if you want to write well, you must read many books. That advice remains questionable, considering the junk out there. Having taken many pictures with my smartphone has never made me a photographer, and having eaten many meals has not made me a chef. So, if reading many books wouldn't lead me to my destination, I figured a new path would.

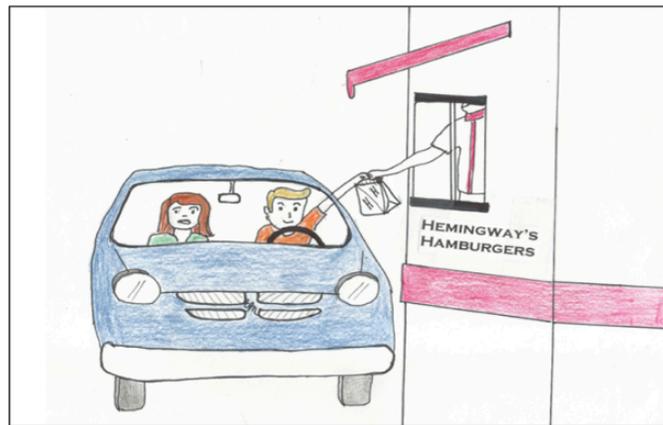
Fortunately, a few novels in the bookstore had lived up to their "best seller" reputation, and I realized the quality of the written word prevailed above quantity. "Read many books" turned into "Study a few well-written books." So, I bought a small selection of works I most admire and began my research.

I'd rather not say which books I've chosen because every reader has individual preferences for quality, genre, and style. But my experience has taught me that choosing the best reads,

studying their sentence structure, scrutinizing prominent phrases, and paying attention to each clever word choice can reveal the alluring secrets of the books we love.

Moving forward, write on.

Off the Shelf
by Edie Matthews



"It's 'Moveable' but it's not a 'Feast.'"

Upcoming Contests & Events

Writing and Publishing Events Document

- California Writers Club [The Smalls Too: A BIG Contest for Small Poems & Prose](#) - Submissions due February 15 – March 15
- Sequestum - Nature and Mystery - Submissions due February 15, 2026
- Next Generation Short Story Awards - Submissions due February 26, 2026
- PEN Women's Mardi Gras Celebrity Lunch Saturday - March 7, 2026

This annual lunch funds "Excellence in the Arts" Grants for high school graduates or college undergraduate women. Proceeds from the luncheon, silent auction, raffle and costume jewelry sale goes to these awards. **The deadline for RSVP is February 24, 2026. [Complete this form](#)** to make your reservation now.

- 2026 Indie Author Project Annual Contest - Submissions Accepted April 1 thru May 31
- [Wergle Flomp Humor Poetry Contest](#) - Submissions due April 1
- [San Joaquin Valley Writers Contest](#) - Submissions due May 1, 2026
- Poets & Writers Writing Contests, Grants & Awards

The Poets & Writers website maintains an extensive database of upcoming contests, grants and awards.

For more information: [Poets & Writers Writing Contests, Grants & Awards](#)



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