



South Bay
WRITERS

Silicon Valley's Premier Writing Group



May 2026 Newsletter

"Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May, / And summer's lease hath all too short a date." — William Shakespeare

WELCOME TO THE MAY NEWS --

- MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL
 - MAY 9 MEETING
 - JUNE 13 PREVIEW
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-

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL UPDATE

by Tonya McQuade (membership@southbaywriters.com)

It's time to renew your membership to South Bay Writers for the 2026-2027 year. Your membership, which also makes you a member of the statewide California Writers Club, provides numerous benefits, including:

- Reduced rate to attend monthly meetings to hear great speakers, build your craft, and network with other writers;
- Opportunity to participate in writing critique groups to hone your writing skills, hold each other accountable, and receive helpful feedback on your writing;
- Option to attend special members-only social events to enjoy food and fun, as well as develop your writing friendships and connections;
- Chance to participate in members-only writing contests and contribute to members-only anthologies (some hosted by other branches);
- Ability to stay up-to-date on both South Bay Writers and California Writers Club events, speakers, and workshops through regular email updates and newsletters.

Current memberships are good through June 30, but renewals begin May 1 – and if you renew by our meeting on May 9, you will be entered into a special raffle. You can pay at the meeting with cash, check, or credit card (\$45 for renewals; \$65 for new members); pay online with PayPal (\$47 at (southbaywriters.com)); or mail a

check to CWC-South Bay Writers; PO Box 3254, Santa Clara, CA 95055. New members only must [submit an online application](#).



Saturday, May 9th Flash Fiction Tutorial with Lita Kurth

by Shari Clare
(vp@southbaywriters.com)

The South Bay Writers welcomes Lita Kurth as our May speaker. Lita is a creative writing instructor at De Anza College and is the co-founder of the long-running

spoken word venue **Flash Fiction Forum**, where writers read their work at WORKS gallery in downtown San Jose. Lita also teaches memoir classes periodically through **CreatorSchoolCA.com**. Her first book, "One Creative Writing Prompt a Day," was published in 2024 by Calisto Publishing.

Her latest work, "Writing Memoir in Flashes: Creative Ways to Tell Your True Stories, One Memory at a Time" will be available in May. You can find Lita on LinkedIn and Facebook to see the latest information about all her writing workshops.

Lita will guide us through how to write in short bursts including an exercise (or two) to help fuel our creativity. Please join us for this "flashy" event!

When: **Saturday, May 9, 2026 at 10:30 am**

Where: **Saratoga Senior Center, 19655 Allendale Ave, Saratoga CA**

Admission: **Members \$10, Non-members \$15**

Pay in at the door or in advance at our website: southbaywriters.com

SAVE-the-DATE: NYT Best Selling Author Karen Joy Fowler Comes to SBW JUNE 13 Meeting

by Shari Clare

"Where Am I and When Did I Get Here?" This is not only an existential question, but also the title of the presentation for our June meeting.

New York Times bestselling author Karen Joy Fowler will provide us with gems of wisdom on how to create memorable settings that bring the written word to life. Karen is a world-renowned author whose best-selling novel, "The Jane Austen Book Club" was adapted into a hit film. Her most recent novel, "Booth," was longlisted for the prestigious Booker Prize.

You will not want to miss the opportunity to learn from this masterful author whose ingenious novels and short stories thoroughly embed you into the worlds she creates.



President's Message

Welcome to May!

We need some Newsletter Helpers to gather news for sharing through our monthly jSouth Bay Writers' communication. **Let me know if you can help at pres@southbaywriters.com**

Elections

In June, we will elect our new board members for 2026-27. Fill out the **INTEREST FORM** to get in touch.

Building Better Branches April 26

Six of our South Bay Writers' members including me attended the all-day CWC NorCal Building Better Branches conference on Sunday, April 26. It was a great opportunity to meet with 13 of our northern California sister branches and a couple of our southern California branches. Information was shared about branch marketing, websites, newsletters, and how to run great meetings.

Birds-of-a-Feather

I especially enjoyed the Birds of a Feather lunch time tables where you chose the table that best matched your role at the branch or roles you wanted to find out more about. Choices included President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary, Newsletter, Membership, Members-at-Large, Website. I sat at the Treasurer's table (follow the money :-)) to see if I could catch any tips for our branch. All treasurers at our table agreed that some training resources would be very helpful for new treasurers and even those who have been doing it for a for a while. We were lucky to have the CWC Statewide Treasurer at our table. Although membership fees and the collection process for 2026/27 will remain the same, we expect a change this fall. Our statewide club will centralize the collection of membership fees and then distribute money back to the branches rather than the way it's always been done. This should simplify the process for branches and provide a standardized membership interface for all branches.

CWC Statewide News

Other statewide announcements included a new CALWRITERS.ORG website and Membership database planned to be launched later this Summer/Fall. For those who have used the legacy Membership database over the years, this is welcome news.

We all came away with some great ideas for improving our branch, our meetings, website, and more and we'll be sharing this with all of you soon!!

Happy Reading and Writing!

Una T Daly (president & interim editor)

April Recap of Creating Memorable Characters with Peggy Townsend



Bill Baldwin and Amanda Senior

Peggy Townsend, our April speaker, shared insights she has acquired writing her series of mysteries. After 33 years as a journalist covering the cops beat, Townsend is well-placed as a crime fiction writer. “I know more serial killers than is good for me.” She’s familiar with cops, convicts, morgues, and graveyards: a hefty dose of hands-on experience!

Townsend’s latest mystery, *The Botanist’s Assistant*, centers around Margaret Finch, a six-foot-tall, big-boned, mid-life research assistant to a charismatic botanist at a small university. The inspiration for Finch came when Townsend met a Montanan Meals On Wheels service user who grew up in a small cabin without running water. “I was so touched by this woman who made her life into something of beauty,” said Townsend, “Margaret wants the same things—to be loved and accepted, while also solving a murder.”

Later, hiking in Carmel with her sister, Townsend came upon the chimney and foundation of a homestead cabin, with views over mansions and houses in the valley. “This is where Margaret lives,” she thought. *In her youth, awkward and friendless, Finch had been pelted by boys with sling-shots as she walked home from school. Now Finch finds herself thrust into the role of detective in a race to catch a killer, before the killer catches up to her.* Townsend’s sister, a scientist with a formidable knowledge of botany, greatly influenced Finch’s special interest in botanicals, making her the perfect detective to piece together this particular mystery.

How do you craft a riveting backstory like Finch’s?

Consider which characters in a story stick with you. As she wrote her book, Townsend’s character Margaret coalesced from a collection of people that she had met and who fascinated her.

Townsend finds people fascinating; she *soaks up information* from the people she encounters. As a journalist she had interviewed prisoners, criminals, police, agents, and many other people with unusual backgrounds. She thinks of some people she has encountered as “magpies” and “brain farms” who just keep providing interesting stories (she mentioned three old men she had met in North Beach, who kept telling her more and more details of the history and atmosphere of that neighborhood). “I meet people and ask them their stories, noting how they talk and interact. It’s a really successful way to build memorable characters. Accepted as they are, people like to talk. They tell you things that make you cry or blow you away.”

And actual Writing Rules?

Provide *specific details* of your characters—more than mere superficial points. Provide multiple aspects of the characters. To develop your skills, research actual people. Townsend’s experience in journalism was a definite plus.

Consider the characters’ *human drive*. What are they *driven* by? What makes them *change and grow*? Characters *should* change and grow! Peggy’s character Margaret wants *respect* and *the truth*. Give readers both the *character* and the *story*. Make your readers *react*. You want your readers to *cheer your characters on*! Present the characters through their *voice*.

Give your main character a *sidekick*, someone like Sancho Panzo. Sidekicks in a story are *great!*

Remember what James McBride said, that “a story is like a flower.” Things “go out” and “come back.” So in your story you can *move a bit away* from the central focus of the story, as long as you are sure to *return to the main focus*. As you continue this in-and-out motion, make sure that the current scene *adds to the story*. Character-wise, keep asking what makes the character tick? Add layering and depth to your characters

Lots of good advice and information! Peggy Townsend certainly inspired and motivated us to move ahead with our writing! Thank you, Peggy!

Member News

If you have Member News you'd like to share, please send it to membernews@southbaywriters.com

Upcoming Contests & Events

- [San Jose Book Festival – Sept 12, 2026, 10am-5pm](#), Stay tuned for more details on how to participate coming May 1st.
 - Book Talk on **May 27, 4 p.m.** @ Los Gatos Library - *Frank and Nora's Historic Honeymoon Adventure: A Travelogue through the West with a "Time Travel" Twist*, by **Tonya Graham McQuade**. Guests are invited to get a close-up look at the original 1905 scrapbook that inspired the journey and share their own family travel storie
 - [2026 Catamaran Poetry Prize for West Coast Poets](#) is now open for submissions. **Deadline July 1, 2026**
 - The Poets & Writers website maintains an extensive database of upcoming contests, grants and awards. [Poets & Writers Writing Contests, Grants & Awards](#)
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SBW Board Meeting Notes - April 7

By Annie Nguyen

Attendees: Alice, Amanda, Annie, Bill, Carolyn, Hal, Ryan, Shari, Tonya, Una,

Membership & Fees

- CWC leadership has voted to maintain the same fees for 2026/27 membership as last year.

Meetings & Events

- A quick Zoom meeting for board members is scheduled for April 30 at 7 PM.
- Karen Joy Fowler is the scheduled speaker for June 13.
- The SBW BBQ is planned for July 12.

- The board is continuing to evaluate to regular in-person meetings will be viable.

Website & Engagement (Hal)

- Hal noted that the current WordPress site has many outdated plugins and needs improved maintainability and a more modern design.
- The website should be used to encourage membership, promote speaker events, and increase overall engagement including contributions from members.
- Initial planning emphasized improving site functionality while also expanding club benefits.
- Key goals include modernizing the site, increasing membership, boosting event attendance, and keeping members engaged through interactive content.
- The redesign timeline is targeted by October 2026 before the current hosting agreement ends.
- Important features to retain include blog pages (board minutes, member news, events), speaker information with payment options, newsletter archives, and writing event listings.
- Improvements are needed for membership applications, social media integration (including adding Instagram), and overall site organization.
- Potential new features include critique groups, a resource page, a website search function, member content sharing, and possibly a member book store.
- Major technical tasks include transferring blog posts, newsletters, images, and email systems, with further investigation into tools like Google Workspace.
- The board also raised concerns about storage, maintaining email functionality, and how to track progress during the redesign process.

Social Media & Outreach

- New members are being added to the Facebook group.
- An Instagram account is currently in development.

Membership Engagement Ideas

- The board is considering hosting raffles in May and June for early renewals.
- Membership payments can be made by cash, check, paypal, or credit card.
- The board is considering other payment options for the future.

BECOME A SBW HELPER

"You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do." — Eleanor Roosevelt



Thanks to Joe-Ming Cheng for the club photos in the newsletter!!

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