



# The Write News

A Monthly Newsletter  
Elisabeth Tuck, editor

January 2021

## VIRTUAL BRANCH MEETING

January 9, 2021

**9:30 Sign-In, 9:45 Breakout Rooms, 10:00 Writer's Table, 10:45-11:00 Break,  
11:00 Business Mtg., Speaker 11:15 – 12:15**

Register online at <https://cwcmt Diablo.org/current-cwc-mt-diablo-meeting/>  
Once registered, you will receive a link to join the Zoom meeting.

### Creating Diverse Characters

Featuring **Frederick Foote**



Fredrick's talk will be a reflection on creating diverse characters in short stories from his African American perspective. It will look at character creation using demographics, dialog, situation, relationships, and history. He'll sprinkle in some of his background and conclude with a summary to bring it all together.



He will address the following:

- Demographics – the foundation of character development (Maybe)
- Dialogue – character in a few choice words
- Situation – situations form character
- Relationships – such as power, status, class define us.
- History - The environment that provides meaning for our writing
- Summary – Why didn't I say that in the first place

Since 2014 **Frederick Foote** has published over three-hundred stories, poems, and essays, including literary, science fiction, fables, and horror genres. Frederick has published two short story collections, *For the Sake of Soul* (2015) and *Crossroads Encounters* (2016). His latest book, *The Maroon, Fables and Revelations* was published on Election Day. The stories in his latest work explore the edge of the wilderness that is human nature from an African-American perspective. They delve into our passions, taboos, and melodies of madness.

[https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08MHT18QQ/ref=cm\\_sw\\_em\\_r\\_mt\\_dp\\_tMzOFb9KW9EDV](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08MHT18QQ/ref=cm_sw_em_r_mt_dp_tMzOFb9KW9EDV)

**CWC Members' Meeting Cost \$5.00 – Guests \$10.00**

By registering you consent to be recorded during the meeting

## *President's Message:* Linda Hartmann



Dear Members,

In looking back over the year 2020, much can be reflected upon. In February, you officially elected me as your president. March brought the pandemic sweeping into the United States, and the board voted to cancel our monthly meeting out of an abundance of caution. In April, we were officially “sheltered-in,” and had our first virtual monthly meeting on Zoom.

Since then, we have discovered that there have been some advantages to virtual meetings. For example, you don’t have to drive, or worry about where to park. This brought in a few extra members who live further out or who do not enjoy the drive. We were able to increase collaboration with our other branches, and extend invitations to each other’s virtual meetings, increasing the variety for the membership as a whole. We were also able to extend our reach for speakers, and have had them join us from as far away as New York City, and guests from as far away as Australia!

We are doing our best to keep the club exciting and interesting for members. Adding more social events, like the popular Open Mic Nights, I hope, are helping to build the spirit of community that we want to keep and build on.

Nothing will feel better than when we can resume meeting in person again. With vaccines to look forward to, we can hope to see each other before too much time goes by. At present, we are under “shelter-in” orders from our County’s Health Officer involving staying at home as much as possible, and a California statewide “State of Emergency” due the rapid spread of the coronavirus once again.

For those of you who have lost loved ones to Covid-19 during this year, my sincere condolences, as I know it was hard not to be there with them.

I feel we will have all changed in some way due to 2020; either through loss, illness, restrictions on lifestyle, travel, isolation from family and friends, or giving up planned vacations. The loss of normal everyday life is surreal in and of itself.

Despite the tough changes this year held for me, my sensitivity and gratitude went up a few notches. Mostly, it is the relationships with people who are important to me, and who make this journey a celebration, in spite of the strange world we are living in. I hold dear: family, friends, and the community that we have established that give importance to life. Thank you all for being part of mine, and each other’s. Find yourself in these unusual times, safely nested, having an adventure, in very good company.

I hope that your holidays were meaningful and safe, and I wish each of you a healthy, joyful, and Happy New Year!

All my best,

*Linda*



## CONTENTS

- p. 3 Board Meeting; Writers Table David George; Member News Jill Hedgecock
- p. 4 Support a New Local Bookstore, Reasonable Books by Lyn Roberts
- p. 5-8 Members' Works: Poirier; Goodwin; Harris; Watson
- p. 9-11 2020 Musings: Susan Berman; Anonymous; Susan Lawson
- p. 11-12 Some Things to Do: CWC *Literary Review*; Open Mic Nights
- p. 13 Young Writers 8<sup>th</sup> Grade First Prize in Poetry by Yu Xin (Kylie) Wang
- p. 14 Young Writers Contest Donor Page
- p. 15-16 In Memoriam: Captain Jack Russ



## Attend a Board Meeting



This is YOUR branch. Extra minds and hands are always welcome.

There's room at the board meetings for observers, the maybe-I'd-like-to-get-involved-ers, advisors, and the just plain curious. This is your branch too, and volunteer organizations can always use new ideas. To join us go to <https://cwcmtdiablo.org/contact-us/> and select webmaster. Fill out the form and ask to receive an invitation to the meeting.

**Next board meeting: Saturday, Jan 2, 1-2:30 p.m. via Zoom.**

## Writers Table

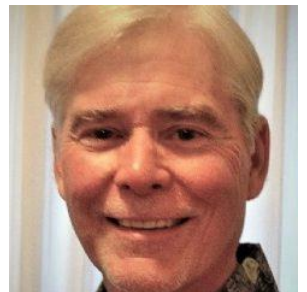
Join us before the general meetings to listen, learn, and ask questions at the Writers Table. These are short (40 minutes or so) informational or practice session on the craft of writing. Hosted by Mt. Diablo members, these sessions cover many topics of interest to writers.

**January 9, 2021**

***Integrating Nature into Your Writing:** Fiction and creative non-fiction can be enhanced by including nature.*

**Presented by David George, past president of the branch and statewide CWC**

From a brief mention of rain to complete world building, we'll explore examples of writing with and without nature's details, and how including them brightens your writing like a sun-dappled morning,



## Member Events, News, and Salutes



If you have a new publication, a book launch, an upcoming media interview, please write up a short announcement and let us put you in the newsletter. Gather up a picture of yourself or your publication and to submit, go to:

<https://cwcmtdiablo.org/newsletter/>

### Jill Hedgecock

Jill and another author were interviewed for the online magazine BARK. They discuss how their books advocate for maligned breeds of dogs.



Jill was asked what triggered her to write about breeds misrepresented in the media. Her partial answer is: I started writing a dog rescue column in fall 2017 for *The Diablo Gazette*, a San Francisco Bay Area entertainment magazine. In discussions with the publisher about the mascot and title of my column, he suggested using Ruby, a red zipper-nosed Doberman with a large Instagram audience, as the avatar and "Ruby Dooby Do to the Rescue" as the column title. At the time, I didn't know that much about the Doberman breed, but because Ruby had a large following, it sounded great to me. It wasn't until September 2018, when my column featured an interview with Ruby's owner, Charles Lindsey, that I realized how sweet Dobermans can be. The idea that I could educate people on the breed's soft side was the impetus for switching the dog breed in my novel.

Read the full interview here. <https://thebark.com/content/dobermans-and-pit-bulls-star-young-adult-books>



## Support Local

By Lyn Roberts

There's a new bookstore in town! At the front of the store there's a special shelf with books that represent local authors. Self-published or traditionally published, local writers are given respect – at the front door of the shop.

After 20 years of marriage, Rudy and Betty Winnacker decided what was most important to them: Start a bookstore and be part of the community. Rudy has been connected to reading material since he was a kid delivering newspapers. Digital publishing is where he landed, with Blogger, Google, and Twitter. But what he loved most was the tactile act of reading, to hold a book, to browse through a bookshelf. The idea of an independent bookstore became the Winnacker's reality.

They named the store **Reasonable Books**. The underlying theme embraces “Thoughtful and Important Subjects.” If you ask Rudy what ‘reasonable’ means to him and the books he brings to the store, he has a ready answer. He will say, “Reasonable is fair, books that give the reader a feeling of the world, books that are inspiring, books that help people think more.” The store carries the bestsellers and can order most any book published. But they also make sure there are choices in philosophy, American history, the classics, and memoirs – books that inspire.

Reasonable Books opened in September 2020. One would think there couldn't be a worse time to start a new business. And yet, the Winnackers already have a following. Perhaps it's because they are so genuinely welcoming. Perhaps it's their thoughtful choice of books. Or maybe it's because they're right next door to Trader Joe's in Lafayette! Readers are in and out all day. You see people stop and smile. A bookstore! Right here in my neighborhood. Sometimes there's a bit of a line in front, waiting to go in because the store is complying with Covid regulations. You can sit on the bench in front and chat with the owner about books.

Rudy said the idea of welcoming local authors “seemed obvious, it's our way of being part of the community.” If you look on their website, you will find authors from the community who are endorsed, supported. As soon as it's safe and allowed, there will be book signings and author talks and book groups. We are all welcome. Support local!

Visit **Reasonable Books** at 3645 C Mt. Diablo Bl., Lafayette

Just to the left of Trader Joe's

To explore their website, go to: [www.Reasonable.online](http://www.Reasonable.online)



## Members' (Short) Works

Members, See your writing in print!

Send your **short** works (up to 750 words, preferably less) to be included in the Mt Diablo branch newsletter to: <https://cwcmtdiablo.org/newsletter/>



### “MARGARET”

Fiction by **Robert Poirier**

Margaret noticed her neighbor's door was ajar as she was leaving for her Rossmoor aquatic exercise class. She knocked on the door. When there was no answer, she tapped in the Rossmoor security phone number. *Strange*, she thought as she saw “No signal” on her cell phone display. *First time I have seen this here.*

She had only seen and spoken with the new occupant twice, both times at night and both times terse.

“My name is Jack Wilson,” he said. “I’m a writer on a deadline, so you probably won’t see much of me. Janet, my aunt, asked me to stay at her house for three weeks while she visited her sister in Oregon.”

While they spoke, Margaret noticed a small, fresh scar in front of his ear and a raisin-wrinkle in his earlobe.

“Looks like he has had recent plastic surgery on his face,” she said to her friend Lynne at the pool. “And not very good surgery. Funny, I do not ever remember Janet mentioning siblings.”

“God knows you certainly are detail-oriented,” Lynne replied. “I suppose it comes in handy when you’re a nurse.”

“Sometimes it is a curse,” Margaret said. “When I was a nurse, I had to pay very close attention to medicine dosages. It became something I do. I have been paying attention to details for over 40 years.”

The neighbor's door was still ajar when she arrived back at her condo 90 minutes later. She tried her cell phone again. Still no signal. Like many of the Rossmoor residents, she had canceled her landline phone months ago, so there was no easy way to contact security. She was CPR certified and felt she should check on Wilson.

“Hello? Hello?” she called as she carefully pushed the door open and stepped in. “Mr. Wilson, it’s Margaret next door. Are you okay?”

She tentatively walked past the small office on her right, then into the living room. A chair scraped on the kitchen floor. A few steps more and she spotted an agitated Wilson, head bloodied, and bound and gagged with silver-colored duct tape. A cutting board with lettuce, sliced tomatoes, and a chef’s knife was on the counter next to him. Margaret used the knife to cut the duct tape. Suddenly she heard the front door snick shut. Fear constricted her throat.



“Hello?” she called, the words sounding throttled. “We’re in the kitchen. Mr. Wilson has been robbed.”

Listening for sound in the small hallway from the kitchen, past the computer room, to the front door, Margaret sensed rather than heard someone behind her and turned as he spoke.

“You nosy bitch,” he snarled as he put his hands around her neck.

Instinctively, she raised the chef’s knife and deeply sliced the back of his left hand. Blood spattered her face and coated her glasses. He stepped aside, grabbed her shoulder, roughly turned her body so her back was to his front, and put her in a right-handed carotid chokehold. He held her tight against him with his bleeding left hand. He shifted his left hand to press his forearm against the back of her neck to complete the chokehold.

**“MARGARET” by Robert Poirier (cont’d)**

Margaret stabbed him in the right thigh, feeling the blade hit bone. Years of aquatic exercise gave her excellent upper body strength. She kept steady pressure on the knife, jerking it as he gasped in pain and eased the chokehold pressure. As he backed away, she slashed the inside of his left arm, severing the brachial artery which sprayed more blood on her. He snatched the knife from her hand. Margaret stumbled backward away from him. He pursued her on wobbling legs as blood spurted in time to his heartbeat. After four or five steps, he slipped on the blood now pooling on the kitchen tile floor, went down hard, and was still.

The banging of the chair legs jolted Margaret back to the scene. She cut the duct tape holding Wilson’s legs and partially ripped the tape from his face.

“Cut me loose, you crazy bitch,” he rasped. “And don’t call the police.”

“That is the second time today someone has called me a bitch,” Margaret said, blood dripping from her glasses, nose, and chin. “I do not like that.”

She picked up the duct tape from the counter and tore off a foot-long section.

“My mother taught me two things,” she continued. “The first was to always try to do the right thing. The second was to be nice to people who help you. I tried to do the right thing, but you are not nice, Mr. Wilson,” Margaret put the tape on his mouth.

Wilson, still attached to the chair, stood clumsily, swung his leg, knocked Margaret off her feet then heel-kicked her in her side. As Margaret gasped in pain, Wilson knelt, backed up, and picked up the knife. He opened a counter drawer, jammed the knife handle into the drawer, held it shut with his hip, cut the tape binding his wrists, and tore the tape off his mouth.

“I’ll show you nice,” Wilson snarled, knife in hand, as he approached her.

“Hello there, Frank,” a voice behind Wilson said softly.

Margaret watched through blood-fogged glasses as a Rossmoor security guard approached Wilson, who whirled and tried to stab the guard. Like a ballet movement, the guard deflected Wilson’s knife hand, took the knife from him, and plunged it into Wilson’s chest. The guard stepped away, grabbed Wilson’s hair, and jerked him violently face-first to the floor.

The guard gently pulled Margaret to the living room carpet and retrieved a small syringe from his jacket pocket. He flicked off the protective tip and jabbed her in the upper thigh.

“This is a drug we have been working on.” The guard said. “You will have stroke-like symptoms and not be able to speak for 45 minutes. Frank here stole a prototype signal-blocking device from us, killing two of our lab folks as he escaped. He activated the device this morning. That is how he communicated with his buyer on the floor here and how we found him. One of the side effects is that the device blocks the nearest cellular tower signals.”

“He’s been on the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list for the past four months,” he continued. “A grateful nation is going to give you a \$100,000 reward. I’ll make sure you get it.”

With that, he selected an app on his cell phone and swept the room.

“There you are,” he said as he picked up a small radio on the living room coffee table, then bent down and patted Margaret on the shoulder.

“Thank you for your help, Margaret. You are a smart, resourceful woman. I hope our paths cross again.”

He spoke softly into his phone as he left. “Clean up on aisle six.”

Two months after the attack, Margaret was shopping at CVS Pharmacy when she heard footsteps behind her and then a soft voice. “Hello there, Margaret.” She recognized the voice and smiled.

## *Members' Short Works (cont'd)*

### **"When?"**

By **B. Lynn Goodwin**

"More will be revealed," the guru said. "Drink coffee. Wander into places where you don't belong."

Nothing could turn me into the upper-middle-class, suburban woman I was born to be. I dropped my career to pursue whatever my family once sheltered me from. How illogical was that?

In my motel room, I slid onto the 3-foot balcony and stared at the leaves coating the pool.

I opened my palms to the universe and breathed deeply, trusting that more would be revealed. Still, I didn't understand my actions, much less the guru's intentions. Should have asked WHEN more would be revealed.

---

### **"DAMN CAT"**

By **Zoë Sutton Harris**

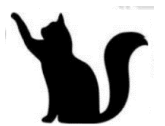
Snowball, a white Manx cat with a nub of a tail and a Jack Rabbit's loping gait, chose to stay with us for a while. His eyes, a piercing crystalline green, unsettled those he chose to gaze upon. He yowled more than mewed, and our neighbor's black Labrador retriever, Gypsy, ran away whenever she saw him. His purr, more of a growl, kept faint-of-heart cat lovers at a distance. He could hack up the biggest hairballs we'd ever seen.

On a wintery evening when snow sparkled on the ground, and twilight brought a steely blue cast to ice covering the river, we waited for Dad to come home from work. We could hear Mom fixing dinner in the kitchen. The smell of roasted chicken wafted through the house; anticipation floated on the air.

We sat on the floor watching Star Trek, a family favorite. Our Dad usually arrived home in time to catch the end of the episode with his children. Just about the time we expected the sound of Dad's car crunching up our gravel driveway, we heard our mother's raised voice. In a small stampede we ran to the kitchen, five faces framed in the doorway expecting blood or worse, burnt chicken. A stench reached our nostrils; Snowball squatted under the kitchen table.

My brother abandoned any sense of restraint and shouted, "Diarrhea, diarrhea," as if we didn't already know.

Our mother, brandishing a broom, swiped at Snowball attempting to shoo him out the door. The broom made contact. A mad scramble ensued as Snowball rounded our mother, claws slipping on the linoleum tile floor as he tried to gain traction. In that moment, which remains a blur, Mom grabbed him by the scruff of the neck; she swung Snowball through the kitchen and heaved him out the back door like a heat seeking missile.



At exactly the same time, in a horrific twist of fate, my father started up the steep stairs to our kitchen's side door. He met Snowball, a flying ball of fur, claws extended, a diaphanous haze trailing him. We heard the sickening thud. Snowball hit Dad squarely and heavily on the chest. In unison Snowball squawked and Dad groaned as air left feline and human lungs. Dad fell backwards into a snowbank, a pile of flailing limbs; a stream of words never heard before or since rose to his children's ears. Snowball streaked into the trees and underbrush and didn't return for two days. Our kitchen looked like a murder scene except it wasn't blood sprayed across the cupboard doors.

Our mother and father engaged in a heated exchange about why we continued to feed and house that damn cat, which scared all of us into silence. Quiet reigned through dinner. We kept our heads down and used our best table manners. As Dad finished his last bite, not looking at us, he uttered his ultimatum.



## “DAMN CAT” By Zoë Sutton Harris (cont’d)

“When that damned cat comes back, it’s a potato sack, a big rock, and the river for him.”

We didn’t protest because we’d never seen Dad this outraged and resolute. We knew to cross my father at that moment bordered on suicide; however, we also knew he didn’t mean it. Dad secretly loved Snowball and the river laid frozen solid. Our kitchen smelled of bleach for weeks. My siblings and I never spoke of the incident again except in secret with hysterical nose-snorting laughter.

My girlfriends and I found his body in a huge snowbank made by the snowplow along the highway. Snowball, stiff as a board as if flash frozen in midflight over the deep snow, leapt from this world. My Dad, to comfort his children, told us he buried him under a pine tree in the woods behind our house. He said Snowball’s spirit played with the squirrels and chased rats at the old burned out mill. Of course, burying him posed a formidable task with five feet of snow and the ground frozen like concrete.



Years later when we gathered for Christmas, my siblings and I reminisced about Snowball’s crazy antics. In a poignant moment my sister said how sweet it felt to know Snowball lay buried under a pine tree. Our laughter drew our father to the living room. Dad leaning on the doorframe, looked at his five adult children, incredulous for a moment.

“I put that diarrhea spewing good-for-nothing cat in a cardboard box. I took him to the dump and slid him down the incinerator chute.” We sat speechless. Dad turned, shaking his head, and we heard him say in a tender way, “Damn cat.”

## “TWO ENJOYABLE 2020 HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES”

By Ann Watson

### Christmas for a teenager in need:

We selected a teenage boy from a charity’s list then early one morning Husband and I went shopping. A young, very helpful clerk helped us pick a complete outfit, head to toe, for the teen. We added the requested wallet, warm jacket, and a gift card for things we may have overlooked. As aging grandparents of small boys, we would have been lost without the clerk’s help. At home I packaged the items, delivered them, and drove home feeling great.



### Christmas for a grandson:

What to give to our four-year-old grandson for Christmas? He’s crazy about toy cars but has plenty. He likes books where he has to find hidden things in the pictures. The best one in my mind is Richard Scarry’s *Cars and Trucks and Things That Go* where tiny Gold Bug is barely visible among the chaos on each page, but his older brother has had that book since he could say “dump truck.” Husband and I both nixed anything *Where’s Waldo*, so I started researching and found several other books that seemed good. I went on Amazon Canada because we were too late for the US to Canada post. Only one of the books could be delivered by Christmas. Frustrated was an understatement.

Husband suggested finding a bookstore near where son and family live on Vancouver Island. It was 10 minutes till 5 on a Friday night, but I found Ivy’s and called. The store owner sounded so excited to search out children’s books. (She also admitted she doesn’t like *Where’s Waldo*!) I wrote down titles while she picked book after book off the shelves and explained each. She said I could order online if I wanted to. I researched her suggestions, picked three, ordered that night, and next morning she sent email to say she had wrapped them separately so they looked like more presents! Daughter-in-law was happy to pick them up because the store is close by, and she’s a member of their buying club. Success!



**2020**

At our last meeting, I asked for musings on 2021. Please continue to contribute to this as we hopefully work our way out of the gloom that likely has settled in places. Send your thoughts to [www.cwcmtdiablo.org/newsletter](http://www.cwcmtdiablo.org/newsletter) Here are a few thoughts on 2020:

**"Why I Like Wearing a Mask" by Susan Berman**

The mask allows me to stick my tongue out without detection at people who are behaving badly (or just pissing me off in general.)

And I wear a mega-sparkly mask. No need for me to be drab during this Shelter-in-Place time.

When Covid is over, I'm going to have to buy new shoes in a larger size because of going barefoot or in slippers for a year!

**NOT ENOUGH HOURS IN THE DAY?**

By Susan Lawson

I wake and remind myself which day of the week I'm facing  
How will I structure a non-structured day?  
Family faces smiling from my phone bring relief. So far---safe  
In front of TV, parked in my recliner, I'm next to a pile of toys  
My writing, books, magazines, two kinds of puzzles, time fillers  
My laptop, portal to the outside world, visual human connection.



Zoom, Webinar, You-Tube, Streaming, Solitude or instant connection  
Activity sandwiched in, interrupt the sloth, Gotta walk, masked. Be safe.  
TV news, numbers of deaths, uncertainty we're all facing  
Check on one new person, write a thank you note, vary the time fillers  
Games on my phone, study Spanish one hour, Continue with toys  
A surprise---sleep comes easy. What was tiring this day?



Number of projects. Plenty of time. Push them all to a different day.  
Read one more chapter of a mystery, deposit recycle, trash, back to toys  
Hunt for stamps. Send two cards, one birthday, one sympathy, continue connection.  
Phone marathon, three sons first, next Missouri sister, relax for a while. All safe.  
Visualize peanut butter fudge and buttered popcorn. Oh, the dangers I'm facing.  
Must stay planted in recliner. Avoid heavy-duty calories. Rely on time fillers.

Watching Jeopardy with pause button. Answers are slow in floating up. Useless time fillers.  
Brain decaying, not stretching. Answer in there somewhere. Painfully slow connection.  
Human kindness shown on news. The now-healthy discharged. They'll remember this day.  
Staff 16 hour workdays. Exhaustion and danger taking toll. A prayer, Keep them safe.  
Food shopping, Empty shelves. Locust invasion? Can't substitute toys.  
Violence over toilet paper. Cheerful messages on sidewalks. Fear brings two-facing.

**NOT ENOUGH HOURS IN THE DAY?** by Susan Lawson (cont'd)

Two masks. One noble. One profane. Both human. What new normal are we facing?  
 On the sidewalk, a young man doing pushups. Dogs pulling owners, chasing rubber toys.  
 Wistful at my window. Whole world out there. I'm here with my time fillers.  
 Multiple TV channels. NPR entertains. 4 books, 4 first chapters. Easy to pass the day.  
 Streaming church on Sunday. Zooming Winter Nights. Important to keep the connection.  
 Nine months from shutdown---new babies, more suicides, some murders. Nothing keeps us safe.

Social distancing. Handwashing and washing. A paper mask. These will keep us safe?  
 Will the cage door swing open? Will our release be on the same day?  
 Will we blot this from our memory, rewrite history, burn our toys?  
 How will today's children explain to their grandchildren the fears we are facing?  
 Will I return to running in place? Will I be Nora out in Ibsen's world? Use actions to replace time fillers?  
 Will I pause, take a breath? Realize the power of connection.

How much longer are we sheltering? Months? Weeks. A day? How much uncertainty are we facing?  
 A man coughs in China. Too bad. We are safe. Many dead in Italy; we see the connection.  
 The message: Reduce the toys. Preparations should be time fillers.

**THE NIGHT BEFORE COVID CHRISTMAS 2020**

by

**Susan McClurg Berman**

'Twas the night before Covid Christmas when all through the house,  
 Not a creature was stirring nor my laptop mouse.

No stockings are hung by the chimney with care,  
 Else I'd text Santa to not come here.

Santa's not part of our sheltered household,  
 A rule we must heed our governor has us told.

Yes, Santa wears gloves and that we require,  
 But, he cannot fit a mask with all that face hair.

Santa should stay at the North Pole with his elfies,  
 So he is not Covid-exposed, to take care of himselfies.

Staying home, social distancing, and using Purell,  
 Done daily since March, more times than can tell.

I've spent these months ordering online,  
 Things I needed, or just wanted for mine.

Amazon, Costco and Chico's alike  
 Are all my most visited sites.

If I want something, or it's on sale,  
 I buy at least one, what the ha-ell.



## THE NIGHT BEFORE COVID CHRISTMAS 2020 by Susan M Berman (cont'd)

My closets are full of clothes never worn,  
I have nowhere to go, oh, heckie dorn.

The untouched clothes hang from the rod,  
Not once have they been on my poor bod.

So there's nothing I need but tax-free mutual bonds,  
Mail them to me, to use post Covid and beyond.

This Christmas Eve I'm not asleep. Doubt that I will.  
I watch "...Wonderful Life," and brandy I swill.

My Smokey Bear toy from long ago youth,  
Sits on our fence with politics' truth.

The good news is that I've cleaned out,  
A desk, several drawers, and three closets, I tout.

I need to triage my kitchen junk drawer,  
Garage too, a job that's a bore.

I am happily waiting for the new administration,  
Now we know Delaware's US location.

My wish for you is that you don't get infected,  
Please shelter-in-place till being injected.

Remember, there will be familiar Christmas next year.  
Something the whole world together will cheer.



### ***Somethings to Do***

#### **SUBMIT TO THE CWC LITERARY REVIEW**

**2021**

- The *Literary Review* began accepting submissions on December 15<sup>th</sup>.
- The updated submission guidelines are on the state website: [www.Calwriters.org](http://www.Calwriters.org)
- The deadline for submissions is **March 15<sup>th</sup> 2021**

Let's have another great year for the Mt. Diablo branch!!



***Be Interviewed*** These interviews help Mt. Diablo Branch members get to know you, your work, and your thoughts about writing and the writing process. If you would like to be interviewed, let us know through this link: <https://cwcmt Diablo.org/newsletter/>

## ***Somethings to Do (cont'd)***

***Submit some of your writing*** fact or fiction for the newsletter. Muse about 2020, share a report on a book you enjoyed (or disliked) and why. Share a memoir piece. Share a writing tip. Share an upcoming event (assuming the timing's right. The newsletter comes out at the end of the month.)

## ***Volunteer to lead a Writers Table***

These are short (40 minutes or so) informational or practice session on the craft of writing. Hosted by Mt. Diablo members, these sessions cover topics of interest to writers. Share a writing, publishing, editing, research, etc. skill. Contact John Schembra: <https://cwcmtdiablo.org/writerstable/>

## ***Speak or Listen at Open Mic Night***



The votes are in and it's unanimous:

**Open Mic Night** is

**FUN and Inspiring!**

Be prepared to have your socks knocked off,  
because when you hear  
what our own member-authors have written,  
you'll be **amazed**

blown away, actually, by the talent in our club.  
See for yourself.

Come **read**

for yourself by signing up for a future date!

**Open Mic Night** is every 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday  
of the month at 6:00 p.m. on Zoom of course.

Register online at

<https://cwcmtdiablo.org/register-for-open-mic-night/>

Or just open the website and click on the link in the pop-up.  
It's that easy!



## ***Recommended by B Lynn Goodwin:***

Chat And Spin Radio is an internet radio station based in the UK, broadcast to 750,000 UK & international listeners per week 24/7, is looking for book authors, writers, artists, illustrators, bands & singers and anyone who would like to come on the radio station over the phone or by Skype/Facebook. FREE PUBLICITY PROMOTION to get out to our listeners. The 10-Minute Live Interview will be on our Evening & Late Show which is broadcast 5 nights a week.

Please email IAN JOHNSON, publicity/advertising manager, [chatandspin@gmail.com](mailto:chatandspin@gmail.com) for more information.

WEBSITE- [www.chatandspinradio.com](http://www.chatandspinradio.com)

FACEBOOK- [www.facebook.com/chatandspin](https://www.facebook.com/chatandspin)

**This item is informational only and does not imply endorsement by the Mt. Diablo branch of CWC.**





## Young Writers Contest First Prize Winner

### \*\*\*POETRY – 8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE\*\*\*

*“All the Little Things”* by Yu Xin (Kylie) Wang

Teacher: Ben Wayne    School: Joaquin Moraga Middle, Moraga

The way the sun shines on the cars kicking up water droplets  
When it rains  
The way tiny beads of water float into the sky like curling smoke  
The way the cherry blossoms cast shadows  
Against the afternoon sun hanging low in the sky  
A shiny white orb  
The way the dawn light settles on the treetops  
Like golden snow  
The way your mother tells you you're beautiful  
Even if it's just to make you feel better  
The way a tiny pebble tossed thoughtlessly into the water  
Can throw ripples all the way across the  
Lake  
The way you can reach your arm across seven and a half thousand miles  
To a friend  
With a single word  
The way a good book, nothing but a string of plain, insignificant words  
Can make you laugh, make you cry  
The way a book can change your life  
The way you see blades of grass  
Struggling through the cracked cement  
A living miracle in the bland, grey world  
The way you can look back at the photograph of yourself three years ago  
Holding your infant brother, who reminds you of a dewdrop  
Reflecting sunny rays of hope  
Tiny, fragile, yet beautiful  
The way you can slow down when you're tired of chasing the big picture  
Searching for something that was never there  
The way you can simply open your eyes and see  
All the little things



# Young Writers Contest Fundraising

Sponsored by

**The California Writers Club, Mount Diablo Branch**



Please consider joining one of the following donor clubs to benefit our programs in support of young writers. Your tax-deductible gift will appear in the contest program in May, and in the newsletter every month in the year you donate. Or remain anonymous if you prefer!

## DONATIONS A/O December 2020

The Jack London Founder's Circle (\$500+)  
**David George** in honor of Lee Paulson  
**Susan Berman**

The John Steinbeck Society (\$250 - \$499)  
**David George**

The John Muir Member Club (\$150 - \$249)  
**Linda Hartmann**  
**Danard Emanuelson**

The Ina Coolbrith Laureate Club (\$100 - \$149)  
**Judith Ingram**  
**Elizabeth Koehler-Pentacoff** in honor of Susie Wilson  
**Patrick Hancock**  
**Aline Soules**  
**Kathy Urban** in honor of Susie Wilson

The Mary Austin Writers Club (\$50 - \$99)  
**Chloe Laube**  
**Marianne Lonsdale**

Helen Hunt Jackson Group (\$25 - \$49)  
**Daniel Cheung** **Dorothy Kerwin**  
**Nanette Cooper McGuiness** **June Gatewood**  
**Patty Northlich**  
**Robert Boyle**

### The Gertrude Atherton Guild (\$10 - \$24)

**Lee Paulson**  
**Marjorie Witt**  
**Susan Lawson**  
**Maya Das**  
**William Yarborough**  
**Chris Stafford**

**George Cramer**  
**Lyn Roberts**  
**Marlene Dotterer**  
**Ana Luengo Palomino**  
**Joanna Pace**  
**Pavan Kumar Katragadda**

**Al Garrotto**  
**Linda Todd**  
**Laura Blackwell**  
**Robin Abbott**

Contra Costa County middle school students who enter the Young Writers Contest are eligible for cash prizes in short story, poetry, essay/personal narrative, and humor. Contest submission is free. Check our branch website for details:

<https://cwcmt Diablo.org/young-writers/>

In May the Mt. Diablo Branch hosts an awards ceremony to honor the students--if there's no pandemic! All program expenses are supported by individual donations and grants.

\*\*\*\*\*

Please list my membership in the following donor club: \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Amount enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ My donation is in honor/memory of: \_\_\_\_\_

To pay via PayPal click "buy now" on the Mt. Diablo website: <https://cwcmt Diablo.org/young-writers/>

Or make a check payable to: CWC Mt. Diablo Branch. And mail to: CWC Mt. Diablo Branch

P.O. Box 606, Alamo, CA 94507

Attention: Young Writers Contest

**THANK YOU TO ALL WHO SUPPORT THIS ANNUAL CONTEST**

## In Memoriam

### Captain Jack Russ

Former Mt. Diablo president Jack Russ passed away December 3



Jack began writing short stories while in high school. After graduation from the University of Washington and commissioning as an Ensign in the Navy, Jack collected wartime anecdotes and incident details associated with his life aboard a destroyer escort, his first active duty assignment. That collection, intended for a future novel, was somehow lost during the next thirty years of his active service as a naval aviator.

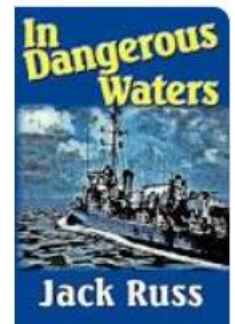
In addition to flying and combat experience, Jack had numerous Navy teaching and staff assignments, requiring a wide variety of non-fiction writing tasks. Jack made notes of interesting incidents, challenges, successes and a few failures that could be fed into later short stories, or perhaps the novel that had rested in the back of his mind for years.



Upon retirement from the Navy, Jack and his wife, Arlene, moved to California. (Ed note: Arlene was a highly skilled and artistic interior decorator who established a thriving business.) Jack joined the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, initially as Human Resources Manager, later as the Lab's publisher. Jack retired after fourteen years with the laboratory, ran a consulting business for 9 years, then retired to pursue the overdue challenge of writing fiction. He'd had more than enough non-fiction for a lifetime.

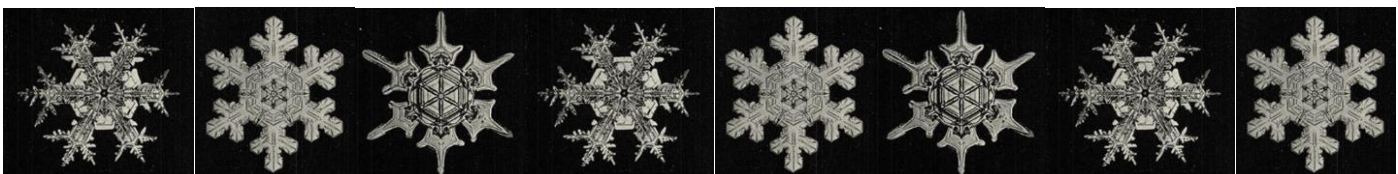
One Sunday-morning newspaper carried a notice of an upcoming California Writers Club meeting. Jack joined the Mt. Diablo Branch of CWC and within two months became the membership chair. He served in several roles including President (3 years.)

Jack's novel, *In Dangerous Waters*, published November 2010, is based on his shipboard experiences aboard a destroyer in the Korean War, embellished by elements of pure fiction and recasting of the experiences of others. He began work on a second novel tentatively titled *Sixty Days* based on a hypothetical future U.S. severance from the United Nations.



Affiliating with a Writers On The Journey literary critique group was one of the top experiences of his career. He continued to learn and explore areas previously unknown thanks to their imaginative works and insightful recommendations regarding his work. They became close and welcome friends for which he was truly grateful.

Editor's note: In time Jack and Arlene moved to Santa Rosa's lovely Fountaingrove retirement community. Jack joined the Varena Writers Club there and contributed short stories to their anthology. During the October 2017 Tubbs fire, Fountaingrove residents were evacuated. Jack was in hospital at the time, and Arlene spent too long in a dormitory situation with other evacuees. Fortunately their home did not burn and Arlene and Jack were able to return home.



David George:

Captain Jack was a true American Navy hero, flying hundreds of missions in the Korean and Vietnam wars. He was shot down (only) once and was rescued from the Gulf of Tonkin. He served many years as an adjunct for the head of Mediterranean operations in Athens and later in the Pentagon. He finished his career as an overseer of military interests in the Dept. of Energy's nuclear research at Lawrence Livermore National Labs.

His military career, especially his early years around Korea informed his writing with honesty, credibility, and decency. Jack was the first to welcome me into the Mt. Diablo branch, and instantly designated me as VP despite me not earning the honor. We have missed Jack from our humble WOTJ critique group since his Parkinson's diagnosis, but he remains in our hearts.

Elisabeth Tuck:

Our critique group remembers Jack as such a nice person. He was a gentleman, a leader, intelligent, a good, industrious, and dedicated writer, and kind when critiquing. As Jack's book shows, he had a healthy sense of humor. At one critique group meeting, s'mores were mentioned. Jack didn't know what they were so at the next meeting, we made oven s'mores (that really works!) It was Jack's birthday and he seemed pleased.

Jack also reached out to others. The son of another member of the critique group was fascinated with Jack's experience flying for the Navy, so Jack made time when we met at that house to chat with and share information with the teen.

Jack led the critique group on a tour of the USS Hornet, a wartime aircraft carrier now docked as a museum in Alameda, CA. It was such a rare treat to tour the Navy ship with someone who had personal experiences on such a huge vessel.

#### Blurb about Jack's novel, *In Dangerous Waters*

At the height of the Korean War, when delayed orders send Mike Kinkaid to a ship instead of promised Navy flight training, he must confront the legacy of his father's wartime tragedy. A revenge-seeking senior officer's vendetta challenges Mike in a series of life-threatening incidents: an arctic night rescue, dodging floating mines, and a downed pilot recovery under enemy fire. His career faces an early end when he runs his ship aground on a night combat mission. Mystery and intrigue surround a lengthy and contentious investigation that threatens court martial and an early end to Mike's dream to fly.

#### A Reader's Comments About: *In Dangerous Waters*

I had mixed feelings about reading this book because I thought a woman couldn't find any interest in a wartime novel. But I was curious, so I turned to page 1 and began reading. Was I wrong! This book kept me spellbound throughout. The high drama continues to the very last page. Now that I can exhale, I gladly recommend this book to anyone who has an interest in good character descriptions and plot development. I came away learning so much about what it took to run a wartime ship. Mr. Russ explains the Navy jargon so that you don't get lost in the terminology, and including a map within the pages was an outstanding tool. I found myself referring to that (dog-eared) page again and again. This is a good read!

