



The Write News

A Monthly Newsletter

Elisabeth Tuck, editor

February 2023

BRANCH MEETING

February 11, 2023

11:00 - Check-In

11:15 – Writers Table*

12:00 – Buffet Lunch

12:35 - Business Meeting

1:00 - Speaker

Zio Fraedo's Restaurant

611 Gregory Lane

Pleasant Hill, CA



Honoring the Creative Self

Kevin Fisher-Paulson

“Every breath we take changes us. Every word we utter changes the world.”

Embrace Creativity:

- Creativity is a marathon, not a sprint, and you have to train your body, spirit, and mind how to run that long race. Kevin will give you a few exercises in which to build your creative muscles.
- Creativity relies on inspiration, perspiration, and desperation. Kevin talks about how not to get in the way of that which can inspire you.
- Creativity requires a commitment to what you believe and the story you have to tell. Kevin will guide people to find their story, and to cherish it.



Kevin Fisher-Paulson is a weekly columnist with the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

He studied writing at the University of Notre Dame, with additional coursework at the University of Iowa. He has written two books, *A Song for Lost Angels* (Benjamin Franklin finalist), and *How We Keep Spinning*. An essay by Kevin was included in *When Love Lasts Forever* by Pilgrim Press.

His writings have also appeared in the National AIDS Theater Festival and ODC Next Wave. He has contributed to National Public Radio.

When not writing, Kevin lives in the outer, outer, outer, outer Excelsior with his husband, two sons, and ever-changing number of dogs.

In-Person – Members \$25.00 – Guests \$35.00 (includes lunch)

***Writers Table: Book Hooks: Eight Seconds or Bust featuring Jill Hedgecock**

<https://cwcmt Diablo.org/>

REGISTER ONLINE AT <https://cwcmt Diablo.org/meetings-and-workshops/>

President's Message: Barry Hampshire

February has a reputation for being the month of love as it has Valentine's Day on February 14th. I hope each of you feel that love no matter if it be from your partner, your pet, your family, your friends, or your writing buddies.

Now, we cannot deny a love we all share – writing. For some of you, at times, it may be more of a love / hate relationship. It does not matter how you define it, the word writing has meaning for us all.

What is writing? It is composing text to transmit a concept. In writing, we may express various emotions, cold hard facts, sensory detail, philosophical thought, and much more. Each writer will stamp those with their own indelible identity.

These same traits can be found in painting, ceramics, music, wood work, and all other forms of creative or expressive art. We writers are not just those who stare at a computer screen with Microsoft Word or Scrivener. We should include ourselves with all those other artists in whatever medium they have chosen.

Writing may feel like an isolating occupation. In truth, we are part of an immense community who are looking for the nuanced word, the perfect tone, the right brush stroke, the deepest glaze, the unexpected rhyming couplet, or the perfect final plot twist.

Another trait that pertains to this entire community is that our works are never truly finished. We reach a point where we chose to abandon a piece of work. To do so, is the ultimate act of love – letting go.

Have a great February and love what you are doing.

Barry



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FOR EXCELLENT TIPS ON WRITING WELL, check out what our past speakers have shared: <https://cwcmtdiablo.org/meeting-materials/>

Member Events, News, and Salutes



This section is regularly open members to writing and submitting a short announcement about milestones in their writing journey. Include a picture of yourself or your book. Publish something? Planning a reading at a bookstore or county fair? Speaking somewhere? Win an IPPY or other prize? Is your play being produced? The TV or movie version of your writing will be out soon? Let us know here.

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

Bruce Lewis

The 2nd episode of my short story “There’s a Mouse in the House” was released.

It’s free to read on Amazon. If you like it, smash on the Thumbs Up Button. Enjoy. It’s kind of silly but was fun the write.

<https://www.amazon.com/kindle-vella/episode/B0BRX55GWY>



Bruce was a crime reporter for several California daily newspaper, covering police and fire. His reporting earned six awards for best news and feature writing. He is the author of the *Master Detective* cover story “Bloody Murder in Beautiful Downtown Burbank” and the book *Tweet It! Great News Writing 140 Characters at a Time*. His work as a communications consultant earned more than 30 professional awards. He lives with his wife in Walnut Creek, Calif.

Check out Lewis’ Kim Jansen Detective Series books: *Bloody Paws* and *Bloody Pages*. Book 3 in the series, *Bloody Feathers*, is scheduled for publication in March and a fourth book, *Bloody Robes*, will be set for release in 2024.



Michael Barrington’s new fiction, *The Baron of Bengal Street*, was published January 17th.

“This is the fastest I have ever written, 97,000 words. I completed it in six months! I knew from the start that it just had to come out, rather like a dam bursting its banks. But this one felt so different. It’s essentially a historical novel about my roots and my family. It focuses on my larger-than-life maternal grandfather whom I never knew, but everyone who did says I am his double, at least in character! Writing about my mother before she was married, was particularly difficult and challenging, and just trying to find the right words and expressions stretched my skills to the limit. It recalls a special time and place and

brought me and my four siblings closer as together we did research, shared our oral histories, and chatted for hours on end.”

An 1800-word short story by Michael “**The Barn**” will be published in the online magazine *Academy of the Heart* on February 15th.

<https://academyoftheheartandmind.com/>

February 11 Writers Table

Jill Hedgecock



It's a sad truth. A reader's attention span was 12 seconds in 2000. In 2022, it had shrunk to only 8 seconds, which is about the time it takes to read one average-length sentence. Therefore, it is critical for authors to draw in a potential customer quickly with a compelling, succinct premise. The great news is that a versatile version of a **book hook** can serve many vital functions for writers, including:

- A quick oral summary of your book whenever you speak about it—in line at a grocery store, or approaching a bookstore owner about carrying your latest release
- The opening line on the back cover book blurb
- Backmatter for a series starter
- Ad copy

During this Writers Table, Jill will discuss essential elements that should be included in a hook and provide different ways to construct hooks using a minimum number of words. This will be an interactive meeting where Jill will present an approach then give participants time to write hooks for their books or works-in-progress.

Would you like to lead a Writers Table? We'd love to hear from you. Please reach out by emailing Andrew Benzie at andrew@andrewbenzie.com

Maybe a Writing Gig is in Your Future

Have you noticed a local newspaper provided in your neighborhood or someone else's? Some of these welcome donated articles. Look around, find a local newspaper. They contain a listing of who to contact for what kind of article. Contact the person and make a pitch about what you'd like to write for them. You might get a one-time gig or you might get a column.

Following are Mt. Diablo members who contributed to the January issue of the *Diablo Gazette*, an online and in-print news magazine. <https://www.diablogazette.com/> Most of these members have regular columns.

Jill Hedgecock:

"Concord's Early Alert Canines" p. 7

"Annual Contra Costa County Christmas Bird Count" p. 11

Bookends p. 12 Review of *This Is How It Always Is* by Laurie Frankel

"For the Love of Pets" p. 16

David George:

"Naked Gardener "Planting Trees" p. 8

Fran Cain:

"Exploring the Amazing di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art" p. 9

Colleen Gonzalez:

"Screen Time" p. 12



You in the Newsletter: Short Works

Members, submit some of your writing fact or fiction for the newsletter. Muse about 2023, share a report on a book you enjoyed (or disliked) and why. Share a memoir. Share a writing tip. Share an upcoming event. Send your short works (around 750 words) to: <https://ewcmtdiablo.org/newsletter/>

The Czech Border

Fiction by Bob Poirier

Paul Schafer overheard the phone conversation as he walked past Frank Novack's office a few minutes after office hours.

"Yes," he heard Novack say. "I'm selling the car because I have emergency Temporary Duty Orders (TDO) back to the states. I'll transfer the title and registration to you tomorrow evening at Weiden, near the Czech border."

Schafer reported the conversation when he stopped by the office of Major John Kelly, the head of the 513th Intelligence Corps Group at Camp King, Germany.

"Major," Schafer finished. "I write all the TDO assignments and have not written any for Novack. Something's not right."

Kelly looked at him closely for a moment. "I think you might have something, Schafer," he said. "Let's keep this between us for now. Check with me at three o'clock tomorrow afternoon, and I'll let you know what I've decided."

"Yes, Sir," Schafer said and left the office. A few seconds later, he saw the Major walk toward Novack's office.

Schafer stopped by Major Kelly's office a few minutes after three o'clock the next day. The Major was standing behind his desk wearing a winter coat. The base weather report indicated that temperatures would hover around 35 degrees and snow intensity would increase for several hours—typical late November weather for Germany.

"Ah, Schafer," the Major said. "Are you ready for a little road trip?"

"I just have to call my wife and let her know I might be late for dinner," Schafer said.

"Not necessary," Kelly said. "We'll be back way before dinner time."

When Kelly moved past him, Schafer spotted the outline of an M1911 .45 caliber pistol in a shoulder holster.

"My car is giving me trouble, so we'll have to take yours," Kelly said.

"Where are we going?" Schafer asked as he started the car.

"We are heading to Weiden to see what Novack intends to do," Kelly said.

They spotted Novack's BMW in a parking lot outside the Weiden city limits, near the no-man's land separating Germany and Czechoslovakia. They parked a few rows away and exited the car. A couple of inches of slushy snow was on the ground, and cold, wet snow was steadily falling.

Novack stepped out from behind a car. He held a small, grey, semi-automatic, silencer-equipped pistol pointed at Schafer's chest.

"Hello, Paul," Novack said. "We thought you could cause us trouble, so here we all are."

"We?" Schafer questioned.

"Stop this BS," Kelly said as he produced the .45 and pointed it at Schafer. "He knows too much. Kill him as we agreed, and let's get the hell out of here."

Novack shot Schafer once, high and on the right side of his chest. The bullet exited above Schafer's shoulder blade. Schafer moaned quietly but kept his feet.

"Shoot him again," Kelly said as he pointed his pistol at Novack, who pivoted and shot Kelly in the center of his chest. Kelly dropped the gun and sat down hard in the slush.

You in the Newsletter: Short Works (cont'd)

“But why, why?” Kelly wheezed as he looked down at the oozing hole in his chest.

“Paul is a patriot, just as I am,” Novack said quietly. “We are professional soldiers for different countries. You, on the other hand, are a traitor to your country. I have watched you take our money and become a degenerate gambler and whore-monger. You disgust me!”

Novack shot Major John Kelly in the center of his forehead. Kelly slumped, fell over onto his side, and was still.

Novack pulled a handkerchief from his coat and turned to Schafer. “I’m an expert shot, Paul. This is a through-and-through wound. Press this against it, and you’ll be fine. I’ll have the border guards send someone to take care of you. This is your story now,” he continued. “You control the narrative. Kelly has a wife and son back in Wisconsin. They don’t deserve to be punished because Kelly was a traitor. Got to go, Paul. Goodbye.”

Novack tossed his gun a few cars away and walked off into the swirling November snow.

* * * *

“And, although not technically ‘knowing a celebrity,’ that’s the story of how I knew a spy,” Schafer said after a neighborhood lunch. “It was almost sixty years ago, and I remember it like it happened last week.”

“Did you ever hear from him again?” One of the after-lunch discussion participants asked.

“About ten years ago,” Schafer replied. “I received a call on my cell phone. He didn’t give his name, but I knew his voice.”

“Nice work on your story, Paul,” Novack said. “I’m happy you healed properly. I’m dying of cancer of the pancreas, and I wanted to make sure I touched bases with you before I checked out. You’re one of the good guys.”

“Where are you?” I asked.

“I’m at my home in Poland,” Novack replied. “I retired as a Colonel from the Polish army and then worked with Lech Walesa’s Solidarity team to help him get elected in 1990. Got to go, Paul. Goodbye.”

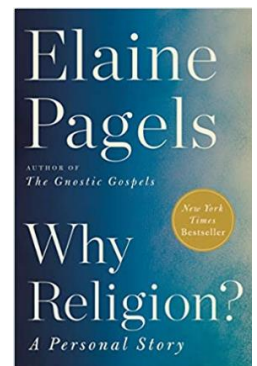
“And that’s the last time I spoke with him,” Schafer said. “A few months later, I received a letter from Novack’s daughter in Poland saying he had died in his sleep. I never got the chance to thank him for not shooting me again on that cold November day in 1965.”

You in the Newsletter: Book Review

Why Religion?: A Personal Story by Elaine Pagels
Literary Review by Frances Stephenson

Why Religion? by Elaine Pagels, is her personal memoir after losing her six year old son to a rare lung disease, and shortly thereafter, the death of her husband in a mountain climbing accident. The author is an American historian and the Harrington Spear Paine Foundation Professor of Religion at Princeton University. She joined the Princeton faculty in 1982. In 2015 she was awarded the National Humanities Medal by President Barack Obama.

At the start of her memoir Pagels asks the question, Why is religion still around in the twenty-first century? In her memoir she weaves a cultural reflection of religious traditions, church teachings, and beliefs that have powerfully shaped our attitudes toward work, gender, sexuality, and death. She sets out to untangle her own answers to the question while sensing how powerfully multiple cultures have shaped religious beliefs.



You in the Newsletter: Book Review (cont'd)

Pagels grew up in Palo Alto, California. She tells the readers that she was raised by an “aloof biologist father” and an unfeeling mother who offered her little comfort. At fifteen, Elaine rebelled and joined the Christian Evangelicals at the Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto. She enjoyed the friendship, singing, and religious passion, something she did not have at home. She stayed with the church until a close church friend died in a car accident.

Her Christian friends were at first sympathetic, but then asked, “Was he born again?”

When I said, “No – he was Jewish!” they said, “Then he’s in hell.”





To Elaine this made no sense for wasn’t Jesus Jewish? She came to the realization that these people were like a club for people spiritually superior to everyone who didn’t share their beliefs. She never returned.

Following high school Pagels started Stanford University. She experienced the violent clashes caused by the Vietnam War and the subsequent loss of friends who fought in the battles. She left Stanford without attending her graduation. For a short time, she focused on dance at the Martha Graham School in New York. Realizing she was never going to be able to support herself as a dancer, she applied to five graduate schools in five different fields. She settled on Harvard’s doctoral program in the study of religion, which offered opportunities to study Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism. She had left Christianity by this time, but questions persisted.

Pagels is scholar of religious history, not a theologian. Her writing style is engaging and not that of the professional historian. Her journey is not so much about belief, but about the importance of ritual in one’s spirituality. Pagels’ memoir is about the road from grief to acceptance to a sense of connectedness and happiness.

Upcoming Programs

2023

Mar.11 	A.M. Larks Workshop	Writes fiction, nonfiction, and drama. Her writing has appeared in <i>Nifty Lit</i> , <i>Scoundrel Time</i> , <i>Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies</i> , and the <i>Zyzyva</i> and <i>Ploughshares</i> blogs. She is the current assistant Managing Editor and Blog Editor, as well as the former Photo Editor at <i>Kelp Journal</i> and the former Fiction Editor at <i>Please See Me</i> and former Blog Editor of <i>The Coachella Review</i> . She is a co-author of <i>The Craft Guide</i> . “In writing, one of the best reasons to learn craft is to understand how to manipulate, deconstruct, and break those rules while finding your own voice and style.”
Apr 8 	Andrea A. Firth	Flash fiction and non-fiction. Writer, editor, educator co-founder, Diablo Writers' Workshop, editor at the <i>Brevity</i> blog
May 13 	TBD	
June 10 	TBD	

If you’ve heard a great speaker on writing/publishing/editing, email our speaker chair, Mark Clifford, at programs@cwcmtdiablo.org

Don't Write Like This

I read for the national Scholastic Art and Writing awards to help our branch earn the \$\$\$ they pay if we judge the works they send.

As an incurable editor I was frustrated that in many cases entrants seemed not to have read their works aloud to themselves, asked another student to read their work, or asked a teacher or someone familiar with writing to help them polish their work.

In some cases it was clear a student's first language wasn't English. None of those are included here. These are examples I believe writers should have found themselves. These make me think I should go volunteer in a high school to help a teacher help their students.

If you enter a contest or send your work to be published, try your best to not make the following kinds of mistakes. If you're weak on grammar, punctuation, word usage, etc., get help!

These are partial sentences. Some are funny. Enjoy.

Elisabeth



From 11th or 12th grade high school students writing "critical essays"

- As a result of the increased religious **femur** surrounding the field...
- I am somewhat passionate about STEM, but my passion **explodes** when it comes to art.
- ...villainize his competition, the press in particular - whom he calls... (Mixed punctuation)
- ...a way to **bring** the blame **off** himself...
- He draws attention to a different issue, effectively **performing** a red herring.
- By focusing on Europe's handling of the virus, which at the time was much more **resolute** than,,
- ,,an extremely **large amount** of supporters that praise him (Ed. Note: if something can be counted, use "number" not "amount")
- The model minority **mythos** has a strong effect on the perception of educational opportunities. (Did the student just copy, or does he know the meaning of the word?)
- ...is embedded in the **mentality** that a number evaluates students' capabilities...
- In Japan, approximately 500 students under 20 years of age commit suicide every year. Every September (which is around the time school starts), **that number triples**.
- ...it shows that they are **capable of** the material they've learned.
- As a result, **a societal chain** developed.
- Next, I will discuss the **scope** to which we have lost our ability to disagree courteously...
- The other more **debted** cause...
- ...being a primary **colonizer** for its renaissance and medieval history..
- ...both revolutions had shockingly similar **originations** yet polar opposite executions (Ed note: **origination** is the process of bringing something into existence while **origin** is the beginning of something.)
- ...to be **able to make deciding** governmental and economic decisions.
- Napoleon **reisnatted** slavery.

9th or 10th grade in high school short stories

- ...she was a Chinese college student in the '90s, and there was simply no such thing.
- ...go to America.he was very shorked at what his mom said
- ...fallen branches and leaves were interspersed among the brittle grass, providing an **immaculate** surface.
- ...and he knew the forest like the back of his hand (cliché)
- ...-I get greeted by a toothy smile from her. (Passive and why use the word get?)

Young Writers Contest First Prize Winner



Personal Narrative – 8TH GRADE

Dorris-Eaton School, Walnut Creek
Teacher: Melissa Parker

AN ENGLISH JOURNEY by Eric Niu

The gleaming airplane touched down at San Francisco Airport and taxied to the terminal. Inside I was with my family, preparing for a new life here in the United States. My dad had been in California a few times before for business trips, but now our entire family was moving here. We had planned to stay for just two years, but even that was a huge period of time. At the time I was only six and in first grade. I knew little to no English, and everyone spoke too rapidly for me to even begin comprehending their words. Venturing outside of the airport for the first time, I wondered what life in this alien land would be like.

We arrived in America in December of 2014, so I didn't immediately go to school because winter break was on. While my dad was at work, my mom and I explored San Francisco since there was nothing else to do. As we explored, I tried to understand what people said and what was written on the signs.

Everything here is so different here. I can't understand a thing.

For about two weeks, we lived at a hotel in San Francisco. Finally, we rented an apartment in Dublin and I went to school again, this time at James Dougherty Elementary school in America instead my old school in Shanghai, China.

School was especially difficult, as I was surrounded by kids who I had no way to interact with. The teacher helped me by translating what she wanted to say to me and using programs to help me learn English. She surely meant to help me adjust, after living 6 years in China, to this foreign country with its foreign aspects. However, these did little to help me overcome the difficulties of coming to a completely new land. Every day was much of the same: go to school, sit in the classroom, and try to understand what the teacher and my peers are saying, and go home. I quickly grew bored with school, which is one of the reasons why I have little memory of first grade.



First grade sped by, with each day being the exact same as the last. Many other barriers had already been overcome, but the language barrier still stood, opposing my advancement. When first grade ended, my situation had not changed from six months before when we first came. Finally, summer break was over and I went back to school, this time in second grade. I was enrolled in a language class called ESL to help with my limited English skills. I didn't struggle much with the words or pronunciation, but the grammar was extremely tough. The rules of grammar in Chinese are very different from English, meaning some sentences in Chinese had to be reversed in English. The teacher was an Islamic woman, and after seeing my situation, she offered to help give me after-school classes. Knowing that our family didn't have much money, she charged very little for these classes. My parents were willing to do anything to help me, so they gladly paid for the classes. At the time, I grudgingly went to the classes, thinking they wouldn't be much help.

As we drove in our car to my first lesson, I sat thinking about how effective the lessons would actually be. After all, I had already spent a year trying to learn English to no avail. At this rate, it would take forever to actually be able to speak and understand fluent English, an essential skill in America. The car rolled to a halt in front of an average-looking home. I ventured inside and my teacher was waiting for me, ready to help me advance my skills. She used a website called Quill to help me and assigned homework on the site, having me practice at home. Every week I went back, and she explained more rules of grammar to me, greatly helping me improve. Suddenly, English no longer looked like an impossible task.

Young Writers Contest First Prize Winner (cont'd)

As weeks went by, my capabilities steadily increased, yet I was still in the ESL class. My learning was greatly accelerated by my extracurricular class, which taught me so much about the rules of English grammar. By winter, I could interact and communicate with my fellow students, although my vocabulary was extremely limited. To solve this, I began to read books to absorb their words and familiarize myself with more language. Still, I wasn't what was called a "native speaker," so I had to continue improving. Nevertheless, I knew I wouldn't be taking the ESL class for much longer.

I still remember the day clearly. It was spring, near the end of my second-grade year. I had made a few friends and had improved to have great English, but I was still in the ESL class. We were called out for an assembly that day and the entire school filed out into a concrete clearing with an elevated stage directly in front of it. Our principal began to call out names and give awards to people for outstanding behavior then took out a pile of different awards and called more names. These, as I would later learn, were for new "native speakers," people who came to the U.S. and mastered English. The principal called out a few names, then, to my great surprise, called my name. I nervously walked onto the stage and took the award the principal held out to me. In my heart, I felt great satisfaction. I had finally accomplished what had seemed impossible only a year ago.



PRINCIPAL vs PRINCIPLE

1. A person in charge of a school or organization

The Principal at my school is very strict. He won't let me get away with anything!

2. Money that has been invested or lent in a transaction

I know that you now owe a lot of money on your loan, but what was the principal?

3. An adjective to describe something that is important

Money comes and goes but the principal thing in life should be your health.

A rule or something that is generally true

- A person without principles is not someone you want to deal with.
- The scientific principles of physics are sometimes hard to explain.
- Understanding the principles of cooking will allow you to cook delicious food.



Young Writers Contest Fundraising

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 Mount Diablo CWC newsletter every month in the year you donate. Or remain anonymous if you prefer!

DONATIONS A/O January 2023

JACK LONDON FOUNDER'S CIRCLE (\$500+)

Judith Overmier

Lily Gwilliam

THE JOHN STEINBECK SOCIETY (\$250 - \$499)

Cindy Leonard

David George in honor of Jan & Lee Paulson

Bob Lane in honor of James H. Oliver, Jr

.

JOHN MUIR MEMBER CLUB (\$150 - \$249)

Ken Kerkhoff

INA COOLBRITH LAUREATE CLUB (\$100 - \$149)

Karen Clayton

Stanford Stewart

MARY AUSTIN WRITERS CLUB (\$50 - \$99)

Marjorie Witt

Marianne Lonsdale

Patty Northlich

Chloe Laube

Sherida Bush

HELEN HUNT JACKSON GROUP (\$25 - \$49)

June Gatewood

Barry Humphries

Lynn Goodwin

Jana Haertl

Jane Bloomstrand

Judith Ingram

Robert Poirier

Colleen Gonzalez

Corrienne Heinemann

George Cramer

Jerry Blair

Juanita Martin

Barry Hampshire

Ann Steiner

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://cwcmtdiablo.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://cwcmtdiablo.org/young-writers/>

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