

# The Write News

February, 2024

A Monthly Newsletter  
Denis Hoye, Editor

## Mt. Diablo Branch

### General Meeting February 10, 2024



### Brooke Warner: The Three Qualities of a Good Memoir

Memoir is a much-beloved genre these days, but it's notably hard to sell to publishers. One of the reasons for that is too many memoirs fall into the trap of being a story about what happened rather than the meaning that the memoirist infuses into events that shaped or changed their lives. In this session, Brooke Warner will cover three qualities of memoir that you'll want to consider and understand if you want to write a story that will impact your readers' lives. Covered in this session will be:

- Meaning-making
- Your story's universal relevance or resonance
- Storytelling (ie, "showing") and good prose

Brooke Warner is the Publisher of She Writes Press and SparkPress. She's also been teaching memoirs for twelve years at <https://writeyourmemoirinsixmonths.com/> and <https://magicofmemoir.com/>. She's a champion for memoir writers and writers of personal stories and recently wrote a Substack post called [Why You Maybe Should Write a Memoir](#). Brooke is a weekly podcaster, TEDx speaker, and author of three books on memoirs, in addition to a regular speaker to CWC groups across Northern California.

#### Schedule

- 10:45 Check-in and Network
- 11:30 Writers Table: Craft Discussions
- 12:00 Buffet Lunch
- 1:00 Our Feature Presentation

**REGISTER ONLINE** at <https://cwcmtdiablo.org/meetings-and-workshops/>

**Deadline to register: Noon on February 7th.**

CWC Members: *Save \$5.00 with Early Bird Registration!* Cost increases to \$30 for members who register after the deadline.

*Prices do not increase for guests.*

**Meeting Cost: \$25 Members (Early Bird) and \$30 Non-Members**

Pay at the door or online with PayPal when you register. You do not need a PayPal account.

## Mt. Diablo Branch President's Message

It's already time for the February Newsletter. Time marches on and carries us all along in its wake. Can we stop it? No. Do we want to stop it? Sometimes!

So time can be a problem on occasions, but in real life, it is not something that we can control. However, it is a very useful item in our bag of writing tools.

We can skip over centuries in just a short paragraph, or we can slow action down so that a 6 second fight scene takes an entire chapter.

I recall one passage in Mervyn Peake's "*Titus Groan/Gormenghast*" trilogy, in which a character was pinned in the corner of a kitchen by a crazed chef with a sword, as he spun, holding the blade out horizontally. It was a spell binding passage to read and it flowed for pages and pages. No one died in the incident, but time passed inextricably slowly, but that felt too fast.

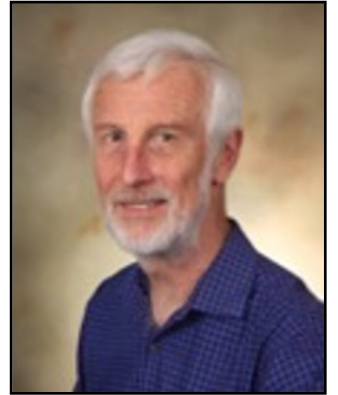
Currently, I am facing an interesting challenge in my latest novel. The chapters of the story flow chronologically, but then the very last chapter needs to leap forward three years. How to achieve that without causing readers to puzzle how that suddenly happened is a bridge that will need some help. But I am a writer and it is resolving problems like this that makes the journey of writing satisfying and fun.

Many writers seem to have their stories simply move through time without any recognition of its passing. I do that too often and in doing so, I miss opportunities. What would happen if we considered time to be a non-speaking character in the story. It has a trajectory as most characters do. It can influence and change characters, it can be a burden or an opening.

I suggest you don't sweep this nugget of potential under the carpet. Embrace it and see where it takes your stories and characters.

But no matter how you see time, the most important detail is that you feel inspired to write and share your work with your intended audience. Have fun and write.

Barry



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## A Note from Michael Barrington

On Wednesday evening January 17th., Michael Barrington made a presentation at an evening function arranged by the *American Association of University Women* in Pleasant Hill. About eighty people attended. With the help of a Powerpoint presentation, he showed a collection of his remarkable photos from more than thirty countries focusing on women. As he explained, he often draws on his travels to provide material for his books. Many in the audience were in book clubs and asked, as he sold and signed copies, if he would consider coming to their meeting if they selected one of his books. That question is music to the ears of any writer!

**Advance notice:** In February, Michael Barrington will publish his latest book, "*Stories With a Cup of Coffee*," a collection of 43 short stories, most of which have already been published in magazines in the USA and the UK. "My intent was to offer a smorgasbord of stories which are not grouped together in any particular order, but which would suit any occasion or mood: waiting outside your doctor's office, taking a break with a cup of coffee, or settling down in the evening with a cocktail at the end of a busy day. The longest will take about ten minutes of your time, others are extremely short. Enjoy."

My latest short story, "*Stonehenge: A Quick Visit*," was published January, 2024 in the UK by *CafeLit*, and is included in this collection.



**From December Readings — Life's A Banquet**  
**By: LaVonne Taft**

Sharon Baker <[Shabake@ael.com](mailto:Shabake@ael.com)>

Sent: August 26, 11:08 AM

To: Sean Baker

Hi Sean,

When I lived in Burbank there was a beautiful fuchsia bush on the side of our house. As a little girl I used to pluck the fuchsias, pull out all but two of the stamens of each one, hold them up and let the breeze catch them, and pretend they were ballerinas.

That memory is the inspiration for this new poem and I'd like to share it with you. And no, I haven't heard back from the doctor. I'm not procrastinating, I just think it's a cold. I'll call Dr. Flores again if I don't hear anything.

Love you,

Mom



**fuchsias**

**magenta tutus  
 a chorus line of petals  
 bright yellow toe shoes  
 dance in a gentle breeze  
 on an invisible stage**

That's beautiful. Very descriptive Mom. Call the doc today.

**Video Appointment today**

Sent: August 29, 2:10 PM

Sharon Baker <[Shabake@ael.com](mailto:Shabake@ael.com)>

To: Sean Baker

Ok, I spoke to the doctor today via a video appointment and he wants me to have a chest X-ray. He thinks I have pneumonia and has already sent me a prescription for a mega-antibiotic. I'm going now to get the X-ray and prescription. So, we'll see. Dad is coming with me because I'm feeling pretty weak.

Love you,

Mom

**Video Appointment today**

Sent: August 29, 4:22 PM

Sean Baker <[Seabake@gmail.com](mailto:Seabake@gmail.com)>

To: Sharon Baker

Hey Mom, glad you're getting the tests and meds you need.

Hope you are getting lots of rest.

## Life's A Banquet (Cont'd)

**Video Appointment today**

Sent: August 29, 6:02 PM

Sharon Baker <[Shabake@ael.com](mailto:Shabake@ael.com)>

To: Sean Baker

Well, the X-ray shows I have severe pneumonia. You can call dad for details. I'm going to bed.

Love you.

**Update and a new outlook**

Sent: September 4, 12:17 PM

Sharon Baker <[Shabake@ael.com](mailto:Shabake@ael.com)>

To: Sean Baker

Hi,

That antibiotic is very strong and it's also prescribed for TB, Anthrax, and Plague! That'll cure what ails me and then some. This illness brings home to me how tenuous life is and it increases my conviction to do the things I can do now. Remember when we went to your cousin's funeral in LA? She's buried in Serenity Palms Cemetery. Sounds boring, doesn't it? How about a cemetery with the name; *Jazz in the Morning*, *Wind Beneath My Wings*, or *Garden of Earthly Delights*?

At least it sounds like you're not just stuck in the ground and be able to get out once in a while!

I've thought about death but it's at the bottom of the list. Really, it is.

Love you.

**Update and a new outlook**

Sent: September 4, 12:20 PM

Sean Baker <[Seabake@gmailer.com](mailto:Seabake@gmailer.com)>

To: Sharon Baker

Mom! You Ok?

**Update and a new outlook**

Sent: September 4, 3:08 PM

Sharon Baker <[Shabake@ael.com](mailto:Shabake@ael.com)>

To: Sean Baker

Of course, I'm in recovery, don't worry about me. I'm just sharing my new outlook on life.

I'm probably in the last quarter of my life but everything is like a shiny new present to be unwrapped.

I found two acronyms online that might explain to you how I feel. *YOLO*, *You Only Live Once*.

That motivates me, gets me moving. Then there's *FOMO*. You know, *Fear of Missing Out*.

I don't want to miss out on life experiences, so I wonder, am I a FOMO-ite? I found a FOMO checklist online and BINGO, we have a winner! I'm in the obsessive-compulsive category.

I guess I'm a FOMO-ite.

Love you!

**Update and a new outlook**

Sent: September 4, 6:10 PM

Sean Baker <[Seabake@gmailer.com](mailto:Seabake@gmailer.com)>

To: Sharon Baker

Mom, I don't think you're obsessive-compulsive. You should question that checklist.

I'm worried about you. How are you feeling?

## Life's A Banquet (Cont'd)

**Update and a new outlook**

Sent: September 5, 1:08 PM

Sharon Baker <[Shabake@ael.com](mailto:Shabake@ael.com)>

To: Sean Baker

No reason to worry, I'm just sharing how I feel, and I don't think I'm obsessive-compulsive either. I'm sure that FOMO isn't a neurosis but a *lust for life*. We love "Auntie Mame," with Rosalind Russell and her famous line, *Life is a banquet and most poor suckers are starving to death!* Well, I'm creating my own *banquet* for life. I'm living free now, all the encumbrances of youth are gone, the lack of self-confidence and fear of failure have less power. I could care less about what others think, and my self-expression seems to have no boundaries.

Love you.

**Update and a new outlook**

Sent: September 5, 5:02 PM

Sean Baker <[Seabake@gmail.com](mailto:Seabake@gmail.com)>

To: Sharon Baker

Maybe I'm getting this a little better.

**Update and a new outlook**

Sent: September 6, 2:28 PM

Sharon Baker <[Shabake@ael.com](mailto:Shabake@ael.com)>

To: Sean Baker

Hi,

I'm on a roll now, trying to get this all out. Remember when you asked about the tap shoes I bought? They were for the flamenco dance lessons I took too late in life because my feet just couldn't move that fast, or my fingers either. Those castanets were murder too. I do Blues Dancing instead and maybe I'll try drumming next! I've eaten raw sea urchin in a Japanese fish market, free-dived to a shipwreck, and dune buggy racing through cornfields in Walnut Grove. All this means is that now my two mantras are, *I'll never be any younger than I am today* and *If not now, when?* Sure, there are limitations; money, health, and time but I am less worried about them, there is so much fun to be had!

Love you.

**Update and a new outlook**

Sent: September 6, 6:55 PM

Sean Baker <[Seabake@gmail.com](mailto:Seabake@gmail.com)>

To: Sharon Baker

Love you, Mom. I'm working on a poem to share too.

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## Upcoming Events

- CWC Mt. Diablo Board Meeting, Feb. 9th, 2024
- Brooke Warner: The Three Qualities of a Good Memoir, Feb. 10, 2024
- Open Mic on Zoom, Feb. 14, 2024
- Art Embraces Poetry, February 24, 2024

## Winners of the December Readings — Short Stories

### Phyllis Houseman 1<sup>st</sup> Place

#### **A Celebration in a Small Ecuadorian Town**

In the summer of 1962, I traveled to Ecuador as part of a Peace Corps Volunteer group of science and math teachers. First, we trained for two months at the University of Maryland's College Park campus.

Half-way through the course, our small team had the honor of meeting President John Kennedy in the White House Rose Garden. He shook all our hands and told us how much we were wanted in Ecuador. No one had a premonition of what his future would bring.

Assigned to the *Escuela de Excelencia*, a secretarial training school in the southern city of Loja, I taught Nutrition and English to three classes of girls. They were the hope of their families to provide the income needed to escape a life of poverty. Home for many of the students was a tar-paper covered shack, with an earthen floor and no running water or electricity.

The school had few resources—the classroom I used had bare adobe walls. And they owned no actual typewriters. The young ladies practiced typing at a long, battered table, drilling on flat wooden replicas that had keys painted on their surfaces.

Determined to change the barren surroundings, I organized a project to obtain classroom materials from a variety of U.S. companies—many from my hometown of Detroit. The girls composed dozens of personalized letters to the businesses, using the ream of paper, envelopes, and postage I secured from local donors.

One student, Manuela Rodriguez, wrote so movingly I asked her to copy her message into a half-dozen requests.

“Sirs, we have little in our school to help us become excellent secretaries. Not even typewriters. But our mothers let us stay out of the fields and laundries. With your generous aid, we may succeed.”

Materials flowed in during the next several months: colorful charts of food groups and nutrition goals went up to brighten the naked walls. We read from an English-language, short story anthology a publisher contributed. There were enough copies so that each girl received her own volume.

The most amazing gift was a microscope with prepared learning slides. The rector immediately locked it away in a display cabinet, never to be used, but always admired by visitors.

No typewriters arrived.

About a year into my stay, I learned the school qualified for a government educational grant. Now they could purchase several real typing machines.

Just before I left for home, the funds showed up, and a committee of various city officials held closed-door meetings on how to best use the money.

The grant the school received *was* nonspecific. To my gringo mind, using it to get actual typewriters for girls studying to be secretaries was the logical thing to do.

A month later, I stood in the *Plaza Central* viewing the parade celebrating the Ecuadorian Independence Day. Many area schools marched by, carrying streaming flags and banners.

None strutted more proudly than the young ladies of the *Escuela de Excelencia*. The girls all wore brand new marching uniforms in the school colors of white and baby blue.

I felt a wave of affection for my students, and sadness that I accomplished so little in my two years with them. The purchase of uniforms instead of the machines was their priority. It was *my* lesson in cultural values. Who was *I* to question how they expressed their pride?

The next day, they carefully stored their outfits to be ready for other ceremonies. The girls then sat down at the table to practice on the painted letters of the old wooden typewriters.

**Winners of the December Readings — Short Stories****Susan Berman 2nd Place****The Tree**

“You know I’ve never done this before,” David said, his thumb hooked into a belt loop. “Let me see if I’ve got this right. We’re going to go buy a tree, not just any tree but a dead tree, one that was probably cut down in early November, cram it into the trunk of the station wagon and bring it home.”

“Yeah,” Alice said reaching for her cup of tea, “unless we buy one that is too tall to fit into the trunk. Might have to tie it onto the top of the car.”

“And risk scratching the paint?” David’s voice grew louder.

“Silly,” Alice said, “we can use that old blanket we carry in the trunk to cover and protect the car top, then load the tree on top of that. You now, the blanket we use for picnics, emergencies and such.

“Well,” David said shifting from one foot to another, “how tall does this thing have to be?”

“So it touches the ceiling.” Alice sipped her tea. “What we are looking for is a full tree with no missing branches. The shape is as important as the height.”

“So, what do we do with it when we get it home? What if it has spiders?”

“We put the tree base into a big bucket of water to give it a good overnight soak. And, at the same time, we spray down the branches with the garden hose to get rid of all the insects.”

“How much is this thing going to cost? I want to make sure I have enough cash money with me.” David reached into his hip pocket. He spread open his billfold and thumbed through his paper currency. “I doubt those people at those pop-up tree lots take credit cards. When I’ve driven by, they all look pretty suspicious to me.”

“The cost depends on several things,” Alice said, tilting her head to one side. “First, how tall the tree is, second, how full and gorgeous it is, and third, the variety or type of fir tree it is.”

“So, what are you saying?” David looked up from his open wallet. “Maybe ten, fifteen dollars?”

“Per foot, maybe.” Alice laughed.

“Are you kidding?” David’s voice rose to a squeaky pitch seldom heard by anything but dogs. “For what this is going to cost we could buy a real live tree and have something that grows in the yard that makes oxygen and provides shade.”

“But who is going to dig it up out of the ground every year, bring it indoors and then replant it again?” Alice shook her head from side to side. “Not at all practical.”

“How long is this thing supposed to be in the living room?” David asked, jamming his wallet back into his pocket.

“Until New Year’s Day. It’s bad luck to take it down any earlier.”

“Won’t it be shedding needles by then? Won’t that ruin the carpet?”

“Worry wart,” Alice said with a grin. “That’s why we keep water in the tree stand so it’s less likely to dry out and shed. If it does shed, we’ll vacuum up the needles everyday”

“Okay, so on January first we un-decorate the tree, take it outside and then what? Do we have to pay to take it to the dump?”

“The trash collecting service generally designates a day for tree pick up. All we have to do is drag it to the street. If they don’t do that, Boy Scouts take up the slack and have a tree-haul-away day, for a charitable donation, of course.”

“Now let me get this straight,” David said, both fists planted on his hips. “We’re going to spend a lot of money on a dead tree, tie it to the roof of the car where it may, or may not, scratch the paint, bring it into the house, decorate it, keep it watered even though it will eventually drop needles on the carpet because it is deader than it was when we bought it, we may have to have the carpets cleaned if the needles stain it, we take off all the decorations, it sheds even more needles when we drag it outside, and then we may have to pay someone to haul it away?”

“Well, when you put it that way, yeah.”

“Well,” David said blowing out a sigh, “my Russian grandmother would have called this tree buying business ‘mishegaas’.”

“David, you know I don’t speak any Hebrew.” Alice waved her hand in the air. “What does that mean?” “Craziness, nonsense.”

David shook his head from side to side in disbelief. “Sounds like there must be a Member of the Twelve Tribes of Israel behind all this tree-money-spending scheme.”

## Winners of the December Readings — Short Stories

Deborah Greenberg 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

### New Discoveries

The mood was celebratory in the luxurious twenty-fifth-story condominium. Lively conversation stimulated by free-flowing champagne rose above the sound of Charlie Parker playing quietly in the background. Hosts Darwin and Celine thanked their longtime housekeeper, Viola, for the lovely meal they finished and announced that coffee and dessert would be served soon. Once again, Viola had made a delicious cake.

As coffee was poured, the twenty-odd guests chanted, “Speech, speech.”

Darwin stood and took a sip of champagne before saying, “A new year will be upon us in less than four hours, and I can’t think of a group of people I’d rather be with. Of course, it wouldn’t be the same without my son, Darwin Fenton the third, and my mother, Belinda, who, you all know, sacrificed so much to raise me as a single mom. I have a feeling this will be an extraordinary year, with new discoveries awaiting.”

The older Darwin then sat to eat his serving of cake. As the din of conversation filled the air, he was interrupted by a tap on his shoulder. He turned to see his mother.

“I think I better get going.”

“I wish you’d stay longer.”

“I know, but I get tired.”

He knew what she would say next before she said it. She always asked for the same thing before leaving.

“Mind if I take a piece of cake?”

“Of course not, but I’ll take you home.”

“Don’t be silly. You can’t leave your guests.”

“I’ll get you an Uber.”

“You know I like to take the bus.”

Viola took a large piece of cake sealed in a plastic container and handed it to Belinda. Darwin walked his mother to the door and kissed her goodbye. Then he looked at Celine, who nodded knowingly. They had agreed that Darwin would follow his mother’s bus home to be sure she arrived safely. She was getting more frail each year, and the crime rate in her area was escalating.

Darwin listened for the sound of the elevator doors opening and closing, then took the next elevator to the lobby. Staying safely behind her, he followed his mother, who left the building, holding the cake container tightly. As she waited at the bus stop, Darwin hailed a cab.

“Stay here,” he instructed the driver. Minutes later, as Belinda boarded the bus, he said, “Follow that bus.” He smiled, thinking about how often he’d wanted to say something like that. They followed the vehicle for twenty-five minutes as it made stops every so often. Along the way, Darwin reflected on how stubborn his mother was. Despite being widowed while pregnant when Darwin’s father was killed in Vietnam, she continued to wear her wedding ring. Darwin had wanted her to marry several of her suitors over the years, but she’d refused every marriage proposal.

Despite financial difficulties, she’d given Darwin a stable home. His education was always a priority, and he had reaped the benefits. Now well-off financially, he’d offered to buy her an apartment near his, but she insisted on remaining in the same small two-bedroom apartment she had raised him in.

Near his mother’s stop, Darwin asked the driver to pull over. He watched his mother exit the bus, then walk towards her apartment.

“Follow her,” he said, wanting to be sure she reached her destination safely. The driver inched along another block, his mother oblivious to the tail. When she reached the front of her apartment building, instead of entering as expected, she continued walking. Confused, Darwin watched as the driver continued to follow her until she entered an old building with peeling brown paint on the next block. He’d never noticed it before. A small sign over the door read New Discoveries Nursing Home.

## Winners of the December Readings — Short Stories

### Deborah Greenberg 3<sup>rd</sup> Place (Cont'd)

#### New Discoveries

Peering in, Darwin saw his mother greet the receptionist with a hug, then disappear down a hall. He figured she was working there to make extra money. She'd told him she had enough income from her small pension and government support, but he wouldn't put it past her to lie about that. He had the driver take him home.

Darwin returned to the nursing home on New Year's Day and approached the young man at the reception desk. "Can you tell me when Belinda Fenton is scheduled to work here next?"

The clerk ran his fingers through his hair, a confused look on his face. Speaking slowly, he said, "She comes in after seven most evenings if that's what you mean."

"How long is her shift?"

"Let me get my supervisor."

The man left and returned several minutes later with a middle-aged woman. "Can I help you, Sir?" she asked.

"I'm trying to find out about my mother, Belinda Fenton. She's quite elderly, and I don't think she should be working. I know she wants to be self-sufficient, but she knows I'm more than willing to help her financially."

The woman took Darwin's arm. "I see the resemblance now," she said.

"Funny, people say I don't look anything like her."

"I didn't mean you take after your mother. You—" The woman stopped talking abruptly as she covered her mouth with her hand.

"What were you going to say?"

"I was going to say your mother doesn't work here. She visits someone regularly. Often brings him treats. He especially likes cake."

"Who? Who is she visiting?"

"A man she's known many years. He was badly injured in Vietnam. Lost a leg and sustained head injuries that left him unable to speak or care for himself. But we all know he enjoys her visits."

"What's his name?"

The woman looked around, clearly uneasy. "Darwin, Darwin Fenton."

### Let's Welcome Our Newest Members

**Lucy Hart:** Lucy was a member until 2023. She has rejoined this January and can help occasionally with an event. She is interested in writing short stories. phone: 323-552-6596

**Tanya Tanya Mburu:** Tanya is interested in humor/satire, screenwriting, and spiritual writing. She found us on the internet and is available to participate in a specific program or event, but she would like more information about committees or chair opportunities, and becoming part of the board.

**Nancy Chan:** Nancy is interested in essays, bio/memoirs, and travel writing. She listed "other" as how she heard about CWC, and cannot volunteer at this time.

**Joanna Kalbus:** Joanna was a member for six years. Re-enrolled in January for 1/2 year membership. She is interested in general writing, essays, and bio/memoirs.

**Jim Brennan:** He writes in all genres and heard about CWC from a friend. 😊 Also interested in board positions and volunteering for a specific event or program.

**Carol W. Brown:** Carol is interested in bio/memoirs and intends to finish the last 25% of her book and is interested in historical writing, and bio/memoirs, and heard about the Club through *Linda Hartmann*.

## Member's Short Story

### Colonel John Blashford-Snell CBE — by Barry Hampshire

Colonel John Blashford-Snell CBE is one of the last pith-helmeted European explorers who hacked his way through seemingly impenetrable jungle with a 3-foot long machete in one hand and a revolver in the other. This may sound like the description of a lead role in a 1950 adventure movie. But it is not, he still lives in the west of England.

I met Colonel John in the mid-1970s when I was about 25 years old. He may have been only 13 years older than I, but his demeanor, confidence, and directness made me feel like a child once again. It was not that he was unkind or cold, far from it, he was warm and engaging. I think my sense of inadequacy came from my own issues that had nowhere to hide in his presence.

I had worked in the city of London for several years and felt that my career path looked well set. However, something niggled deep within. One morning, I was on the train into London and found an interesting half inch advert in the Opportunities section. It was for volunteers to help in an organization called the "Scientific Exploration Society" (SES). As we had no internet to check out organizations, I sent a letter to the provided address. Several weeks later, I received a letter, inviting me to go for an interview at the society's offices.

I checked in the London A-Z map and found the address was about a block from Downing Street (The Prime Minister's residence). What was I getting myself into?

On the appointed evening, I took the tube to Westminster and found the address as darkness fell. I rang the doorbell for the SES. A male voice answered and said he would come and collect me. He escorted me across a marble foyer to a bank of elevators. To my surprise, when the elevator moved, it descended several floors. He led me into a warren of underground tunnels that were lit by occasional dim bulbs. He warned me to be careful as there were gantries supporting cables and hissing pipes over my head. I had to duck under a number of them.

As we walked briskly through the tunnels, I soon lost my sense of direction. As if it may help me, at one point, he said, "One floor above us, over there, is Churchill's war room." I sensed feet urgently scurrying along these hallowed passageways. Each second counted. Each could cost England a battleship or a battalion of infantry or allow the RAF to destroy a huge flight of Nazi bombers.

On we rushed until he took an abrupt left turn into an office. The dimly lit room had one desk lamp and was jammed with books, equipment, and furniture. At a table, in the middle, sat two men having an ardent conversation. My escort disappeared into the darkness and I was left standing a few feet from the men who paid me no attention.

I shuffled from one foot to the other, I scratched my nose, I let my imagination run rampant through images of Churchill, 10 Downing Street, military maps, two men talking in the dark, and insignificant me.

After five minutes, their conversation finished. One man stood up and headed into a back corner. The other man, dressed in an elegant suit and tie, slowly stood before taking two strides to me. He offered his hand and said, "Mr. Hampshire, I'm delighted to meet you. I'm Colonel John Blashford-Snell."

"Pleased to meet you," was all I could think of saying.

"The society has been in existence since 1969 and we have organized a number of scientific and humanitarian expeditions in a few parts of the world."

To say a sense of intimidation was nagging at me was utterly correct.

*Blimey, what the hell am I doing here?*

He then gave me a list of the members to review while he made a phone call. The list was full of doctors, eminent scientists, military tacticians, bankers, research fellows, and other worthy and prestigious figures. What could a computer programmer like me do in this environment? The only high-tech object I could see, as my eyes adjusted to the light, was a manual typewriter. My heart sank and I feared this had been a wasted outing. I was shocked when Colonel John invited me to come into the office one evening a week to help with administration.

Over the next few weeks, I went into the offices for several hours to assist where I could. Colonel John was never around, he had better things to do. I created lists, filed documents, and organized piles of everything conceivable. In that time, I chatted to members of the staff about the society, their expeditions, and the goals of the group.



## Member's Works (Cont'd)

### Colonel John Blashford-Snell CBE — By Barry Hampshire

The society had organized the first ever expedition to raft the entire length of the Blue Nile, which originated in the mountains of Ethiopia and finished when it met the Mediterranean Sea. In doing so, they managed to map areas that allowed medical and humanitarian supplies to be more easily brought into the extremely remote villages of the high mountains. One of their other successes had been their crossing of the Darien Gap in Panama with two Range Rovers.

This led to the consideration of constructing a highway across the gap so that goods and travelers could safely traverse the region. It has yet to be built even though the SES expedition found a plausible route.

I was intrigued by all that I heard and began to hope I could join one of their expeditions. However, I also realized that I didn't have any qualifications or abilities to join one of their endeavors. This was not an environment for dreamers like me. They wanted extremely capable and incredibly determined individuals.

The one time that my efforts were acknowledged by Colonel John was when I designed the first necktie for the society and had 100 manufactured. It hadn't been complicated or difficult, but it required me to be resourceful and diligent, in an era when catalogs and phone calls were the only means to negotiate business deals.

In filing paperwork in the office or designing neckties, I had reached my peak of my abilities to participate in the society's functions. That was a harsh revelation for a 25 year old.

After each evening helping in the office, that fact sat with me for the one hour train journey back to where I lived in Brighton. I didn't stew and judge myself. That simple fact seemed to light a flame. I considered my job, my life, my prospects, and how I wanted my future to look. I knew my mother wanted me to buy a house and saddle myself with a mortgage. That was traditional and expected in those days.

Thoughts of working abroad entered my head, but where? I scanned the newspapers for opportunities. Working in Europe looked quite feasible, but such a prospect didn't excite me. I wanted somewhere that was more remote. My mother realized what I was contemplating. She canvassed seriously for the house and mortgage option, saying it was time to settle down. But I was far from settling down. Then I found the advertisement I had been waiting for. Aramco in Saudi Arabia were looking for scientific programmers. I applied that evening and was accepted after an interview and various tests.

All of my family gathered at Heathrow to say farewell. The look of concern on my mother's face still haunts me. She could not understand. I relaxed on the plane and reflected on being in that situation. I was there because of that niggling feeling I had while working in London and then the frustration of never being qualified to join an SES expedition.

Saudi gave me opportunities to grow and flourish in ways that I felt England could never do. Having decided to stay after my first year, I recognized a need for a reliable vehicle. When I checked the various options, the prospect of driving 5,500 miles from England felt daunting and, at times, terrifying. But the memory of my frustration regarding the SES expeditions fueled my determination to arrange the purchase of the Blazer and drive it across Europe and the Middle East. I have no doubt I would have never seriously considered that journey if I had never encountered the SES and Colonel John. His inspiration was what drove me to organize and undertake my own expedition. Not only did I make all the arrangements, but I then executed the project.

That journey was pivotal in who I became, how I see life, how I value life, and many of my achievements in life. And all of that was caused by having the chance to interact with who became a hero of mine, Colonel John Blashford-Snell.

His confidence and determination were qualities that inspired me in long term endeavors, such as running marathons and writing my memoir based on my drive from England to Saudi Arabia. When my editor reviewed the book, she told me I needed to get written permission from Colonel John as I mentioned him by name in the first chapter. When I reached out to him after 40 years, he remembered me once I reminded him about having the 100 neckties manufactured. To my delight, he agreed to review my memoir and write a forward.

To have his forward at the start of my memoir is unbelievable to me. Having a person, who I have looked up to for much of my life, be so generous feels like such an honor and is an inspiration that now colors my own life and actions.

## Writers Helping Writers 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 practical assistance to writers. Your tax-deductible gift will appear in the Mount Diablo CWC newsletter every month in the year you donate. You may remain anonymous if you prefer!

### DONATIONS as of March 2023:

J.K.ROWLINGS STAIRCASE CIRCLE (\$1000 +)

**Lilly Gwilliam**

GEORGE ORWELL'S FUTURE FORUM (\$750 – \$999)

ROBERT HEINLEIN'S UNIVERSE (\$500 - \$749)

HARPER LEE'S SYMBOLS (\$250 - \$499)

TONI MORRISON'S MEMORIES BAND (\$100 - \$249)

DEAN KOONTZ THRILLER TEAM (\$50 - \$99)

**Bob Poirier**

MARK TWAIN'S ADVENTURES PARTY (\$25 - \$49)

**Sandra Hall, Sherida Bush, June Gatewood, Dita Basu**

RICHARD WRIGHT'S UNDERGROUND SUPPORTERS (up to \$24)

AGATHA CHRISTIE'S MYSTERIOUS ANONYMOUS SQUAD (any amount)

**Squad Member One** (\$765)

All program expenses are supported by individual donations to date.

**Check our branch website for details:** <https://cwcmtdiablo.org/writers-helping-writers/>

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/writers-helping-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: Writers Helping Writers

This month we received a donation of \$100 for the Young Writers Contest from Joni Treadwell.

**THANK YOU TO ALL WHO SUPPORT THIS IMPORTANT FUND!**

### Young Writer’s Contest Fundraising

Sponsored by:  
The California Writers Club,  
Mt. Diablo Branch



Please consider joining one of the following donor clubs to benefit our program 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! 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 submissions are free. Check our branch website for details:

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

The Mt. Diablo Branch hosts an awards luncheon in May, depending on Covid 19 and its offshoots: Delta & Lambda.

All program expenses are supported by individual donations. Thank you for considering membership in one of the above donor clubs.

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Please list my membership in the following donor club:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Amount enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Acknowledge my gift in honor/memory of (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

To pay via PayPal click “buy now” on the Mt. Diablo website: <https://cwcmtdiablo.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**

## Ekphrasis Exhibition 2024

### Call for Writers by Linda Hartmann

In 2023, *California Writers Club, Mt. Diablo* (CWC) collaborated with curators from *Lamorinda Arts Council* (LAC), and *Lamorinda Arts Alliance* (LAA), to develop a creative and successful Ekphrastic Exhibition Project. The 2023 Exhibition can still be seen on-line at <https://lamorindaarts.org/product-category/ekphrasis/> (click on any image to see the writing paired with it), and was shown in the Art Gallery at the Orinda Library throughout the month of May 2023. The 2024 display will be our *2nd annual Ekphrasis Exhibition* and will hang in the same gallery for *two months* this year, during May and June.

For those of you who are new to the concept, “Ekphrasis” is a Greek word for writing that describes or explains other art; a detailed description of a work of visual art as a literary device. Plato was among those known to have done this first. Have you ever sat in front of a painting or piece of art and really taken it in? Where did your thoughts go? Where did your imagination take you? What did the visual art make you think of, or what emotions did it evoke? Writing about this experience is ekphrastic writing. Ekphrasis is not just a description of visual art, but how the piece affects you.

Last year we had a two-way exhibition, with writers responding to works of art as well as visual artists creating as inspired by a written work. This year, we will be keeping it more traditional, with writers/authors responding to the work of visual artists only. The terms writer and author are used interchangeably for this project, as one need not be a published author to participate.

Please see our *home website for a full calendar of events*, as it is time to put the important dates on your calendar and get registered to participate. We are hoping to obtain a grant this year and need to have an idea of how many of you will be participating. Calendar at: <https://cwcmt Diablo.org/ekphrasis/>

*The exhibit will run from April 29 to June 28, 2024, with Presentation Program in the Auditorium, and Reception following on Saturday, May 4<sup>th</sup> from 1:00 – 5:00 PM.*

This project culminates as an exhibit of fine visual artwork and the literary work it inspires to be enjoyed by the public as well as fellow art and literary enthusiasts, collectors, press, family and friends. It is free and open to the public. Pieces of visual art will be hung side-by-side with the literary responses in the gallery, and the on-line gallery will be made available for viewing and purchasing pieces again this year.

We are looking for fifty writers from CWC-Mt. Diablo to respond to art pieces created by members of LAC and LAA. *Deadline for registration to participate is January 31<sup>st</sup>. You will receive artwork to choose from by ranked-order and first-come, first-served by February 4<sup>th</sup>. For questions, please contact:*

**Linda Hartmann at:** <http://ekphrasis@cwcmt Diablo.org>

## Poems by Lee Paulson

### “One Sweet Summer”

Butterfly wings and pretty things  
 Laughter on a gentle breeze  
 Dandelion wine, you and I  
 Sharing a special love  
 Cloud faces and picnic places  
 Together for one sweet summer

### “The Cove”

Come gently to me  
 In the quiet time  
 Soft breezes, flowers, and wine  
 Whisper love to me  
 On an August land  
 Summer sun, seashells, and sand

## Out the Gate by Philip Scimonelli

The anticipation and preparation start the night before. Warm clothing is laid out. A base layer of thermals followed by multiple outer garments to keep me warm and dry. Of course, last will be XTRA TUF deck boots to protect my feet and help me hold my grip as the vessel rides the waves to our destination. I'll also apply a circular medicated patch behind my ear, so the breakfast I consume that morning will not come back and visit me.

You see I'm going on a six-pack adventure, This has nothing to do with the consumption of beer. Although my companions and I are known to quench our palates with a bit of ale on the journey back to the docks.

Five buddies and I are heading out of San Fransisco on a six-pack fishing charter. A boat with a max load of six anglers. If your budget allows, I highly recommend this opportunity. Not only will you have fewer tangles. You will engage in banter, shared stories, partake in delicious food, and maybe even take home the prized targeted fish. The King Salmon.

We meet very early, 5 a.m. on the stern. Our captain and deckhand have the rods, reels, and rigs ready to roll. By 5:30, we are starting our journey through San Fransico Bay. It's dark, and a sense of calm splashed with a touch of eeriness. In the distance, an array of lights sparkles taus from the hills of San Francisco. A lovely good morning welcome from the city by the bay.

As we pick up knots the queen of bridges is appearing closer and closer. People come from all over the country, even the world, to take in her majestic orange beauty. They drive across her walk over her, bicycle her span. However today we are traveling underneath this marvel. For the few minutes I'm directly below, I look: up, and there she is in all her glory. The Golden Gate Bridge. A shiver runs through. I utter one word: Amazing.

We crossed under now and are heading out to the Pacific Ocean. Otherwise known to the local angler as "Out The Gate." The ocean was flat, my stomach was settled, it was already a wonderful morning, and we hadn't wet a line. Fishing is akin to gambling, when you pull that armed bandit you might hit a jackpot, fishing is its equal. You never know. However, I like the odds with a fishing pole in my hand, plus the winnings taste so delicious.

Forty minutes into our ride the throttles were pulled down, the engines slowed, and the captain shouted, "let's get em boys." Which is kind of funny because the youngest boy on the boat is sixty-five. Of course, you want your fishing pole to bend and bounce which will trigger the most coveted words. FISH ON! FISH ON! The deity of the sea was shining on me.

I thrust myself towards my arching fishing rod. The fight was on, the pole bending, the reel screeching, the deckhand instructing. Me turning the handle and saying a silent prayer "Thank you, but don't let me lose him". It was a good fish. You can tell by its effort to escape the force that didn't allow it to swim untethered. He jumped once to eye his opponent. He teased me, by getting close, just to run again. He wasn't going down until I felt in my arms and legs. After fifteen minutes, he seemed to know the efforts of his battle on my appendages. The deckhand made what can be an awkward situation into a graceful netting. The prize was on the deck. The salmon was a marvel of beauty, as its colors shimmered off its scales.

The six of us each caught at least one, an amazingly successful trip. Smiles broad and wide adorned the faces of the captain, the hard-working deckhand, and of course all six anglers. We enjoyed the ride back to the docks, and again under her majesty while enjoying a six-pack.

Tight Lines!

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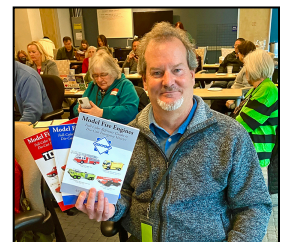
## Writer's Table

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Our February Writers Table will be focused on something we all need to know.

### How to Market Your Book Building a Successful Marketing Strategy: Andrew versus AI.

Designer/publisher/author Andrew Benzie will challenge Chat GPT's twelve book marketing suggestions while discussing his own marketing process for an upcoming book. Compare how well you are doing vs. AI and discover how you can integrate these strategies into your marketing plan.



## CWC Mt. Diablo Writers Connection

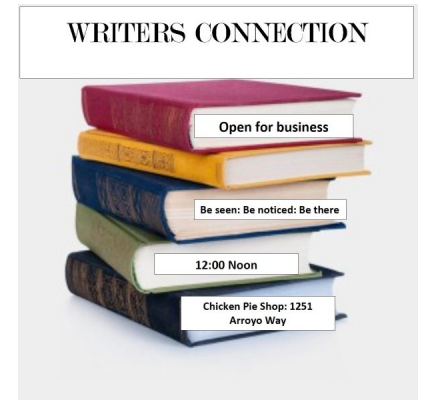
**Writers Connection** is a social place where like-minded people, hapless authors and creative geniuses can come together and chat about the one thing they all have in common: the compulsion to write. It is open to any CWC member, published or not, interested in a freewheeling, nonjudgmental, welcoming, and relaxed environment. Content will include a potpourri of writing or associated topic: news items, agents, publishers, bouquets & brickbats. Membership is open ended, limited only by space, and people may come and go as they please. Short readings are welcome.

Join us on the last Wednesday of each month.

*February 24, 12:00 pm–2:00 pm*

Chicken Pie Shop  
1251 Arroyo Way  
Walnut Creek, CA

**To Register:** <https://cwcmtdiablo.org/register-for-writers-connection/>




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## Local Children's Author at Barnes & Noble in Concord, CA

**Veranda Shopping Center, Concord, CA - February 17, 2023— Time: 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.**

Barnes & Noble in Concord, CA, is hosting a special event featuring local children's author Doré Ripley of Yellow Duck Press whose enchanting stories captivate young minds. This event promises to be a delightful experience for families, bringing together the magic of storytelling with the joy of reading.

The featured book is, *Ellie the Cat in The Princess Ballerina and the Lost Tiara*, a heartwarming tale of a young dancer who faces the challenge of losing her cherished tiara. Join Ellie as she perseveres and, with the support of her family, embarks on a journey to solve her problem, teaching young readers the values of determination and family bonds.

In addition to *Ellie the Cat*, other enchanting books will be presented during the event, including;

*Pearl the Cat Needs a Friend* - A delightful story about Pearl, a young cat who spreads friendship to everyone in her neck of the woods. This charming tale encourages children to embrace the spirit of friendship and kindness.

*Kelvin the Cat and Artie the Alien in the Intergalactic Vacation* - This intergalactic adventure showcases the power of friendship through giving, sharing, helping, thankfulness, and kindness. Join Kelvin the Cat and Artie the Alien as they embark on a heartwarming journey beyond the stars.

*Motorcycle Mack Slows Down* - Follow the adventures of Motorcycle Mack as he discovers that there is more to life than the highway. This delightful story teaches children the importance of making new friends and finding joy in the changing seasons.

Ripley, a former professor who taught Children's Literature wants to engage with readers, sign books, and share her creative process. This event is a fantastic opportunity for families to connect with a local author and instill a love of reading in young readers.

**Location: Barnes & Noble, The Veranda, 2025 Diamond Blvd Suite 125, Concord, CA 94520**

Don't miss this wonderful opportunity to celebrate the magic of storytelling and meet the author behind these captivating children's books. You are invited to join in for an event filled with imagination, inspiration, and the joy of reading. For further information, please contact Dore Ripley at: [dore.ripley@gmail.com](mailto:dore.ripley@gmail.com).