

Happy Valentine's Day!



Ink Spots

The Newsletter of Fremont Area Writers

The "Centennial" Branch of the California Writers Club

Nancy Guarnera – Editor-in-Chief

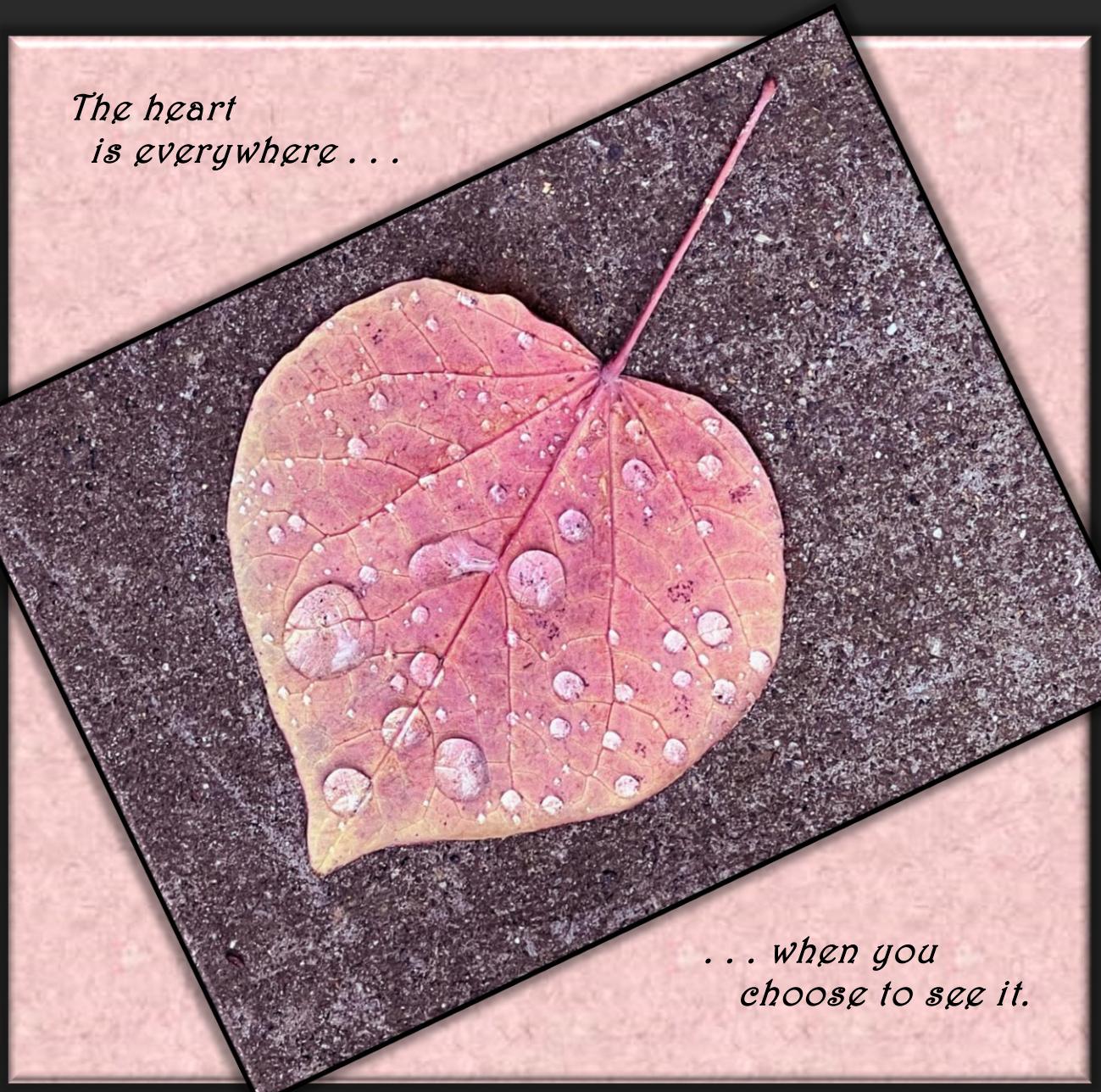
inkspots@cwc-fremontareawriters.org

Vol. 5 No. 2 February 2026

Visit us at <http://cwc-fremontareawriters.org>



*The heart
is everywhere . . .*



*. . . when you
choose to see it.*

Visual Prompt

Photograph by nguarnera

February General Meeting

* February 28th * 2 to 4 PM * ZOOM * FREE *

KILLER OPENINGS: *Starting Your First Chapter off with a BANG!*

with Guest Speaker

RICH AMOOI



There are many tips and techniques writers can learn and use in crafting a story. Perhaps one of the most difficult is the opening. It is, after all, the beginning. If you don't grab your reader's attention with your first few sentences or paragraphs, they will likely never make it to the end of your first chapter. If openings give you the "willies" and make you wish you hadn't listened to your muse when it whispered, "Write!" help is on the way. Award-winning, best-selling author of romantic comedies, Rich Amooi has some suggestions that might just make you fall in love with openings.

Rich has planned a presentation to help you understand how to craft "killer openings," followed by an interactive workshop to help support you in writing an opening that keeps your readers reading. Attendees are encouraged to bring the first few lines of their work-in-progress. After the presentation, participants can share their work for analysis. First lines will be looked at by those in attendance and workshopped to offer improvements, if needed.

Rich Amooi is a Readers' Favorite Gold Medal Recipient, TaleFlick Discovery winner, a Holt Medallion Finalist for Best Contemporary Romance, and the bestselling author of twenty-six romantic comedies, including *It's Not PMS, It's You; Dying to Meet You; and Ice Ice Maybe*.

A former radio personality and wedding DJ, Rich now writes romantic comedies full-time in San Diego, California, and is happily married to a Spanish Princess. He believes in silliness, infinite possibilities, donuts, gratitude, laughter, and happily ever after.

For more information about Rich and his books go to: <https://richamooi.com/about>

This presentation is FREE to everyone. To get your link for this event, email a request with "FAW Zoom" in your Subject line to scottfrombayside@yahoo.com. You'll receive a link on or before the day of the meeting.

You can learn more about Fremont Area Writers (FAW) at cwc-fremontareawriters.org.

FAW is one of 21 branches of the California Writers Club (CWC) calwriters.org.

All CWC branches welcome new members.

EVERYONE IS WELCOME!



Scott Davidson
FAW President

about why we care about them. If you've been married a long time, it may seem hard to come up with something new, but you've had all year to think about it.

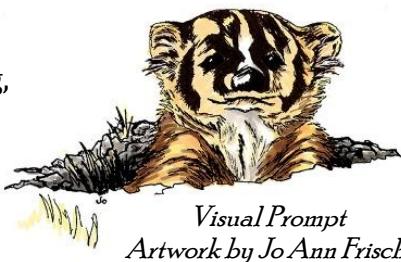
Writing and romance can be strongly connected, and not just if you write romance novels or put romance in your fiction. There is also writing to the one you love. Tish and I never lived closer than 600 miles from each other until we got married, so we communicated through letters and sometimes expensive phone calls in the pre-internet age of the 1970s. I have a box filled with letters from her. They tell a story of the anticipation of seeing each other again, the joy after we did, and the suspense of how our lives seemed to keep us apart, and, after we got engaged, the build-up to our marriage. I've kept them for 50 years, and I'm glad I have them.

Today we would have been texting, emailing, or Zooming with each other. Better in some ways, but writing a letter forces you to focus your thoughts. So, even if you see the one you love every day, think about writing a letter to them. It's something they can keep.

Happy Valentine's Day!

Keep writing and thinking,

Scott



President's Message

Welcome to February. There are two major holidays this month. The first is President's Day. When I was growing up we had two president's days, one for Washington, and one for Lincoln. (Did you know that Abraham Lincoln was born on the same day and year as the great scientist Charles Darwin?) Now they've combined the two holidays into one, made it generic, and put it on some random Monday. It is hardly worth thinking about anymore unless you want to celebrate the accomplishments of Millard Fillmore.

More important for many of us is Valentine's Day. I hope that, as writers, we don't just sign cards to people we care about, but write



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A Word from Our Editor



Nancy Guarnera
Editor *Ink Spots*

Welcome to our February 2026 issue. We hope you enjoy it!

February, our shortest month, is also a busy one. It brings us Groundhog Day, Lincoln's Birthday, Washington's Birthday, President's Day, Valentine's Day, Lunar New Year, Ramadan, and Black History Month.

There are four quotes in this issue of the newsletter—three by African American women authors/poets: Toni Morrison, Lucille Clifton and Alice Walker. I hope you are inspired by all of them and take some time to find out a bit more about these remarkable writers.

If you're a moon watcher, (I'm looking at you, Bob Garfinkle) take note: the moon will be full on the 1st. Lots of full moon energy this weekend. The Lunar New Year will be celebrated by many on the 17th —this new moon will bless us with introspective energy during the inky darkness of no moon. This year Lunar New Year and Ramadan share the same day. Ramadan is the ninth month, from crescent moon to crescent moon, of the Islamic calendar. It is observed worldwide as a month of fasting (sawm), communal prayer (salah),

reflection, and community. Lots more online.

Interesting how Lincoln and Washington are the only two presidents whose birthday's we acknowledge, but we only really celebrate them, (...and maybe all the other presidents mashed together?) on Presidents' Day (the third Monday of the month). I'll bet most of us are just happy to have a three-day weekend to take advantage of all the great Presidents' Day sales.

Punxsutawney Phil, the weather prognosticating groundhog, thinks it's hilarious that humans believe he/she can predict how much more winter there will be on the 2nd of February. As absurd as this event is, we just don't seem to be able to quit it. I doubt the groundhog cares whether it sees its shadow or not. It's got better things to think about and do.

Valentine's Day! Frilly cards, flowers, decadent chocolates in heart-shaped boxes, fancy dinners, chilled champagne, sparkly bling...why would anyone not want to celebrate Valentine's Day? Of course, letting someone know that you love them, and showing them that love, shouldn't be limited to just one day a year. Quite the opposite, perhaps it should be expressed every day of the year. But that's a lot of cards, flowers and chocolate!

A RECOMMENDATION: Check out HAY HOUSE (hayhouse.com)! Last week I took part in a FREE event, the Writers' Boot Camp, presented by Hay House publishing. The event was 2 hours-a-day for four days (M-Th), with the option to pay to upgrade to VIP status, allowing you to participate in additional intensive workshops leading to a polished proposal which participants could then submit as part of a contest, with a \$10K advance, to have your manuscript published. There were also "vendor booths" that participants were encouraged to check out and replays of each day's webinar. This was a soup-to-nuts experience from getting started on your manuscript to choosing the type of publishing path to take: self-pub, hybrid or traditional, and everything in between. The different types of editing, and how much it's likely to cost, were covered. Guest speakers talked about their writing journeys and offered suggestions about how to deal with writer's block and the obstacles that keep us from ever getting started. They're even experimenting with AI and how writers can use it to their best advantage.

Hay House, while not as well-known as Penguin Random House, Colliers, Hachette, HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster, and MacMillan, has published over 15,000 authors, 100's of whom have made the NYTimes Best-sellers list. Perhaps you've heard of some of them: Deepak Chopra, Dr. Wayne Dyer, Louise Hay, Mel Robbins.... While once known as a self-help, spirituality and new age publisher, they are now publishing fiction as well.

DEADLINE: MARCH ISSUE Deadline is February 10th for the March issue. If you need more time please email me and we'll discuss an extension! inkspots@cwc-fremontareawriters.org. For complete submission guidelines check the Newsletter menu on the FAW website and click on "Guidelines [here](#)".

FAW – February Meetings

Fremont Area Writers “Fourth Saturday” General Mtg on Zoom

Saturday February 28th 2:00 – 4:00 PM

*Meeting is open to CWC/FAW members and the public
Writers of all skill levels are welcome*

*Speaker: Rich Amooi Award-winning best-selling author
of comedy romance discusses openings (p.2)*

*For details on Zooming, contact Scott Davidson at
scottfrombayside@yahoo.com*

Fremont Area Writers “Tuesday before 4th Saturday” Board Meeting on Zoom

Tuesday February 24th 4:00 PM

*Meeting is open to FAW members to observe their Board in action.
Comments and questions from members will be addressed
at the end of the meeting, with prior notice.*

*For details on Zooming, contact Scott Davidson at
scottfrombayside@yahoo.com*

FAW – February Meetings

Fremont Area Writers **“Second Saturday”**

Social Write-In on Zoom

Saturday February 14th 2:00 – 3:30 PM

*Get to know others through personal writing with prompts.
Members receive a Zoom invite. Non-members should
contact Scott Davidson (see below) for an invite.*

*For details on Zooming, contact Scott Davidson at
scottfrombayside@yahoo.com*

Fremont Area Writers **“Fourth Monday”**

Writers’ Salon on Zoom

Monday February 23rd 7:00 – 9:00 PM

*Open to FAW members and the public.
Share, listen and support writers as they read their work.
For a Zoom invitation link contact Tony Pino (see below).*

*For details on Zooming, contact Tony Pino
up.dragonfly.com@gmail.com or 510-745-0761*

KUDOS - *Members' News*

If you have an accomplishment related to your writing, or some other creative aspect of your life, and would like to share it with FAW members in this space, please send it to inkspots@cwc-fremontareawriters.org, or submit it through the **Shout Out for Ink Spots** link at cwc-fremontareawriters.org. Just scroll down the home page until you reach the red **Shout Out** link and click on it. Please do your best to keep it to **100 words or less**. Put **FAW — Shout Out — Your Name** in the Subject field of your email to us. If you don't, your email may get lost in the mail. Thanks!

KUDOS to Cherilyn Chin whose 8-book early reader (*grades 1 to 3*) series, ***Lucy Lu to the Rescue***, published by Lerner Publications, is now available on Amazon or on bookshop.org which allows you to support your local and independent bookstores. Books 1-4 came out on January 1, 2025 and books 5-8 were released on January 1, 2026. Books are available in both hard and soft cover.

Cherilyn's titular character is a spunky 7-year-old Chinese American girl, who travels the world saving ocean animals with her marine biologist, writer mother. Titles include: *Sea Turtle in a Tangle*, *Sea Otter's Second Chance*, *Dolphin's Cry for Help*, *Penguin Gets Cleaned Up*, *Axolotl's Safe Place*, *Octopus's Tide Pool Trouble*, *Manta Ray Swims Free*, and *Shark Washed Ashore*. **Congratulations, Cherilyn!**

KUDOS to Pat Doyne whose sonnet "Out in the Cold," which appears in the CWC San Francisco Peninsula branch's **Fault Zone: Faultless** has been nominated for a **Pushcart Prize**. (*The Pushcart Prize is an American literary prize published by Pushcart Press that honors the best "poetry, short fiction, essays or literary whatnot" published in the small presses over the previous year. Magazine and small book press editors are invited to submit up to six works they have featured.*)

In December, Pat had a poetry reading at Forest & Flour in Fremont, and in January read with four other poets at the Adobe Art Center in Castro Valley. A piece of her artwork and a poem are currently on exhibit there. **Congratulations, Pat!**

KUDOS to Maren Madalyn whose *horror flash fiction* story, "Reverie," was accepted for publication by *Flash Phantoms* (<https://www.flashphantoms.net/>). This will be her first horror and first flash fiction piece ever published. Look for the story's release on February 1, 2026." **Congratulations, Maren!**

KUDOS to Richard E. McCallum whose story, "Dream Twice," about Docktown Marina and the community of floating homes fighting eviction by condo developments, appears in the CWC Redwood Writers anthology, *Moonshadow: Tales of Hidden Light*, available now on Amazon. This is Richard's 20th contribution to CWC anthologies. CWC High Desert published three of his stories in their 2025 Anthology *Anything Goes*, including: "Elegant Demon," "Goodbye God: Going to Boulder 1961," and "VideoNauts." In addition, Redwood Writers published his poem, "Hot Flash" in their poetry book, *Just So*. So far, 2025 and 2026 have been very productive years for him! He thanks to all who worked to make it possible! **Congratulations, Richard!**

KUDOS to Rose Owens whose poems "They Pity Me in the Village" and "How Far to Bethlehem?" have been published in *From Silence to Speech: Women of the Bible Speak Out* a publication of the Poemsmiths of the Mojave High Desert branch of CWC. The anthology is currently available on Amazon. **Congratulations, Rose!**

KUDOS to Tony Pino who was one of two featured readers at the Alameda Island Poetry Reading in January. As part of this event, Tony presented a workshop on Zoom featuring thematic prompts which encouraged a successful writing experience for those in attendance. **Congratulations, Tony!**

FAW & CWC Information

— PLEASE READ —

**Mark Your
Calendar**

You're Invited to...

Fremont Area Writers Social Luncheon

**Monday February 9th at 11:30 am
Andersen's Bakery in Union City**

Details will be e-mailed to members.

Feel free to bring a guest.

FAW Needs You *Help Wanted* FAW Needs You

The following non-elected Board positions need to be filled:

CWC & NorCal Representatives Wanted

We are looking for a California Writers Club Representative and a NorCal (Northern California Branches) Representative. Evelyn LaTorre has held both these positions for a number of years and is planning to step down as soon as we've found replacements. For more information about these positions, contact Evelyn at elatorre@aol.com.

You can also contact Scott Davidson at scottfrombayside@yahoo.com.

Hospitality Chair

welcomes, introduces, contacts, & encourages newcomers to join FAW

Service Coordinator

finds & assigns helpers to assist FAW committee heads

Please speak to a Board member if you are interested in one of these positions or in being of service to FAW in some other capacity. Check the last two pages in this issue for contact info.

FAW & CWC Information

WANTED: FAW Membership Chairperson

THE JOB:

When new members join FAW, collect the information from the web form you will receive and create a new record in MRMS, the CWC member database.

Update MRMS records for current members when they renew.

Attend the FAW Board Meeting once a month.

TIME COMMITMENT:

A few hours a month, except in June-August, when we get renewals.

ADDITIONAL DUTIES – THOUGH NOT REQUIRED:

Greet visitors at General Meetings. Help recruit new members.

You will get trained in all this, and get walked through the job for the first few new members.

Contact Scott Davidson at scottfrombayside@yahoo.com

Highlights of the 2025 FAW Membership Survey Results

Last year I sent out a survey to all FAW members. Seventeen people returned it, over one third of our membership, a very good return rate. Thanks to everyone who spent time filling it out.

The first question we asked involved how we are doing communicating with you. Were we communicating, though email and Ink Spots, too little, too much, or just right. 100% of respondents said just right. I'm amazed. So, no changes there.

We asked what new activities you would like to see. Eight people would like an Open Mic session, like the one we used to have at Starbucks in Newark before COVID. Anyone want to volunteer to run it? We even have a few possible venues.

Second was a critique group. Seven wanted this. Again, any volunteers? I volunteer to start a Zoom group, but not run it.

Third was a place to write in person, together. I suspect off-hours at any coffee shop will do. The Berkeley branch had a writing session in the cafeteria of the Oakland Museum. Any takers?

(continued on page 13)

FAW & CWC Information

2026 FAW GENERAL MEETINGS TOPICS & SPEAKERS

FEBRUARY 28TH 2-4 PM ZOOM

Killer Openings: Starting Your First Chapter off with a Bang!

Rich Amooi, Romantic Comedy Author
www.richamooi.com

MARCH 28TH 2-4 PM ZOOM

Workshop: Using Poetry for Healing

Adrienne Danyelle Oliver, Poet, Writing Coach
www.adriennedanyelle.com

APRIL 25TH 2-4 PM ZOOM

Writing Dialog for Characters Whose Native Language is not English

Vanessa Hua, Author
www.vanessahua.com

MAY 23RD 2-4 PM ZOOM

Writing Family Secrets

Lisa Montanaro, Author
www.LisaMontanaroWrites.com

JUNE 27TH 2-4 PM ZOOM

Writing Comedy or Writing Comedy into Fiction

Brian Copeland, Author, Comedian
www.briancopeland.com

No Meeting in July

FAW PICNIC

Date Time & Place TBD



**All General Meetings are on the 4TH SATURDAY of the month
(no meetings in July & December).**

To receive a link to zoom meetings, send a request with "ZOOM LINK" in the Subject line to the email below, and you will receive a link the week before the meeting.

scottfrombayside@yahoo.com

PLEASE NOTE: While it's not required...if a topic is of interest to you, consider checking out the speaker's website, if available, before the meeting.

There may be gold waiting for you there!

(Note: Rich Amooi offers a free "short book" if you subscribe to his free newsletter.)



\$\$\$ CONTESTS \$\$\$

NARRATIVE MAGAZINE

For general submissions to the magazine:

www.narrativemagazine.com/submit-your-work

Winter 2026 Story Contest

Fiction & Non-fiction / 1st Prize: \$2,500 / Deadline: March 31st
<https://www.narrativemagazine.com/winter-2026-story-contest>

Story of the Week

www.narrativemagazine.com/story-week-guidelines

Six-Word Stories

www.narrativemagazine.com/sixwords

Poem of the Week

www.narrativemagazine.com/poem-week-guidelines

Photography

www.narrativemagazine.com/photography

DEADLINES: Continuous...check your category

TCK Publishing.com

TCK Publishing Mission Statement

***“To build a sustainable book publishing company that helps
as many authors as possible fulfill their dreams.”***

Our mission is to help all our clients earn a full-time income from book royalties.

**TCK has various contests throughout the year and accepts submissions
of both fiction — all genres and markets — and non-fiction.**

FREE classes and webinars

<https://www.tckpublishing.com>

\$\$\$ CONTESTS \$\$\$

**The Wolfe Pack &
Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine**

Proudly Announce

Our Twentieth Annual

Black Orchid Novella Award Contest



Portrait of Nero Wolfe by Kevin I. Gordon

Does your sleuth measure up to this master?

We are looking for original works of fiction in the traditional deductive style exemplified by Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe. Your entry must:

- Contain no overt sex or violence
- Emphasize the ratiocinative skills of the sleuth
- Not include characters from the Nero Wolfe series

First Prize: \$1,000...and publication in Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*

Entries must be 15,000 to 20,000 words in length, and must be submitted by May 31, 2026. The winner will be announced at The Wolfe Pack's Annual Black Orchid Banquet in New York City on December 5, 2026.

Please visit www.nerowolfe.org for official rules, procedures and guidelines.

For questions, contact Jane K. Cleland, Chair of the BONA contest, at
Jane@janecleland.com.

*If no acceptable candidates are received, AHMM and The Wolfe Pack reserve the right to declare no winner for any given year.

\$\$\$ CONTESTS \$\$\$

Tom Howard / John H. Reid Fiction & Essay Contest

TOTAL PRIZES: \$12,000 1st prize each Story and Essay \$3,500

DEADLINE: May 1, 2026

GENRE: All styles & themes - fiction and nonfiction

SUBMISSION FEE: \$ 25 per submission • unlimited number of entries • Length: 6K words max

SUBMIT TO: winningwriters.com/our-contests/tom-howard-john-h-reid-fiction-essay-contest



WERGLE FLOMP Humor Poetry Contest

DEADLINE: April 1st (now accepting submissions)

GENRE: Humorous Poetry (published or unpublished)

NO FEE!

PRIZES: \$3,750 in prizes

INFO & SUBMIT TO: winningwriters.com/our-contests/wergle-flomp-humor-poetry-contest-free



FAW Survey Highlights (Continued from page 9)

Finally, we asked for ideas for **speaker topics**. The top ones were:

Writing great openings and endings

Writing Flash Fiction

Marketing your work

Voice and writing styles - show not tell

The art of revision and self-editing

Writing subplots

Writing comedy / how to use comedy in fiction

Advice on finding agents

Writing the personal essay

Getting the details right

We've already booked speakers for several of these topics for the first half of 2026. See the list in this issue of Ink Spots (p. . Tish is working on finding speakers for the rest. Your suggestions are always appreciated.

Again, thanks to those who responded. If you didn't get around to it and have comments, please send them to me. And if you really want to participate in a new activity, help us make it happen.

FAW President, Scott Davidson

Book & Movie Reviews

Here's your opportunity to share your favorite books and movies. They can be just for fun, ones that changed your life, books on writing craft, etc. If you decide to submit: **360 max. word count doc file**. Please email to the **Ink Spots** email address and put **FAW—Book/Movie Review—Your Name** in the Subject field.
(The opinions stated here are strictly those of the individual, and do not represent either CWC or FAW.)

ROOMMAID

by Sariah Wilson © 2020

This is a cute, clever, uncomplicated romance. It's an enjoyable read when you need a feel-good book.

Madison, a rich girl rebelling against parents who control everything in her life, wants independence, no matter the cost. She becomes a teacher and stays on a friend's couch until she can manage on her own. In exchange for cleaning and keeping a dog company in the apartment owner's absence, she's offered a wonderful room in a penthouse apartment. Pampered all her life, she doesn't know the first thing about cleaning or anything else for that matter. She'll fake it until she makes it, she decides. He's gone much of the time on travel, so he'll never know the mistakes she makes, right? She makes plenty of them.

Oh yeah, and he's mind-meltingly hot. He's had to take out a restraining order on one infatuated female, and women fall over themselves around him, so one ground rule is they can be friends, but no more. You can guess how that works out.

The bedroom door is closed in this clean tale, but there's plenty of sexual angst to keep things interesting. One note: she uses a lot of cliches, but it seems fitting, somehow, for this character and story. You'll forgive her, eventually.

Review by Joyce Cortez

SOME BRIGHT NOWHERE

by Ann Packer

Claire, in stage four of her eight-year battle against cancer, requests that Eliot, her devoted husband of nearly four decades, no longer provide her daily care. Instead, she chooses two close women friends to live with her in her final months. Mystified, Eliot is sent to live at one of the friend's homes and a tug-of-war between girlfriends and spouse begins. The couple's adult children, Abby and Josh, puzzled by this new arrangement, have Eliot return to his house when they visit.

Eliot is deeply hurt when Josh and others describe him as "a boring blob." He finds creative ways to express himself through development of his culinary skills, and continues to insist that he's the best one to take care of his fading wife. However, he admits that women are natural nurturers and practitioners of easy intimacy, which he is not. A crisis ensues that brings a panoply of emotions for everyone.

I rarely shed tears when reading a book, but they came this time from the poignant metaphors and from feeling the emotions of the dying and their caretakers. This deep dive into grief is recommended for those who wish to understand the complexity of feelings evoked by their own or loved ones' eventual passing.

Review by Evelyn LaTorre

Notes from the World

**HEAR YE!
HEAR YE!**

**Check out the
Poetry Foundation**

[https://www.poetryfoundation.org/
poems/poem-of-the-day](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/poem-of-the-day)

**Register to receive
a free poem each day
& all sorts of other
cool poetry stuff**

AUTHORS PUBLISH

<https://authorspublish.com>
Check here for lists of publishing
opportunities (*Please vet before submitting*):

[https://authorspublish.com/
32-flash-fiction-markets/](https://authorspublish.com/32-flash-fiction-markets/)

[https://authorspublish.com/
12-places-that-publish-writing-about-
writing-and-publishing/](https://authorspublish.com/12-places-that-publish-writing-about-writing-and-publishing/)

[https://authorspublish.com/
25-magazines-accepting-creative-
nonfiction/](https://authorspublish.com/25-magazines-accepting-creative-nonfiction/)

[https://authorspublish.com/
40-specialized-manuscript-
publishers-that-accept-direct-
submissions/](https://authorspublish.com/40-specialized-manuscript-publishers-that-accept-direct-submissions/)

**... and many more . . . a newsletter
and free webinars on craft....**

FREE Online Workshops w/ JANE CLELAND

Award-winning author Jane Cleland offers **FREE** Zoom workshops on the craft of writing for writers of every skill level. Jane takes you behind the curtain and shares her years of experience with writing craft and its many intricacies, as well as the world of traditional publishing, with its agents, editors and publishers...Oh my! *Register in advance at janeCLELAND.com/events. You'll receive a link for the workshop shortly before, and on the day of the event. Don't miss these...register early.*

Saturday, Feb 21 from 10:00 to 11:00 AM PT

"The World in a Word: Writing Descriptions that Bring Your Stories to Life"

Breathe life into your descriptions; imbuing every scene with tangible precision and imagination!

Saturday, Mar 14 from 10:00 to 11:00 AM PT

"Nurture Your Creative Spirit: Feel Better, Write Better—Listen to the Pros"

Learn proven strategies from successful authors who've mastered the art of sustainable creativity.

Jane Cleland is an award-winning author who writes both fiction and nonfiction. Her fiction includes the long-running Josie Prescott Antiques Mystery series, published by St. Martin's Minotaur and *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*. Her non-fiction includes the Agatha-Award winning best-sellers, *Mastering Suspense, Structure & Plot* and *Mastering Plot Twists*. She's a Contributing Editor at *Writer's Digest Magazine* and the chair of the Black Orchid Novella Award (BONA). Cleland teaches writing at the university level, and offers free monthly webinars on the craft and business of writing.

Register on Jane's website to receive a Zoom link.

<https://janeCLELAND.com/events/>

winningwriters.com
contests with big \$\$\$ prizes

Notes from the World

* CONTESTS * * NEWSLETTERS * * ETC. *

Writers Weekly. **Free newsletter.** 24-hour short story contest once each quarter. Topic and word length revealed after signing up. Limited to 500 entrants. \$5 entry fee. Also lists some paying markets for fiction and nonfiction. writersweekly.com

Winning Writers. **Free newsletter.** Lists free contests (many age or location restricted) as well as pay-to-enter contests. Lots of poetry contests. winningwriters.com

The Write Life. **Website.** Lists free contests (with a few exceptions.) Includes book, short fiction, essay, and poetry contests. Many contests are very specific, e.g. book by first generation immigrant, book of military fiction. thewritelife.com/writing-contests

Poets & Writers. **Website.** Searchable contest database with filters for cost, genre and deadline. pw.org/grants

Submishmash Weekly. **Free newsletter.** A curated arts newsletter with select publishing opportunities including contests, publications seeking submissions, and artist residencies. Run by the submission platform Submittable.com.

The Writer. **Website and free newsletter.** Listing of mostly pay-to-enter contests. writermag.com/contests

Fan Story. **Paid site.** Seven-day free trial. \$9.95/month or \$69/year. Feedback on writing you post and almost daily contests that can be entered at no additional fee. fanstory.com

Gotham Writers Workshop — FREE —

The **Gotham Writers Workshop** in New York City has put together the **Inside Writing** series of free talks about writing. Now in its fifth season, the workshops cover a variety of tools necessary to writers in today's world. The format varies from season to season. Best of all, you get to listen and learn from other writers!

Free Talks are archived at:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIOByuSHCqP7V9mSsoqU5FojJys2LsvYi>

Inside Writing: A recent Special Episode discussed the importance of using "sensitivity readers" as part of your editing process.

Check out these **free** talks on writing!

Call for *Romance* Submissions

Belonging Books, an inclusive, feminist publishing house, began accepting submissions in June 2020. Submissions can be of all lengths from and about minorities—people of color, people with disabilities, religious minorities, LBGTQ+ people, etc.—and non-traditional romance.

Mission: diversify and modernize the genre.
belongingbooksonline.wordpress.com

FREE Online Workshops
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Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators
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(*also open to men*)

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Poetry Society of America poetrysociety.org

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(*nonfiction writers*)

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Scriptwriters Network scriptwritersnetwork.com

Historical Novel Association historicalnovelsociety.org

Horror Writers Association horror.org

fanstory.com

Contests with cash prizes you can enter this week!

Take a look at this site. Lots of interesting contests. Many are very short...not necessarily easy, but as short as a one-line poem, or a 50-word flash fiction story. Some may have deadlines fast approaching, others you'll have time to contemplate.

Fee Site. Seven-day free trial. \$12.95/month or \$155/year. Feedback on writing you post and almost daily contests that can be entered at no additional fee.

FAW Members on Social Media

● **Angelica G. Allen**

Angelica is a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian author of **Millennial Fiction and Poetry** books, genres targeted to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to millennials. These SDA Christian genres were created by the Fremont, Bay Area native, and are defined as having Seventh-Day Adventist symbolism, coded languages, lyrical writing, illustrations, and emotional storytelling in her U.S. Copyright. You can learn more about these books on her website: angelicagabriellaallen.com. Like her author Facebook page [@AngelicaG.Allen](#) and follow her on Instagram: [@AngelicaGAllen](#) where she posts a new poem in her Reels section every Wednesday!

● **Cherilyn Chin**

Cherilyn is a professional aquarist and marine biologist. For the past 12 years, she's maintained her award-winning blog, **"Ocean of Hope: Marine Animals Voice Their Wishes on Ocean Conservation Issues,"** and has 8,500 followers on Twitter. She also writes children's fiction and non-fiction books about the ocean. She's a website developer, strategic content copywriter, and digital marketer at **Wordsmith for Wealth.** <https://oceanofofhope.net>; Twitter: [@protectoceans](#); <https://wordsmithforwealth.com>

● **Terry Connolly**

Twice a week Terry posts her own writing ranging from essays, personal stories, poetry and short fiction. On her second blog she posts prompts twice a week, to help get you started. tconnellyswritingposts.com and connellyswritingprompts.com

● **Evelyn LaTorre, EdD**

Evelyn loves to travel and write about her experiences. Besides travel adventures, the blogs on her website share the first chapter of her prize-winning book, *Between Inca Walls*, her adventures in other countries, and her cousin's drowning on the Costa Concordia cruise ship. Her second memoir, *Love in Any Language*, shows how a shotgun wedding turns into a bulletproof marriage. It won a Book Excellence award. You can also find recent recordings of her interviews. Website: <https://www.evelynlatorre.com>.

● **Dave M. Strom**

Check out Dave's creative and tech writing blogs and his videos at: [http://davemstrom.wordpress.com/](http://davemstrom.wordpress.com) [http://davemstrom.weebly.com/](http://davemstrom.weebly.com) <http://www.youtube.com/user/davstrom>

● **Anita Tosh**

Anita writes YA Christian fiction often with a focus on the "end times." She's recently published her third book, *The Book of Jeremy*. It's now available for sale. Website & Blog: booksbyanita.com
Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/111394698919>
YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCn2Eh1NyNnca6V0pAZNUSRA>

**"Just write every day of your life. Read intensely.
Then see what happens. Most of my friends who are put
on that diet have very pleasant careers."**

— Ray Bradbury

FREMONT AREA WRITERS' CORNER

The Stone Keep

by Rose Owen



Photograph by MP Smith

Inspired by a *Visual Prompt*
Ink Spots Vol. 5, No. 1 January 2026 p.12

The young woman and the man stood motionless before the stone house. She hesitated, drew in breath and broke the silence with her words.

"Rosina came to me in the night. Moonlight spilling over her shoulder, hair shining like spun gold. 'It is time,' she whispered to me."

The woman hesitated once more. "At first, I thought it a dream. Her face was like a mirror reflection of my own. 'I am Rosina,' she said. And then I knew her—my great-great-grandmother. Or should I say I knew of her? I had

seen her picture. She was dressed in the same old-fashioned clothes of her time.

"I heard her speak again. Rosina said, 'They took him from me, but you shall have him.' Her face shifted from melancholy sadness to radiant joy. She beckoned to me. 'Come. He waits at the stone keep.' She smiled once more. Her form wavered and then there was only emptiness where she had been but a moment before.

"I wished to call her back but knew I could not. So, I did what she asked of me. I came down here to this stone house that she called a keep. And I found you here."

He gazed at her, speechless. He took a step forward and spoke. "Night after night I have been compelled to come here. I pace the path and wait, hoping that here I might finally meet my destiny. Tonight, I saw you—hair like spun gold, a radiant smile on your face—coming to meet me." He stepped closer, cupped her face in his hands.

"Cut!" yelled the pudgy man in the director's chair. "It's a wrap." He looked back at the cameraman.

Gazing into each other's eyes was not enough and so their lips met in a long-awaited kiss. Then... "Come with me," he murmured in her ear.

The pudgy director leaped from his chair. "Wait! It's not time for the kiss. That happens in scene 4." He tripped on a stone. Fell on his face. When he scrambled to his feet, they were gone.



FREMONT AREA WRITERS' CORNER *(Continued)*

THE JOURNEY

Gratitude
on newly-oiled hinges
swings open
to the work-field
of transformation

Or perhaps
it's through and
beyond that field
one rejoices
breathes a ponderous sigh of relief
and opens gratitude's gate
which in time
beckons
to yet another field of transformation
spiraling deeply upward.

- Jacqlyn M. Freitas

*"Your life
is already artful —
waiting,
just waiting,
for you
to make it
art."*

— Toni Morrison

BEYOND

forever I have waited
to be ripped asunder
and strewn amongst the stars

to slip beyond the conscious
and soar through realms unknown
carrying with me
the dreams and aspirations
of a lifetime
mere piffle in comparison

oh! what joy and wonder
a riot of sensation
beyond the telling
beyond words
beyond contemplation

you who have never known this
felt this
imagined this
must struggle to unleash that Self within you
that knows no limits
that can withstand the utter terror of sheer joy

beyond comprehension
beyond explanation
there is nothing
no nothing
that can compare

nancy guarnera



*Visual Prompt
Artwork by Jo Ann Frisch
Anna's Hummingbird &
California Fuchsia*

Holly and the Saw!

by Dave M Strom

Artwork by Amber Padilla



I, Cal "the Intellectual" Critbert, black-caped-and-cowled-and-body-armored, looked down at the mightiest super on Earth. And in my eyes, the most brave and bold and beautiful. And right now, maybe the most stubborn. And I told her, "Maybe I want to rescue you, maybe I want you to rescue yourself."

Super Holly Hansson, in her blue supersuit and red cape and blue boots on long strong superheroine legs (best in the business), tied to the conveyor belt slowly conveying her to a large circular saw, frowned up at me. Or rather, frowned even more, her eyebrows mashing together like two male buffaloes butting heads over the most beautiful female buffalo in the herd. She tossed her head, her long blonde hair almost snapping like a whip. "Hey! I'm in danger here!"

The villain slowly keeping pace with her with ominous evil steps, dressed in black pants, black shirt, black overcoat, black stovepipe hat, and black long waxed mustache, laughed his Dishonest John vs Snidely Whiplash evil laugh again. "NYAH, HAH, HAAA! You are too late, Bat Boy! I lured Super Holly here to finally remove her pretty heroism from Earth! Permanently!"

"With a buzzsaw?" I asked. Yes, we were in a saw mill. Holly was tied to the conveyor belt with green glowing chains. I smelled a slight whiff of lutefisk. The chains must be painted with green lutefisk, the substance that weakens her, and could even kill her in larger amounts.

BZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ!!! said the buzzsaw as Holly ever so slowly inched toward it, headfirst. She lifted her head to look at the villain. "Yeah, where did a guy like you ever get enough green lutefisk to weaken me enough to tie up? That stuff is rare, illegal, and really expensive on the black market!"

The villain grabbed one side of his long black overcoat and dramatically pulled it over the lower half of his face. "Don't you know me? The residuals from my movies and TV shows have me rolling in dough, swimming in cash, dining on dollars! I am rich, rich, RICH!!! NYAH, HAH, HAAA!"

I felt my eyes widen. "Of course! My movie critic memory recalls you!" I blinked. Holly's comic-book-dramatic battle banter was rubbing off on me. "You're Dan Diablo! Dastardly Dan! The most over-the-top villain in movies and TV! And the most dramatic and funny, I might add."

He deeply bowed. "Thank you!"

(continued on next page)

FREMONT AREA WRITERS' CORNER *(Continued)*

(continued from previous page)

Holly yelled, "HEY! Super-damsel in distress here!" She was 8 feet from the saw, 7 feet 11 inches, 7 feet 10 inches...

Okay, that was enough! "Holly! This is totally against type for you. Since when have you ever been the meek little girlfriend screaming for her big strong hero to rescue her?"

Dan twirled his mustache. "Yes. YES! See how I have reduced the brave and mighty Super Holly Hansson to a helpless movie girlfriend stereotype! She is in my clutches, in my power, and soon to be... PUSHING UP DAISIES! NYAH HAH HAAA!!!!"

5 feet 4 inches... Holly puffed steam out her proud beaky nose. "Over-actor."

I told her, "Dan excels at that. My scan reveals that the green lutefisk on the chains is really plain lutefisk, dyed green. Disgusting, but harmless to you." I told Dan, "The jig is up."

Dan's eyes bugged out, his mustache whipped straight out with a **TWANG!** His lips skinned back from his long white teeth. "WHAT?!?!?" He **WHOOSHED** over to Holly, black cape-like overcoat fluttering. He leaned over Holly so his long nose was almost sword fighting with hers, and yelled, "I told you I could not fool a super-smart movie critic!" He grinned. "But it was fun trying! Now tell him why you hired me."

2 feet 10 inches... Holly pouted. "Because Batman is supposed to save Superman. But I saved Cal five times this week. FIVE!" She turned her brave and bold and beautiful face to me. "So save me, bat boy."

My jaw dropped. "You, brave and bold and fearless Super Holly Hansson, set this up to be damsels-in-distress saved? Swept off your feet? Have a man in black be your handsome hunky hero?"

11 inches... 10... 9... Holly batted her big blue eyes. "Pretty please?"

It was not easy cutting the chains with my Intellecta-mini-laser-knife, for I had never laughed so hard in my life...

Until Holly bounced up and glommed her lips on mine: **SMERRRRP!** "My hero!"

Like Dracula, Dan raised his black overcoat to cover his lower face. "Curses! Foiled again!"

**"Writing is a way of continuing to hope...
perhaps for me it is a way
of remembering I am not alone."**

— Lucille Clifton

OPERATION BABY LIFT

by Richard McCallum

Howa'd deploys on medivac evacuation missions over the year as the Vietnam war rages. I worry for his safety, but each time he returns, our hearts fill with love. In the hospital ward following his most recent three-month deployment, we get a chance to spend time together. I try to hide my medical condition, but it's hard to control its symptoms. My light brown skin pales, I gag, and run to the sink. Howa'd, concerned, notices my distress, and pulls me close. He wraps his arms around me and assures me that everything will be all right.

Crying, I push him away. "Leave me alone." My self-conflicts confuse me; I am a good Catholic girl, and I know Howa'd and I should have waited for marriage, I worry his black family in America will not accept me, an Asian woman.

"What's wrong? Are you sick?"

"Yes. You go."

"I'll help."

Shaking off his attempt to hug me, I say, "Please leave me." His image in the mirror shows profound concern. A handful of water on my face calms me down. Howa'd hugs me from behind. The sound of my sobs echoes.

"Please, Lin, what is it? How can I help?"

His need to console me interferes with my privacy, making me feel smothered.

"Oh, my god! You're pregnant?"

The expression on my face matches the look women give men when they figure out something that would have been obvious to any woman.

"But it's been three months since . . . why didn't you tell me?"

"My girlfriends all say you will leave me when you go. Lots of Vietnamese girls with abandoned American children." Tremors twitch on my face as I watch Howa'd's eyes for the unmasked moment of his true feelings before he can conceal them.

"I love you, Lin."

I do not detect falsehood in his gaze. "I love you, too, Howa'd."

Rather than make up in the washroom, where I've just been sick, we move out into the hallway. As Howa'd hugged me, he says, "We can't go on as if nothing has happened. We'll get married in an allied country, then the authorities will have no choice but to allow me to see you, and then you'll be able to come to the States as my wife."

"How will we get there?"

(continued on next page)

FREMONT AREA WRITERS' CORNER *(Continued)*

(continued from previous page)

"We'll fly. We'll only go for a day."

"I love you, Howa'd." I flush with relief over his non-judgement and commitment.

"I love you, too. Don't worry, we'll do it. Please trust me."

"No one believes me, Howa'd. Everyone says you will leave me if you know about the child."

"I'll never leave you. Never. I love you."

"Có thể bạn sống một ngàn năm."

Five months pregnant, I step cautiously down the stairway as the colossal jet unloads its passengers. In customs lines, disorder presses on us from all sides as Howa'd struggles with my baggage and I try to protect my inflated belly. Despite being pushed, shoved, battered, and exhausted, we finally reach the official.

Howa'd and I are scrutinized by a customs agent, who checks our papers and declares in English, "Pregnant Vietnamese not permitted entrance."

"What?" I question in shock.

The man repeats, "No allow. No have baby here."

"We're only staying one day to get married," Howa'd states.

The officer says, "I call American MP."

The agent blows a whistle, and Howa'd grabs me and begins breaking through the lines. I attempt to help. Howa'd loses control when he sees them hitting me and starts swinging wildly. The MPs come running and beat us both with clubs, not sparing my pregnant belly.

We are arrested. Howa'd is confined aboard a US Navy ship of the coast of Vietnam. I am returned to the hospital.

Howa'd calls, periodically, and I tell him, "We hear rumors of Vietnamese families being evacuated by Americans."

He answers, "Operation Baby Lift is the name of the program. Swarms of Vietnamese-American children are fleeing with their mothers. Ask the hospital staff about catching a plane for you and our baby."

"Howa'd, we terrified. The airports blocked . . . riots rage . . . looting everywhere. I live in the hospital, and we shelter in the basement."

"You must get to the airport and try to get on a plane out."

"I need fellow workers here to help me with our baby, Lực. They depend upon me to help with their children. We work together and pray for each other. Leaving would be abandonment."

"Lin, tanks are moving into your area. No time to stay. THEY WILL KILL OUR BABY! Get out, get out, in any way you can."

(continued on next page)

FREMONT AREA WRITERS' CORNER *(Continued)*

(continued from previous page)

The opposition forces enter the capital, and my country dissolves. Rumors spread about the victors killing interracial babies as the days and nights pass in frightful isolation. One day I hear the unique throbbing of large U.S. medivac helicopters approaching. We rush out with the families.

Howa'd, aboard the "helo," yells at me, "GET ON THE CHOPPER. NOW LIN! We will shield you!"

I squeeze Lực to my chest, and rush through the whirlwind of debris. The binging sound of bullets hitting the helicopter sounds like hail. Time slows down. I lose hope of closing the gap. With one last heroic leap, I pass our precious baby to Howa'd. He spins and passes the baby to a medivac. Howa'd reaches to help me. The chopper lifts off as Howa'd throws me aboard.

The thudding of the rotors deafens the cries, screams and shouts. I huddle with Howa'd, and we both kissed our baby.

"You came back for me and our Lực. You risked your life for us."

"I will never leave you, Lin, never abandon him."

My heart pounds with love, tears blind me, and I choke on sobs, "Howa'd, *Có thể bạn sống một ngàn năm.*

"Lin, may we live a thousand years together."



**"The most common way people
give up their power
is by thinking they don't have any."**

— Alice Walker

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Fremont Area Writers educates writers and the public by providing:
Forums for educating members in the craft of writing and marketing their works [and]
Monthly public meetings, workshops, and seminars open to all writers and the general public
to facilitate educating writers of all levels of expertise. (*Article II: PURPOSE Section1: 1.1 and 1.2 FAW Bylaws*)