



# VALLEY VOICES

The Newsletter of San Joaquin Valley Writers | May 2025

## From the President

Summer is almost upon us. It's a great time of the year for writing, with long days and plenty of sunshine. It's also a great time for reading. Research on writing has shown that the more one reads, the better one's writing gets. This research speaks largely to issues of spelling, overall discourse structure, vocabulary use (expansion), and sentence structure (e.g., use of clauses and complex sentences, appropriate use of passives). Can reading impact fiction writers, poets, and those of us working in creative non-fiction? It sure can. We subtly and incidentally pick up things such as style, tone, and even overall story structure as well as a feel for pacing.

But sometimes we need to be close readers. This means we need to focus not just on the *what* when we read but the *how*. For example, when I read, I read something twice—generally a chapter or story. I read once for the what: the action, the plot, the players—the way the average person reads. Then I read a second time and look for things like characterization, use of language, what setting does for the story, new ways of showing and not telling, and so on. In this way, a novel or story almost becomes a textbook for me. Does it take the joy out of reading? No. My experience is that it brings me even more joy. I get to marvel at how these writers paint pictures on the pages of their works. And this is equally true for poetry and non-fiction.

There's something else that close reading of fiction can do. It can enhance our knowledge of the technical and mechanical side of things. In good published work, we can find how to punctuate, whether and how to use semi-colons, colons, and em dashes. We can see the mechanics of dialogue, when to use italics, how to format texting when characters are using their phones, and many other detailed aspects of writing. It's all there on the published pages. We just need to look closely.

So this summer when you pick up your books and poems, read for fun—but also read to learn.

—Bill VanPatten



## Upcoming Events

### Monthly meetings

- Saturday, May 10. In lieu of our monthly meeting, we are hosting a full-day workshop on self-publishing. Details appear in the **Additional News and Notes** section of this newsletter as well as on our website.
- Saturday, June 14, 12:00-2:00 p.m. "Writing a Realistic Crime Novel." Adam Plantinga, an SFPD sergeant and author, will give us the rundown on everything from bullets to fingerprints to help writers give their crime novels an authentic feel. Bring your criminal questions to the discussion! This is an *in-person event* at the Lodi Public Library (201 W. Locust Street, Lodi)

### Craft Chats

- Saturday, Saturday, May 24, 12:00-2:00 p.m. "Power Up Those Verbs!" Do you know what weak and strong verbs are? How do verbs make a scene vivid or create imagery? Bring a sample (maximum 300 words) for feedback and discussion. (Papapavlo's, 501 Lincoln Center, Stockton)
- Saturday, Saturday, June 28, 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. "How Well do You Know Your Characters?" Image interviewing your characters. How would they answer ten basic questions about themselves? Bring a sample of your own writing (max 300 words) that reveal a character's nature. We may put your character in a situation and ask "What would she/he do?" (Lodi Library, 201 W. Locust)

## News and Info from Our Members

- **June Gillam** is excited to announce *Fallen Kings: Unholy Secrets* is now available as an audiobook. In exchange for an honest review, she is offering a free audiobook to the first five (5) people who respond. Please contact her for your free audiobook code at <https://www.junegillam.com/contact>.
- **John Britto** will be featured at Delicato Winery's "Book Swap & Book Talk" where he will discuss his novella *Cybil's Gift*. Free to the public. June 7<sup>th</sup>, 3:00 p.m. Delicato Wineries, 12001 S. 99, Manteca.
- **Rose Cordero-Gonzales** published an article in the April newsletter of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Fresno State University. She also participated in an art and poetry exhibit at the Fresno State University Library.
- **James Fox's** poem, "When Centuries Collide," has been accepted for publication in the Tuleburg Press 2025 anthology *209 Labor*. The poem juxtaposes recent Weber Point festival vendors and workers with that park's history.
- **Pamela Pan** has three poems accepted for publication in the anthology *209 Labor* by Tuleburg Press. The poems are "Birth," "I've Never Finished a Book Before," and "Rainbow to the Future."

If you have news or information you would like to share, please contact us by [clicking here](#). We welcome all kinds of news from our members.

## Additional News and Notes

- The Sacramento Branch of the CWC is hosting its second **Sacramento Book Festival**. With bestselling authors James Rollins and Catriona McPherson, the event features author booths, readings, panels and other events. For more information, visit [www.sacramentobookfestival.com](http://www.sacramentobookfestival.com).



- Welcome to **Flash Fiction World: Virtual Writers Workshop Series**. Join fellow writers from around the globe in honing your craft and mastering the art of flash fiction. Our experienced instructor, Gini Grossenbacher, M.Ed., will guide you through exercises, provide feedback, and help you unleash your creativity. This series is perfect for anyone looking to sharpen their skills and connect with a community of like-minded individuals. Zoom classes are on Wednesday evenings, May 7, 14, 21, and 28, from 6-8 pm. Attend one class or take them all--tickets are \$25 each; a 10% early bird discount is available on Eventbrite.

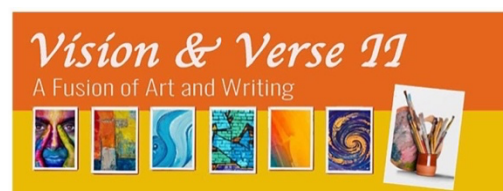
Ticket link: [www.eventbrite.com/cc/flash-fiction-world-virtual-writers-workshops-4156143](http://www.eventbrite.com/cc/flash-fiction-world-virtual-writers-workshops-4156143)

- SJVW will offer a full-day workshop: **The Ins and Outs of Self-publishing**. Topics include traditional publishing vs. self-publishing, editing, book design, platforms for publishing, among others. Join us for an interactive and informative session. Free to all members. Details on the SJVW website.

Date: Saturday, May 10, 2025 10:00 a.m.- 4:00 p.m.

Location: Lodi Public Library (201 W. Locust, Lodi)

- The CWC has announced the call for submissions for **Vision and Verse II**. The deadline is May 15. Click on the image to go to the CWC website.



## Special Section: Upcoming Elections

As per SJVW bylaws as well as policies and procedures, each year we hold elections for the Board of Directors. Beginning 2024, directors serve staggered two-year terms. The current president and secretary terms are 2024-2026. This year, we are voting on the positions of Vice-president and Treasurer to serve from 2025-2027. The nominating committee (June Gillam, Todd Whiteley, Angie Angus-Ha) have prepared the following slate of candidates.

Candidate for Vice-president: Deborah Grochau

Candidate for Treasurer: Pam Van Allen.

Voting will take place on June 14 at the regular monthly meeting (second Saturday). Email reminders and additional information will be sent as the date approaches.



## Writing Tips and Tidbits

- Are you wondering about **how dialogue works in fiction**? What aspects of writing dialogue do you question? Editor Kristen Hamilton discusses five essential rules of dialogue writing—everything from punctuation to action tags versus dialogue tags. <https://www.kristencorrects.com/5-essential-rules-of-writing-powerful-dialogue/>
- What are **the odds of getting traditionally published**? The Aspiring Author website has a breakdown with some commentary. You can find it here: <https://aspiringauthor.com/statistics-odds-of-getting-published/>
- If you are interested in having an **author's booth at the Great Valley Bookfest** (Manteca, October 2025) the site is now open for you to sign up. Authors can have individual booths or team up to split the cost of a single booth. There are additional Bookfest opportunities as well. Here is the website for those interested. <https://gybookfest.org/vendors/>
- **Marketing your work** requires looking at the matter from different angles. Kourtney Jason offers some ideas about pitching to local media. Check it out by [clicking here](#).
- While many working in fiction work in both novel and short story, some novelists shy away from short stories. Yet, writing **short stories can enhance novel writing**—and vice versa. For an interesting read on this matter, check out Junot Diaz's piece, "On My Way to the Novel, I Fell in Love with the Short Story." <https://lithub.com/junot-diaz-on-my-way-to-the-novel-i-fell-in-love-with-the-short-story/>
- Looking for ideas for your poetry, fiction, and non-fiction? Reedsy prompts focuses only on fiction. The site **Poets & Writers** offers **weekly prompts** in all three main categories of writing. Check them out and see if your creativity is tickled. <https://www.pw.org/writing-prompts-exercises?genre=31>

### Poets&Writers

PUBLISH YOUR  
WRITING

PROMOTE YOUR  
WRITING

FIND YOUR  
COMMUNITY

REGISTER FOR  
CLASSES

Writing Prompts & Exercises

The Time Is Now

### SMART HOME

flash fiction by KA Wiley

2:30 a.m. No lights. No television or radio. No internet. As the rainy assault diminished, unrepentant wind gusts accelerated, growled, and slapped around my bungalow. Chirping every few minutes and reminding me of the power outage, the alarm system frazzled my nerves. I surveyed my home with a small flashlight intended more for reading. The small, illuminated spotlight bounced between my kitchen island and the cabinets.

I paused in my galley kitchen when a belch and then a graveled voice erupted from the garbage disposal. Sure that I was hearing things, I checked my cell phone, but it was quiet. No messages or texts. I set the phone down and turned on the goose-necked faucet. Water pulsed out, and then ran freely.

"You stop that! Stop that right now!" The gurgling voice volleyed the hat-shaped cover for the disposal to the other half of the dual sink with such force I recoiled into the faux marble counter.

My home came equipped with its fair share of smart technology: an outside camera synchronized with the doorbell chime, an alarm system that sang hello and goodbye in five languages, and lights that switched on when I scratched my forehead. But I didn't remember the garbage disposal having verbal capability.

I crept to the sink, leaned over, and turned off the water. "Excuse me."

"Yeah, G.D. here. Have you ever read my manual? Clearly, you don't know how to operate me."

"Who are you?"

"I'm your best friend. I dispose of what you don't want."

"I beg your pardon. I don't use you that much, and I have a garbage can under the sink."

Blue clock numerals on the microwave and stove blinked back to life. Still dark outside, lights came back on in each room.

G.D. vomited bits of broccoli, rice pilaf, and braised pork chop from last evening's dinner. "Sorry, I'm still backed up. How about a little privacy here." He burped.

"Running some water might make you feel better." I was comforting the garbage disposal. Was I still asleep, dreaming?

"You don't get it, do ya? I need rest." G.D. belched again, this time letting out a noxious plume.

I waved the odor away. "Rest from what? You don't work that hard."

"Yesterday, you dumped Folger's coffee grounds my way. Yeah, the cheap stuff."

"And?"

"That's a violation of garbage disposal etiquette."

"How so?" I leaned forward and rested folded arms on the edge of the counter.

"Coffee grounds expand inside me, causing a clog. Constipation, Stupid."

I emptied a glass of water into G.D. "How rude."

"Rude is not reading that damned manual." G.D. coughed and spit. "How about some baking soda? A dab on my tongue always helps my indigestion."

"Now you want to be helpful. I'll try anything at this point."

I reached into my pantry for the baking soda box and spooned some down G.D. Soon all was quiet.

Exhausted, I wished my smart home was a little dumber.



## Featured Essay

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### It Blew My Mind

By Daniel Bacon (Marin Writers)

I'm a fan of ProWritingAid, the program that checks grammar, spelling, and syntax, critiques text, and flags suboptimal writing habits. In my own work, it often highlights passive voice sentences and prompts me to use active verbs to strengthen the reader experience.

Its most intriguing feature is the ability to analyze and critique. It can examine one chapter at a time or an entire manuscript. I know this because the company asked me to beta test the critique/analysis function with my current novel. (I didn't receive remuneration).

The result blew my mind.

In about eight minutes, it raced through my entire manuscript and produced a six-page detailed analysis and critique. It started off identifying elements of each chapter: the type of text (expository, action, climatic, or resolution), the POV character, the role of each character (protagonist, antagonist, or supporting), and a plot outline.

Impressive comprehension, but could it go deeper?

It then offered paragraphs entitled First Impressions, The Heart of Story, Emotional Journey, Characters, Climax and Resolution, Pacing, Tension, and Central Conflict. Each paragraph contained specific comments, mostly complimentary, showing it understood the plot elements and character relations.

Impressive again, but could it offer actionable analysis?

Yes. In a section titled Almost Put the Book Down, it identified three places needing improvement. Then it described Original Elements and Cliched Elements, and a section titled Ideas for Improvement. The comments were generally astute and certainly worth considering.

Conclusion. ProWritingAid isn't as insightful as an expert professional editor, at least in its current iteration, but it's substantially faster and a lot less expensive.

As always, happy writing (and reading)!



Note: Daniel serves on the board of the California Writers Club Marin Branch. He is the author of *Walking San Francisco on the Barbary Coast Trail*. We thank him and the CWCM newsletter for allowing us to reprint his article here.

## Final Thought

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"There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed." - Ernest Hemingway

The next newsletter will appear in July. Send us your news, thoughts, and ideas--anything! Deadline: June 15.