

SACRAMENTO WRITERS

Everything You Need to Know About Agents and Query Letters



[Chuck Sambuchino](#)

Finding a literary agent can be daunting, yet it is important for authors to know how to navigate this landscape. Renowned former editor and writing workshops guru Chuck Sambuchino will give a crash course on dealing with literary agents. After reviewing what an agent is and what they do for writers, Chuck will discuss resources for finding agents, how to identify the best fit for you, query letter writing, and the most important things to do and not to do when dealing with representatives.

Chuck Sambuchino is a former editor for Writer's Digest Books. During his time there, he edited the [Guide To Literary Agents](#) as well as the [Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market](#). His [Guide to Literary Agents Blog](#) was one of the biggest in publishing, averaging more than 350,000 page views each month. He loves connecting with writers and helping them to get published and sell more books. In 2018, he became executive director of Writing Day Workshops, a series offered around the country giving writers tools and access to agents.

[Arden-Dimick Library](#), 891 Watt Avenue, Sacramento

Saturday, January 18, 2025, 1–3 p.m.

The meeting is open to the community at no cost. Since library rules prevent collection of a meeting fee, members are encouraged to support the club's Speaker Fund. This allows the board to continue to bring in experts of regional or national reputation. Suggested amount per meeting: \$10. Thank you, members!

First Friday Networking Meeting

Setting Goals for the New Year

Larry Mandelberg

This enlightening 30-minute process will engage writers interested in achieving their writing goals and reinvigorate their journey.



- Better understanding of, and clarity about your true writing goals
- Greater confidence in your ability to achieve those writing goals
- Better understanding of, and clarity about the obstacles you're facing, not just the symptoms
- A shift in how you think about your writing that will make it easier and more rewarding for you
- Ideas and suggestions from other writers

Mandelberg is a non-recovering serial entrepreneur who has launched four start-ups, led a merger, and conducted a successful turnaround. He solves complex business problems for clients in diverse industries. Larry is author of [Businesses Don't Fail They Commit Suicide: How to Survive Success and Thrive in Good Times and Bad.](#)

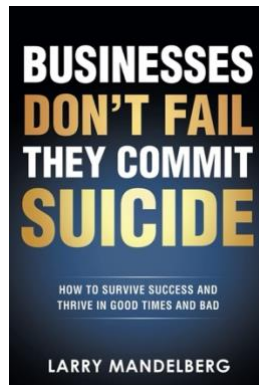
We continue to hold hybrid meetings with zoom, but please be aware that zoom participation may be limited to audience only.

Join Zoom Meeting

Meeting ID: 817 3734 0307 Passcode: 227171

Denny's Restaurant, 8841 Greenback Lane, Orangevale, 9–11 a.m.

Friday January 3, 2025



The Three Parts of an Irresistible Query Letter

by Michael Larsen



A query is a one-page, single-spaced letter with three or four indented paragraphs with a space between each. Without sounding self-serving, it explains why, what, and who—the hooks, the book, and the cook:

The Connection Hooks:

Whatever will best justify reading your work

- A quote about your book (or a previous book) from someone whose name will give it credibility and/or salability. The quote could also be about you.
- The reason you're writing the agent or editor:
 - the name of someone who suggested you contact the person
 - a book in which the author thanked the person you're contacting
 - where you heard the person speak
 - where you read about the person or something the person wrote

The Book:

The essence of your book

- Whatever will most excite agents or editors about your book:
 - the opening paragraph
 - the most compelling fact or idea about your subject
 - a statistic about the interest of people or the media in the subject or the number of potential readers
 - your book's depth, scope, or relevance
- A sentence with the title and the selling handle for the book: up to fifteen words that will convince booksellers to stock it and consumers to buy it
- The model(s) for it: the two most similar successful books or published in the last three years (not bestsellers which may sound like overreaching) that prove the market for your book and convey your literary and publishing goals.
- An overview of the book and with its biggest benefit promise to readers
- The book's biggest markets
- A round number for the actual or estimated word count of your manuscript

- The number of pages in your proposal and sample chapter(s) and how many additional pages of the manuscript, if any, you have ready to send
- (Optional) A list of back matter and how many manuscript pages they will be
- (Optional) The names and/or credentials of people, whose names will give your book credibility and salability, who will give you a foreword and cover quotes
- (Optional) The number and kind of illustrations you will provide with samples in the sample chapter(s)
- (Optional) If you're proposing a series or standalone books that will sell each other, the subjects or titles of the next two books
- (Optional) Information about a self-published edition of the book that will help sell it

The Cook:

Why you're the person to write the book

- Your platform: the most important things you have done and are doing online to give yourself continuing visibility with potential readers, with round numbers if they are impressive: your online activities, links to impressive published work, and media and speaking experience with links to audio and video
- Your promotion plan: the one-to-three most impressive things you will do to promote your book, online and/or off, with numbers, if they're impressive
- Your credentials; years of research; experience, positions, prizes, contests, and awards in your field
- (Optional) A link to a video query up to two minutes long in which you make the case for your book

Baiting Your Hooks

Here is how to make your hooks effective:

- Assemble your building blocks in the most effective order. Frontload your letter by putting what is most impressive close to the beginning. Include anything else that will convince agents or editors to ask to see your work.
- Rewrite the letter until it's as convincing as you can make it.
- Get feedback on it, and have someone proofread it.

If your query is as effective as it needs to be, your book is well on the way to a sale.

Branch President's Message

Yikes! It's another New Year!

Every new year makes my neck stretch. It's not a strain, but I like to look forward, as well as look back.

I'm looking back to when I accepted the office of President in September 2022. In the following October newsletter, I remember writing these words to you.

Without you, I am talking to myself. It is our members that make this club.

These words may seem corny, but I wholeheartedly believe in them. I strongly believed then, and I continue with that belief now.

In previous lives, I rubbed shoulders with the captains of industry. However, nothing can compare with my experience of being with you. These past two years have been the best in my life. I have stood alongside creators of fabulous worlds, beholders of mysterious secrets, romantics that have captured my heart. Such wonder and creativity can only humble me.

The Winter Party in December is a point of note.

We all talked together enthusiastically. We made a lot of noise and had a ton of fun. My favorite joy was listening to everyone's inspiration. We all spoke about such diversity, but there was one common theme.

The LOVE of writing.

That is what I want to look forward to this coming year. We all have a commonality. The most knowledgeable of us have much to share, while we all have much to learn. We are all equals as we write. We must get together and be together!

My resolution for this year is to make sure we all connect, we all learn, and we all write.

The board and I have great ideas for making meetings more inspiring and communal this year. We would love to hear your ideas, after all, this is YOUR club.

If you want to help, or simply send encouraging words, please talk to your board members.

I am very proud of the work they do for us.

You should be proud of them too.

Have a very happy and prosperous New Year!

Remember, your words must be read.

Bernard Wozny (bpwozny@gmail.com)



Should I look for an agent or publisher, or self-publish?



They used to call self-published books million-copy sellers, because the authors had a million copies in their cellar.

Those were the days before print-on-demand publishing. Now more than 90% of new writers self-publish. If your books are available online as print books, ebooks, and perhaps audiobooks and videos, readers around the world have access to them. You can let your communities know your books are available, and ask them to tell others about them.

If you want to publish only one book or different kinds of books, self-publishing is usually the best option. If you want to write one book just for your family and friends, you can publish it by emailing your manuscript to them, or having a copy shop or printer print it, and copyrighting it online with the Library of Congress.

If you self-publish, you need developmental, line, and copy editors, and a proofreader to ensure your manuscript is ready. You will also need a designer for your text and cover. You can promote your book if you wish, but sales of only one book or different kinds of books probably will not justify your time or money.

Self-publishers publish more books than all other publishers combined, sell more ebooks than big houses; and will continue to be a growing power in publishing. This is the age of Creator Entrepreneurs who control every aspect of their work and benefit the most from their efforts.

The three keys for success are:

1. Writing books that your readers love. It takes three books that sell each other to build an audience.
2. Building a mailing list of fans ready to buy your book before you publish it.
3. Running a business that supports your work.

As I mentioned in the previous post, there are agents who help clients self-publish and may pay for it. If you use an agent to help you publish, research the agent to be sure that the agent makes a living selling books, not publishing services.

But depending on your literary and publishing goals, your time, energy, and creativity, and whether you want to run a business, you may decide to stick to writing and let a publisher take it from there, with you helping with promotion.

Ask an Agent (Continued)

You are welcome to write to me at epml@aol.com with comments and questions.

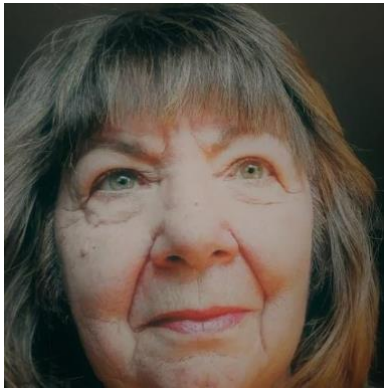
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[Mike Larsen](#) is an author coach who loves helping writers achieve their goals by adding value to readers' lives. In 1972, he cofounded Larsen-Pomada Literary Agents, which sold books to more than a hundred publishers and imprints before declining new submissions. His books: [How to Write a Book Proposal](#), fifth edition, coauthor Jody Rein; [How to Get a Literary Agent](#); and [Guerrilla Marketing for Writers: 100 No-Cost, Low-Coast Weapons for Selling Your Work](#), second edition, coauthored with Jay Conrad Levinson, Rick Frishman, and David L. Hancock. His next book, *Writing Success Guaranteed: 9 Superpowers for Making a Living and Changing the World* is in progress. Mike is cofounder of the [San Francisco Writers Conference](#) and the San Francisco Writing for Change Conference.

If you have a question for the Ask an Agent column, please send your question to: Kimberly Edwards, kimberlyedwards00@comcast.net.

Straight from the Keys...

by Dorajane Grummer RN DHA



Dorajane Grummer is a retired registered nurse and expert witness (on Catastrophic Injuries) who writes historical western romances, romantic suspense, and mysteries. You can find her under her pen name: Jo Donahue at www.jodonahue.com.

January is the month for taking stock of our lives and starting the new year with the hope that everything will be better than the year before. In this column I will address writers' problems, different ways to approach the problems of writers, and hopefully entertain a little along the way. Have a great 2025!

The Writer's No-Stress Guide to Tax Deductions: Everything You Can Write Off!

Hey there, fellow writer! Let's talk about everyone's "favorite" topic: taxes. I know, I know—but stick with me! This guide will help you keep more of your hard-earned money in your pocket. Whether you're just starting out or you're a seasoned author, we've got you covered.

First Things First: Yes, You're a Business!

Even if you haven't published it yet, you can still deduct writing expenses! The IRS considers you legit as long as you're actively pursuing writing as a career. So, if you're querying agents, taking classes, or working on your manuscript—you're in business! Even though there have been many people subscribing to the old "[Three in Five rule](#)" (Must make a profit after five years or it is a hobby). That is not always true. If you keep good books and show you are operating as a business, they will move forward.

Show Me the Money: Your Writing Income

Here's the scoop on reporting your income:

- Got paid \$600+ from one place? You'll get a 1099-NEC form. Using PayPal or Venmo? Watch for a 1099-K
- Even if you made less than \$600, you still need to report it (sorry!)

The Home Office: Your Creative Castle

Working from home? You might be able to deduct part of your housing costs! Here's the deal:

- Need a dedicated space (sorry, kitchen table doesn't count!)
- Calculate what percentage of your home is your office
- Can deduct that percentage of rent/mortgage, utilities, and other home costs

"Heck Yeah, That's Deductible!"

List Tech Stuff You Need:

- Computer equipment (yes, that shiny new laptop counts!)
- Writing software ([Scrivener](#), anyone?)
- Cloud storage (got to back up ole that manuscript!)
- Website costs (time to flex your author platform!)

Office Goodies

- Furniture (get that ergonomic chair!)
- All those pens and notebooks (we know you have tons)
- Printer ink and paper (because sometimes you need hard copies)
- Those fancy filing systems (organization FTW!)
- Don't forget the clack-clack keyboard
- Any software, paid in one payment or the monthly fees

Your Professional Squad

- Literary agent fees
- Editor costs
- Cover designer fees
- Formatting wizards
- Legal eagles and number crunchers (they did review your contracts, right?)

Getting Your Name Out There

- Website stuff (hosting, design, the whole shebang)
- Email newsletter services
- Social media ads (got to get those readers!)
- Book launch party expenses (celebrate good times!)
- Promo materials (bookmarks, anyone?)

Research & Learning

- Books (research purposes, of course!)
- Online courses (always learning!)
- Writing conferences (network away!)
- Professional memberships (join the club!)
- Organizations, fees, webinars etc.

On the Road Again

- Conference travel
- Book tour expenses
- Research trip costs
- Local writing meetups
- Parking fees
- Hotel stays
- Half of your meals (IRS rules, not ours!)

Staying Connected

- Business phone costs
- Internet (because online research is real!)
- Zoom subscriptions (virtual writing groups count!)

Special Goodies for Published Authors

Already published? You get extra deductions:

- Donated books (at retail value—nice!)
- Speaking engagement costs
- Book signing expenses
- Shipping to bookstores
- Self-Publishing costs

Keeping Track of It All (Without Losing Your Mind)

- Save those receipts! (7 years' worth—fun times!) #
- Track your miles
- Keep good records
- Consider using an expense tracking app
- Separate business money from personal cash

Important Dates to Remember

Mark these on your calendar:

- January 15: Q4 estimated taxes due
- January 31: Watch for those 1099s
- April 15: The big day! Tax returns due
- June 15, September 15: More estimated taxes
- October 15: Extended filing deadline

Self-Employment Perks

Being your own boss has benefits:

- Write off half your self-employment tax
- Health insurance might be deductible
- Retirement contributions could save you money
- Possible 20% deduction on your income (thanks, tax law!)

The “Keep It Legal” Disclaimer

While this guide is super helpful, tax laws can be tricky, and they change faster than publishing trends. It’s always smart to check with a tax pro for your specific situation. Think of them as your tax editor—they’ll catch the stuff you might miss!

Pro Tips for Tax Time Success

1. Track expenses as you go (future you will be thankful!)
2. Keep a separate bank account for writing income/expenses
3. Save about 30% of your writing income for taxes (That way, even though you have deductions, you have the cash to pay the tax.)
4. Consider quarterly tax payments to avoid a big bill
5. When in doubt, save the receipt!

Remember: You’re not just a writer—you’re a small business owner! Own it, track it, and deduct it. Your future self (and bank account) will thank you.

Questions? Confused? That’s totally normal! Tax stuff can be overwhelming. Consider working with a tax professional who can help you maximize your deductions while keeping everything legit with the IRS. It is important to keep some kind of tracking system. You probably won’t remember what the \$29.00 receipt was from last January unless you either write on the receipt, put it on a spreadsheet or in a journal. This all means money in the pocket. So as bad as it seems, Whatever method you decide to do ... track it.

Now go forth and write—and save those receipts! You need to keep as much as you make and still give Uncle Sam his due.

Stories On Stage, Davis

By Tim Schooley



Priya Mapleton



Lally Pia

Congratulations to CWC member Lally Pia for having a chapter of her memoir, *The Fortune Teller's Prophecy*, performed at a Stories on Stage event in Davis. Stories on Stage brings together local authors and actors by having the actor perform the author's writing in a dramatic reading. More than 100 people showed up at Sudwerk in Davis on December 8 to hear actor Priya Mapleton perform a compelling chapter from Lally's memoir.

As many of you know, Lally's memoir tells of a fortune teller's prophecy, made when Lally was a young girl living in Sri Lanka, that Lally would someday become a "doctor of doctors." The memoir traces the ups and downs of Lally's life's journey across four continents before the prophecy finally became true. Priya read a portion of Lally's memoir recounting Lally's joy and then sorrow as she was halfway through obtaining a medical degree in Ghana only to have a military coup result in the closure of the medical school.

[Stories on Stage](#), Davis performs two authors' works once a month. In addition to Lally's piece, another actor, Eric Baldwin, performed a short story written by Davis author Mark Donnelly.

On Friday, April 11, 2025, Chuck Sambuchino will return to Sacramento to host The 2025 Sacramento Writing Workshop—a full-day in-person "How to Get Published" writing event. This event is a unique opportunity to get intense instruction over the course of one day. On the conference website, you will find the agents and editors expected to be in attendance. Seating is limited to 125 total, resulting in a event truly personalized with so many experts in the house. We, the California Writers Club Sacramento, are proud to be the local partner of this event. See you there!

Michele Drier Makes Us Tense

by Heather Dodge Martin



Your protagonist approaches a closed door.
What's behind it?

A lost child? A killer? A raging storm? An ex-lover?

Can you feel the tension?

Michele Drier, author of 18 books and speaker at the CWC-Sacramento December Network meeting, described tension as the curiosity readers experience when a character faces a decision point.

She urged writers to use tension judiciously throughout their stories to keep readers invested, moving the plot forward and deepening the characters.

Types of Tension

While every genre of writing can employ tension, Drier noted that the type of tension may be genre specific. Action and adventure stories tend to contain *external tension*—a kidnapper, a thief, a gun pointed at the character's head—whereas romance leans more on *internal tension*, the stress characters feel inside, perhaps caused by miscommunications and interpersonal power plays. And every genre can contain what Drier called *general tension*: a historical or political event, a natural disaster, or some other precarious situation proceeding in the background. Two memorable examples Drier mentioned were the cliffside location of a house threatening to crumble into the sea, and a glassblowing studio full of molten glass. These inherently tense settings can ratchet up the emotion in a scene as well as affect the plot.

Time and Tension

Tension in stories can appear either slowly or suddenly. Small sources of tension can be gradually layered into a character's experience, making them relatable for the reader. A medical condition, a bad marriage, or a character's own self-doubt can all create a sense of understandable pressure on the character's decision-making. A "ticking clock", some sort of approaching deadline within a story, can be a great tool for a writer to manipulate time as a tension-builder. Tension can also arise out of the blue, with the sudden appearance of an old high school crush, a social media stalker, or a high-speed chase that envelops a character without warning. Any situation that gives characters the opportunity to change their reality and shift their responses has the potential to add that "what if?" feeling.

Tension Mistakes to Avoid

Drier cautioned writers not to continually jump from one high-action situation to another, without giving readers the chance to breathe. Too much external tension without space for the character's internal reactions can cause the reader to emotionally disconnect from the character and become bored despite the story's constant movement.

Another common tension mistake Drier sees writers make is over-explanation of potential conflicts. Readers must be inspired to wonder about the possibilities in a story, bringing their own imaginations, experiences, and truths. "Make it participatory," she urged. "Readers are half the equation; don't talk down to them."

Tension Tips

Some final bits of advice from Drier on how to add tension:

- Use your own experience. Consider your actions and reactions; could your character experience these too?
- Look to your favorite writers. How do they establish and maintain tension?
- The absence of expected things can add as much tension as the presence of unexpected ones. Is the room strangely empty? Is the forest too quiet?
- Try ending each chapter with a *hook*, a single line that inspires curiosity for what comes next.

Learning to create and manage tension, what Drier calls "the backbone of stories", will help you engage readers and keep them up at night finishing your book. Now that's tense!

[Michele Drier](#) is the author of 18 books, including her latest, *Resurrection of the Roses: A Stained Glass Mystery*. Contact her at micheledrier.me

Heather Dodge Martin, a brand-new member of CWC Sacramento, writes women's fiction set in the 1970s. You can sign up for her author newsletter at HeatherDodgeMartin.com.

California Lawyers for the Arts Presents:

Copyright for Authors

Saturday, January 25, 2025

Sierra 2 Community Center for the Arts & Community, Room 9.

2791 24th St., Sacramento, CA 95818

The presenter will be Steve Davis.

This will be an overview of copyright law, and the significance of registering your own copyright. Steve will then guide us through the registration process on the copyright website. The event does not entail personal or legal advice. It will serve as a hands-on overview and tutorial.

CWC members [register](#) with the access code "CWC" for the \$10 discount. You must sign up early to reserve your place and avoid disappointment.

Five Editing Secrets Your Teacher Never Mentioned

by Gini Grossenbacher, M.Ed.

Shifting Lenses

When working with editing drafts, fiction, and non-fiction, writers often ask me about revision techniques that work. Though each writer is different, here are some ways to approach your manuscript so that you look at each draft through a fresh reader's lens. That way, you can revise in a substantive, meaningful way.

Work Backwards

Start with the last sentence and work your way to the beginning. This strategy breaks the flow of your narrative and helps you focus on grammar, syntax, and structure without being distracted by the story or article. If you are writing non-fiction, you may work on each section; for fiction, focus on each chapter from the last sentence to the first. This technique may initially feel funny, but you'll be a pro with practice.

Inspect Your Verbs

Review every verb in your manuscript. Intense, specific verbs engage your reader, while weak ones like "was" or "did" often signal lifeless prose. Use "find" in track changes to locate "was," "were," and "did" and replace them with dynamic action verbs.

Catch and Release Repetitive Words and Phrases.

In some cases, repetition works for emphasis; in others, repetition without purpose can bore the reader. Words like "just," "very," and "really" can clutter your sentences, making them hard to decipher. You may have darlings like "in my view" that are obvious and do not need stating. Catch and release them. Press the delete button and declutter. It's freeing!

Read Your Work Aloud and Record It.

Some authors use the "Read Aloud" feature in Word under the "Review" tab, but using your voice is most effective. Many writers read and catch errors as they review their manuscripts; they will find more when listening. Your reading voice reveals awkward phrasing, unnatural dialogue, and pacing issues that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Use Highlighters

This technique taps brain science to identify our challenge areas. Numerous ways to use highlighters depend on our creativity. For fiction, choose colors to flag issues, such as green for pacing problems, red for dialogue tweaks, and blue for character inconsistencies. For non-fiction, select colors illuminating inconsistent arguments, off-topic discussion, or text that needs citations. A visual approach makes it easier to tackle one issue at a time.

Gini Grossenbacher (continued)

Want more assistance or a workshop series to broaden your editing skills? Contact CWC member, [Gini Grossenbacher](#), or [register on Eventbrite](#) for **Polish to Perfection: The Art of Manuscript Revision Workshops**

A Four Week Online Mini-Series, Feb. 5, 12, 19, 26
\$25/class; \$100/mini-series.



Take a journey into the techniques and strategies for refining your work to professional standards. Learn how to tackle step-by-step revisions to bring clarity, depth, and impact to your writing. Safe space environment. Wednesday evenings, 6–8 pm, facilitated by Gini Grossenbacher, guest instructor, Rebecca Evans, M.A., and sponsored by [San Rafael Writers & Artists](#) and JGKS Press.

Announcements

[Redwood Writers](#) Invites All CWC Members to Submit to the



What's the Story in Your Heart?

Are you ready to unleash the magic of your heart? Whether it's a tale of first love that made your heart skip a beat, a love-at-first-sight moment that swept you off your feet, or a humorous yet heartbreaking saga that had you saying, "Oh, my heart!"—we want to hear all about it!

Dive into your memories and spin a story, fact or fiction, that captures your heart-centered experiences in up to 1500 words. Remember, *only one story per writer*; so make it count and let us laugh, cry, or both!

We are looking for fresh work. Unpublished stories are eligible.

Winners

The excitement doesn't stop there—our top three storytellers will be recognized at the February 15 meeting of Redwood Writers, with fabulous prizes of \$100 for first place, \$75 for second, and \$50 for third! Plus, the winning tale will be published online and in our newsletter for all to see.

Due Date

Stories are due by 9:00 p.m., January 18, 2025. Mark your calendars!

Questions?

Please [email](#) our contest chair, Judy M. Baker, if you have questions.

Next Generation Short Story Awards

A not-for-profit international awards program for authors of short stories.

Brought to you by the Next Generation Indie Book Awards (the largest book awards program in the world for self-published authors and independent publishers) and Independent Book Publishing Professionals Group

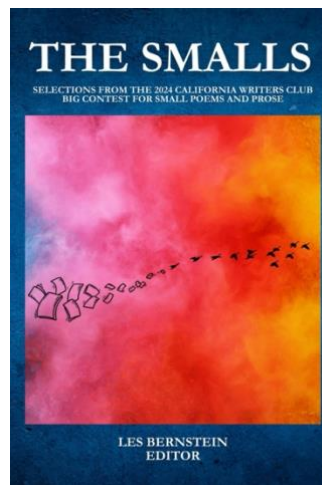
A brand new not-for-profit awards program open to authors writing short stories worldwide is now accepting entries written in English.

Why you should enter the [Next Generation Short Story Awards](#):

- 30+ Categories open to all short story authors worldwide
- Cash Prizes plus Gold Medals for all Winners
- Inclusion in a published Anthology for all Winners
- Exposure and valuable literary recognition
- Gala invitation for all Grand Prize Winners to attend the prestigious awards reception being held in conjunction with the Next Generation Indie Book Awards (NGIBA) awards gala

[Enter](#) by February 27, 2025 to take advantage of this exciting opportunity to have your short story considered for cash prizes, awards, exposure, and recognition as one of the top short stories written this year!

All stories must be submitted digitally (online) by February 27, 2025 to be entered into the 2025 Awards Year.



THE SMALLS

Announcing a new CWC publication for 2025.

Available on Amazon for \$10.00

What better way to start the new year than acquiring this new book of small poetry and short prose from our CWC members?



Board of Directors

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Second Vice-President/Membership: [Bonnie Blue](#)

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Open Readings Host & Coordinator: [John Patterson](#)

Publicity Chair (Print/TV/Radio/Social Media): Chris Hennessy

Webmaster: Bernard Wozny

Writers Network Coordinator: Cheryl Stapp

We welcome 3 new members this month. They are:

Jacki Sturkie

Carl Weber

Deborah Kelch

Please say hello if you see them.

<=>

New members are invited to share a brief (200 words max) bio and a jpeg headshot for our website's [Members](#) page. And you can include a link to your own website in your bio! Please send to sacramentowriters@gmail.com. You can have your published books listed in our [Members' Books](#) section by sending a description and a picture of its cover to Bernard at bpwozny@gmail.com.