



VALLEY VOICES

The Newsletter of San Joaquin Valley Writers | July 2024

From the President

Summer is in full swing! Although many of us think of vacation and ways to get away, these are also the months to write, write, write—and of course, read some, too. And don't forget about critique groups. If you'd like feedback from and interaction with fellow writers, go to our website and learn more by [clicking here](#).



And in case you missed the news, our new board members elected in June 2024 are:

- Bill VanPatten (President, two-year term)
- John Britto (Vice-president, one-year term)
- Pam Van Allen (Treasurer, one-year term)
- Charity Romstad (Secretary, two-year term)

Pam also serves as Membership Chair, processing all new member applications as well as renewals. She's a busy woman! Under our new bylaws (May 2024), officers serve staggered two-year terms. However, during this transition, the Vice-president and the Treasurer will not be elected to two-year terms until 2025.

We welcome suggestions for monthly meeting topics, workshops, special events, ideas for this newsletter, and anything else related to our organization and its mission. We look forward to seeing you at our scheduled events!

—Bill VanPatten

P.S. And don't forget to **renew your membership**. Details on the next page.

Upcoming Events



Monthly meetings¹

- Saturday, July 13, 12:00-2:00 p.m. "Book Promotion: Finding Readers without Spending Money," presented by [Dan Klefstad](#).
- Saturday, August 10, 12:00-2:00 p.m. "Everything You Wanted to Know About Modern Publishing but Were Afraid to Ask," presented by [ML Hamilton](#).

Craft Chats

- Saturday, July 27, 12:00-2:00 p.m. Craft Chat. "Self-editing Tips." Keeping things tight is fundamental to all kinds of writing. (Papapavlo's, Lincoln Center Stockton)
- Saturday, August 24, 12:00-2:00 p.m. Craft Chat. TBA. Stay tuned.

For a full description of these and future events, please visit our website by [clicking here](#).

¹ Check email messages for Zoom login information regarding monthly meetings.

News and Info from Our Members

- Congratulations to **John Britto** who just published his first novel, *Cybil's Gift*. Available on [Amazon](#).
- **Cami Rumble** has been on a roll with her poetry. She published one piece in the 2024 Spring edition of *Penumbra*. In addition, five of her poems appeared in the June 2024 issue of *Adelaide Literary Magazine*. Go, Cami!
- Big news from **Monika Rose**! Monika was recently named the **2024-2026 Calaveras County Poet Laureate**. This is a wonderful honor and well deserved for this hard-working writer and editor. Check out [Monika's site](#) for more about her. Congratulations, Monika!
- Kudos to **Betsy Schwarzentraub** for her June 29 eBook online launch of *Tossed in Time Expanded Edition: Steering by the Christian Seasons*. She also received confirmation that she will co-teach an in-person "Advent and Lent Planning Retreat" on September 7th, using the *Expanded Edition* as one of the texts. Her book is available on [Amazon](#).
- Congratulations to **Bill VanPatten** who is the recipient of two awards: (1) The 2024 Eric Hoffer Book Award for best self-published book, *There Go I*, a collection of short stories; and (2) The 2024 Indie Readers' Discovery Award for best LGBTQ fiction for his latest novel, *Refuge*. Go to [Bill's website](#) for more information.
- Bill also recently published the short story, "Piano Lesson/s," in the June 2024 issue of *The Write Launch*. [Click here](#) to read the story. Enjoy!



If you have news or information you would like to share, please contact us by [clicking here](#).

Additional News and Notes

- **Membership renewal is underway.** Remember to renew your membership by mid-August. It's easy and fast on our [Membership Page](#) of the website. And to provide some incentive, we are offering the first "raffle" for renewed membership in the history of SJVW. **All those who renew in the month of July will be entered into a drawing for a free membership.** If selected, your membership fee will be refunded, but you will remain a member for 2024-2025. We look forward to seeing everyone's name on the SJVW list!
- The first biennial SJVW writing contest is underway. Blinded submissions are in the hands of judges and results will be announced toward the end of summer. Thanks to all who submitted to this year's contest. Keep in mind that **in the even years, we will host contests and in the odd years we will publish an anthology.** So keep an eye out for eblasts and newsletters announcing these events.
- SJVW is on the verge of making it to the next branch tier within CWC. Spread the word and get your writing friends to join. SJVW is on the move!
- On Saturday, June 29, the new board members voted on the first award that the SJVW will offer: **The June Gillam Award.** In honor of our recently "retired" president, this award will be given in even years in conjunction with our biennial writing contest. June has given much to SJVW and this award will recognize excellence in writing to reflect her contributions in this area. June, we have appreciated all you have done for our organization and your work will live on with this award in your honor. Our very best to you (and we know we'll be seeing you at our events)!



Writing Tips and Tidbits

This tip comes from Debbie Saarloos. Thanks, Debbie!

- Have you heard of **A+ Content** in Amazon? A+ Content allows you to add images, text, and comparison tables to your Amazon detail page to engage readers and give them more information as they consider buying your book. Add A+ Content to your detail page to make your book stand out, connect readers with your books, and share more about your author story. To learn more click on this link: [A + Content](#). (more tips and tidbits on the next page)

Have you ever thought about attending a writing conference? They can be great places to meet other writers, attend workshops, and possibly meet agents. Here are two websites to get you started.

- [Best 2024 Writers Conferences in California](#) (also includes some for 2025)
- [Association of Writers and Writing Programs](#). This site has a database of conferences all over the United States with searchable feature to narrow the range of conferences you're interested in.

Featured Essay

Transforming Family History into a Novel: My Path into Historical Fiction

by Pamela Pan

I began my historical fiction *Eight-sided Mountain* not as a writer but as a mother who wanted her children to understand their family history.

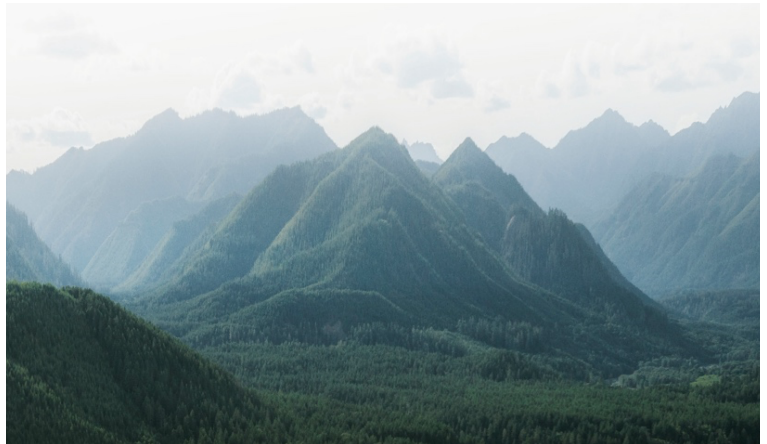
My grandma, who played a pivotal role in raising me, was a central figure in my life. But it had never occurred to me she had extraordinary stories to tell until the summer of 2013, almost two decades after her passing. I took my children to China and visited her cousin, who was in his late eighties. He recounted how when he was seven, the Japanese invaded his village and caught him in a rice field. They kicked him and smacked him with their rifles until he lost consciousness. They thought he had died and moved on to their next target.

“Do you know how your grandma survived the invasion?” he asked.

I had no idea—Grandma had never spoken about it. I conducted extensive interviews with him and later with my uncle and my mom and the full story unfolded.

When an editor in China showed interest, I wrote a short piece in Chinese which was published in a magazine. My two US-born children spoke Mandarin but couldn't fully understand the complexity and nuance of the article. So, I decided to write an English version for them, thinking it would be just four to five pages.

It became a multiyear journey that resulted in my first novel. During the creation of this book, I discovered my passion for writing historical fiction, relishing both the research and the storytelling. My upcoming project, *Goodbye Shanghai*, will also be a work of historical fiction.



Interested in working on one of our committees? SJVW is happy to accept volunteers to work on various aspects of our organization (newsletter, events, scholarships and awards, anthologies, recruitment/outreach, among others). Time commitment is minimal, and you'd be helping other writers in a different way!

Featured Essay



Know your Reader

by Bill VanPatten

I have pitched a total of five novels over the years, and every agent has asked this question: Who is the audience for your book? Typically, agents want a brief description such as women 35-70 years of age, teenagers 14-19, or even something like “fans of Madeline Miller.” Agents might ask the question a different way by asking what books are similar to yours. This is called asking for “comps”

(comparable titles). This question is an indirect way at getting you to tell the agent who your audience is.

Why is this question universal among agents? For three reasons. The first, agents try to picture your book on a shelf at Barnes and Nobles or within a category on Amazon. Where does the book fit among others? The answer is based not just on genre (as we all might assume) but also on audience. A second reason for this question is that agents want to know how to pitch it to publishers and what the potential for sales are. Nothing gets a publisher more interested than something with a readymade audience. A final reason is mostly about you: do you know how to write for the audience that will read your book? Writers may overlook this somewhat obvious issue. They might think “Hey, I’m writing a thriller and it’s good.” That may be, but thrillers don’t all share the same readers. There are thrillers pitched at women 35-70, thrillers pitched at men 35-60, thrillers pitched to people in their 20s and 30s, or fans of a particular author such as James Patterson or Gillian Flynn (who may not be the same fans). This one reason why *both* genre and audience are important for a writer to consider.

Knowing your audience keeps you on track in terms of style, tone, characters, length, and so on. As agents look at your sample, they will check to see if indeed there is a match between your writing and who you say your audience is. And when working in critique groups, this is a good thing to keep in mind. Feedback from fellow writers should not be about how *they* would write the book, but about how the book should be written for the intended audience. If I’m asked to provide critique for a sci-fi story targeted for adult male readers, I may offer feedback that’s not the same as if the book had a literary bent with a female protagonist where characterization may be more important than plot—a book aimed at fans of, say, Sue Monk Kidd.

Whether you’re seeking traditional publishing via an agent or self-publishing, the matter of audience is equally important. If you self-publish on Amazon, you must select the category or categories your book belongs to, and this is partially informed by who your audience is. You also need to know your audience for purposes of marketing your materials, and this would include cover design, for example.

So as you plow away, as you revise, as you seek feedback, keep a post-it by your computer: *Who is my audience?* It’s as important as the golden rule of “Show, Don’t Tell.”

Final Thought

“A book is never finished; it’s abandoned.”—Gene Fowler



The next newsletter will appear in September. In the meantime, do you have news to share with your fellow SJVW members? Or perhaps you have found a website that is useful for writers or have a writing tidbit to share. Maybe you’ve read a book recently that you would like to share or even review for the newsletter. Perhaps you have an idea for a featured essay. If so, please drop us a line by [clicking here](#). We love hearing from all members. Happy summer months to all. Stay safe, cool, and enjoy!