



# Scribbles

California Writers Club – Central Coast Writers Branch

[centralcoastwriters.org](http://centralcoastwriters.org)

April 2023

April 18, 2023

## With a Trowel not an Axe: The Gentler Way of Editing

Kevin Fisher-Paulson



A good writer knows that editing is a part of the process, like gardening is to the growth of flowers. But some go at their gardening with indifference, and some go at it with an axe. This presentation will teach you when to stop writing and start editing, how exactly to kill your darlings, how to edit for someone else, and when to stop editing and start submitting.

**Kevin Fisher-Paulson** is a weekly columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He is also the author of *A Song for Lost Angels* (Two Penny Press), which was a finalist in the 2015 Benjamin Franklin Awards as well as the Next Generation Indie Book

Awards. The book is about a year in his marriage, a year wherein Brian and Kevin took in newborn triplets, learned how to change a colostomy bag, learned how to bake cupcakes, and learned how to deal with the loss of children. His second book, *How We Keep Spinning*, is a compilation of some of his best-loved columns.

May 16, 2023

## Advanced Internet Research for Writers

Geri Spieler



How do you start your research process? What words do you use to find information? Do you know how to gauge when a website is genuine? In this presentation, you will learn the main topics of "Online Research Methods," which include several methodologies to equip you with the skills and tools to find accurate

information and discern whether it is reliable.

**Geri Spieler** is the author of *Housewife Assassin: The Woman Who Tried to Kill President Ford*, an investigative true crime book about Sara Jane Moore, the only woman to attempt an assassination of a US president. She is also president of the San Francisco Peninsula branch of the California Writers Club.

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## CCW President's Letter

By Sarah Pruitt

Greetings and welcome to April.

April 7 is Billie Holiday's (1915-1959) birthday. Despite a harrowing childhood, she became a famous singer but was still on her way up in 1939. That year she first sang "with some trepidation, fearing possible retaliation" a new song called "Strange Fruit." You can hear her sing it on a video on YouTube. "Strange Fruit" was written by Lewis Allan, the pseudonym of Abel Meeropol as a protest against the lynchings that were then common in the South. In the early 1950s, Abel and his wife, Anne, adopted the orphaned sons of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. Meeropol contributed several other hit songs for performers like Frank Sinatra and Peggy Lee.

April 1, 2023, April Fools Day, would have been my grandparents' one hundred and first wedding anniversary (if they were still alive.) My grandmother taught in a small school in Idaho where the woman who became her mother-in-law worked as a teaching principal. My grandfather, a World War I naval veteran, visited his mother. He met my grandmother, and they eloped to Idaho Falls, Idaho.

Wildflowers should cover every hill in Monterey County by April if our March rains are any indication. If not, enjoy the lushness of the fields and hills whenever you get out of town. With a little more rain, the grass may stay green through May before turning to our familiar California gold.

April's CCW meeting is on Tuesday, April 18, at the:  
Center for Spiritual Awakening  
522 Central Avenue  
Pacific Grove, CA

The center is across the street from the Pacific Grove Public Library. If you want to help set up, doors open at 5 p.m. Or, any time between 5:30 and 6:15 is an excellent time to arrive. As always, admission is free for members and guests. Don't forget—FREE pizza!

Our speaker will be Kevin Fisher-Paulson, a columnist with the *San Francisco Chronicle*. I am looking forward to an evening of humor and wisdom about the gentle art of editing.

A quick reminder: our literary salon is the Sunday after the monthly meeting. This month we will meet on Sunday, April 23, 2023, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at: Juice n' Java, 599 Lighthouse Ave., Pacific Grove, CA

Stay safe and happy writing,

Sarah E. Pruitt  
CCW President



## The Elements of Screenwriting

“Film tells a story by painting a picture,” according to screenwriter Paul Zeidman. “So, when writing a screenplay, you should think as visually as possible. “Screenplays are not books,” he added. Big blocks of text in a screenplay turn readers off. “Think of the page as valuable real estate,” he said, “and use as little of it as possible to communicate the story. The more white space on the page the better.”

To conserve text, Zeidman suggested screenwriters avoid unnecessary physical descriptions. “Describe what type of person a character is rather than what they look like or what they’re wearing,” he said. “Write ‘a lavish garden party takes place’ rather than describing the setting.” And if you need to include exposition to convey information, use carefully crafted dialogue so it doesn’t seem obvious.

Every scene requires conflict, and scenes should start as close to that conflict as possible in order to maintain momentum. “Conflict shapes story,” Zeidman said. “Each scene should force your protagonist to make choices that move them closer to their goal.” One page of a screenplay equals about one minute of film time and important plot points should occur at certain intervals. For example, the theme should be established early, around page three, and the inciting incident around page ten.

Action lines should be written in the present tense and be no longer than two or three lines. “Important information can get lost in too much text,” Zeidman warned. The same goes for dialogue. “The longer someone speaks on the page, the more likely you are to lose the reader or audience.” If you do include a long monologue, he suggested breaking it up by having the character take some action—even if it’s drinking a glass of water. Zeidman also suggested reading dialogue aloud to ensure your characters sound like real people. And avoid chit chat between characters, which tends to slow the action down.

There are specific industry standards to formatting a screenplay. New scenes are denoted by “sluglines” that offer pertinent information such as the scene’s location and whether it’s interior or exterior and day or night. Shorthand such as V.O. (voice over) and O.S. (off-screen) is used to indicate dialogue spoken by someone not currently seen on the screen. Zeidman recommended *The Screenwriter’s Bible* (by David Trottier) and *Story Sense* (by Paul Lucey) for reference, as well as the screenwriting software *Final Draft* or *Movie Magic*.

When asked about generating ideas for screenplays, Zeidman said “familiar but different” is a good approach. *West Side Story*, for example, is a familiar but different version of *Romeo and Juliet*. “Think of new ways to tell a familiar story,” he said, “but make sure it’s different enough and not just a copy.” He also suggested reading speculative scripts, which can be found online, for inspiration. “Write what you would want to watch,” he said, “not what you think the market wants. A writer’s love of the material should be evident on the page.”

# Announcements

## New CCW members

Please welcome rejoining member Rags Rosenberg.



### **Writers Roundup**

Dennis Hamilton with Share Your Work: Poetry  
Saturday, May 27, 1:00—3:00 pm  
The Little House in Jewell Park, next to Pacific Grove Library, PG

### **Sunday Salon**

Sunday, April 22 and Sunday, May 28, 1:00—3:00 pm  
Juice n' Java, 599 Lighthouse Ave., Pacific Grove

Full house for Writers Roundup on March 25 when Nancy Middleton schooled us on getting an agent!

### **Member Congratulations**

Member Nicki Ehrlich will be reading from her novel *Ellis River* at the Downtown Book & Sound on Main Street in Salinas, on Friday, April 14, around 5:30pm.

Have you published a book within the last month? Won a writing award? Please send information to [csleeter@gmail.com](mailto:csleeter@gmail.com).

### **Women's National Book Association Pitch-O-Rama**

The Women's National Book Association-San Francisco Chapter celebrates its Twentieth Anniversary of Pitch-O-Rama! It will take place via Zoom on Saturday, April 29, 8:00 A.M. - 1:00 P.M. At Pitch-O-Rama, up to 100 writers will get to pitch to agents, book professionals, and publishers. Unlike other pitch events, it is organized entirely by volunteers of WNBA-SF, so the registration fee is affordable. Since 2020, Pitch-O-Rama has been held online via Zoom, allowing writers the flexibility to pitch remotely from the comfort of their home.

Before the event, WNBA provides a pre-coaching session for:

- Support on how to prepare a winning pitch
- Advice on getting the most out of your time during the event
- A chance to ask questions to book professionals

During the event, authors will join breakout rooms to speak to a book coach or a marketing expert. Agents and publishers will circulate among the breakout rooms to hear writers' pitches and provide valuable feedback.

Pitch-O-Rama is open to all writers seeking representation—nonfiction, fiction, YA or children's literature—but is primarily intended for those with finished manuscripts or book proposals. To register, go to: <https://wnba-sfchapter.org/save-the-date-register-for-virtual-pitch-o-rama-2023/>. This event has limited capacity, so consider registering soon to secure your spot.

# Announcements (Cont.)

## Who's Ready to Celebrate the Good Old Days in Pacific Grove?

Following up last year's successful return to an in-person street fair (after we all hit the pause button during the Covid apocalypse), PG's Good Old Days will be back again on May 6 and 7, and once again, the fabulous CCW booth will be set up on Lighthouse Avenue, letting folks know about all of the benefits of being a CCW member—including the free pizza and water at our monthly meetings! You heard about that, right?

Aside from singing the praises of CCW, our booth also allows our members the opportunity to showcase their talents. If you'd like to take part in the festivities (and it actually is a lot of fun), we'll have two-hour shifts set up for both days. The event runs 9-6 on Saturday and 9-5 on Sunday. We like to have two members working our table at all times, so there's always somebody to help you fend off the paparazzi and autograph hounds. If you're one of the lucky few, the proud, the brave, who manages to score some booth time, you'll be able to sell your books and/or display related materials such as bookmarks. We want our members to shine (that's easy), while keeping in mind the fact that our main goal is to promote the club and all of the great reasons to join our merry band of scribes.

By now, you're no doubt asking yourself, "How can I be a part of the festivities? What must I do to ensure I don't miss out on this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to serve my country, while also promoting CCW, AND my own flourishing career as a *NY Times* best-selling writer?" So glad you asked. All you need to do is put down that pen where you've triple-circled May 6 and 7 on your calendar, go to your computer and dash off an email to [scotty@scottycornfield.com](mailto:scotty@scottycornfield.com) letting me know that you'd like to enter the contest. That's how much fun this is—even if you don't have books to promote or timeshares to sell. I'm kidding—of course you have books to promote!

I will start trying to get the schedule together as soon as possible, so WHEN you email me (probably right after you read this article, and surely well before you finish reading all of the other fantastic content in *Scribbles* (currently the #1-rated publication according to CCW surveys), please include your preferred choices for which day(s) and time(s) you're most interested in being in the booth.

Finally, a hearty shoutout to Laurie and John Sheehan for once again being superstars and helping us out with the tent that makes all the other booths jealous.

## CCW Member Contact List

Just a reminder that Scotty Cornfield is still compiling the voluntary CCW members contact list. If you'd like to be included on it so others can see how best to reach you (and vice versa), please email Scotty ([scotty@scottycornfield.com](mailto:scotty@scottycornfield.com)) with the following info:

LAST NAME:

FIRST NAME:

PHONE NUMBER:

EMAIL ADDRESS:

WEBSITE: (if you have one)

ONE SOCIAL MEDIA SITE (with the link on how people can find you there)

You may include all or some of the above info—whatever you're comfortable sharing with the other people who have also agreed to share their info. Please remember that this is not a marketing tool so you can market to club members. It's just a way of reaching out to specific members. Only people who share their information will have access to the list. Please send your info to:

[scotty@scottycornfield.com](mailto:scotty@scottycornfield.com) and feel free to reach out to him if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, etc.

## Ava Homa Book Talk

Former CCW member, previous CCW speaker, and award-winning novelist Ava Homa will be talking about her book [Daughters of Smoke and Fire](#) on Thursday, April 20, at 7pm, and the Pacific Grove Library (550 Central Ave.). Her book portrays the lives of 40 million stateless Kurds through a story of identity and family.



## “The Power and Magic of Words”

Nicki Ehrlich

It was through her love of reading that Nicki Ehrlich “recognized the power and magic in words and stories.” Whether it was a “good” book or a “bad” one, she was motivated to write.

Nicki joined CCW two years ago and soon began penning a monthly column titled “In So Many Words” for this newsletter. Her formal education started with a B.A. in Philosophy/English at the University of Denver, which she completed at Idaho State University. She also graduated from Henry Marchand’s Creative Writing Program at Monterey Peninsula College (MPC). “Henry Marchand is an incredibly supportive teacher, and his workshop-style classes have been helpful beyond measure,” Nicki says.

As a singer/songwriter, Nicki produced song-writing workshops. “I also did some post-graduate work in English, but martial arts and horses claimed my life for a while.” Before moving to California, she ran a sailing school in Washington State’s Puget Sound. In addition to selling boats and earning a captain’s license, she wrote a boating column for the *Peninsula Gateway* newspaper. Her freelanced articles have appeared in *48 Degrees North* and other boating magazines.

Nicki prefers to write character-based literary works as opposed to plot-based. While she creates most of her work in her home office, she sees writing as more than “watching words populate a page.” By “taking a walk, riding a bike, driving to work—a writer is always ‘writing.’ The characters are always with you—at least that’s my experience.”

Through her CCW membership, Nicki gained a great deal of knowledge about independent publishing. Her debut novel, *Ellis River*, was published in September 2022 under her imprint, Bay Feather Books. A semi-finalist for the Publishers Weekly BookLife Prize, *Ellis River* is available in paperback and eBook and will soon be offered as an audiobook.

While she’s a proponent of steady reading and writing, Nicki says writers would also do well to “keep an open mind, and a beginner’s mind. Read like a writer, and write like a reader,” she says. “No matter how much you know, there’s always more to learn.” Additionally, she recommends writing classes and listening to feedback.

Nicki’s flash fiction has appeared in the *Monterey County Weekly*. Her short stories, memoir, and poetry have been published in *Scheherazade*, MPC’s literary magazine. In 2021, she received the Ray Fabrizio Memorial Award in Creative Writing. Currently, she’s working part-time as Business Administrator for the Carmel Art Association for which she’s worked 19 years—at least until she earns a decent living as a novelist! Her website is [nickiehrlich.com](http://nickiehrlich.com).

*Michelle Smith’s articles have been published in a variety of magazines. Her website is [www.theebonyquill.com](http://www.theebonyquill.com).*





*Spring is finally here! If you're one of the lucky readers whose trees are still upright and long for events out in the sunshine, check out the Paradise Chocolate Fest!*

### CONTESTS

#### **The 31st Annual Tom Howard/John H. Reid Fiction & Essay Contest**

**Deadline:** April 31, 2023

**Entry Fee:** \$22.00 per entry, unlimited entries

**Website:** <https://winningwriters.com/our-contests/tom-howard-john-h-reid-fiction-essay-contest>

**Prizes:** 1st Prize STORY, \$3,000, 1st Prize ESSAY, \$3,000. The top two winners will receive two-year gift certificates from the co-sponsor Duotrope (a \$100 value), 10 Honorable Mentions will receive \$300 each (any category), Top 12 entries will receive online publication.

**Final Judge:** Mina Manchester assisted by Sarah Halper

**Guidelines:** See website for Complete Guidelines. For this contest, a story is any short work of fiction. An essay is any short work of nonfiction. Submit as many entries as you like. All themes accepted. Entries may be published or unpublished. Length limit: 6,000 words maximum

### WORKSHOPS AND CONFERENCES

#### **2023 18th Annual Paradise Chocolate Fest "All About Books!" Special Event**

**Event Date:** Saturday, May 13th, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Website & Application:** <https://chocolatefest.us/public/uploads/2023-author-application.pdf> \*There is a date error on the application page, the event is May 13, 2023.

**Location:** Terry Ashe Park on the Skyway, 6626 Skyway, Paradise CA

**Fee:** Author, Illustrator, Publisher, Literary Exhibitor: \$40.00

**Details:** A special invitation to Authors, Illustrators, Publishers & Literary Exhibitors to present at "All About Books". This is a special event of the Paradise Chocolate Fest. More than 4,000 Paradise Chocolate Fest attendees can meet the authors, illustrators and publishers who call Northern California home. Book subjects range from romance, mystery, children's stories, science fiction and everything in between. Applications Due by April 25, 2023. Honored as one of the "Top Festivals in the State!" by Cal Expo, the Paradise Chocolate Fest is the place to find great books and indulge your love of all things chocolate!

#### **Virtual Pitch-O-Rama, Sponsored by the Women's National Book Association**

**Event Date:** April 29, 2023

**Location:** Virtual

**Fee:** \$95.00

**Website & Application:** <https://wnba-sfchapter.org/save-the-date-register-for-virtual-pitch-o-rama-2023/>

**Details:** Pitch-O-Rama is an annual event that brings in a set of publishing professionals to share their knowledge of the publishing industry. During the event, you will be able to practice your pitch with coaches and fellow writers, and then share that pitch with experts who will provide advice on taking your writing project to the next level.



What are *you* reading now? What book has moved or engaged you in a special way? Share it with the other CCW members. All genres will be accepted. Please send your review to [Barbara.siebeneick@gmail.com](mailto:Barbara.siebeneick@gmail.com). Remember to add: Name of book, author, publisher, date of publication and your name. Tell us what the book is about (without giving away any spoilers), your reaction to it and why.

This month's review is from *Joyce Krieg*.

*Marmee*, Sarah Miller, 2022, William Morrow Publisher

If you've always loved *Little Women*, if you've watched every movie version from Katharine Hepburn to Greta Gerwig, if you've fantasized as a child about moving in with Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy—then you must read *Marmee*.

Written by Sarah Miller and published by William Morrow in 2022, *Marmee* is a re-telling of the *Little Women* story from the viewpoint of the March family matriarch, whom the girls affectionately nicknamed Marmee. Readers of the original Louisa May Alcott classic will remember Marmee as the strong, steady and almost saintly presence in the household, a pillar of wisdom, piety and selflessness. As Ms. Miller writes in her Author's Note, Alcott was pretty much forced by the expectations of her time to create an unrealistic picture of motherhood. It wouldn't do back in 1868 to have a less-than-perfect mother in a book intended for young readers.

Ms. Miller had no such restrictions in creating her version of Marmee. Her protagonist is a fully realized, three-dimensional woman riddled with faults and foibles, but with a strong inner core of strength, integrity, and authenticity. As a character whose voice is heard on every single page, I thoroughly enjoyed the time I spent with her and felt a sense of loss when the book ended.

For readers who cherish memories of *Little Women*, *Marmee* fills in many of the blanks of the original story. We learn the circumstances that forced the March family into genteel poverty, and we discover the backstories of some of the book's secondary characters: the Hummels, Aunt March, Mr. Lawrence. And the death scene of dear, sweet Beth is even more harrowing and heartbreaking than in the Alcott book, if such a thing is possible.

About the only negative thing I can say about *Marmee* is that if you're not familiar with *Little Women*, it's probably not going to resonate with you. The author definitely assumes her readers are already on intimate terms with the story and the characters.

As for me, I plan to seek out *Caroline*, Sarah Miller's re-telling of *Little House on the Prairie* from the perspective of Ma Ingalls. If it's half as good as *Marmee*, it's sure to be a satisfying read.





Yesterday I listened to KAZU's "Sunday Sound Adventure," a reminiscence of Carole King's *Tapestry* album. When I write, I don't listen to music. But I do, sometimes, listen to music and then write—when I need to tune into a memory stored on one of those dusty mind shelves.

When *Tapestry* released in 1971, I had just graduated high school, left my hometown and family. The title song includes the phrase: "...my tapestry's unraveling..." The year the album came out, my own life's tapestry was unraveling. My father had died a few short months before I graduated high school. I turned eighteen and moved 850 miles away from the only home I'd known, to attend college where I knew no one. The album played like a soundtrack to a privileged life with secret flaws that I was so grateful to be escaping.

Carole King ushered in the singer/songwriter era. Pop music prior to this particular album was all about the performing bands. You might not have known who wrote the songs. (Carole King and Gerry Goffin wrote The Monkees' "Pleasant Valley Sunday," The Drifters' "Up On The Roof," Herman's Hermits' "I'm Into Something Good.") With *Tapestry*, Carole King, the writer, became Carole King the performer.

As I listened to Sunday's radio program, I considered the parallels to how book publishing has changed.

Traditional publishing persists, but in recent years more authors are becoming their own publishers, as "self-publishing" becomes less stigmatized and more accessible. More authors are learning how to create not only a good story, but also a professional-looking product.

No one, including Carole King, herself, thought a "self-made" album could be a hit. But the times they were a changin'. (No, she didn't write that one.) *Tapestry* sold twenty-five million records, world-wide.

Both music and stories transform us on multiple levels. They ask questions and answer them. They offer up forks in the road and help us decide which way to go. A musical score consists of black and white notes on a page. Words in a book, also in black and white, are what we read. But the emotion, the music, is the colorful stuff between the notes or words.

Our novels, short stories, and poetry are filled with characters and sentiments that arise from our subconscious. Moments are crafted. Scenes are developed. The story of Carole King's success once gave me validation as a songwriter. I'll thank her again, and other luminaries like her, who just may have paved the way for writers to take on more aspects of publication, giving those of us who create a story more control over our achievement. We have been given permission to sing our own songs.



THE PURPOSE OF THIS COLUMN IS TO SPUR READERS TO TRY THEIR HAND AT THE PROMPT, BASED ON THE PRECEDING MONTH'S TOPIC AT CCW. Let your inspiration shine and share it with us. E-mail me ([pregnev001@gmail.com](mailto:pregnev001@gmail.com)) to display in upcoming Scribbles.

“What it Takes to Finish a Book”

“A poor, dumb boy, one of many mouths to feed.” That was to be Dominic Lacroix’ epithet, masking the truth. His father damned Dominic whenever he laid eyes on the boy. The bastard had killed his Lilia with his birth, leaving him stranded, void of any feminine love.

Seven years of hell ended when scrawny runt Dominic was shipped off to an abbey—‘one less mouth to feed, the little jackal tamed,’ his Christian father thought best.

The walls of the abbey brought peace, solitude, and enlightenment. The scared little boy grew into a strapping young man, fervently going on missions to alien lands, the fruits of his labor heralding the Word of the Lord.

How many years had it been since that fateful day, now cloistered within the walls of another abbey, so far from home, facing the Irish Sea? ‘A lifetime ago, a distant shadow, before enlightenment,’ the friar recalled.

Now an old man, his tonsure claiming most of his hair, knobby knuckles creaking, his eyesight fading, even with four candles rimming his desk, Dominic stooped, eyeing the parchment page. He meticulously copied the frayed pages of an ancient tome, long past its prime. It had taken a lifetime to finally arrive at this page, the last page, all his life behind him, down to these last few lines. He prayed to God to steady his hand one last time. Soon, he could rest in peace.

Prompt from February 2023 CCW Speaker, Brooke Warner’s topic:

“What it takes to finish a book.”

The CALIFORNIA WRITERS CLUB is a 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit, dedicated to educating members and the public-at-large in the craft of writing and in the marketing of their work.

**The Last Word**  
**Christine Sleeter**



**Cliffhangers**

Imagine rushing to the airport in a cab, after the first cab you called didn't show up and the shuttle service you had reserved canceled your reservation. Only one direct flight home per day. Will you make it?

Suddenly you discover that you can't find your driver's license. Oh no! You must have dropped it somewhere. A quick call to the hotel confirms that it fell from your pocket onto the floor of the lobby. "We've gotta go back to the hotel," you cry to the taxi driver. He replies, "Okay, but then I can't take you to the airport because I have another ride scheduled."

Back to the hotel. Will you miss your flight?

By the time yet another taxi picks you up, you've missed your flight. Hours later, when you finally do get home, you discover that the electricity is out and won't be coming back for another couple of days. Shoulda stayed in LA!

Four days later, back in LA, another cliffhanger, except this time, you don't lose your driver's license and you do make it to the airport. You board the flight to Monterey. But a fierce storm is coming through, so the plane can't land there. Instead, you find yourself stranded in Fresno.

Now what?

Welcome to my life in March!

**Christine**

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[Centralcoastwriters.org](http://Centralcoastwriters.org)

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