

S C B W I

S O C I A L

NEWSLETTER



SUMMER 2024



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Courtney Donovan  
Jr. Agent



Jolene Haley  
Agent



Lynnette Novak  
Agent



Mallory Grigg  
Senior Art Director

## Fall Harvest Writers and Illustrators Day

Join us for presentations, contests, critiques, portfolio reviews and pitches

Saturday, Oct. 5, HYBRID: Online or Cal State University, Fullerton



Moni Richie Hadley  
Author



Rex Ogle  
Author



Laura Segal Stogman  
Author



Benson Shum  
Illustrator

You can learn about craft and book publishing, connect with professionals in the industry and connect with other SCBWI members. This full day conference at CSUF will include agents, an editor, an art director, local authors and an illustrator. We'll offer critiques, pitches, and contests.

When: Saturday, Oct. 5, 2024

Where: Cal State University, Fullerton, Titan Student Union AND zoom, you choose.

[Click here for more information and to register.](#)

Congratulations to Banner Contest winner Ricardo Aguilar!





# OUR MEET-UPS ARE FREE WEBINARS

Do you need inspiration? Do you need to expand your knowledge about writing children's books? That's our goal at our monthly meet-ups. Jodi Rizzotto has recruited top notch speakers to enlighten all of us for free. Sure, you can pay money for online companies. You can register for SCBWI webinars from all over the world. You can also join our locally sponsored SoCal meet-ups-for free. We usually meet on the fourth Sunday of the month 1:00-2:00. Here's a taste.

MAY



Mystery writer Ginny Myers Sain spoke at our May meeting. She started out in theater, but when she transitioned to writing, she brought her theater toolbox with her. She shared some of those secrets with us. When fleshing out characters, you need to know four things: What do they want? Why do they want it? What's in their way? What do they do to overcome that obstacle? Then she presented how props can be used to deepen a scene, set the pacing, and set the mood. It was a fresh take on Show-Don't-Tell.



At our June meeting, award-winning humor writer Bruce Hale shared tips to make your book unputdownable. The short answer is: Use suspense. The long answer is he shared nine kinds of suspense, then read excerpts from children's books to highlight how it works. Here are a few tips: hook the reader, develop your character, conceal and reveal, and up the "uh-oh" factor.

JUNE



## AUGUST



We have more meetings planned! In August, author Nicole Chen will share her experiences living in a multicultural family and writing a picture book and two middle grade novels. Specifically, she'll address how to write relatable BIPOC characters and stories, finding the balance between honoring those who share cultural and experiential differences and appealing to those who don't.



In September, agent Tia Mele will share tips for writing a successful pitch and synopsis for your story.

## SEPTEMBER

## OCTOBER

In October, author Carol Hughes will discuss writing enticing taglines, loglines, and jacket flaps as well as finding comps for your story.

To keep up with all the meeting dates and topics, you can read about them on our [website](#) and get the announcements through our SoCal email blasts. As a bonus, we often have a raffle at the end and one attendee wins a book by that presenter. We hope to see you there!





# WRITING WITH A DISABILITY

BY LIZ TURNEY

I am a writer. I've been a writer since I first learned to write. I also have multiple disabilities. Some I've had my whole life, others came later. However, it wasn't until relatively recently, like three years ago, that I ever considered connecting the two. For me, writing was a way to escape my health issues. I wrote characters who may have been like me in personality, looks, or how they spoke, but they were never disabled.

I hear a lot on social media about people looking for disability representation in books, the need for books featuring characters with disabilities; particularly by disabled writers creating stories where their own disability is represented. I get it, I applaud it, and I admire writers who are confident enough to share their stories, fictional or otherwise. It's just not where I ever intended to focus.

I have, however, long used journaling and sometimes poetry writing for therapy, particularly when dealing with my health issues. But those endeavors were used in the heat of emotion and were always meant only for me. That writing was to stop myself from getting overwhelmed by emotions that would otherwise destroy me. I never considered using fiction writing as a type of therapy.

Yet the first novel I wrote (not counting novel-length fanfiction from college), the one that got me an agent, is a middle grade fiction novel that is 100% my experience, my thoughts, and my feelings living with hearing loss and having to get hearing aids when I absolutely did not want them. Why? How did my writing switch from complete escape of my real life to full immersion into it?

When I say I have lots of medical issues, I mean LOTS. I'm writing this article as I return from a weeklong stay at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), where a giant team of doctors is studying me and my de novo (the first known) medical case. That's my life.

It's overwhelming. And until I decide to write a memoir, there's no way I can squeeze my entire disability experience into one book, but I have learned I can put individual bits into individual books. I did it because initially I wanted to write about my hearing loss experience. It's the easiest to separate from the rest of my medical issues. It was also the one that took me over a decade to accept and not feel hate towards.

[www.tammydoillust.com](http://www.tammydoillust.com)



My most recent novel, which I just sent to my agent, is about an entirely different medical issue I have experienced. I cannot tell you how therapeutic it has been to write these books. And writing them from a middle grade perspective offers enough separation for me as a writer to handle the parts I continue to struggle with.

Writing pieces of my disabilities into my characters has helped me process them differently in real life. My experiences don't feel as pointless anymore, because I'm going through them for a reason. The fact is, emotions are universal. In any story, of any genre, we as readers might have no connection to the character's reality, but the emotions they feel, and what drives them, is entirely universal. We can suspend our reality and put ourselves in the character's head to understand what they're experiencing and what their life is like. The same is true when writing and reading about disabled characters. Whether readers share the character's disability, or have never heard of it before, the story can be universal, because we all share the same emotions in life.

Disabled or not, that is the truth. We are writers and we can all share the stories we want to tell in ways only we can tell them. It's also true that disabled characters are just as capable and deserving of being the main characters in books as any other type of character. Because we all have stories to tell.

### LIZ TURNEY

is a middle grade writer, rep'd by Stephanie Hansen with Metamorphosis Literary Agency. She lives in Anaheim, CA and works as a Senior Media Operator for the Walt Disney Company. Follow her on X @LizTurney.



# RETURN TO TAHQUITZ

Written by Carlene Griffith

As always, SCBWI's SoCal chapter leadership pulled off another successful annual writer retreat from May 30th through June 2nd. Writers from all over Southern California came together to enjoy the beautiful Idyllwild mountains and starry evening skies, as well as socialize with other writers, while gaining insights as they work on their manuscripts. This year's planning committee members included Regional Advisor Bev Plass, and volunteer members Heather Buchta and Lori Polydoros.

Returning to its original location, this annual gathering made for another memorable weekend. When asked what she thought of the retreat, Laurie Young said, "I think you all do a fantastic job of putting this retreat together, and this was the best one yet! (I've been attending since the first one). "The quality of writing seems to rise year after year." Carol Hughes said, "Everyone involved with planning and executing the entire event is to be commended for doing such an outstanding job." Kathleen Troy said, "Bev, Heather and Lori did an amazing job—as always. We are so lucky to have you. XOXO."

Last year, the usual Tahquitz location was unavailable because of new ownership and construction. Though a new location was a challenging experience for our planning committee, they found one suitable for our needs. But if you ask me, the changes were worth the year's wait to return. The facility improvements included new hotel-like accommodations but kept the same quiet

mountain retreat weekend getaway we've all come to love. Tahquitz now offers a four-star restaurant and bar, a heated swimming pool, a game room with a pool table, a store, multiple BBQ pits, beautiful landscaping, and multiple covered seating areas throughout the grounds. First time attendee Debbie Meneses said, "The location in the forest was excellent. The grounds were beautiful and very clean. Parking was easy and in a helpful spot near our rooms." Marianne Wallace said, "(It) was nice to have a restaurant onsite besides planned meals in the dining hall. It was a beautiful location with plenty of parking."





Besides the accommodations, planned activities available during free time included a beautiful nature hike led by Heather, a free yoga class given by attendee Andrea Jensen, a pizza and wine party at the BBQ pits and plenty of writing time. “(I) enjoyed being able to give the mind a rest with the options of yoga and hiking,” said Marianne. Rilla Jaggia said, “The pizza party was a lovely event to sit back, stick my feet up on the fire pit and enjoy my community.”

Surrounded by the retreat’s pleasant environment, attendees got to share their work in four group roundtable critique sessions with other writers and two guest faculty members. They also could have a 15-minute, 1-on-1 consultation with an agent or editor of their choice. For me the professional insight into our manuscripts was incredibly helpful. During my 1-on-1 time, I asked specific questions regarding my manuscript, query letter, and its potential during the submission process. This kind of personalized feedback from an industry professional isn’t something you can get at just any conference. Debbie said, “Four critique group sessions were perfect and the 1:1 session included in the price was excellent.” This opportunity was such a bonus for writers trying to get traditionally published.



This year’s faculty included Jemiscoe Chambers-Black, agent with Andrea Brown Literary Agency, Sally Morgridge, Executive Editor with Holiday House Publishing, Inc., Alex Weiss, agent with Azantian Literary Agency, and Rachel Diebel, editor with Feiwel & Friends (an imprint of Macmillan Children’s Publishing Group). Many commented on how great this year’s faculty was. Mary Shannon said, “The faculty were awesome! Friendly, approachable, and full of great advice.” Brett Jewell said, “The editor, Sally, who sat in with us was phenomenal. She had quick, concise responses for everyone. I was impressed with her ability to gauge the story overview while also giving important feedback to the writer.”

I had the privilege of leading one of the critique groups and overall, others agree it was the best part of the whole weekend. In my opinion, I had the best critique group, but I’m sure others would argue their group was the best. The shared stories and writing were fantastic. I felt like I was in the big league with so many talented writers to work with. Other groups were led by Tim, Crystal, and Jodi. When asked about her critique group, Rilla said, “We had a wonderful group leader. She ensured that everyone had enough time to give and receive feedback. The faculty members gave us useful comments both verbally and in writing on our manuscripts.” Laurie said, “The quality of writing in my group was off the charts. Everyone’s pages read like final, published work. And the feedback I got on my own work was deep and very helpful.”





# RETREAT



The Play-Doh sculpting was an especially big hit. Divided into our groups named after famous sculptors, we were asked to create a sculpture with clay inspired by this year's theme, "From Slab to Sculpture." Though we are all artists, many of us decided to stick to writing. Kathleen said, "Our group learned that the art world has nothing to fear from us. We also decided our centerpiece was the saddest (but it was the most loved, we're sure). The poor thing collapsed into itself by the next morning. We had a blast making it."

Throughout the retreat, the program allowed for many opportunities to get to know other writers and socialize. I can't tell you how important it is as a writer to find a supportive community. It really makes a difference in improving your writing and keeping you motivated when there is so much that can discourage you in the business. For me, the retreat made me feel motivated again and gave me the motivation and validation I needed with my work. Mary agreed, "I often get discouraged when I'm writing alone, but so many genuine writers encouraging me truly lifted my spirits. Hearing the stories of others and sharing our struggles filled my writer's soul."



When asked what she gained from attending this year's retreat, Jodi said, "A renewed momentum to continue the writer's journey. For most of us, the road to publication is slow and paved with rejection. Being part of a writer's community encourages me to keep moving forward. Writing is hard work, but it's the most wonderful hard work I've ever done." Marianne Wallace said she was "reminded that my writing gets better when I don't write in a vacuum. Comments and questions from other children's writers and faculty working in children's publishing always highlight problem areas and support places where the writing and story are working well. I came away impressed by the quality of writing in my group and energized to continue revising and finishing my manuscripts." Scott Sussman said he gained "new writing tools for my toolbox, i.e. a heightened perspective of how to approach revision and specific literary elements to keep in mind when writing."

The weekend had so many brief moments that made it great. Not wanting to go to bed after everything was over, I brought out a few games to play and a few attendees joined me. Jodi said, "After dinner Saturday night, when we were all punchy from critiques, we played the card game Exploding Kittens. We laughed so much." Some suggest adding a Game Night to the schedule next year as community building time. I agree with this recommendation.



Leadership provided wine for attendees at the various social gatherings, and many enjoyed the relaxing after-dinner atmosphere. As a non-drinker, I enjoyed the silliness that comes from watching people let their guards down. I also enjoyed mealtimes, where I made new friends and learned more about people I'd met at other SCBWI activities. Mary said, "The shared meals were always full of lively conversation, laughing, and bonding." The prepared meals in the dining hall were more cafeteria-level than the four-star restaurant, but it didn't matter given the company we were keeping.

When asked what she enjoyed most about the weekend, Kookie Williams said, "That's hard to pinpoint because I loved meeting with so many amazing/talented people and hanging out, the conversation and critiques were priceless, and the 1:1 was very exciting. Teri Vitters said she "can't wait for next year!" And this writer couldn't agree more.



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Carlene Griffith is the author of the 10 Minute Play for Kids of All Ages and the Rose Maidelaiden series. She has been a proud SCBWI member since 2018 and serves as SoCal's chapter co-Assistant Regional Advisor and Newsletter Editor.  
[www.carlenegriffith.com](http://www.carlenegriffith.com)

# Remembering Ellen Kim

by Carlene Griffith

On July 1st, SCBWI chapter leadership received very sad news: member, volunteer and talented artist Ellen Kim had passed away unexpectedly in early June due to complications during childbirth. The baby, daughter Ava, is doing well. During this difficult time, Ellen's husband, Abraham Lee, asked not to be contacted but gave us permission to share the news.

Residing in Fullerton, CA, Ellen Kim had been a member of SCBWI SoCal since 2021. At the 2003 Fall Harvest Writers and Illustrators Day event, she won first place for Picture Book dummy, and second place in the Portfolio showcase. When asked what the most impactful thing she'd learned from being a part of SCBWI was, she said, "Creating picture books is like a marathon, so don't give up!"

Ellen graduated from UC Berkeley with a BFA and received her MFA in Illustration-Entertainment Arts from ArtCenter College. In addition to working in the animation industry as a background artist, she also worked in occupational therapy with children for many years after receiving a degree from University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences. Ellen loved working with children, creating art, hiking, and gardening. She was pursuing illustrating picture books in her free time.

Her friends here at SCBWI remember her as a kind, sweet, helpful, positive and talented lady who will be sorely missed.



# THE GRAMMAR NERD

by Tim Burke

Issue 9: The Introductory Comma NOTE

In our very first issue of the newsletter, I covered the first of the five important comma rules every author should know—the so-called FANBOYS rule. Today, I'll cover the second rule—the Introductory Rule. As always, let's try to avoid fancy-pants grammar terms and make it as intuitive as possible.

**SITUATION 1:** If the sentence begins with a word or short phrase that tells where or when, put a comma after it.

Examples:

**WHEN:** First, Finally, In October, On Wednesday, At seven o'clock,

**WHERE:** In the corner, On the table, Next to the science building, Near my house

**SITUATION 2:** If our voice hints to us to pause by going down in pitch/if we need to know where the beginning group of words ends or it will cause confusion, put a comma after it.

Examples:

After he finished the entire test was collected. (Oops! After he finished, the test . . . )

Though all the children loved playing the piano was out of tune, so they refused to perform. (Oops!

Though all the children loved playing, the piano . . . )

**Helpful hint:** If the sentence begins with any of the following, you'll probably need a comma. (this is only a list of the most common words/phrases that trigger a comma)

because since although when if after before despite in spite of

**CONCLUSION:** before you submit to an agent or editor or critique group, comb the pages looking exclusively for this situation. Your writing will come across as more professional. As for your typos, no worries. Just blame them on Autocorrect. ;>}

**Tim Burke** is a past Regional Advisor, SCBWI SoCal chapter member volunteer, and author of the Grammar Nerd and Killer First Lines newsletter columns. Represented by Jennie Kendrick at Red Fox Literary, he writes MG and YA novels, though he has also sold stories to the national adult crime fiction magazines, Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine and Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine. His debut MG novel, *Troll Tails*, is out on submission (fingers crossed, y'all!). You can contact him at [tim@timburketales.com](mailto:tim@timburketales.com) and visit his website at [www.timburketales.com](http://www.timburketales.com).



# WELCOME HEATHER SOODAK

## OUR NEW CO-ILLUSTRATOR COORDINATOR

We are excited to announce that Heather Soodak will join our SoCal Regional Team as the Co-Illustrator Coordinator. She will work closely with Su Moon in providing events and connections for SCBWI children's book illustrators.



Heather is an illustrator and art educator in the Santa Ana School District. She received her B.A. in Illustration at Laguna College of Art and Design and art teaching credential from California State University, Long Beach.

Spending most of her childhood growing up in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, Heather is passionate about the environment and her main goal is to use her art powers advocating for animals. Heather is also an advocate of art education and believes that through creativity and community we can support each other to make positive change for all.

Instagram: arty\_heather

Website: <https://www.heathersoodak.com/>



Illustration by Heather Soodak www.heathersoodak.com

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Illustration by Heather Soodak www.heathersoodak.com

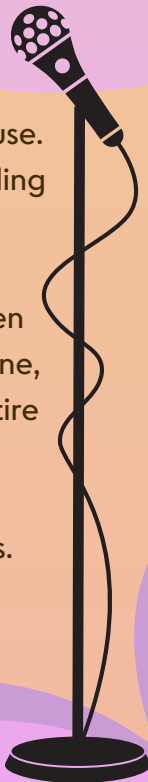
## HUMOR ON WRITING/WRITERS

COMPILED BY TIM BURKE

A writer comes home to a burned down house. His sobbing and slightly-singed wife is standing outside. "What happened, honey?" the man asks.

"Oh, John, it was terrible. I was cooking when your agent called. Because I was on the phone, I didn't notice the stove caught fire. The entire house went up. Poor Fluffy was almost trapped. I barely made it out myself."

"Wait, wait. Back up a minute," The man says. "My agent called?"



I can't understand why a person will take a year to write a novel when he can easily buy one for a few dollars.—  
Fred Allen

.....

Writers spend more time on baby name websites than expecting parents.

.....

I once asked this literary agent what writing paid the best, and he said, "ransom notes."

# OC BOOK FAIR

JULY 13TH

## SCBWI SOCAL AT THE OC BOOK FAIR IN TUSTIN!

By Lori Polydoros



YES, it was hot. YES, it was the OC Book Fair's first-year event. And YES, most importantly, we had tons of fun and sold our books! This year, four authors and one illustrator participated at SCBWI SoCal's booth at the OC Book Fair on July 13th in Old Town Tustin. With a mix of independent booksellers, publishers and literary vendors, the event included author talks, panel discussions and book signings, plus lots to do for kids of all ages.

Our SoCal members really enjoyed getting to know each other, talking to readers, and spreading our love for books. Middle grade author Marie Chan (Mamie Takes a Stand: The True Story of a Chinese American Girl's Fight for School Rights) was so grateful for the camaraderie of all the SCBWI authors and illustrators and impressed with the "stellar" quality of books coming out of our region, which she purchased and enjoyed reading to her daughter at bedtime.

Lori Polydoros has been writing for children for over twenty years and has published over 80 books, article and short stories. Her latest work is *QUAKE CHASERS: 15 Women Rocking Earthquake Science*, published by Chicago Review Press April 2022.



The OC Book Fair was the perfect place for artists, too. Illustrator Christina Forshay (A Morning with Gong Gong, Sport's Illustrated Goodnight series (Soccer/Baseball/Football/Hockey)) was able to meet new friends and visit with old ones in her SCBWI community and was especially grateful to see kids excited about books as a "good reminder about why I do what I do!"

Katrina Tangen's Team Copy Cat (Copy That, Copy Cat! Inventions Inspired by Animals) enjoyed connecting with local independent bookstores and thought the event was the perfect size. "Not too big or too small, a good mix of ages and very book-focused."

Author Chris Keung (Can We Get a Rhinoceros?) not only enjoyed meeting the enthusiastic people of Tustin but loved the opportunity to chat and discuss writing experiences with other SCBWI SoCal members.

In addition to our booth, other author/illustrator members — Laura Segal Stegman, PJ Gardner Switzer, Ernesto Cisneros [moderated by our own RA, Bev Plass,] Jude Atwood, Tootie Nienow, Joy Hwang Ruiz and Benson Shum — participated in panel discussions, read from their books, or presented drawing activities on stage.

The day was a success and we look forward to continuing our presence at this awesome event!





# MEMBER NEWS

By Desi St. Amant



**THE STAFF OF KNOWLEDGE**  
the 4th book in  
**THE CAT & CAT**  
series by Susie Yi  
released  
July 23rd, 2024



**HAUNTED STATES OF AMERICA ANTHOLOGY**  
published by SCBWI  
includes Erin Lagerberg's short story. Come out July 9th



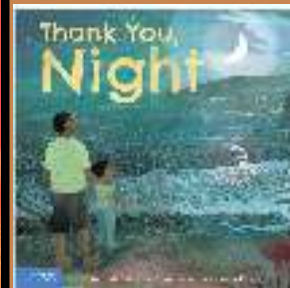
**MISO MAGIC** by  
Moni Ritchie Hadley will be out in September 2024



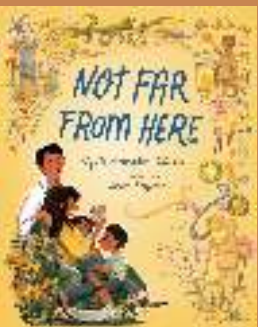
Marie Chan's **MAMIE TAKES A STAND: THE TRUE STORY OF MAMIE TAP, A CHINESE AMERICAN GIRL'S FIGHT FOR SCHOOL RIGHTS** will be out September 3rd, 2024



Kitty Feld's **ESTADO DE LA UNIÓN** the Spanish version of **SATE OF THE UNION**, translated by Jorge Flores will be out August 1st.



Dan McCauley's **THANK YOU NIGHT** will be out October 2024.



**NOT FAR FROM HERE** by Nydia Aremendia-Sanchez debut picture book is due out October 1st, 2024



**VIVA DURANT AND THE MYSTERY AT MASQUERADE BALL** by Ashil St. Amant is now available on Audible

If you are a SoCal member who has good news to share - we'd like to celebrate you by announcing it on social media and our website. You must be a SCBWI SoCal member and "follow" our SoCal region on SCBWI.org. Check out our SCBWI SoCal regional page for more information.

Desi St. Amant is a HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHER and an aspiring MIDDLE GRADE NOVELIST.



# NEWSLETTER STAFF

## **CHAIR: BEV PLASS**

As a writer and speech-language pathologist, she creates materials and stories that get kids talking!  
Email: [socal-ra@scbwi.org](mailto:socal-ra@scbwi.org) Website: [www.beverlyplass.com](http://www.beverlyplass.com) Twitter: @PlassBev

## **ART DIRECTOR: TAMMY DO**

Known for her whimsical, playful, and vibrant art style, Tammy creates characters that are not only imaginative but also brimming with personality. Website: [Tammydoillust.com](http://Tammydoillust.com)

## **PROOFREADER: CHRISTINE HENDERSON**

A two-time Author of the Month for her stories in Highlights magazine, Christine Henderson is currently revising her first middle- grade novel. During the school year, Christine works as an instructional aide for the Corona-Norco school district. Twitter @cm\_henderson.

## **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: CARLENE GRIFFITH**

Carlene Griffith is child at heart and loves all things writing, theater, and playing pretend. Email: [cgriffith7338@gmail.com](mailto:cgriffith7338@gmail.com), Website: [carlenegriffith.com](http://carlenegriffith.com), Twitter: @authorcgriffith

## **MEMBER NEWS COORDINATOR: DESI ST. AMANT**

Desi St. Amant is a high school English teacher and an aspiring middle grade novelist. Website: [www.desiwrites.com](http://www.desiwrites.com) Email: [dstamant07@gmail.com](mailto:dstamant07@gmail.com) Twitter: @desistamant

**WANTED:** Children's Illustrations and articles pertaining to our region or children's book writing in general for upcoming issues. If interested please contact Carlene Griffith @ [socal-ara@scbwi.org](mailto:socal-ara@scbwi.org)

## UP COMING EVENTS

- August 31st: Barnes & Noble book signing event at Victorville Mall.
- September 8th: LA Kids Book Festival in West Hollywood
- September 22nd: OC Children's Book Festival at Orange Coast College
- October 5th Fall Harvest Writers & Illustrator's Day at Cal State Fullerton.
- See SCBWI SoCal for upcoming meet-up dates



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