
The Pen & Press

July – August 2015



NCPA President, Sharon Darrow



As newsletter editor, I thoroughly enjoy spotlighting NCPA members, and Sharon Darrow's remarkable story is why.

Sharon is relatively new to NCPA, having joined in 2012. A natural leader, she didn't use the excuse of "I'm new" to sit in the back row when leaders were needed; and instead took on the membership director position only a few months after joining. She didn't stop there. She was instrumental in this year's Awards Ceremony and, this "newbe" is our new NCPA president!

NCPA isn't her first dive into a professional organization's leadership position. She joined the National Association of Professional Women in 2008 and soon after formed the first local chapter in the nation for the group. Sharon served as local NAPW President for 3.5 years.

Sharon describes herself as an entrepreneur, having worked in family businesses for most of her life. She currently owns Travel ID Cards, which started by marketing the KidsTravelCard, a photo ID for children. She expanded the business to include other unique products, including custom identification cards.

She joined NCPA after publishing her second book, *From Hindsight to Insight—A Traditional to Metaphysical Memoir* in 2012. She shares that her publisher suggested checking out the NCPA group as a way to learn more about her craft and to meet other people in the industry. “She was so right!” Sharon says. “I learned so much, and met many fascinating, talented people in the group.”

When asked why she decided to run for President, she says, “Because it seemed like the organization was drifting a bit, and needed to revitalize itself. I'd love to see NCPA grow in both numbers and enthusiasm. It is a unique group in the Sacramento area, and I'd love to see that recognized and celebrated. The NCPA exists for the members, and I'd like to see speakers and events that provide valuable training and information for them. Most of all, I look forward to feeling an upsurge of energy and excitement that helps us all!”

As much as Sharon loves writing and leadership, family is her first priority. “I've been married 49 years, and have two daughters and four grandchildren. I've lived most of my life in Sacramento, and am still here with my husband, Stan, and our great dane, Ellen, and three cats. We live right next door to my parents' house, where I grew up.

“Much of my inspiration for the KidsTravelCard came from my twin grandsons, who were diagnosed at 20 months with an autism spectrum disorder, but are now fourteen and fully integrated in school, little league, and other activities. Learning how to be supportive for the boys and their parents meant learning about autism, about how special needs children affect a family, and how important the family support system is.”

Sharon is passionate about animal rescue and raised orphan kittens for over twenty years. “I no longer foster kittens, but still work closely with rescue groups. In fact, rescue groups throughout the United States and the United Kingdom utilize my first book, *Bottlekatz, a Complete Care Guide for Orphan Kittens* as a training manual. My third book, *Faces of Rescue; Cats Kittens and Great Danes*” is full of stories and pictures of rescue animals.

“Besides animals,” Sharon says, “I'm passionate about working with people, and flying. I didn't manage to get my pilot's license, but will still go up in anything, anytime, with anyone who invites me! I firmly believe that life just gets better and richer, the longer you live. My personal motto is ‘Find harmony within, then all things are possible.’” Thank you, Sharon for all you have to offer NCPA.

—Linda Bello-Ruiz, Editor

Book Reviews

Linda Bello-Ruiz

We all need book reviews. We need honest reviews. Do you know how to leave a good review? I found author, Karen Ball's *6 Elements of a Good Book Review* of great interest.

I've summarized her comments below:

1. A good review is **balanced**. It takes into account that we all have likes and dislikes, and while this book may not be our cup of tea, it could be someone else's absolute favorite. Share your honest opinion, but realize that's what it is—your opinion. A subjective evaluation of what you've read. No more, no less.
2. A good review is about the **book**, not the author. Focus on the writing, on the treatment of the topic, on the characters, storyline, research, facts, and so on. Don't make judgment calls about the author's faith, intelligence, relationships, parenting skills, parentage, or whatever. A reviewer's job is to share your opinion of the *book*. You don't have the right to go beyond that.
3. A good review is about the author's **craft**, not the book's packaging. Don't base your review on the cover or endorsements or things over which, I guarantee you, most traditionally published writers have absolutely no control. (Now, if the authors are indie, then yes, they control those things...) But remember, what you're reviewing is the writing, not the packaging.
4. A good book review **doesn't** give an extensive summary of the book and then one or two lines about your thoughts. Readers can get the summary from lots of places. What they want to know is what you thought of the writing, the message, the story.
5. A good review **doesn't** give away the ending/secret/mystery/twist! Don't ruin the read for others. Have mercy on not just the readers, but on the author.
6. A good book review is **specific**. Don't just say you loved the book or hated it, tell us why. And tell us what specific aspect of it you loved or hated.

(The post *6 Elements of a Good Book Review* appeared first on The Steve Laube Agency blog.
Author: Karen Ball)

Upcoming NCPA Meetings Mark Your Calendars!

- **SATURDAY, July 11, 2015 ~**
- **SATURDAY, August 8, 2015 ~**
- **SATURDAY, September 12, 2015 ~**

Topics and speakers are still in the works. More information will be provided on the website and via Yahoo group when the details are “dialed in.”

Thanks go to Norma Jean Thornton for her energetic, creative, and effective recruitment of speakers and selection of topics for our meetings.

Norma Jean adds, “If you have any suggestions for guest speakers, and/or topics, please let me know (normathornton@yahoo.com). I’ll do what I can to make it happen.”

NCPA Awards Banquet Sponsors

A late but grateful “Thank you” to the sponsors of the 2015 NCPA Book Awards Banquet held April 26. Your generosity helped make the evening a huge success:

- ✦ Cheryl Anne Stapp, Author/Historian - *The Stagecoach in Northern California, Sacramento Chronicles: A Golden Past & Disaster & Triumph: Sacramento Women*. www.cherylannestapp.com
- ✦ Frances Fuller, Author of *In Borrowed Houses*, a true story of love and faith amidst war in Lebanon. www.inborrowedhouseslebanon.com
- ✦ California Writers Club (CWC Sacramento Branch) ~ Enjoy our Luncheon, Writers Network and Open Mic events! CWCSacramentoWriters.org
- ✦ Margie Yee Webb ~ *Cat Mulan’s Mindful Musings ...* and *Not Your Mother’s Book ... on Cats!* <https://catmulan.wordpress.com/>
- ✦ Teresa LeYung-Ryan ~ Coach Teresa LeYung-Ryan teaches authors and publishers how to attract fans before and after publication. Find out more at: www.WritingCoachTeresa.com
- ✦ Wilson Trophy Company ~ Awards, Trophies, Plaques and much more. (916) 927-9733. www.wilsontrophy.com, 1724 Fianza Av, Sacramento CA 95815
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News from the NCPA Board

Treasurer: Long-term NCPA treasurer, Laura Hoirup announced her resignation from the treasurer position after several years of service to the group.

Vice-President: Amy Rogers resigned her new VP position and the Board unanimously voted her into the Treasurer position vacated by Laurie. (We need a new Vice President. Are YOU interested?)

Communications Director: Norma Thornton has been our Program and Public Relations director for several years. Those positions, along with Awards Ceremony Director are now under “Communications Director, with Norma as the Director.

NCPA Conference: Norma Thornton and her fact-finding committee (Sharon Darrow, Amy Rogers and Kim Edwards) are looking into the possibilities of a NCPA 2016 Conference.

Webmaster: Our Webmaster, Ted Witt, reminded us that NCPA has a FACEBOOK page. Please “Like it” and follow...<https://www.facebook.com/NORCALPA>

❖ The Board is looking to fill the V.P. and Membership positions.

IBPA Training

Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA)’s “Publishing University” report

By Amy Rogers, Treasurer NCPA

One of the benefits of NCPA membership is the opportunity to apply for a scholarship to attend IBPA’s PubU conference, held each April. Any member of NCPA may apply online to IBPA for a waiver of the registration fee for the conference. Free registration is awarded by IBPA to one member of each regional affiliate (including ours).

I received this year’s scholarship and traveled to Austin, TX for the event where I attended a day and a half of seminars, lectures, and workshops on the publishing business. One of the most practical sessions was titled “How to sell books by the truckload on Amazon,” by Penny Sansevieri of Author Marketing Experts.

Sansevieri discussed “Search engine optimization.” SEO is something you may have heard about in regards to getting your website or blog noticed by Google, but it’s critical to consider that Amazon is *also* a search engine. When a potential customer types a search term into Amazon, you want YOUR book to pop up.

How can you do this? Keywords are, well, key.

Keywords are single words, or more often, strings of words or simple phrases, that link your book to things that people type into search engines (whether Google or Amazon).

Your keywords should obviously relate to your book, but should also be strings that people actually use.

Good keywords are: 1) used by lots of real shoppers and 2) a good match to your book. To find good keywords, start typing in the Amazon search box. Look at what keywords Amazon suggests. Use them. Also, visit ubersuggest.org. This website lists the most common terms people have searched on Google for the past 24 hours. Prompt it with a starting word or letters and look at what comes up. Hint: type in a single word followed by “and”. For example, type “romance and” and you’ll discover the most widely searched subcategories of romance. “And” is a very powerful keyword to include. Use it often. Once you’ve found commonly used keywords, go to Amazon and type them in. Look at the book titles that match. You want keywords / searches that produce *under* 1,000 titles, *and* the top titles in the list have a sales rank of 10,000 or better. This indicates that not only are people searching that term, but they are also buying things related to it.

What to do with your fantastic keywords? Use them to help you choose your book’s title (if nonfiction). Include them in your subtitle and in your book description. Within the book description, keywords are most powerful if they appear in the headline, first paragraph, and last paragraph. Finally, be sure to type your optimized keywords into your Amazon listing. Within your KDP account, find the place where it lets you add “search keywords,” usually up to 7. It says this is “optional” but it’s actually essential!

Too many keyword choices? Then rotate your keywords occasionally. Swap out the old ones for new ones and see if it affects your sales.

Sansevieri was an excellent speaker who works as an author marketing agent. Learn more about her at her website <http://www.amarketingexpert.com/>.

Members Beware!

I recently asked the NCPA membership about the credibility of a book-awards group that sent me an invitation to submit my book for their “contest.”

Immediately, one of our members replied with a warning. Based on her experience, this company, J&B Media, is “scam-ridden” and in the simple business of collecting money from unsuspecting wannabe-famous self-publishers. They have been around a while, she said, but apparently have recently changed their come-on and the name of their “award.”

She strongly believes that all they do for a living is collect money from the innocents. In fact, she shares the following real-life experience: "Several of us from the Sacramento area entered their event when held in Hollywood. These are the "benefits" we received from paying \$50 to enter:

All entrants were supposed to be able to sell books all Saturday at a well-known Los Angeles park, prior to the "awards ceremony."

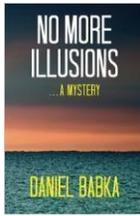
All entrants who showed up at the evening "awards dinner" at an old-time Hollywood gathering place for movie stars were supposed to be able to schmooz with Hollywood directors.

What really happened?

- 1) All entrants (except for 2-3 of J&B's friends who no doubt paid nothing) got "honorable mention" with no stickers -- just the pleasure of having the organizers read out the entire list of those who entered, calling them "honorable mentions."
- 2) The J&B people had no permit for bookselling at the park, and shrugged off my query about it.
- 3) Not one Hollywood film director attended the awards.
- 4) The finger food at the event was skimpy and cheap, hardly a "dinner".
- 5) Three friends/relatives of J&B won awards -- we could see they were buddies as we watched their booth before and after the "awards ceremony." Their awards seemed to be nothing other than being allowed to read ad nauseam from their books at the ceremony-- awful stuff. Difficult to sit through it.
- 6) After that boring 1 1/2 hour of "reading," a list of honorable mentions was read aloud. That list squared precisely with the list of people who entered the "contest" -- everyone we queried at the event was on it, including everyone from the Sac group. Some of us checked it out. Needless to say, none of us honorees received any PR."

Member Ken Umbach shared the following blog post which validates the above negative experience: *Awards Profiteers: How Writers Can Recognize and Avoid Them*; Posted by **Victoria Strauss** for **Writer Beware**
<http://www.victoriastrauss.com/2015/06/09/awards-profiteers-how-writers-canrecognize-and-avoid-them/>

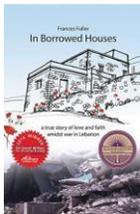
News from Members



Daniel Babka announces his contemporary California noir mystery, *No More Illusions*, continues to pull in strong reviews. The Midwest Book Review's Small Press Bookwatch (April 2015) calls it, "A compelling and deftly crafted novel of mystery and suspense from first page to last . . . an impressive mastery of the genre."

Ernest Troost, Los Angeles award-winning composer of scores for films & television, with four solo Americana CD's to his credit, says, "It's a multi-faceted gem of a book, with a story that twists like the Pacific Coast Highway along Monterey's famous dramatic coast line. This book is a wild ride...."

Daniel shares, "This review is from a great storyteller and lyricist whose work has been compared to the best of Randy Newman & Paul Simon. Check out Ernest's Resurrection Blues CD."



Frances Fuller, our 1st place winner of non-fiction memoir this year, *In Borrowed Houses*, also took top honors in the '50 Great Writers You Should Be Reading' book awards. Winners will appear in this year's edition of the awards book.

According to the CNN I-report, "In the tradition of books like 'Out Of Africa' and 'City Of Joy,' Frances Fuller's memoir offers readers a glimpse into day-to-day life that is completely unlike the experience of most Americans. 'In Borrowed Houses' details her years in Lebanon during the Lebanese Civil War.

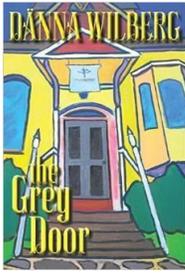
"I am honored," Fuller states in the article, "to be chosen for these awards from among so many good authors with valuable books. And I am happy that right now, when horrors out of the Middle East dominate the headlines, I can offer readers a more human and hopeful view by sharing stories about ordinary people in Lebanon, that microcosm of the Middle East so critical to the world."

SEX TRAFFICKING ... in your own backyard



LEARN ABOUT THIS EPIDEMIC
Thursday, July 9th
Rocklin Golf Club, 2nd Floor
4222 Middle Avenue
7:00 – 9:30 p.m.
Admission: Free
Meet Linda Bello-Ruiz, author of the award-winning memoir, *From Tears to Triumph, My Journey to The House of Hope*. She shares her first-hand experience in the fight against the underground sex trade.
• The world's largest illegal trade involves sex, drugs, weapons and sex trafficking. Experts believe sex-trafficking will soon outpace the sale of drugs and weapons.
• 100,000 to 300,000 women are trafficked right here in the United States, with the average age being just 13.
• In 2013, three out of five sex-trafficked victims saved by the FBI in a nationwide raid were from foster care or group homes. Many had never been reported missing.
Awareness is a weapon — help stop this crime against children and only together to take a stand.

Linda Bello-Ruiz, anti-trafficking advocate and author of the award-winning memoir, *From Tears to Triumph, My Journey to The House of Hope* invites you to attend her FREE presentation on the horrors of sex-trafficking — to be held at the Rocklin Golf Club, on July 9, 2015, 7:00 pm.



Author Dänna Wilberg launched her second book in the Grace Simms trilogy, *The Grey Door*, at Avid Reader in Sacramento on June 20. She was featured, along with Author William J. Blaylock and Artist Jim Marxen, at Weibel Winery in Lodi on June 28, at "Two Authors and an Artist" event from 1-3pm. Danna and Bill will be addressing PTSD, and donating a portion of the proceeds to our local Vets.

Other Notices

- ✓ Know someone who is looking for quality assisted living? Be sure to ask for a tour of our monthly meeting host, Brookdale.
- ✓ Searching for a special used book, or looking for bargains on reading material? Check out 2010 NCPA Conference sponsor Time-Tested Books, 1114 21st Street, Sacramento, CA 95811. See <http://timetestedbooks.net/> for more information.
- ✓ Your notice or announcement could go here!

HAPPY 4TH OF JULY!



A Note from the Editor

Send your articles and announcements for the newsletter to Linda Bello-Ruiz at lbello Ruiz@gmail.com.



Use “NCPA NEWSLETTER” as the email subject heading!



Please provide submissions in Microsoft Word (or compatible) format or in plain text (preferably not in pdf and definitely not in jpeg or other image format for text). If you would like to discuss an article idea or have any other questions or comments about the newsletter, feel free to email or phone.

What fits best into *The Pen & Press* is news of members’ books, activities, marketing, speaking engagements, and accomplishments. Also of value: members’ insights into the challenges and opportunities of writing and publishing and information on regional resources for authors and publishers. Cover illustrations and other photos are welcome in jpeg or other standard format. Please keep file sizes and illustration dimensions reasonable. When in doubt, call or email me in advance.

The deadline for submissions for the next issue is close of business, **Tuesday, August 25, 2015**. Please submit material, especially anything longer than a brief notice, well before the deadline. If you do not want your article or announcement to be lost in hundreds of accumulated email messages, use **NCPA NEWSLETTER** — exactly and only that — as your email subject heading. Send to Linda Bello-Ruiz.

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Readers are of course free to print copies for noncommercial personal use, and NCPA members are welcome to print copies of the newsletter to share with friends, colleagues, and prospective members.

—Linda Bello-Ruiz, editor

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Meetings are on the second Saturday of each month, 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., at Brookdale, 7418 Stock Ranch Road (just west of Sylvan Road about a quarter mile north of Greenback Lane), Citrus Heights. Visitors are welcome.

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