

Words of Fire

PEN & PIER SECOND ANNUAL RETREAT SEPT. 13-15, 2024

Pen & Pier's annual retreat took place in mid-September at different locations in SLO County. Here's a look at the long weekend.

Lunge! Riposte!

The retreat started Friday with a fencing lesson, as Brittany asked local fencing instructor James to show us some basic techniques. Sometimes writing involves stepping away from the keyboard or pen, and trying something new.

Top right: Nick and Michelle spar.

Below: James and Michelle don safety gear.

Bottom left: Nick practices lunges.

Bottom right: Ute scores a point.



Write Time

From 9am–3pm on Saturday we took over one side of [Café Andreini](#) in Arroyo Grande for writing and discussion. Eleven people sat around the table, and eventually the adjacent couches, to type and talk.



Who's who? In the group photo:
Kevin, Laurel, Ute, Katie, Joe,
Barbara, Quinn, Michael, Nick,
and Michelle

Above: Michelle, Quinn, Barbara,
Kevin, Ute, Tyler



Talking Pubs & Subs

Four of our members talked about their experiences promoting their writing and getting published. We heard from Ute, Barbara, Michelle, and Kevin about finding publishers, self-publishing, meeting submission criteria, and tracking where they've sent stories.



Short story submissions

Sub Call	Story title	Deadline	submitted	supposed to hear back?	accept/reject
Dark Horror	Till Death		5/16/24	9/15/24 made to 2nd round (7/1)	Accepted! (8/9/24)
Observation	#Dance-libsongs Social-Media Stream		5/24/24		rejected (6/3/24)
Genre anthologies	Open Forum		6/24/24	5/30/24	not 6/15/24
Too Bad, You Died	Open Forum		6/24/24	5/30/24	rejected 3/4/24
Horror Fiction					
Paranormal Horror	The Impression that I Get		8/2/24	end-of-Oct	not 9/13/24
Alien/Ludha Horror	The Donovan Road Spirit		8/29/24	end of Oct	
Haunted House					
Butterfly effect		9/30/2024			
Deadlands	A Mortal Interaction			9/30/2024	
Santa Murder		11:59PST, September 30th, 2024			
Ullaste		Nov. 1st (Ongoing)			
Second and Secondary		Sept-10th			
Inanimate Objects		Dec 1st			
Adoles	Love, Not War	sept. 22nd			
Margaret's Day		sept. 22nd			



Top left: Michelle shows everyone the submission-tracking spreadsheet that she created.

Top right: Barbara shows her self-published book

Bottom left: Screenshot of Michelle's submission spreadsheet.

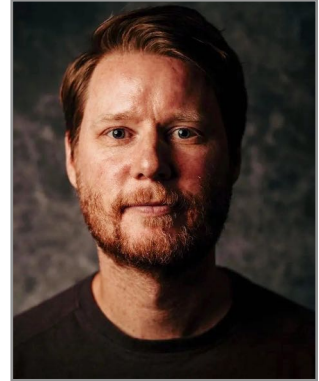
Bottom right: Kevin and Ute talk about submission guidelines.

The Speakers

Kevin Carver

Kevin Carver is a writer, musician, and digital marketer from San Luis Obispo, California. He founded the indie-rock band The Function, published articles as a freelance journalist, and penned and produced award-winning one-act plays.

A graduate of the creative writing program at the University of Rochester, NY, he later earned his masters at Gonzaga University in Washington state. In 2022, he self-published *The Musician's Guide to Digital Marketing*. In addition to his upcoming novel, Kevin's work has appeared in multiple publications, including NY Post, The Inlander, CITY, 585 Magazine, Reflections Literary Journal, FlowerSong Press, Trestle Creek, and more. [Find him online.](#)



Michelle Dornish

Michelle Dornish is a special education teacher and fantasy & short fiction writer, previously published in The Best of SLO NightWriters (2009-2013) and Twisted Laughs Anthology (2024). Michelle lives in San Luis Obispo, California with her husband and son. [Find her online.](#)

Barbara Swihart Miller

Barbara is a wife and mother of two adorable children, a boy and a girl who love to keep her on her toes. A devout follower of Christ, her first published work was a Christian devotional dedicated to helping the parents of young children titled How To Love Your Preschooler. She recently published her first fictional work, a gold rush adventure inspired by a true story called *The Call of Gold*.

In her free time, she loves to explore new places with her children and go on long hikes and bike rides. Along with being a cub scout leader for the last two years, she also volunteers her time at church teaching preschool Sunday School. [Find her online.](#)



Ute Orgassa

Ute Orgassa was born and raised in Germany. She now lives with her family in the Bay Area. Her short stories have been published by Shortwave Media, Haunted Word Press, Alternative Milk, and Punk Noir. Her play A Different Track premiered at the 2023 Fringe in Barnstaple, UK and is currently produced by Awkward Pigeons Theater. [Find her online.](#)

Word Burn

Saturday night we ate dinner at Fin’s Bar & Grill, then carried on to the beach for a bonfire and Word Burn. Katie provided matches, firewood, and strips of paper with “negative affirmations.” Everyone found one they identified with (such as “no one wants to read my writing,” “I will never finish my story”), read them silently or aloud, and fed them to the fire—symbolically cleansing the bad vibes from our minds.

We also had a writing session with the intent of burning what we wrote. This exercise freed us from consequences, expectations, and judgement, knowing the words wouldn’t last through the night.



Dallidet Gardens

Sunday morning was perfect conclusion to a fun and inspiring weekend. The [Dallidet Adobe and Gardens](#) in SLO was a beautiful setting to relax, unwind and appreciate the joy of new friendships.

Brittany made a strawberry tart and hand-crocheted “sushi roll” pets to celebrate our second annual event. Here’s looking forward to our third in 2025!

