

# HAWAII WRITERS GUILD

## MINUTES - Special Board of Directors Meeting Regarding Community Outreach

MARCH 9, 2023

Minutes of the Hawaii Writers Guild (HWG) Special Board Meeting Regarding Community Outreach, held *via* Zoom due to pandemic protocols. All times noted refer to Hawaii-Aleutian Standard Time. Please note that organizations referred to or discussed are in **bold**.

Officers and Directors present via Zoom:

Diane Revell —*President*

Donna Beumler —*Secretary*

Joy Fisher —*Public Relations Director*

Others Members present via Zoom:

Duncan Dempster (Webmaster)

Gwen Gorg

Cecilia Johansen (telephone connection)

Sara-Lynne Simpson

Margaret Zacharias

Special Guest present via Zoom:

Mahealani Wendt

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Prior to the beginning of the meeting, Webmaster Duncan Dempster queried all present as to objections to activating the Zoom “record” function; hearing none, the meeting was recorded *via* Zoom. Duncan also advised attendees how to access the Zoom function known as the “chatroom” during the meeting.

**1. CALL TO ORDER:** President Diane Revell called the meeting to order at **1:05 pm**.

**2. REVIEW OF THE PURPOSE FOR THE MEETING:** Prior to the meeting, Diane had circulated an agenda which stated that the purpose of the meeting was as follows: *How best to serve our communities to fulfill the other parts of our Hawaii Writers Guild works as required by our non-profit status*. More specifically, the Guild’s Articles of Incorporation, (see §3.1(2)),

emphasize that the Guild was incorporated to, among other things, promote literary and educational purposes.

Diane advised that the focus of this meeting would be to explore the possible development of an HWG-sponsored student writing contest in order “to support our children in the love of writing.” She acknowledged Cece for her diligence in reaching out to esteemed Maui-based author and poet Mahealani Wendt in this regard, and thanked Mahealani and all present for participating. She also expressed her appreciation to Mahealani for e-mailing in advance of the meeting information pertaining to a children’s poetry contest.

**3. INTRODUCTIONS - Background and pertinent experience:** Attendees remarked briefly upon their relevant backgrounds as follows.

DIANE REVELL: She is currently the president of HWG. Formerly a software engineer and manager in the aerospace industry, Diane has limited background and experience with school-aged children. She is open to ideas as to how to engage kids and their teachers in a writing contest.

GWYN GORG: She is a published poet. She has worked with all ages of young people, and was co-founder of a children’s theatre group in Hilo in the 1970s. When she was living on Maui, she was involved with the Maui-based **International Peace Poem Project**. Gwyn also worked with youth when she lived in California.

SARA-LYNNE SIMPSON: She has a background in education, and teaches children of all ages. She has significant professional development experience involving teachers, and has designed collaborative models for programs which serve teachers and children. Sara-Lynne is “Zooming in” today from Oregon.

MARGARET ZACHARIAS: She has a background with the **Iowa Arts Council** as a visiting artist, and in this capacity has worked in the Des Moines public schools with children from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Margaret has worked with students from kindergarten through high school, and college level as well. In the past, Margaret has chaired the **Des Moines Women’s Club** Scholarship program, which has awarded thousands of dollars to student artists to support their education. She currently serves as a judge for a student writing contest sponsored by a Phoenix, Arizona high school.

MAHEALANI WENDT: She has a strong background in administration due to her lengthy affiliation with a §501(c)(3) non-profit public interest law firm. She is a life-long writer, and has participated in school related, writing-based events in the past. More recently, she has taught poetry, intermittently, at Hana School (intermediate and high school students). Mahealani notes that her “real strength” is organizing the community around legal issues. She is active with the Maui Writers Group, which was founded by Melinda Gohn. Mahealani then discussed briefly

Melinda’s involvement with the Maui-based **International Peace Poem Project**, and the need for volunteers to support that project. She also referenced her experience with the **Hanalei Writers Group** and its three-day writing retreats/workshops.

CECILIA JOHANSEN: She has been promoting the development of a HWG student writing contest since 2017. She is appreciative to Mahealani and all participants for meeting today to explore ways to move this project forward.

DONNA BEUMLER: Donna is the secretary of HWG, and lives in North Kohala. She has published poems as well as a novel. She is a retired superior court judge; in the latter part of her career, she served as the presiding juvenile court judge for a rural community in southeastern Arizona which bordered the Republic of Mexico. In this capacity, Donna made it a mission for herself and her team to work toward improving the outcomes for children and families. She’s very interested in helping the Guild find ways to reach out to children, so that they may find their voices through the written word.

JOY FISHER: Joy has very little experience with children. She is present to support Cece and the Guild in its efforts to explore ways to reach out to children.

DUNCAN DEMPSTER: He, as the Guild’s webmaster, is facilitating Zoom for purposes of this meeting. He is pleased to see that HWG is moving forward toward mapping a future plan for outreach to children in the community.

#### **4. DISCUSSION RE: GOALS AND APPROACHES**

Diane Revell started off the discussion by suggesting that we identify, first, goals (i.e., “what we’d like to accomplish”) and, secondly, how we’d like to meet these goals. She made reference to a recent HWG Board meeting at which the consensus seemed to be that the Guild should focus on developing a “pilot” project. One way to learn how to do this might be to support Melinda Gohn and the peace poem project. Another way would be to start with one or two schools on the Big Island, perhaps initially making contact with the **Hawaii Department of Education** and, ultimately, with local teachers or other appropriate individuals. Diane remarked that the Guild has also discussed narrowing the topic of any student-based writing project, as well as limiting the project or contest to high school students, with the goal of “encouraging them in the joy of writing,” and possibly awarding them student memberships in HWG.

Gwyn Gorg remarked that, generally speaking, she would like to see HWG offer its support here on the Big Island to the **Peace Poem Project**. She noted that on April 29th, children (ages K through 12) who have been selected to read their writings will be giving a presentation and readings at the University of Hawaii at Hilo. Gwyn encouraged HWG to endeavor to have a presence at the presentation.

Gwyn then addressed the Guild’s proposal to develop some kind of student writing contest, and indicated her *opposition* to proceeding in this fashion. She remarked that it was her experience as a teacher that the kids who like to write and do so well will often succeed at this type of competition, but that this contest will not reach the kids who doubt their abilities, or who do not enjoy writing— unfortunately eliminating a broad demographic of children to whom the Guild may truly want to reach out. She suggested that the Guild consider instead creating a program wherein HWG members go into the classrooms and talk to the kids about writing. Gwyn emphasized that in this way, speakers would be competing with technology (cell phones, computers) which would be in and of itself a challenge. She proposed that HWG members present some kind of fun and exciting workshops which would engage the kids and direct their attention toward writing as an alternative to communicating *via* technology.

Margaret Zacharias then mentioned that her rough proposal for a Guild student writing contest was drafted with high school seniors in mind. She spoke generally about engaging students in writing, based upon her experiences as a teacher. Margaret fully supports the Guild having a presence at the April 29 youth poetry reading event in Hilo, and believes this is one of the most important things that can be done in order to validate young writers and to encourage them to write.

Sara-Lynne Simpson inquired as to what the HWG’s proposal has been to date, and is under the impression that a contest for high school seniors could include as an award the winner being sponsored by HWG to attend the **Kauai Writers Conference**. Although Diane indicated that she had not heard that being discussed, Margaret advised that she did review this possibility with Sara-Lynne. Margaret feels that this type of award would not be part of an initial pilot program, but might be considered a goal to be attained in the future.

Sara-Lynne then explored possible models, including the “writer-in-residence” model proposed by Gwyn which would be designed to capture the attention of a broad range of students. She also shares the concern that a “competition” model might be too limiting, and that a program which is not confined to “already successful students” should be considered. In terms of logistics, Sara-Lynne discussed the preliminary need to engage teachers and encourage them to involve themselves in whatever writing project the Guild ultimately comes up with. She mentioned that the **Hawaii Writers Project** (College of Education, University of Hawaii) will be sponsoring an “invitational institute” for teachers at U of H- Manoa this year, and that she would be willing to bring the HWG student writing project to their attention, once a model has been decided upon. Similarly, the **National Council of Teachers of English** may be a resource in this regard. Sara-Lynne also has connections with educational administrators on Hawaii Island. She acknowledged that it will likely be important to first approach the **Hawaii Department of Education** with whatever project the Guild decides to advance, but that success of the project will lie with engaging individual teachers. She then mentioned that it will be important to consider drafting a timeline for moving forward, and offered her assistance in this regard.

Diane at this point emphasized that she considers this meeting to be a “brainstorming session,” and that she is quite pleased to see options presented and concerns raised. She added that the Guild has not had many expenditures in the recent past due to the pandemic restrictions, and that therefore the HWG budget might be a resource to be relied upon in, for example, awarding prizes. Diane then commented that early discussions surrounding some kind of student writing project did include reference to the Guild’s on-line literary journal *Latitudes*. More specifically, the proposal had been made that one type of award or prize could be membership in HWG, which would then allow the students to enter their writing for consideration for publication in *Latitudes*.

Joy Fisher spoke to the proposal that HWG members offer presentations to students in the classroom. On this topic, Joy advised that she has met Sherman Warner, who is associated with the **Hawaii State Foundation on Culture and the Arts (SFCA)**. Joy suggested that HWG would do well to contact this organization, as the foundation does involve itself with sending artists into the schools, and may offer appropriate guidance. The contact e-mail address is: [sfca.hawaii.gov](mailto:sfca.hawaii.gov).

Mahealani Wendt spoke to the suggestion of making contact with the **Hawaii State Foundation on Culture and the Arts**, remarking that this organization is a source of scholarships and stipends which afford artists the economic opportunity to spend time in the classrooms giving presentations. She emphasized that a preliminary step to engaging with this organization would be to identify volunteers willing and able to write grants for submission to **SFCA**.

Mahealani next addressed the concern, previously raised, that a student writing project modeled as a *competition* or *contest* might necessarily exclude a demographic of children which the Guild may most want to reach. Her own childhood was one of being marginalized and economically challenged, and she sees great value in reaching out to children who may not be among the most academically or socially successful. At the same time, Mahealani talked about having won an award for writing in a state-wide essay contest while she was in high school, and how empowering that experience was for her. She proposed that the Guild search for a way to “balance” both interests: rewarding success while including children who do not always thrive in competitive educational settings. She did reference the **Peace Poem Project**, but thought that HWG might wish to plan a project of its own, emphasizing how special the Big Island is among all the Hawaiian Islands. A possible theme for a Guild student writing project could well be *‘aina*, given the uniqueness of our island home.

Gwyn returned to the topic of the **Hawaii State Foundation on Culture and the Arts**, mentioning that she had received a grant from **SFCA** in the 1970s. She worked as a performer, and went into high schools to bring kids together in a successful program of theatrical outreach. As to the on-going dialogue concerning what model to use in developing a Guild student writing project, she noted that many kids may feel left out of a competition-type of activity because of individual, family, economic or other challenges. Gwyn noted that, in California, she worked

with school children as a theatre arts specialist, in order to communicate effectively with children facing such challenges and to “make them feel good about themselves” through writing. She encouraged HWG to consider developing a program which would reach a “broad spectrum” of youth. Gwyn opined that we as writers have a responsibility to do all the good we can, for as many kids as we can.

Diane agreed that the Guild is not necessarily interested in developing a program which would strictly focus on traditional grammar rules, but rather would prefer to create a program to inspire communication through writing in new and perhaps novel ways. She suggested that Guild members may want to focus on one or two “models” and to form “teams” to go into the classrooms (with of course prior coordination with teachers) in order to encourage the kids to write; she noted that the model(s) ultimately agreed upon may or may not have a “competition” component, and that one goal may be to encourage children to believe they can do that which they might think they cannot do.

Sara-Lynne mentioned that she likes the “artist-in-residence” model, which would serve all the students. She also agrees that a writing project which has as its focus the *‘aina* would be very grounding for all children, and potentially allow creativity using the five senses. On the topic of whether the project should include a “competition model,” Sara-Lynne suggested that the group consider a *teacher’s* contest. As to the children, Sara-Lynne finds favor with the idea of the kids submitting their work for publication in *Latitudes*. She notes that, although being college-bound is by no means the optimal goal for all students, having been published can be an important element to include on student résumés and college applications. *At this point, Sara-Lynne excused herself from the meeting to attend to other matters.*

Joy advised that Mahealani sent a link to a video about her interactions with school kids, and she will endeavor to locate the e-mail and send it out.

Mahealani clarified that, at the time, she was regularly participating in writing conferences in high schools, and the writers were asked to sit for video-taped interviews. The videos were then distributed to the schools. She also recalled that, when approached about teaching poetry at Hana School, she was faced with the question as to how to make kids “care about” poetry. She ended up preparing a curriculum which included music (Reggae, Hip Hop, etc.) using this music as a lesson in literary devices (e.g. resonance, repetition, alliteration). She found this approach to be enormously successful in terms of engaging the students. Just like with Gwyn, who approached the classroom from a theatrical perspective, Mahealani advised that there are indeed different ways to connect with students. [Diane spoke with Mahealani for a moment about HWG’s efforts to set up a public reading on Maui for a Canadian writer who had reached out to the Guild about a reading of her work re: indigenous topics.]

Margaret noted her agreement with the suggestions made by Gwyn and Sara-Lynne that the *ideal* approach would be one-on-one, with writers going into the schools in an effort to engage students. Margaret acknowledged however that the reality is that the Guild has a difficult

time finding members who are willing to devote their time and energy to volunteer activities which would further the Guild's projects and activities. She believes that high school seniors can handle a competition-based model of a student writing project.

Joy referenced the April 29 children's "peace poem" event in Hilo, noting that HWG has no intention of *competing* with this long-established project, but may wish to assist. She inquired as to whether Gwyn would contact Melinda Gohn and ask how the Guild might help. Gwyn provided Melinda's phone number, and Mahealani will share Melinda's e-mail address as well. Gwyn noted that it might be a good idea for HWG members who do attend the poetry reading to identify themselves by wearing HWG T-shirts, and/or even offer a T-shirt as a prize. Joy indicated that she has extra T-shirts and can order more.

Diane suggested a follow-up meeting might be needed to address next steps, as the issues covered in this meeting were extensive.

Donna Beumler offered her appreciation to participants for the dialogue and exchange of ideas. She noted that, in particular, she appreciated Gwyn's comments that a competition-based model might end up just rewarding those kids who typically already receive accolades, which is very likely not what HWG has in mind in terms of outreach to students. At the same time, Donna recalled that many years ago, she won a student writing contest, and that achievement was tremendously important to her.

Donna queried about the possibility of developing a "hybrid" model, which does endeavor to reach out to students who "maybe never thought they could write," while at the same time offering some type of awards or prizes. On this note, Donna mentioned that she was published while in high school, and that type of recognition can have positive life-long ramifications. Accordingly, she would like the group to continue to consider the idea of being published in *Latitudes* as a possible outcome of any student writing project model, though she did reiterate that HWG rules currently require authors who submit to *Latitudes* to be HWG members (and therefore an award of membership would be a prerequisite). Indeed, Mahealani referred to the recognition she received as a student writer to be "pivotal." Finally, Donna suggested that an on-line survey of student writing projects and/or reaching out to U.S. Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman as a resource might be helpful.

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The next **Board of Directors meeting** is scheduled for March 23, 2023 at 6:30 pm. Bruce advised that he is traveling during that time frame and is very unlikely to be available, although he will be participating in the April meeting.

Due to the on-going pandemic, all meetings for the foreseeable future will be **held via Zoom ONLY and will be hosted by Duncan.**

The **meeting adjourned at 2:36 pm.**

Respectfully submitted this 18th day of March, 2023

By: *\_\_Donna Beumler\_\_*

Donna Beumler

Secretary

Hawaii Writers Guild