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A Writer's Place: Lafayette Library and Learning Center Hosts Group of Budding Writers

By Moya Stone

A Sunday visitor to the Lafayette Library and Learning Center might spot in the Teen Center a group of animated men and women sitting in a circle, laughing and clearly having a good time. Who are these jovial folks? They are local writers, part of a new group called A Writer's Place.

A Writer's Place is just that - a space and opportunity for budding scribes to regularly meet and discuss the craft of writing. Started late last year by Lafayette resident and author Gloria Lenhart, the group supports one another by discussing their own crafting challenges. Moderated by Lenhart, the writers also share writing strategies, publishing tips and research resources. Additionally, participants have the option to exchange manuscripts and critique each other's work.

Called Writers Open House, the meetings happen once a month on Sunday afternoon. Among the writers gathered recently is Lafayette resident Dudley Braun, who is working on a non-fiction piece and looking for tips on how to write a book proposal. Shelley Koon from Martinez writes young adult fiction and shares information on e-publishing and the importance of social networking for writers. Lenhart begins with a particular topic, such as how to get started writing, but the discussions take on a life of their own as any good conversation does.

Moraga resident Danielle Vanaman is working on a collection of personal essays and excited to be attending for the first time the upcoming San Francisco Writers Conference. Those in the group who have attended the popular event guide her on what to expect and how to prepare. Lenhart mentions that what's great about this conference is the opportunity to pitch story ideas to editors and agents. Business cards are now number one on Vanaman's must-have list.

Lenhart was one of the women behind the Lafayette Library Sweet Thursdays Author Reading Series. Having seen the success of that program, she was inspired to offer something useful to local writers. "I know there are a lot of writers out there waiting to start that book or short story," she says. "I'd like to be a resource for these people." Lenhart is familiar with the distractions writers face. Life got busy in 2006 after the publication of her memoir, *Planet Widow: A Mother's Story of Navigating a Suddenly Unrecognizable World*. "I fell off my own writing," she admits. Wanting to start writing a historical novel, she recognized the need for a supportive community and approached Friends of the Lafayette Library with her idea of A Writer's Place. The response was immediate and enthusiastic. The Friends provide administrative support and promotion and the Lafayette Library and Learning Center provides the space.

In addition to the monthly meetings, A Writer's Place offers reasonably priced workshops led by published authors. Scheduled for March 6th is a workshop designed to jumpstart would-be writers, *Write that Book Already*, led by authors Kathi Kamen Goldmark and Sam Barry. Lenhart also organizes visits from local authors to talk about their writing and publishing process. Visitors last fall included San Francisco Chronicle columnists Jon Carroll and Adair Lara.

Writers Open House is free and open to all writers. Each meeting attracts eight to fifteen writers coming from Oakland, Lafayette, Moraga, Walnut Creek, Pleasant Hill, Martinez, and even Brentwood. Lenhart says she's pleased with the interest and support. "We are feeling our way and seeing how it goes."

For more information visit A Writer's Place Website: <http://www.awritersplace.com/>

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