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writing sample: CWC . . . Commodity or Community? [Conquer the Kraken]

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From: CWC Berkeley <berkeley.cwc@gmail.com>
Date: Wednesday, February 10, 2021 at 2:39:36 PM UTC-8
Subject: CWC . . . Commodity or Community? ["Conquer the Kraken" CWC-BB President's Message]
To: Write Angles Editor <writeangles@gmail.com>, Google Group <cwc-berkeley@googlegroups.com>

Dearest writer,

I recently read the classic book *Mutual Aid*, and thus the concept has been on my mind. If you're not familiar, it was a response to Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, in which the author points out that species don't only survive through competition. Survival of the fittest often means those animals that are willing to come to the aid of their weaker companions are more likely to survive. The book details numerous examples from ants to apes to humanity, of how they are fittest who look out for one another. Or, to lean into our ongoing nautical metaphors, a rising tide lifts all boats.

Last month, *Slingshot* newspaper published an article I wrote about mutual aid (it's nationwide but you can find it in print locally, often at coffee shops). My article was about how we get people involved in whatever movements we care about. Over many years and many campaigns, I have seen how organizations rely on guilt or obligation to get people involved. This is a mistake. Nagging volunteers may get them to commit once or twice, but ultimately they will turn their attention to things they really care about. And organizations people care about are those they feel most connected to. Those that have helped them in some way, the third place, where "everybody knows your name." In short, communities.

These feelings of tribal kinship are more than altruistic, they are adaptations for survival. They are human nature. It is only through fostering true community that we can keep people engaged...and that comes from mutual aid.

Which leads me to a question: do you think of the CWC as a commodity, or a community?

It's easy to think of CWC as a commodity. We pay a fee to become members, and where a fee is involved it's easy to think of membership as an object you purchased. One might think that you pay your fee and in return you are granted access to discounts, publication on our website, listings in our calendar, access to our groups, etc. Viewed this way, it is easy to be disappointed. After all, we are volunteers here, creating this space in the gaps between the obligations that pay our rents. If the club is

just another expense, honestly we're happy to take your money...but if everyone viewed it this way, there would be no club at all. Because there would be no volunteers.

From the very beginning, CWC was a community set out to provide mutual aid. Originally, it was a civic club set up by successful writers to give other writers a leg up. On the board, we have been strategizing about how to create a space that feels like something more than a fee you pay to be listed in our roster. We are creating new guilds where you will be put in touch with mentors who write in your genre. The new Diversity committee is making a conscious commitment to confront racial bias. I am building a new section on the website that will automatically create an author page for you when you update your membership. Every featured member is asked what they hope to get out of the club, and what they can offer. I am also working to make board tasks more efficient, so our volunteers feel their time is well spent. This month, some of the funds you donated to the Virginia Prentiss fund assisted two of our members who are struggling right now.

Whether or not these efforts succeed remains to be seen. If the club is a mere commodity, then they will fail despite our best efforts. If we can reach out to each other, person to person, and create real bonds, we will succeed. I don't strive to be a suit, I strive to be a friend. So, friend, talk to me. What's been *Kraken with you?

Yours in service,

Karma Bennett

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* If the pun is lost on you, refer to the first email in this series. Our motto, "Sail on!" urges writers to persist. In continuing the past president's nautical theme, I urge you to "Conquer the Kraken," as we face darker storms and bigger monsters, we must keep writing.