

SPRING 2024



The Quarterly Magazine of the Women's Fiction Writers Association

WRITE ON!

EYES ON THE PRIZE: KEEPING A POSITIVE MINDSET

**FINDING THE
RIGHT BALANCE**

**NEW COLUMN:
THE BUTLER'S
PANTRY**

**STAR AWARD
WINNER
MAGGIE SMITH**

**BENEFITS OF
WFWA MEMBERSHIP**



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Check out our calendar of events, workshops, and webinar information on our website.

ABOUT THE WFWA

We began this organization in 2013 with the idea to create a safe, nurturing place for writers of women's fiction. The publishing industry is morphing—with new opportunities and, as yet, unknown futures. The founders of the Women's Fiction Writers Association wanted somewhere to amass and disseminate information to and about our chosen genre.

Defining women's fiction has proven as subjective as the types of books we read. For that reason, our guiding statement is broad and comprehensive: Stories that are driven by the main character's emotional journey. Our stories may have romance. Or they may not. They could be contemporary. Or historical. But what binds us together is the focus on a main character's emotional journey.



facebook.com/WFWritersAssociation



twitter.com/WF_Writers



instagram.com/womensfictionwriters/

Join the closed WFWA Facebook group by sending an email to:
membership@womensfictionwriters.org

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IF YOU LIKE WHAT YOU'VE READ ...

Send us a letter! We'd love to hear your feedback and reactions on the stories and features. Email them to writeon@womensfictionwriters.org. Submitted letters are considered for publication and may be edited for clarity or space.

Staying Focused

As we kick off WFWA's 11th year, I am honored and excited to serve as your new president. For those who may not be familiar with me yet, I'm Kristi Leonard, a retreat host, an audiobook narrator, podcast host, writer, and now, your dedicated WFWA president.

In the spirit of embracing new challenges and perspectives, I want to introduce a theme for the year: the year of semicolons. As an audiobook narrator, I've learned the importance of pacing and taking intentional pauses. Just like in writing, these punctuation marks give us a moment to breathe, reflect, and appreciate the journey. It is my intention as president to stay focused on keeping WFWA the vibrant community that it is. To that end, we have a few areas where community is the central theme.

One exciting improvement is our private online community platform, housed on Mighty Networks. This space, which started with workshops, continues to expand, offering a unique platform for our members to connect beyond traditional social media. Visit the Learning Library, join live Office Hour sessions, participate in Critique Groups or the Mentorship program, and stay tuned for more enhancements. You can access the private space from the Member Center on our website from the link titled [WFWA Community Platform](#). For those curious about Mighty Networks or with any questions, please reach out to our Online Community Director, Debbie Abbot (onlinecommunity@womensfictionwriters.org).

To keep our community as a central focus, your board of directors are embarking on a strategic mission this month to define what makes WFWA special and align all future decisions with that core identity. We want to ensure that WFWA remains a strong and supportive community, providing the best resources for our members at all stages of their writing careers.

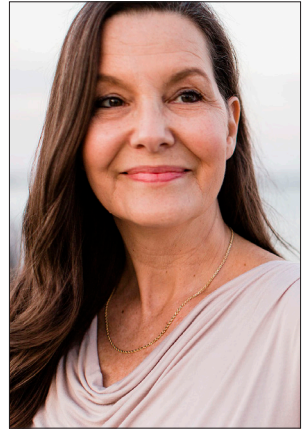
As you look ahead to your own 2024, I invite each of you to embrace the semicolons in your writing journey. Take intentional pauses, reflect on your growth, and continue to write with passion. WFWA is here to support you every step of the way.

Thank you for being a part of our vibrant community.

Warm regards,



Kristi Leonard



IN THE SPIRIT OF EMBRACING NEW CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES, I WANT TO INTRODUCE A THEME FOR THE YEAR: THE YEAR OF SEMICOLONS. AS AN AUDIOBOOK NARRATOR, I'VE LEARNED THE IMPORTANCE OF PACING AND TAKING INTENTIONAL PAUSES.



WHAT A GREAT GROUP!

When I speak about writing and my personal projects, I always talk about community. Writing is a solitary pursuit. We are the only ones who can do the work. Yet I know my inspiration and best work comes when I seek the support of others. This same idea holds true for *Write ON!* As WFWA moves into our second decade, it's time to grow and stretch again. I'm excited to announce the addition of new editorial staff to our already stellar lineup.

Like a book with the perfect ensemble cast, our new team is filling these pages with fresh ideas and energy. Unlike a page-turning book, there is no conflict, though I hope for some healthy debate.

I'm eager to see what we can do this year. How we can help each member reach their personal writing goals. How we can celebrate and support success and make a difference with our words. And how we can better connect each member to our community.

Please welcome our newest editorial volunteers (yes, we are all volunteers):

- Brittany Clair, Managing Editor
- Katie Tammen, Articles Editor & Staff Writer
- Tiffany Butler, Feature Columnist
- Beth Dotson-Brown, Proofreader
- Diane Riley, Proofreader

We have much planned for 2024, and we'd love to hear from you. Drop us a line at writeon@womensfictionwriters.org.

Sharon Ritchey, Executive Editor

WELCOME TO "SPOTLIGHT ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION"

THE D&I COMMITTEE INVITES OUR GENERAL MEMBERSHIP TO SHARE STORIES THAT IMPACT THEM IN THE AREA OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION. WE WANT TO HEAR ALL VOICES. PLEASE SEND YOUR SUBMISSION TO DI@WOMENSFICHTIONWRITERS.ORG

Living Outside the Lines: A Look Inside Neurodivergence

During the past several years, there has been an explosion of news stories that shed light on neurodivergency because of the realization that not everyone has the same brain functions and behavioral traits.

The term neurodivergent describes people who have a variation in their mental functions. This can include someone with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), as well as conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

As writers and as people, what does neurodivergency look like? Who is a neurodivergent person? How do they present themselves and manage in our largely neurotypical world? As we craft stories and create characters, we often see unique characteristics or write about those who struggle. Many of us create neurodivergent people though we may not be aware that is what we're doing. Whether or not we mean to, we often write in tropes that serve our story world but do not serve the real world.

Kori Kobzina, Vice President of Marketing and Communications, shares an intimate portrait of neurodivergency in her life. She is a business owner, a wife, a friend, a volunteer, a writer, and most of all the mother of an exceptional daughter. When you consider neurodivergency in your writing and in your life, consider Kori's story.

By Kori Kobzina

It's Christmas 2023, and my adult daughter is in a psych ward.

This is the fourth time in a decade she's been involuntarily committed for psychological assessment. Her first stay at a mental health facility was at the age of thirteen.

In addition to intractable epilepsy, my daughter is diagnosed as mildly autistic (level one) and ADHD. She also exhibits OCD behavior. As the result of thousands of seizures, she is mildly intellectually disabled. She is essentially a poster person for neurodivergence since she is labeled with several of the most common neurodivergent characteristics. It's estimated that one in five individuals exhibit one or more aspects of neurodivergence. More often than not, however, individuals remain undiagnosed and face a lifelong struggle to fit into a neurotypical society.

Mental health issues are a common co-morbidity of epilepsy, and mental health perils periodically overtake her, most severely when one of her seizure medications fails.

Although my daughter has diagnoses aplenty and has received extensive treatment for them, she struggles. When she's in a down period and perseverating (mumbling a repeated phrase) for example, people stare at her, point, even laugh, and sometimes make rude comments or give *me* unsolicited advice in her presence. Her reaction to this: "I'm not a weirdo, Mom. I'm a good person."



Camryn and John Kobzina relaxing on a summer day.

You will never meet anyone with a more generous spirit or someone who tries harder to fit in. But my daughter is a square peg who will never fit into our round societal openings. She will likely never marry or be a parent. She probably won't be able to work, won't drive, and most likely won't again travel far from home or her medical team. Fortunately, before her condition worsened considerably, we were able to travel with her regularly. On the plus side, however, she will not worry too much about our burning/drowning planet or the strife of global conflict.

Everyone's life is about balance, a too-brief sojourn of measures and counter-measures in the pursuit of enjoyment and meaning. If you are dealt a challenging hand for whatever reason, you will likely rely on the kindness of strangers for much of your life in spite of the best efforts of those who love you.

On behalf of my daughter and for individuals like her, I ask one thing: whenever you come across someone who behaves differently than you do or what you imagine a person should act like, please try not to judge them. Do not assume that they have control over how they present themselves or the circumstances that led to this. They are just as entitled as you are as citizens of our precious planet to be treated with consideration. They are undeserving of your pity, derision, or annoyance. Please give them simple, basic respect as your fellow human beings. Think of my beautiful daughter, and be generous, be thankful, and be kind.



Kori Kobzina currently serves on the WFWA Board of Directors as the VP of Communications. She writes so-far unpublished upmarket women's fiction, featuring characters who, although relatable, live outside the lines.

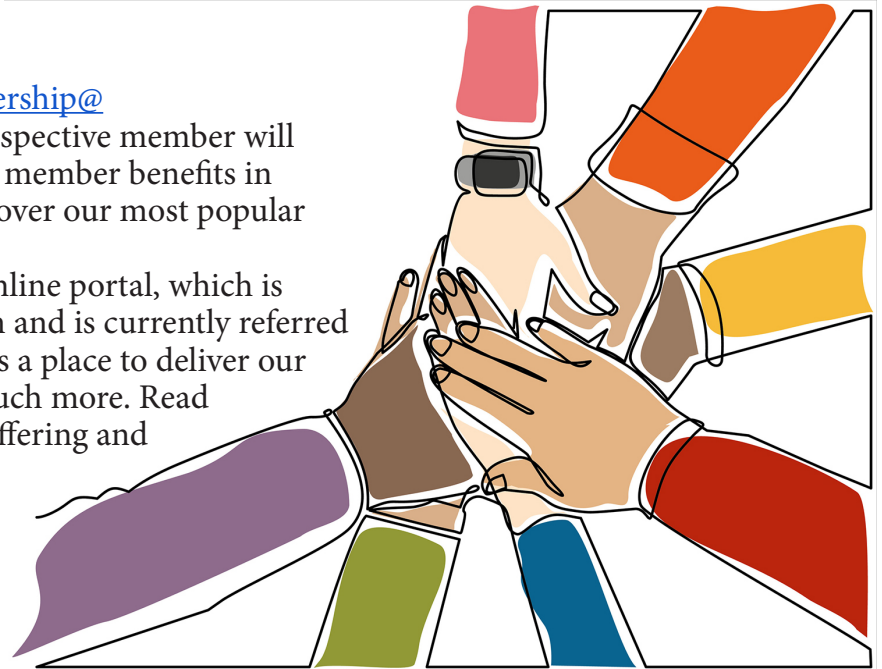
12 WAYS TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR WFWA MEMBERSHIP IN 2024

By Wendy Rossi, VP of Membership

Many of the emails I receive at membership@womensfictionwriters.org ask what a prospective member will receive if they join. Though we highlight member benefits in each weekly newsletter, this article will cover our most popular resources and programs.

Last year WFWA opened its newest online portal, which is hosted on the Mighty Networks platform and is currently referred to as the [Online Community](#). It started as a place to deliver our workshops, but has developed into so much more. Read on to find out about this powerful new offering and what it can do for you.

Scrolling down the navigation bar on the left side of the Online Community's main page, you'll find:



1 COMMUNITY HUB
This Facebook-like discussion space is where members can introduce themselves, ask questions, or shout-out milestones in their writing or publishing life. However, unlike Facebook, no wizard is behind a curtain changing algorithms and showing you the things it thinks you want to see. Instead, once you start interacting you'll get notifications (if you elect to receive them) on posts you've created or responded to. Over time we expect to create separate channels within the Community Hub to address conversations and interactions about specific aspects of the writing journey.

2 SUGGESTION BOX
You've asked for it, we've provided it! We want to hear from YOU about what you'd like to see more or less of. If there's a program you'd like to see offered, this is the place to let us know. We might not implement every suggestion, but we will write back and let you know we're listening.

3 WORKSHOPS
We offer free quarterly workshops and a multitude of paid workshops throughout each calendar year. The topics cover everything from the business side of writing to more craft-centric workshops.

4 HELP DESK
If you're having difficulties with the Online Community, give a shout out to the administrator.

5 OFFICE HOURS
These are scheduled live-stream events where the organization's president interviews various members of our leadership team, answering questions and providing insight into all that goes on behind the scenes. Recordings of these programs are always available for members to view at their leisure by clicking on the Live Events Library in the navigation bar.

6 LEARNING LIBRARY
Our library has a robust and ever-growing selection of curated resources from around the web. If you come across something valuable, you can suggest its inclusion by posting it to the Requests tab within the Welcome to the Learning Library introduction page.

Keep an eye out for new features, including a Mentor space, Critique Groups space, Historical Fiction group space, and much, much more! If you haven't received an invite already, [click here](#) to join the Online Community and establish your username and password.

While the Online Community hosts many of our offerings, it's not the only way to get the most out of your membership.

7 WEBINARS
Every month we offer a free webinar on a topic of interest to writers and authors, such as best practices for critiquing other writers' work or how to revise your own writing. As more of our members have explored the indie and small press paths to publication, these webinars have expanded into marketing, publicity, and audiobook production as well.

8

WRITING DATES

Every day, and sometimes twice a day, our members gather on Zoom to write. There's a brief check-in where members can set a goal, followed by a writing stretch of either 1.5 hours straight through or two 45-minute blocks. At the end of the structured time, members are encouraged to stay and discuss issues they may be having with their writing, or their joys and successes. If you haven't tried it, check the schedule by clicking on the Programs tab on the top of WFWA's main page and join one (or a few)!

9

EXPERTS LIST

Also offered on the main website, this downloadable list documents members with specialties in niche areas that may serve your writing practice, including sensitivity reading (disability, race, ethnicity, or gender), developmental editing, or legal questions. It's located under the Resources tab at the top of the home page and currently covers more than 100 topics. Don't forget to add your own expertise by submitting an expertise form, which is linked on the same page.

10

CRITIQUE GROUP MATCHING SERVICE

Looking to make new connections while improving your manuscript? Look no further. Using a detailed application that opens for one month twice per year, we match groups of three to five writers based on their experience, intended audience, subgenres, and the time period in which their manuscript takes place. Participants are asked to dedicate at least six months to their group. Applications for the next session open April 1.

11

MENTORSHIPS

This is a fantastic opportunity for emerging writers to get short-term, one-on-one support from a more seasoned member. All mentors are traditionally or independently published, agented, book coaches, or developmental editors. Once paired, you can choose to receive feedback on your writing, discuss book promotion, or gain insight into independent publishing. The mentors don't provide full manuscript reviews, but they can read up to 7,500 words or your query package. This service is offered twice a year, and applications for the next session open in July.

12

CONTESTS

We offer two annual contests exclusively for authors of women's fiction. The STAR Award is an opportunity for published authors to compete for two \$500 prizes. We accept 50 debut authors and 50 general applicants for this award (please note that applications are already closed for this year). Unpublished writers without agents can submit manuscripts for the Rising STAR Award. The top five candidates from the 100-person pool will receive feedback from three literary agents, and the winner takes home a trophy. Entry for this year's award opens May 5 at 12 p.m. EST. Both contests cost \$45 each for members. The winners will be announced at the WFWA Retreat in Alexandria this October. [Click here](#) for more details.

All of this is available to you at the cost of your annual dues of \$58. We think that's a very good deal. We hope you do too. Don't forget, your Board of Directors is always open to the membership's ideas on improving or streamlining the programming and resources we offer. Have a suggestion? Write to Programs@womensfictionwriters.org, membership@womensfictionwriters.org, or info@womensfictionwriters.org.



Wendy Rossi is the Vice President of Membership for WFWA. She is recently retired from a career in project management, where she herded cats and sculpted fog on a regular basis. Her first novel is in progress.



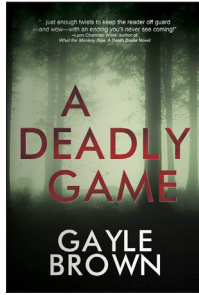
INTRODUCING THE 2024 WFWA GUIDING SCRIBE: DENNY S. BRYCE

Each year we invite a distinguished author to serve as a guiding voice within the association. As WFWA President Kristi Leonard describes the role, "The Guiding Scribe is an important resource and scholar for our organization, akin to a poet laureate." As a community, we have the occasion to learn from our Guiding Scribe through various community events and platforms as well as published editorials here in *Write ON!*

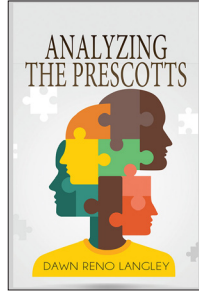
This year we are thrilled to announce we'll hear from Denny S. Bryce, the award-winning novelist and historical women's fiction writer, as our Guiding Scribe. In addition to her [numerous books](#) featuring the untold stories of Black women in America (including two new releases this year, *Can't We Be Friends: A Novel of Ella Fitzgerald and Marilyn Monroe* [co-authored with Eliza Knight] and *The Trial of Mrs. Rhinelander*), Denny is also a former public relations professional with more than twenty years of experience running a marketing and public relations firm, an NPR book critic, an adjunct professor at Drexel University, and a freelance writer with articles in *Harper's Bazaar* and *USA Today*. Denny is a longtime WFWA member and also belongs to the Historical Novel Society and Tall Poppy Writers.

In future issues, we'll feature columns from Denny that will provide her insights and advice about the craft of writing, the business of publishing, and everything in between. It's an incredible opportunity for all of us to learn from her expertise and experience in the industry. We hope you're as excited as we are to hear what she has to say. Stay tuned!

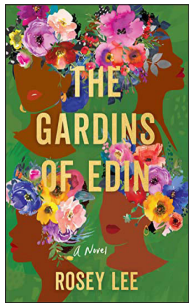
MEMBER RELEASES



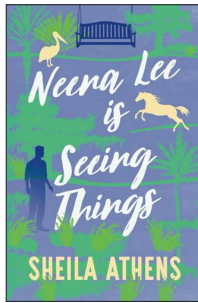
GAYLE BROWN (CLARK)
A Deadly Game
12/7/2023



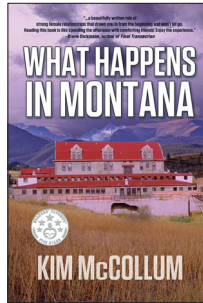
DAWN RENO LANGLEY
Analyzing the Prescotts
1/4/2024



ROSEY LEE
The Gardens of Edin
1/9/2024



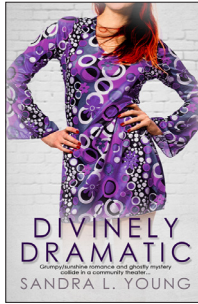
SHEILA ATHENS
Neena Lee Is Seeing Things
1/30/2024



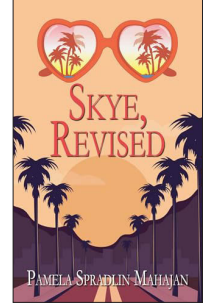
KIMBERLY MCCOLLUM
What Happens in Montana
1/25/2024



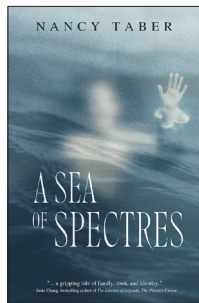
KELLEY MCNEIL
Mayluna
2/1/2024



SANDRA L. YOUNG
Divinely Dramatic
2/5/2024



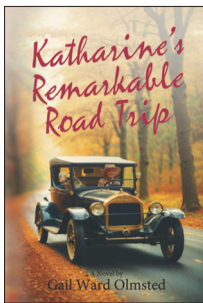
PAMELA SPRADLIN MAHAJAN
Skye, Revised
3/27/24



NANCY TABER
A Sea of Spectres
4/15/24



AMY DRESSLER
How to Align the Stars
6/4/24



GAIL OLMSTED
Katharine's Remarkable Road Trip
6/13/24

WHY ISN'T MY BOOK LISTED IN WRITEON!?

The number one question we answer at *Write ON!* is from authors wanting to know why their latest release isn't listed in the magazine under new releases.

Well, dear member, to list your book, we first must know about it. And no, submitting your publication news to the weekly newsletter isn't enough.

THE PROCESS IS SIMPLE

Step 1. Log into the WFWA website. You're probably already here if you're reading this.

Step 2. Toggle over to the Member Center tab and then down to Submissions.

Step 3. You'll land on a page that allows you to submit news to the Weekly News, as well as the option for WFWA Public Women's Fiction Platform (this is key!).

Step 4. Select WFWA Public Women's Fiction Platform. This will take you to a screen that allows you to submit your book to the WFWA book review committee. If you're a debut author, you can add your name to the list of authors to be interviewed for the WFWA podcast, *Hear Us Roar*, hosted by Maggie Smith.

Important! Your books must be Women's Fiction titles. We know that many members write in multiple genres, but our list only includes Women's Fiction.

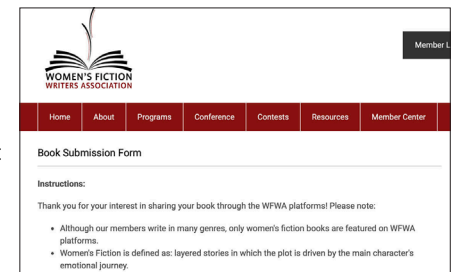
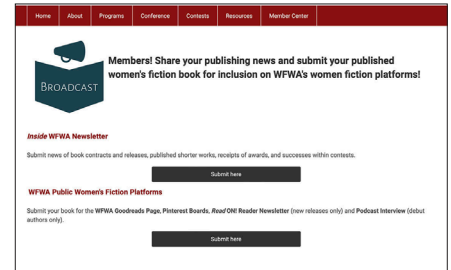
WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Your book is reviewed by a committee of anonymous members. When your book is approved, it is placed on the WFWA Goodreads shelf. Once there, it will be picked up in the next edition of *Write ON!*

Regarding *Hear Us Roar*, due to the publication schedule of our growing community, it may take weeks for your turn to chat with Maggie. Please be patient.

If you have a question about your submission, email: president@womensfictionwriters.org.

Member Center
Member Center
My Profile
Member Directory
Forms
Renew Membership
Volunteer
WFWA Meeting Minutes
Not receiving our emails?
Submissions
Guiding Scribe



SHOOT AND SHARE CONTEST: BOOK FESTIVALS AND SIGNINGS

We asked to see your book festival and signing pictures and you did not disappoint. This issue's randomly drawn winner for a \$25 bookstore gift card is Mel Greenberg. Thank you to everyone for sharing. Your table set-ups are an inspiration of ideas.



Mel Greenberg



Kathy Strosos



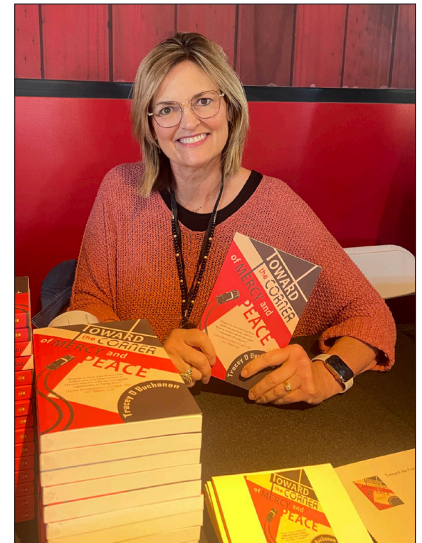
Jen Craven



Gabi Coatsworth



Cherie Dawn Haas



Tracey Buchanan



J. Marie Rundquist

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SHOOT AND SHARE CONTEST: BOOK FESTIVALS AND SIGNINGS



Cindy Burke Maynard



Lisa Braxton



Carol Owens Campbell



Gail Priest



Michelle Haybrych



Kerry Fryar-Freeman



Julia Daily



Erica Haraldsen



BOOK FESTIVALS AND OTHER BOOKISH EVENTS



Welcome to the Butler's Pantry, a new column where I investigate and present resources to help writers live their best writing lives, and have some fun along the way.

This quarter I set the literary table with curated advice from seasoned writers for attending literary festivals, craft fairs, and book signings.

Literary events offer ample in-person opportunities to connect with our audience and find new readers. Whether you're a debut writer weighing the pros and cons of attending, or if book festivals are part of your annual calendar, you'll find these best practices will help you make the most of the experience.

The time to decide and apply is now. Competition for tables can be fierce and space is limited. Deadlines for the earliest spring festivals may have already closed and the deadlines for summer festivals are looming. Here is a [link](#) to a list of U.S.-based events for 2024. Don't fret if you missed one. Sign up for the event's mailing list or join its Facebook group, if it has one, and you'll be a step ahead for next season.

If you tend to be more of a last-minute person, you have plenty of time to consider applying to festivals that take place in the fall. Make sure the events you apply to fit your genre, and don't be afraid to ask for a marketing plan if this is the event's first year.

Shout it from the rooftops when you've been accepted to an event. Your marketing should include the usual suspects: your social media accounts, your newsletter, and your in-person contacts. Using the event's logo in your marketing creates free brand recognition.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO: IN-PERSON EVENTS COST MONEY AND TIME

Some festival applications require you to send in a physical copy of your book, while others prefer digital copies. Consider the book part of the application fee. Consider, also, the upfront costs: travel time, expenses, possible time off work, subscribing to payment apps (including a merchant account so you can accept credit cards), table swag, purchasing enough books that you don't run out at the festival, and the table fee. You may want to share a table with another author to split the costs. As a bonus,

you'll have a buddy to chat with, help with set up and break down, someone to watch your books during bathroom breaks, and with whom to exchange tips and information.

ACCEPTING PAYMENTS: MAKING MONEY SELLING BOOKS IS YOUR GOAL

Create a sign showing the price of your books and the payment methods you accept. Many authors choose to sign up for a Stripe account. The app allows you to take payments by tapping the credit card on the back of your phone or by manually entering the number. Stripe sells a chip reader as well. Stripe's receipts can be sent by text and email through your phone, and the app is user-friendly, which works well at a busy book festival.

PayPal and Venmo apps are also easy for taking payments. Creating a folder on your phone will keep your payment methods within easy reach and speed up the process so you can move on to the next sale. You'll also want to have change for those who prefer cash. Consider offering a discount for readers who purchase multiple books. For authors with only one book, suggest that readers can give them as a gift.

BE YOUR OWN BIGGEST FAN: KNOW YOUR BLURB

Can you recite your elevator pitch? If not, start practicing. You'll have only a few seconds to catch readers' attention and it is essential to have something quick and catchy to tell them. Consider different elevator pitches for different audiences. While we want our books to appeal to everyone, readers of different ages or demographics might be interested in different aspects of your book. By understanding what appeals to various audiences, and by distilling these ideas into a sentence or two, you'll be able to speak to each reader's heart. Sustaining their interest while you have their attention can transform a quick *hello* into a sale.

MAKE IT PRETTY: SET YOUR TABLE DECOR

Authors are expected to write well and be marketing geniuses. At book festivals, we're also expected to be visual designers. While these can be heavy loads to bear, there are many resources available for making your tablescape eye-catching. Your color scheme and every item on the table needs to be on-brand. Assembling an event box will allow you to stay organized and ready for travel.

Must haves!

- Tablecloth
- Pens for signing books and taking notes
- Book stands
- A bowl for candy or mints
- Bookmarks and/or business cards
- Hand sanitizer
- A portable charger
- A newsletter signup sheet
- Pull-up banner with your author brand, if desired.

You may also want to frame an image of your book cover or of particularly thoughtful reader reviews. At holiday events, gift-wrapped books may increase sales. If you have items that go with your book's theme, consider placing them on the table. If you're uncertain how your brand and book will translate into an author's table, you can find additional ideas using the search terms *book festival author's table*. Also, in this issue, check out the photo contest where you can see how other WFWA members set their tables.

DURING THE EVENT: IT'S SHOW TIME!

It's understood that we have precious few moments to capture a reader's attention with our book alone. Consider visual "surveys" that readers can participate in. You may have a graphic with a dozen classic books that invites readers to list the ones they've read, or a graphic showing possible covers for your next book with a voting option. A simple activity that gets people to stop and engage with you is an opportunity to turn them into a customer. Have some open-ended questions at the ready, including asking what kind of books they enjoy reading. Be prepared to turn the conversation toward your own books by finding a common ground between their interests and what's on your table. Reading a book that isn't yours or making notes about your WIP will prevent you from looking like a vulture ready to pounce on the next person who walks up. People are likelier to approach your table if you aren't watching them with pleading eyes.

Write ON! would like to thank the following people who contributed to this article:

Elisenda Sola-Sole is the owner of Kensington Row Bookshop (www.kensingtonrowbookshop.com) and the organizer of the Kensington Day of the Book Festival (www.dayofthebook.com). The next festival will be on Sunday, April 21, 2024 in Kensington, Maryland.

Jill Hannah Anderson is the author of *A Life Unraveled*, *The To-Hell-And-Back Club*, *Crazy Little Town Called Love*, and *Beyond Lonesome Road*. www.jillhannahanderson.com

Penny Haw is the author of *The Wilderness Between Us* (WFWA 2022 STAR Award Winner), *The Invincible Miss Cust*, and *The Woman at the Wheel*. <https://pennyhaw.com>

Kimberly Packard is the author of *Dire's Club*, *Vortex*, and *The Phoenix Series*. www.kimberlypackard.com

Maggie Smith is the 2023 Star Award Winner for her novel *Truth and Other Lies*. <https://maggiesmithwriter.com/>

Professional bookseller advice from Elisenda Sola-Sole, owner of Kensington Row Bookshop and organizer of the Kensington Day of the Book Festival:

- Pack your books and items in a wheeled carrier. For outdoor festivals, be prepared for unexpected weather. Bring a plastic sheet or pop-up tent to quickly throw over your table in case of rain, and clips to secure your display from wind. Dress in layers and wear comfortable shoes.
- Remember that the experience is what you make of it. It's not all about how many books you sell, but about creating energy around your books. Leave people with a positive feeling even if they don't buy anything. Every event and festival is another chapter in your author journey!

If you're gearing up for your first book event, consider bringing that fancy notebook you've tucked away on a shelf that always seemed too nice to use. Ask everyone who purchases a book from you to sign their name. Separate from a newsletter signup, this notebook will become a personalized record of readers to cherish.

TALK, TALK, TALK: IT'S ALL ABOUT NETWORKING

Book festivals are built-in networking events where like-minded authors connect, and we're all there for the same reasons: to sell books, increase our readership base, and meet our audience in person. Here, bookmarks work double-duty as business cards. If your event includes appearing on a panel, familiarize yourself with the other authors' books. It will help the conversation flow and give you the opportunity to contribute to discussions beyond your own work. If you don't have time to read their books, read up about them. Be considerate of neighboring tables by not interfering with their space or visitors. Rather than being competitors, other authors are our fellow travelers.

By customizing the tips and ideas you've read here, your table will showcase your unique brand and personality. Making the most of your book festival experience means going into it with an organized plan and a clear roadmap, but don't let that overwhelm you. As with all areas of book marketing, lean into the aspects you enjoy. Remember, readers are drawn to tables where a writer's authenticity and enthusiasm for their book is evident.



Tiffany, "TJ" Butler lives in Virginia with her husband and dog, and writes fiction and essays that are not all fun and games. *Dating Silky Maxwell* is her first short story collection. You can learn more about it at TJButlerAuthor.com.



By Lyn Liao Butler

Publishing is a hard business. As writers, there's waiting involved in every stage of our careers, whether we're in the query trenches, on submission with editors, or waiting for a book to be released. Often we have no control over how our books will do, even if we've done everything we're supposed to. In my own life, I've found that balancing my writing with other interests keeps me from burning out and helps me stay sane and productive.

HAVE A PLAN THAT WORKS FOR YOU

Everyone's different, and it's important to write however you can—there's no right or wrong way. I am a working mom with an eleven-year-old boy whose schedule is jam-packed. I've learned to carry my laptop with me wherever I go because I never know when inspiration might strike. I've written while waiting for him at swim practice and those endless meets, in the car while waiting to pick him up from after-school activities, at Urgent Care when he got sent home with pink eye, and while out to happy hour with my family. I don't write every day because some days do not allow me to write. I've gone months without writing a single word. But I'm always thinking about the story, working out the characters, plot points, and twists.

Personally, I write fast, and—with my agent's blessing—now write across three genres. But if you're not a fast writer, lean into that. Write at your own pace. Don't compare yourself to others; someone who is ahead of you now may be behind you by this time next year. That's how fickle publishing is.

Continued on page 15

FEATURE

EXERCISE

Movement is critical for writers. I'm lucky that one of my jobs is working as a fitness and yoga instructor. When I'm anxiously waiting for news from my agent (or waiting for agents to reply when I was querying), teaching a high-energy cardio sculpt class lets me burn out some anxiety. When I'm spiraling, wondering if I'll ever sell another book, breathing mindfully and setting intentions while I'm teaching yoga helps calm my nerves. I have never experienced writer's block because when I feel stuck I move, and then I come back to my computer refreshed and with new insight. I keep a yoga mat open in my writing studio, a reminder to stop and stretch when I pass it.

During the pandemic I started teaching fitness and yoga classes on my Instagram Live to keep my students moving while we were all stuck at home. I still teach them and always save the recorded classes on my videos, so anyone can catch a workout for free at any time. The classes are only half an hour. Recently, writer friends have told me they've started working out with me, and they are astounded at how it's helped them with their anxiety and creativity.

My goal is to get all my writer friends active and moving, even if it's only for ten minutes. If you don't like to work out, go for a walk. Turn some music on and dance in your kitchen (my son caught me doing this at 10 p.m. one day, and the look on his face when he asked, "Mommy, what are you doing?"). Play in the snow. Take the stairs. Jump up and down. It doesn't matter—just move. It's not only good for you but also good for your mind and writing.

Interested in working out with me? You can find my Instagram workouts @lynliaobutler.

HOBBIES AND ANIMALS

To distract from the anxiety of publishing, I highly recommend focusing on a hobby. I love to sew, and sewing at night for me is like meditation. I don't have to think, and the repetitive movements help me unwind. I even turned that creative hobby into another job when I opened an Etsy shop, and the work I do for that business really keeps me grounded.

I'm a huge animal lover and volunteer at shelters and foster dogs for two rescues. Our family fostered seventeen dogs during the pandemic. Having the unconditional love of those animals and our own dogs is what got me through many rough moments in my publishing life. They are great writing companions and force me to get up and go for walks, which clears my head. They lick away tears when you receive rejections and give you love when you need it.



Lyn Liao Butler is a Taiwanese American author of thrillers, upmarket fiction, and rom-coms. Her most recent thriller, *Someone Else's Life*, was an Amazon bestseller and her second book, *Red Thread of Fate*, was a finalist in the WFWA STAR Awards for 2023. Before becoming an author, she was a professional ballet and modern dancer and is still a fitness and yoga instructor.



WHEN I'M SPIRALING, WONDERING IF I'LL EVER SELL ANOTHER BOOK, BREATHING MINDFULLY AND SETTING INTENTIONS WHILE I'M TEACHING YOGA HELPS CALM MY NERVES.

FIND WRITER FRIENDS

Find writer friends who are at the same place you are and writer friends who are ahead of you to guide you. I was very fortunate to find a group of friends who all debuted the same year from the same imprint. I would not survive publishing without them. They are my trusted confidants in this journey, who cheer me on and keep me going. We share resources, talk each other down, celebrate every win, commiserate on every bad thing. Thank you, my #berkeletes. (Also: do not, and I repeat, do not go on social media and rant about any injustices in publishing, including bad reviews, agent rejections, etc. Talk to your friends instead!)

Wherever you are in your writing career, balancing your writing pursuits with other hobbies, physical movement, and a supportive community is so important. Don't let writing be your entire life or it can literally drive you mad with anxiety. One final fun tip as a fitness instructor and author: hang upside down for a few minutes a day. It not only realigns your spine and neck but it also brings blood back into your brain and makes it function faster and better.



MOVE YOUR BODY TO INSPIRE YOUR STORY

By Brittany Clair

In this issue, Lyn Liao Butler reminds us that pursuing balance in our lives is, in many ways, part of finding fulfillment in our writing. Physical movement is not only beneficial for our physical health, but it's also a welcome distraction that pays its own artistic dividends: inspiration, creativity, and mental clarity.

Indeed, there's a newer and growing body of research exploring the ways in which moving our bodies—whether through formal exercise, a leisurely walk, dancing, stretching, performing, or even gesturing (yes, really)—can boost learning, improve focus, and ignite the imagination. There is mounting evidence that movement of all kinds can deepen understanding and breed creativity.



When we move our bodies, the physical changes that transpire rewire our brains and set the stage for improved cognition. Exercise, as psychiatrist John Ratey writes in *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*, exerts measurable cognitive changes that tee us up for enhanced learning and optimal thinking. According to Ratey, physical exertion is crucial for neuroplasticity and our best pathway to improved thinking (and writing). In her book *The Extended Mind*, science writer Annie Murphy Paul explores the ways in which we think outside our brains—including with our bodies. She argues not only that movement expands our ability to think abstractly, but also that tuning into our bodily sensations can help us perceive patterns, experiences, and concepts more clearly.

Walking can be a good choice if it is accessible for you. In a recent experiment run by Stanford researchers, participants showed significantly higher levels of creativity during and right after walking. Walking stimulates neural connections, promotes brain development, and is the ideal mix of repetition with novelty. As Ferris Jabr wrote in *The New Yorker* in 2014, “Because we don’t have to devote much conscious effort to the act of walking, our attention is free to wander—to overlay the world before us with a parade of images from the mind’s theater. This is precisely the kind of mental state that studies have linked to innovative ideas and strokes of insight.” Or, as Rebecca Solnit put it so poetically in *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, “walking, ideally, is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord.”

And while the science may be recently developed, the truth is that philosophers, writers, and creatives have recognized the rewards of physical activity for thousands of years. From ancient Greek philosophers to Enlightenment thinkers to contemporary novelists, writers across time have shared an intuitive understanding that movement serves their work. As the novelist Haruki Murakami, a dedicated runner who attributes much of his success in writing to running, recently wrote in his book *Novelist As Vocation*, “the everyday combination of physical exercise and the intellectual process provides an ideal influence on the type of creative work the writer is engaged in.”

Examples abound of other writers who insist they do their best, most innovative thinking while walking: Virginia Woolf adored walking and conceived of literature and movement as intimately intertwined; Dan Brown tells students of his online Masterclass that he records his thoughts on his phone while taking walks; Stephen King has written about his daily walking habit and how it led to some of his best ideas; and we’re guessing many of you know someone who’d say the same.

The research and personal testimonies in favor of moving to think are as compelling as they are exciting, especially for the diversity of ways in which movement can serve our creative minds. If you haven’t tried building movement into your writing practice, give it a shot—and we’d love to hear how it worked out for you.



Brittany Clair has a PhD in history and left academics to pursue writing (mostly) full-time. She is the author of *Carrying On* (a book about the history and science of prenatal health care) and *Rest Uneasy* (a history of SIDS), and previously wrote for the parenting website Lucie’s List and other online outlets. She lives in Maine with her family.



AND WHILE THE SCIENCE MAY BE RECENTLY DEVELOPED, THE TRUTH IS THAT PHILOSOPHERS, WRITERS, AND CREATIVES HAVE RECOGNIZED THE REWARDS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS. FROM ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHERS TO ENLIGHTENMENT THINKERS TO CONTEMPORARY NOVELISTS, WRITERS ACROSS TIME HAVE SHARED AN INTUITIVE UNDERSTANDING THAT MOVEMENT SERVES THEIR WORK.

MEET STAR AWARD WINNER MAGGIE SMITH

By Brittany Clair

Many readers will recognize Maggie Smith as host of the WFWA podcast, *Hear Us Roar*, but we're thrilled to introduce her as the winner of the 2023 STAR Award for Outstanding Debut for her novel *Truth and Other Lies*. We spoke to her about her sophomore novel *BlindSpot*, what art means to her writing practice, and what she's reading next.

WO: Congratulations on winning the STAR Award for Outstanding Debut. How did it feel to receive the award after all your work interviewing debut novelists for the *Hear Us Roar* podcast?

Maggie: Winning the STAR Award was the highlight of my 2023 author year. I didn't expect to win—I'd interviewed my fellow nominees (Maggie Ginsberg and Grace Marcus) and knew their books were both excellent. Imagine my shock when my name was called! It was the perfect end to a fabulous conference and a great honor for my first book. But just to clarify, I don't really view my role as the host of *Hear Us Roar* as "work." For me, it's more like getting to make a wonderful new writing friend every week as well as a slow-drip MFA as I sit and absorb so many inspiring stories.

WO: Tell us about your sophomore novel, *BlindSpot*.

Maggie: I'm switching genres to psychological suspense. *BlindSpot* is the story of an ambitious district attorney and single mom in Milwaukee who tracks down the person stalking her, only to be arrested for murder when he turns up dead. It's got plenty of twists and turns and what I hope turns out to be a final surprise. It's got a strong mother-daughter love story at its heart, so for someone who also loves family stories mixed with their suspense, it's a perfect choice.



WINNING THE STAR AWARD WAS THE HIGHLIGHT OF MY 2023 AUTHOR YEAR.

WO: How did you transition from *Truth and Other Lies* to this new project?

Maggie: I started writing *BlindSpot* during NaNoWriMo while querying *Truth and Other Lies*. I'd always been a fan of suspense/mystery stories from as far back as my teenage years when I devoured the entire works of Agatha Christie in one summer. I had a brain flash about who the antagonist would be and why they wanted to harm my protagonist. The final reveal, though, didn't get fleshed out until later in the process. I also hadn't had any luck getting an agent with my debut (I traditionally published with a small press here in Wisconsin), so I thought perhaps the suspense genre might be an easier sell to an agent. Boy, was I wrong about that. Turns out the market is pretty saturated all across the board, which led me to indie publishing this one.

April 24, 2023, County Courthouse

WO: Can you tell us about your writing process and how it changed (or didn't) working on *BlindSpot*?

Maggie: I'm freshest in the morning hours so I get most of my writing done from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. I no longer have kids in the house and I'm a full-time writer, so I trudge upstairs to my writing room with my sheltie at my side and my coffee in hand and get to work. With *Truth*, I wrote three entire manuscripts start to finish before I landed on one that felt right. That was partly because it was my first novel, and I was also teaching myself *how* to write—reading craft books, working with a book coach, going to seminars and conferences. But with this second book, I knew more. I'd been exposed to the Save the Cat methodology along the way, and it seemed to make sense for this story, so I worked for a while on a detailed chapter outline, wrote 50,000 words during NaNoWriMo, and then worked through several additional drafts until it all seemed to click. Something else I changed was the feedback aspect. With my debut, I was giving it out to all kinds of people and kept changing it based on what I heard back. This time I wrote it all to my satisfaction before hiring a developmental editor who specializes in the genre and doing a final revision based on her suggestions.

WO: How has your work for the *Hear Us Roar* podcast informed your writing?

Maggie: When I first started to host the podcast, I wanted to give back to WFWA and help my fellow writers get exposure. I knew it would help me grow my own author platform. What I hadn't counted on was how much I would learn each week listening to intelligent, thoughtful, and enthusiastic writers tell their stories. It came home to me in full force when my own debut came out—I suddenly realized how much I'd learned from my guests along the way. Not only marketing techniques and industry knowledge but also the sheer pluck and perseverance it took each author to get their work out into the world. Even now, after 220-plus interviews, I still learn something new every week, and it's my hope our listeners do too.

WO: You have a background in art consulting and an ongoing interest in cinema

The killer is sitting in this courtroom and it's up to me to prove it. It isn't every day a murder this sensational happens in Milwaukee. Sure, we've had our share of drive-by shootings, domestic arguments that escalated, home invasions that turned deadly. And yes, there was that lurid trial a while back when the deranged sicko drugged, then ate his victims. That one landed our city in the national spotlight. A once in a lifetime case.

But this one's right up there. Everyone involved is high profile. Which means it warrants the top guns. Which means my boss of nine years, Marcus Huntley, Deputy DA, is sitting first chair. I catch his eye and his expression confirms what I already know. This is the most important case of my career, and if the verdict goes south, any hope for that promotion goes right along with it.

But this isn't only about winning for me. There's a lot more at stake. Consequences I don't dare think about or I'll lose my nerve. Because even though the police are convinced this is an open and shut case, I know better.

I know they've arrested the wrong person.

Because I witnessed the murder. But for reasons I can't reveal, I have to keep quiet. Only two people know the whole story and I've sworn them to secrecy.

I watch the crowd. Examine each person in detail. Who's talking to whom, who's staring at their lap, who's looking around the room. Who's fidgeting, adjusting their tie, rummaging through their purse. Who looks bored and who looks agitated. But even though I'm an expert in spotting a tell, I'm coming up empty.

The electricity in the air ratchets up as the judge enters and the bailiff calls the case. I've been up most of the night, pacing the floor, rehearsing my lines, imagining how today would go. What to say and what not to say. What needs to happen so I can walk out of here satisfied.

Part of me wants to scream. Part of me wants to whimper. Part of me wants to rush out the door and never look back.

But I don't do any of those things. Instead I steel my nerves and set aside the theatrics. A bead of sweat slithers down my spine as I stand to address the judge.

In an orange jumpsuit. And handcuffs.

"Rachel Elizabeth Matthews. You stand accused of first-degree intentional homicide.

How do you plead?"

"Not guilty, Your Honor," I reply.



and photography. How do the arts influence your creative process as a writer?

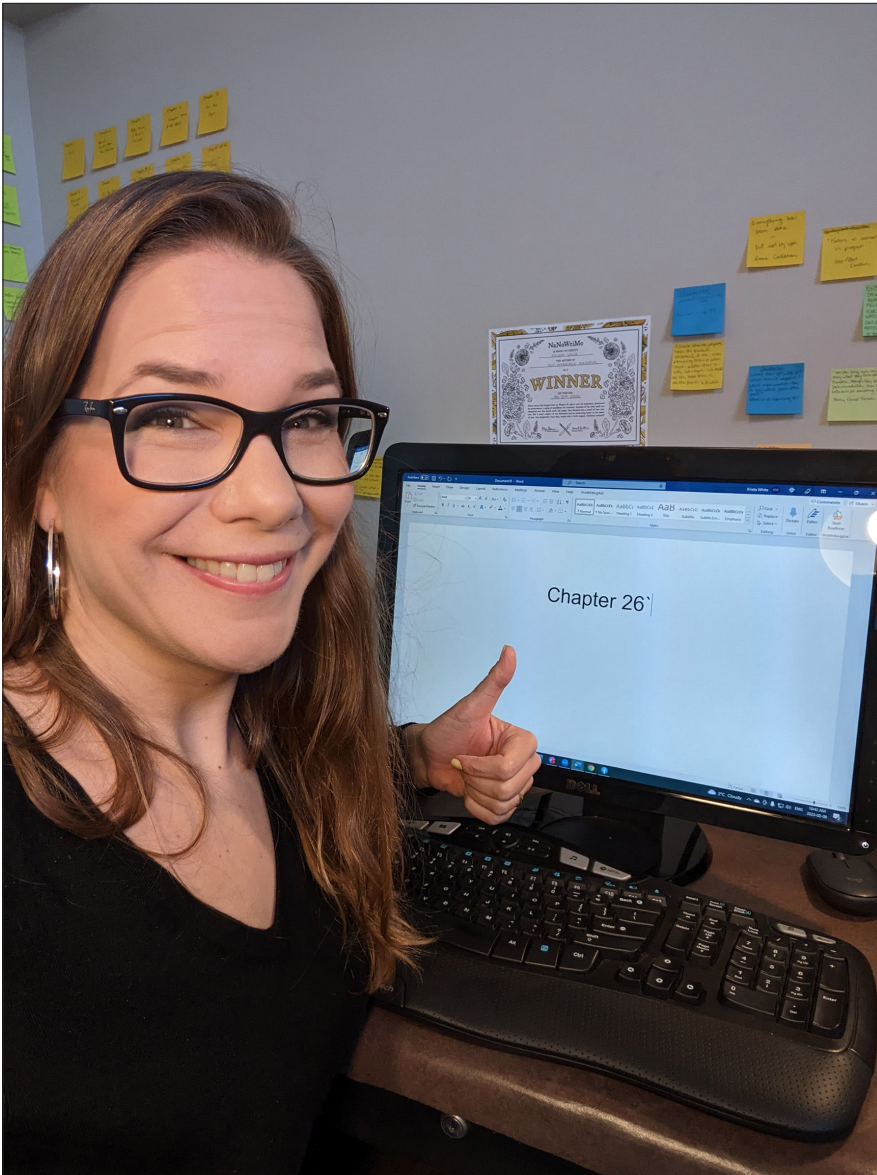
Maggie: Gone are the days when I could watch a movie without analyzing it for story structure, the narrative arc, and the use of setting and dialogue to enhance characterization. In some ways it's ruined my ability to get "lost" in story, but in other ways it's helped me appreciate the great work being done in film. As for photography and my years as an art consultant, the unconscious "eye" I bring to the world of book promotion is most useful in developing effective marketing campaigns, primarily on Instagram. The marketing aspect is a burden for many authors, but for me it's a creative outlet and great fun.

WO: What are you looking forward to reading right now?

Maggie: I read about three novels a week, and it's generally a mix of books in the two genres I write in (women's fiction and suspense), works by writer friends to review, and the latest hot books I see on bookstagrammer review sites. I buy books, get them off NetGalley, and check them out from the library, and right now my waiting list includes *Northwoods* by fellow Wisconsinite Amy Pease, *Never Lie* by Freida McFadden (a master of suspense), and Madeleine Gray's *Green Dot*, a darkly comic coming-of-age story.

We're so grateful to have Maggie as a part of our community, and we can't wait to see what she has in store next.

KRISTA WHITE **MANAGER OF** **VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT**



KRISTA'S IMPACT GOES BEYOND HER OFFICIAL DUTIES. SHE ALSO ORGANIZES MEETUPS—ONLINE AND IN-PERSON—FOR MEMBERS WHO LIVE IN AND AROUND TORONTO, CANADA, AND ATTENDS THEIR BOOK EVENTS WHENEVER POSSIBLE.

In a group powered by volunteers, Krista White is the person who matches the right people to the right roles to propel our growing organization into its second decade.

An executive recruiter and writer, Krista brings a full toolkit of experience to her role as the Manager of Volunteer Recruitment. Among her position's many components, Krista says her favorite piece is interacting with everyone.

"WFWA has such interesting, accomplished, personable members," she says.

Krista's impact goes beyond her official duties. She also organizes meetups—online and in-person—for members who live in and around Toronto, Canada, and attends their book events whenever possible.

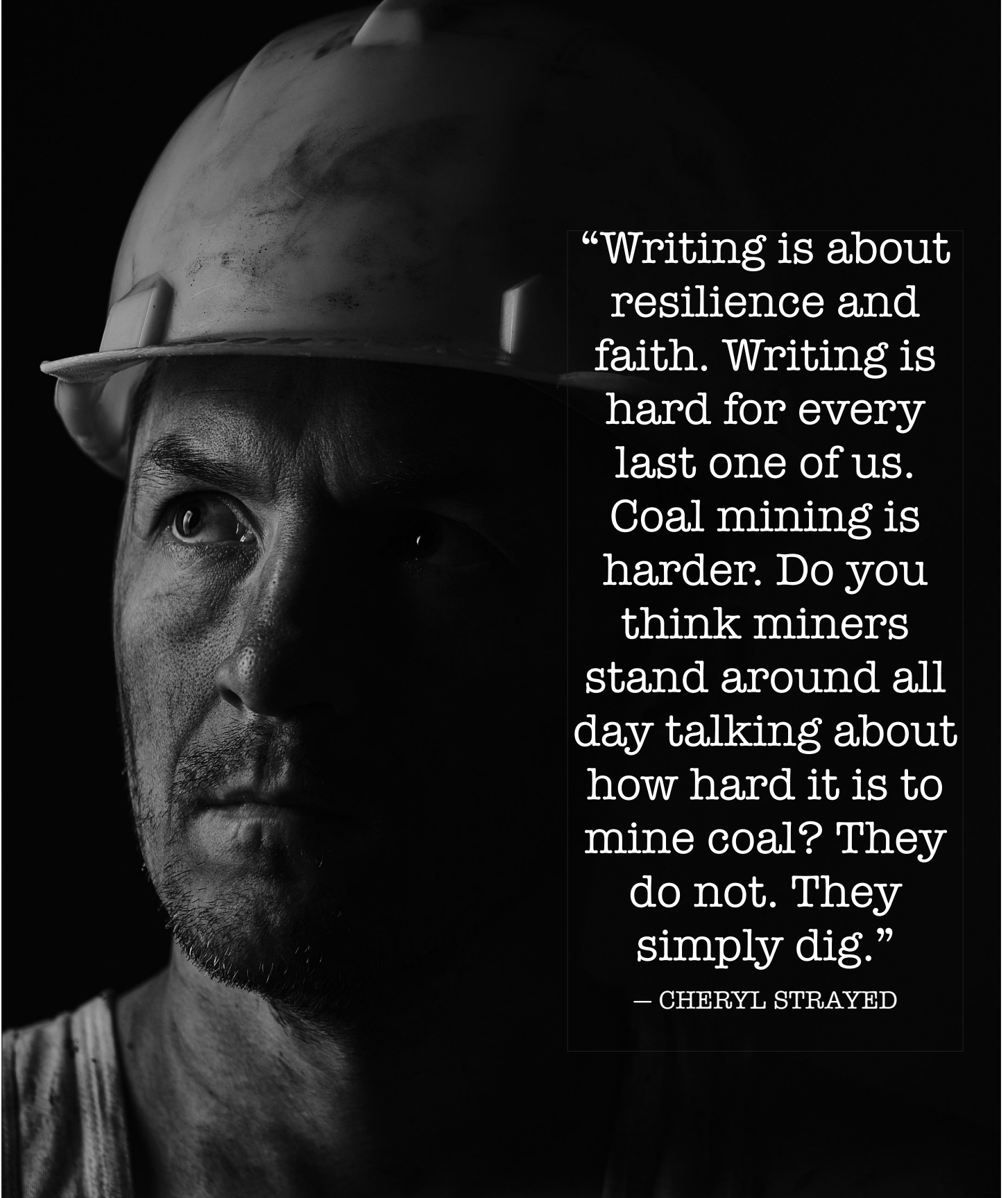
"I thought maybe there'd be four, five WFWA members in Ontario," she says. "But I've since begun organizing regional meetings. I've easily met over twenty members."

When she's not writing or emceeing literary events for her local library, Krista likely has a book in her hands and another two or three awaiting her attention. Most recently, she bounced between *Everything Is Just Beginning* by Erin Bartels, *Thirst for Salt* by Madelaine Lucas, C. S. Lewis's *Till We Have Faces*, and the *Sentence-Composing Teacher's Handbook* by Don and Jenny Killgallon.

"Nearly everything in my life revolves around reading and writing," she says.

Volunteer opportunities at WFWA are constantly evolving. Open slots are shared through a variety of platforms including on Facebook and in the weekly newsletter. Additional information about volunteering can always be found on WFWA's main website under the Member Center tab at the top of the home page.

The key to finding your perfect fit? Keep your eyes open! Krista shares new opportunities all the time.



“Writing is about resilience and faith. Writing is hard for every last one of us. Coal mining is harder. Do you think miners stand around all day talking about how hard it is to mine coal? They do not. They simply dig.”

— CHERYL STRAYED