



Write On!

Quarterly e-Zine • Spring 2014



WHAT'S INSIDE?

Easter Eggs
by Donald Maass

Five Helps for Writing a Dual Time Period Novel
by Susan Meissner

Fifty Shades of Publishing: New Ways of Bringing Your Book to Readers
by April Eberhardt

How to Write Your First Draft in Just Two Months
by Erin Bartels

... and more!

EDITORS

FEATURES EDITOR

Erin Bartels is a copywriter by day, a novelist by night, and a wife, mother, seamstress, and tireless ambassador for the state of Michigan in between. Erin is a board member of the Capital City Writers Association and the author of *The Intentional Writer*. You can find her encouraging writers, talking about craft, and sharing beautiful photographs at www.erinbartels.com.

HIGHLIGHTS EDITOR

Jessica Ferguson is the author of *The Last Daughter*, a novella published by The Wild Rose Press. She interviews authors for Southern Writers Magazine and is co-editor of Swamp Lily Review, a Journal of Louisiana Literature and Arts. In her spare time, she plays with her recently retired husband. Jess blogs at www.jessyferguson.blogspot.com.

COLUMNS EDITOR

Tasha Seegmiller (T + ash + a S + egg + miller) is a high school English teacher in Southern Utah for part of the day, mom to three for the rest, and writes contemporary women's fiction with a dash of magic. She loves owls, runs on Diet Coke, chocolate and cinnamon bears, and a life immersed in words. Tasha can be found at www.tashaseegmiller.blogspot.com.

MANAGING EDITOR

Reese Leyva wrote her first poem at age seven (in a birthday card for her grandmother) and became a narrative addict shortly thereafter, captivated by stories of any form—books, poems, spoken word, film, etc. She's written hundreds of poems, several short films, a novella, a full-length stage play, and an unpublished novel. She's currently working on her second novel while blogging at www.reeseleyva.com.



ABOUT THE WFWA

We began this organization in 2013 with the idea to create a safe, nurturing place for male and female 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 prefer. For that reason, our guiding statement is broad and comprehensive:

An inclusive organization of writers who create stories about a woman'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 woman's emotional journey.

Write on!



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Are You Our Next Rising Star?

President's Note



I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm in denial that it's already spring. I'm not complaining about the nicer weather, but where has the time gone?

The first part of 2014 was busy with launching the Rising Star contest for unpublished women's fiction manuscripts, which opened for entries on May 1 and maxed on entries in under 24 hours. The Goodreads Book Club kicked off with a discussion of Marilyn Brant's *A Summer in Europe* and is now deep into Barbara O'Neal's *The Garden of Happy Endings*. Teacher, agent, and WFWA member Donald Maass opened the 2014 workshop program with a master class on writing with emotional power.

In the very near future you'll be hearing about the 2015 WFWA retreat. Details are coming together and I can't wait to share the news with everyone. It'll be the perfect opportunity to learn, write, and network with fellow WFWA members and industry professionals.

At the beginning of April we went through a significant update to the WFWA website, most obvious to members is the additional functionality to the forums and Hub. I'm excited to see discussions picking back up in the Forums.

If you haven't already gone in to update your profile and re-friend members, please do so. Don't be shy. You joined WFWA to network with other women's fiction writers and industry professionals. Our community is growing every week—as of this writing, we're just short of 350 members.

Go explore the new Hub. There are a few local and specialized groups forming. If there isn't one for your region, start one. It might just lead to some get-togethers with new writing friends.

While you're in the website, click over to the WFWA Zazzle store. I have my special writing mug and now a WFWA mug for when I'm working on association things. We added a few new items recently. All proceeds go toward fundraising for association programs and events.

I want to thank everyone who stepped up to volunteer so far. We wouldn't be introducing new programs and growing without you guys. There will be plenty of additional opportunities coming up (never too early to start thinking about a board position—we'll be running elections at the end of the year). If there's something specific you think will benefit the organization, please don't hesitate to contact me directly or any of the other directors. We're always looking for fresh new ideas.

Write on!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Olopez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Books are mirrors of the soul. — Virginia Woolf

goodreads



The Women's Fiction Goodreads Book Club Is Going Strong!

Thank you to Marilyn Brant for being our first highlighted author.

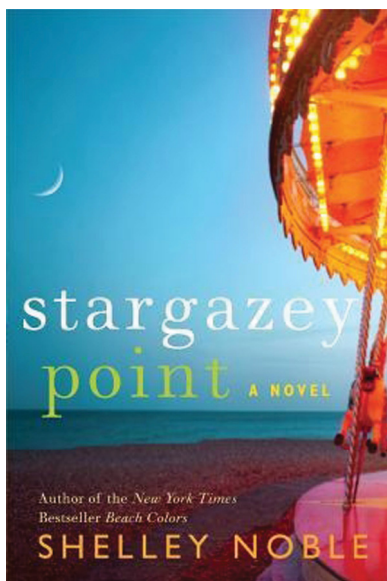
During the month of May, we're discussing Barbara O'Neal's *The Garden of Happy Endings*. Come join us for a lively discussion with other women's fiction readers.

You do not need to be a WFWA member to join, so please share the link <https://womensfictionwriters.org/programs/womens-fiction-book-club/> via social media and help us grow the Club and raise awareness for our published members.

Coming up on the Women's Fiction Book Club:

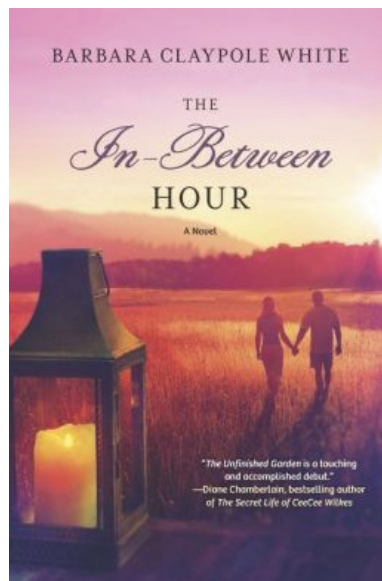
June 2014

**Shelley Noble,
*Stargazey Point***



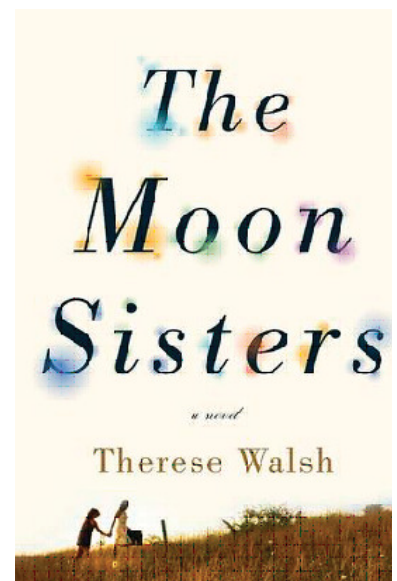
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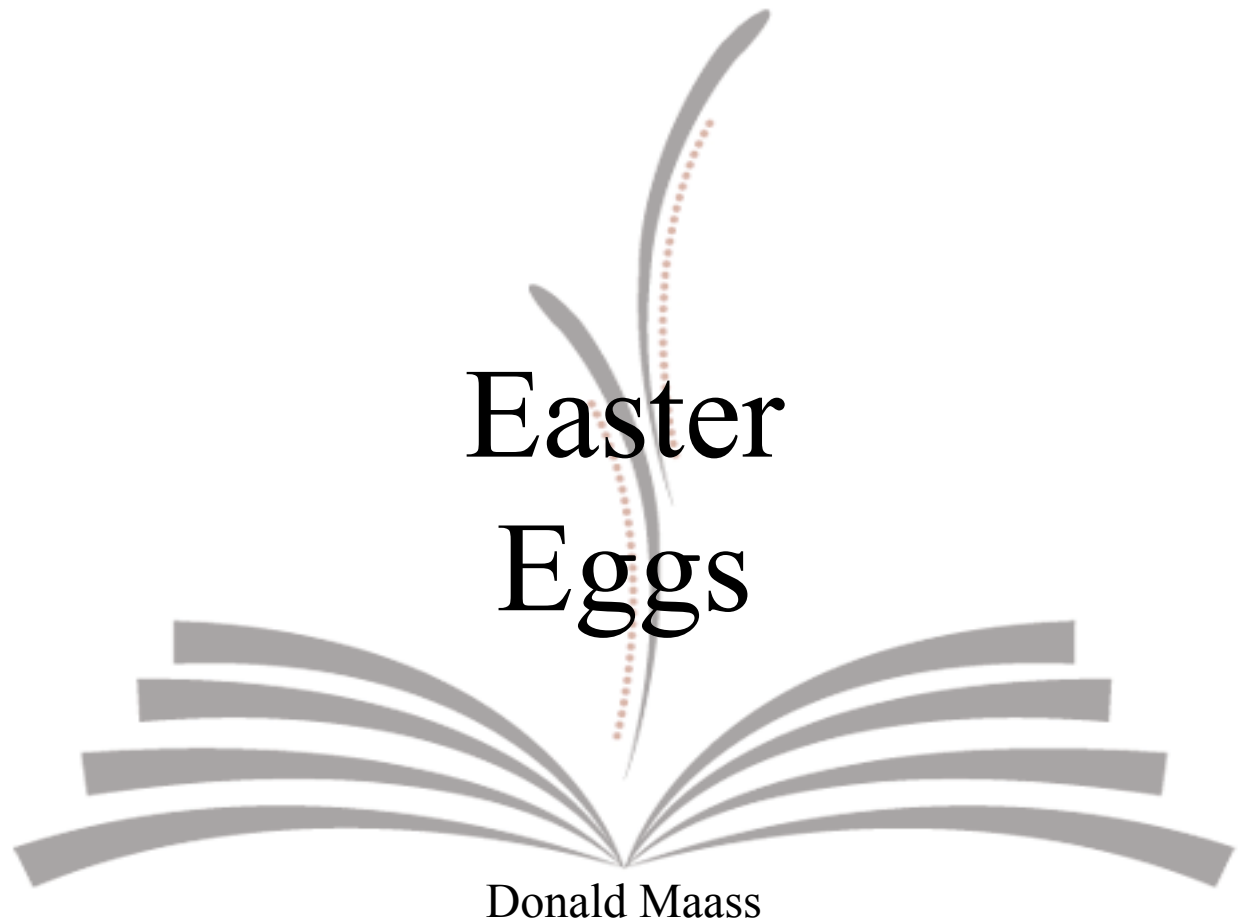
**Barbara Claypole White,
*The In-Between Hour***



August 2014

**Therese Walsh,
*The Moon Sisters***





My six-year-old son was worried that the Easter Bunny wouldn't come. For him, this fear was not unfounded. Adopted, he comes from a place where Santa, the Easter Bunny, and birthdays did not, in fact, arrive.

But of course this year the Easter bunny did invade our home. He left behind an orange basket filled with green synthetic "grass," a chocolate soccer bunny, a wooden recorder, activity books and more. EB also had hidden hollow plastic eggs for which our kid hunted as his mom prodded, "You're cold...getting warmer...very, very warm... red hot!"

The eggs, when found, contained surprises like coins, whistles, red plastic lips, and other cool kid stuff. The fun, though, was more in the hunting than the finding.

Which brings me to manuscripts. As an agent

I read a lot of them. Too often they leave me feeling like my son. There are few surprises. There's little for which to hunt. They're short on mystery and meaning. In the end I feel empty, let down, abandoned by the Easter Bunny. It's such a shame because Easter Eggs are so easy to create and hide in plain sight.

In the world of computer games, movies, and TV, Easter Eggs are a well-known storytelling device. The term technically means an inside joke or hidden message, usually self-referential and deliberately planted to delight fans. The term, though, more broadly means any nugget that creates mystery and meaning. Easter Eggs can be objects, flash forwards, messages, or anything coded in such a way as to make readers think, guess at connections, scratch their heads, or in any other way feel pleasantly intrigued.

Easter Eggs may sound like a gimmick, but

in truth they are evidence that an author is in control of a story. When an author is willing to hint, tease, tantalize, and plant, readers paradoxically relax. Rather than feel irritated, their imaginations are engaged. They know they'll be rewarded for joining in the hunt.

So, how does one create Easter Eggs? Here are some ways:

- Choose a character other than your protagonist. What is something you haven't told readers about this person? What is something surprising in his or her past? What's his or her hidden ability? Does he or she have a secret role or status? What has he or she done, out of sight, to affect your protagonist? Create a piece of evidence—then plant it without (yet) an explanation. Render that explanation later.

- Create a mystery object, something unusual or loaded in a way that provokes intrigue. Put it in the hands of your protagonist. Don't explain it. Just let it ride along. Make readers wait until you are ready to reveal the source and significance of the object.

- Who in the world of the story can have foresight or foreknowledge? Have that character send to your protagonist a message that's mysterious, coded, portentous or foretelling. Don't reveal the sender. Save that for later.

- Take any two characters and forge a connection between them. Did they know each other in the past? Do they share an interest or special knowledge? What kind of secret relationship can they have? Hint at it, then later spring the surprise.

The business of Easter Eggs is related to the larger issue of stories that play out as expected, unfolding predictably and delivering endings that are wholly expected. It's good to get in the habit of playing head games with your readers. It's practice for creating a more global effect which I call the "fourth level" of storytelling: the manipulation of readers' expectations and beliefs over the span of a novel as a whole.

Now, if you're an author who doesn't outline, preferring to discover story as you go, that's no

problem. Play head games with yourself. Set up mysteries that don't have solutions. The solutions will come. Believe it or not, a surprising number of crime novelists have no idea whodunit until they get to the end. If they can plant mysteries with no idea how they'll pay off, then so can you.

Above all let your story, like *Easter Morning*, be a time of mysteries and amazement, revelation and joy. Do that for yourself as well as your readers. Happy hunting. The treasures you're seeking are all around you, hiding in plain sight. •



A literary agent in New York, **DONALD MAASS's** agency sells more than 150 novels every year to major publishers in the U.S. and overseas. He is the author of *The Career Novelist* (1996), *Writing the Breakout Novel* (2001), *Writing the Breakout Novel Workbook* (2004), *The Fire in Fiction* (2009), and *Writing 21st Century Fiction* (2012). He is a past president of the Association of Authors' Representatives, Inc.

Fifty Shades of Publishing: New Ways of Bringing Your Book to Readers



April Eberhardt

There's no better time than right now to grasp the reins of your writing career and consider independently publishing your work. Why? Indie publishing, sometimes called alternative or non-traditional publishing, is quickly becoming the New Normal, as traditional publishers become ever more risk-averse, acquiring far fewer books for far smaller (or no) advances—and authors feel increasingly empowered to reach out to readers directly, letting readers decide (and share) what's worth reading.

Whereas traditional publishing used to confer upon authors the status of being chosen and selected by a single publisher, it's now cool to be "crowd-selected"—having dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of fans discover your work online, and blare-and-share their enthusiasm for it. Additional benefits of taking the independent path include much greater control over your work—you choose the cover, the title, the mode and style, and the marketing approach for your book, and decide how long to keep it in the market—as well as profitability. You keep a much greater portion of the profits from indie-publishing your work than you would under the traditional publishing model. Want to hear more?

Let's begin by covering some of the options

you have in this new publishing world. While many authors think of alternative publishing as meaning self-publishing, that's only one of your indie choices. It's certainly one to consider—but tempting as it is to do-it-all-yourself, it's harder than you might think to get every detail right. Effective, high-quality, error-free publishing requires a set of skills and an understanding of how things work to move a manuscript from initial draft to published book.

Before selecting self-publishing as your route to readership, be sure you "know what you don't know." As Holly Payne, author of the award-winning indie-published book, *Kingdom of Simplicity*, says, "Self-publishing' is anything but 'self.'"

If you decide to do it yourself, commit to doing it right. That means learning the publishing business, including knowing what makes a good book stand apart from the millions published each year. There are dozens of details involved in producing a high-quality book, so if you choose to go it alone, be prepared to devote time to mastering the craft, doing a few practice runs, and making some mistakes along the way. Set your patience level to High, your frustration meter to Low, and plan to invest time and money

in doing a high-quality job, as well as fixing the errors that inevitably occur while learning a new skill set and process.

In addition to impeccable editing, your book needs a professional cover to be taken seriously. Don't be lulled into thinking that "good enough" is—it isn't. Take the time to study other books in your genre, noting the elements that signal to the reader the kind of book it is, and commit to producing a cover that is worthy of your work and your readers. People do choose books by their covers, so be sure you're inviting the right people (i.e., readers interested in your subject matter and style of writing) to buy yours. A professional cover melds good design with the appropriate message.

Titles also are important. Study titles of books that catch your eye, and analyze why they compel you to pick them up and begin reading. It can take a while to land upon just the right title for your book, so allow enough time to brainstorm a few. Then, once you have a short list of contenders, "road test" them with prospective readers to see which seem most compelling. Finally, once you've settled on a final few, Google them to be sure others have not already selected them for their books.

As you can see, self-publishing takes substantial effort to get right. While many authors have self-published successfully, others would prefer to conserve their time and energy for writing. If that's the case with you, another path to consider is partner publishing, in which you work with an experienced partner, paying for services you want or need. There are advantages to this—you don't have to bear the burden of doing it all, and can focus more of your efforts on marketing and/or writing your next book. You also have access to professional-level editing, cover design and production services. Respected partner publisher entities like She Writes Press also offer the advantage of a built-in community of women readers, and are transparent both about the services they provide and the costs. Warning: Not all partner publishers are honest or transparent, and some will attempt to sell you add-on services you don't need. Two add-ons that most authors neither want nor need are large

print runs—with the advent of Print On Demand, or POD, technology, there's no need for boxes of books stored in the garage—and marketing services. The reality is that most marketing today is done most effectively by the author via social media, hence no need to pay a partner publisher to do it.

Before joining up with any partner publisher, vet them thoroughly online, including talking to a few clients of theirs to gauge service level and satisfaction. Be sure to ask for a contract and review it thoroughly, engaging a professional to help you understand its terms and obligations if needed. Ensure that the services you will receive, and pay for, are those you wish, and don't include extras you neither want nor need. If there is pressure to buy add-on services, that's a red flag to reconsider working with that partner. Honest, ethical, transparent publishing partners don't pressure you to buy more than you need.

Another option is to engage a publishing consultant, a relatively new breed of professionals consisting of individuals focused on helping authors produce and bring their books to market in a high-quality way. Publication consultants include former publishers, former editors and even agents, who understand the publishing business and can fast-track you through the process, helping you navigate smoothly and efficiently the myriad of decisions you'll need to make at each step in the process.

A good publishing consultant will ask focused questions up front to understand your goals and preferences, and based on those, will help you devise an overall publishing strategy. S/he will suggest an approach that meets your objectives and budget, and will then guide you through the process so that the book you end up with, be it an e-book, a p-book, or both, will be the one you wish to share with the world with pride.

Before beginning with a publishing partner or consultant, ask her or him about the approach s/he plans to take. Understand and agree in advance on what the costs will be. Ask for a contract, and spend time reviewing it to be sure you're comfortable with its terms and costs. Ask for references from other clients. Very

importantly, trust your instincts. Like any group of professionals, publication consultants differ in their strengths and approaches, and your goal should be to select a partner with whom you can work openly, comfortably, and with full trust.

Expect a publishing consultant to advise you on choosing or setting up a publishing entity; to guide you on editing, be it copyediting, line editing, or developmental editing (and to define what each of these encompasses, as well as how much it may cost); to guide you on book design, both cover and interior; and to advise you on marketing and promotion, including activities you may wish or need to do yourself, as well as what expertise you might buy elsewhere. A publishing consultant in effect acts as a general contractor, identifying discrete resources who offer particular expertise in areas needed, and planning and managing the overall process to the desired outcome.

Many have asked why I as a literary agent would encourage authors to consider independent publishing. After all, historically an agent's role has been to place an author's manuscript with a traditional publisher for an advance, thereby earning the agent a commission on the sale. The answer is this: in these changing times, it's much more difficult to find traditional buyers for manuscripts, even for very high-quality ones, and particularly for first-time authors such as the many I represent. I want to be able to offer authors a viable route to publication, with the satisfactions inherent in seeing your work published well, and discovering readers who will enjoy your book. Many authors come to me with the dream of being published traditionally, which I honor, and do my best to find them a traditional deal. That said, after exhausting the traditional possibilities, which sometimes entails querying 50 or more editors, I encourage my clients to consider publishing their manuscripts independently. If done in a high-quality manner, publishing one's own work can, at the least, be a route to sales, modest market visibility, and delight in seeing one's writing out in the world. At its best, indie publication can lead to major sales, substantial market visibility, great satisfaction, and even a traditional publishing contract—

if in fact that's what an author seeks. (Given the choice, some authors decide to continue publishing independently, due to bigger profits, better control, and greater overall satisfaction with the process.)

So think it over. With indie publishing rapidly gaining credibility and respect, you'll want to consider all your options and develop a strategy that suits you and your goals. And if you do go indie, consider asking for assistance in navigating the confusing array of choices available to indie authors. With the right partnership in place, you'll be prepared to step into the new world of publishing with confidence and success. •



After 25 years as a corporate strategist and consultant, **APRIL EBERHARDT** joined the literary world, where she saw strategic opportunity to play a role in the changing world of publishing. As a "literary change agent," April advises and assists authors as they choose the best pathway to publication, be it indie or traditional, digital or print. She serves as an industry advocate for establishing quality standards for non-traditionally published work to raise the bar for independent publishing.



The WFWA Cafe

with Jessica Ferguson

The WFWA Café has more tasty morsels to offer you this month—huge cinnamon buns with thick gooey frosting, chocolate chip banana bread, carrot cake, scones and my personal favorite, no-bake chocolate oatmeal cookies. Grab one (or more) and join us at that large orange table in the corner.

Hanging out with writers is my favorite thing to do. They don't even have to talk to me, and I still glean wonderful tips and tidbits that help me in my writing. Our differences are fascinating. The way we work and where makes for interesting trivia. So this month, we're revisiting how some of our writer friends find their inspiration, where they pen their delightful stories and what they

do in their leisure time. Please join Kristi Rhodes, Karoline Barrett, Laura Drake, Annee Brizo and Jamie Raintree.

Jessica: *So here we go ladies. Let's talk about our writing spaces. Kristi, you first.*

Kristi: My writing space is a cozy room sandwiched between the master bedroom and bonus room. It's narrow, with a built-in desk my husband made. A window sits to my left. Wicker boxes and baskets abound and they're a tiny bit overfilled. A Mylanta-blue rolling cart that holds my most-used writing books, is parked behind me. Photos, trinkets, treasured books, and inspiring words surround me.

Karoline: I have a lovely antique desk I picked up several years ago at an antique store in Indianapolis. That's where I do the majority of my writing. I also like to sink into my couch with my laptop.

Laura: Bucking bull screen saver, dinosaur poop (long story), Keurig, Internet, and a cat.

Jessica: *Laura, Laura, 'nuff said! My imagination is running wild! Annee, I understand you have an interesting office. Tell us about it.*

Annee: I write on a treadmill, which I've converted to a tread desk with a \$19 lap desk. Velcro straps and an old curtain rod. I don't move fast, two miles an hour, but I can do seven or eight miles on a good weekend or day off. On a typical weekday I rise at four a.m. and put in about three miles writing before I'm off to my day job. I track my writing in miles of words or hours.

Jamie: I have an office that's separated from my daughters' play area by a room divider. It has everything I could want in an office—books, comfy couch, desk, white board, inspirational posters—but I still end up writing in bed much of the time. I think it must be the door.

Jessica: *We've all been influenced along our writing journey by books we've read and favorite authors. Share some of them with us and how or why they've influenced you.*

Kristi: Barbara Kingsolver's accessible, relatable, warm storytelling inspires me. Carl Hiaasen blows me away with his use of humor, vivid characterizations and settings. E.B. White shows me simplicity in stories. Julia Stuart—just everything. Also Nora Ephron and Jennifer Weiner. Plus tons more that I'm forgetting right now.

Karoline: Naomi Ragan, Ann B. Ross, Joan Hess, Danielle Steele, Debbie Macomber.

Laura: I'll say Barbara Samuel O'Neal and JoAnn Mapson

Annee: Diana Gabaldon is the only one that floats to mind. I read so many books and authors and pick up so many interesting tidbits it's hard to nail it down to any particular ones.

Jamie: Even though I currently write for

adults, I read a ton of YA—especially dystopian and paranormal romance. I love the angst of new love and coming of age so I think a lot of that bleeds into my own novels. Maggie Steifvater writes amazing prose. I love stories like *The Horse Whisperer* and *Lady Chatterly's Lover*. But the one book that changed my view of great writing is *The Time Traveler's Wife*.

Jessica: *You all stay busy with your deadlines, whether from publishers or self-imposed. How do you wind down? How do you enjoy life outside of writing and reading?*

Kristi: Snorkeling is my favorite hobby, swimming with the fish, floating and observing, just heaven to me. I also enjoy walking in the woods, watching my sons' sports games, playing tennis, creating cards, having lunch with girlfriends. I love to cook too, especially tropical meals and spending time with friends and family.

Karoline: I love the beach, the pool, and going to museums and baseball games with my husband.

Laura: Ride my motorcycle, fly fish, knit, bicycle ride, and sew.

Annee: My garden. Currently, I'm focusing a lot of energy on building a foundation in social media; building a website, Facebook, and Twitter. It's a bit exhausting. Progress. I'm not as overwhelmed as I once was.

Jamie: Awww, c'mon, reading totally counts! I'm a technoholic so I love poking around with my website, hanging out on social media, blogging, finding fun organizational apps for my iPad. Also, I've sung my entire life so I'm finally teaching myself to play guitar so I have something to sing along with!

Jessica: *I'm worn out just listening to all the fun things you ladies do. Though some of it sounds like work to me. Let's talk about inspiration. It doesn't take much to get down or depressed in this business. How do you stay inspired?*

Kristi: I love reading books by Anne Lamott, Natalie Goldbert, and other inspirational people; just a short chapter first thing in the morning does the trick. Goal-setting also gets me revved

up. Re-reading my WIP always brings a smile and reminds me that there's a lot of good even if I have a slow or bad day. My heavenly critique partner and our weekly meetings also energizes my writing routine.

Karoline: I stay inspired by writing even when I don't feel it, and by letting my imagination run free.

Laura: I ride my bicycle—for some reason the judgmental editor gets involved in helping balance, etc. and frees up the ideas.

Annee: I spend a lot of time participating in the writing exercises at the CompuServe Books and Writers Forum.

Jamie: I'm very goal oriented and luckily, self-motivated. If I set a goal, I stick to it. Almost compulsively. But that can get tough and what really keeps me going is witnessing other writers strive for and reach their goals. I feed off that energy and my excitement for them gets me excited about my own goals.

Jessica: *I think Jamie has nailed it for all of us. We feed off the energy of other writers, we celebrate their successes and in turn, they celebrate ours. We grab a chunk of chocolate and happy dance around the room and then we sit down and start over again. And we write. We write. We write.* •



JESSICA FERGUSON is the author of *The Last Daughter*, a novella published by The Wild Rose Press. She interviews authors for *Southern Writers Magazine* and is co-editor of *Swamp Lily Review*, a *Journal of Louisiana Literature and Arts*. In her spare time, she plays with her recently retired husband. Jess blogs at www.jessyferguson.blogspot.com.

Fun Challenge

Remember last issue's fun challenge?

FINISH THIS SENTENCE:

She walked past a blue bucket that reminded her of...

Here's our chosen reader response, written by **Enid Grayer**:

She walked past a blue bucket that reminded her of the time years before, when she went blueberry picking with her grandfather. She saw his straw hat pulled down tight over his bald head, and his faded dungarees rolled up to his knees. Her small hands seemed lost as his large wrinkled ones enveloped them. He showed her how to choose the best berries. "These will be for Grandma's pies," he said, "and these will be best for snacking." He popped one of the sweet ones in his mouth and smiled, purple juice making a stripe along his gray beard. "Time to go home now," he said, "our bucket is overflowing." She imagined her grandfather filling that blue bucket to overflowing once more, and the wonderful juicy pies that her grandmother made from the tart berries.

Now onto the Next Challenge!

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

I write because ...

Send your response
(in 150 words or less)

to Reese Leyva at

writeon@womensfictionwriters.org

and you may find your
submission published
in our next e-zine.

Thanks for playing!

Five Helps for Writing a Dual Time Period Novel

Susan Meissner



Several years ago, I read what would become one of my favorite all-time reads: *The Thirteenth Tale* by Diane Setterfield. It's the Gothic-style story of a reclusive but famous writer who is nearing the end of her life, and who engages a young biographer to fill in gaps that her readers are begging for. To tell the biographer her story, she must take us all back to the years when she was young.

At the time, I was plotting a novel about a college student transcribing the 400-year-old diary of a young woman named Mercy who had witnessed the Salem Witch trials. It was during the reading of *The Thirteenth Tale* that I realized the story I was getting ready to write didn't just belong to the college student, Lauren, even though she had plenty of story-worthy issues to deal with—including her debilitating need for her father's approval and her oh-so-subtle penchant

for judging people before she knew anything about them. The story was suddenly just as much about Abigail, the elderly woman who owned the diary. I knew that somehow that diary was going to be the catalyst for Lauren's transformational change at the end of the book, and that, because of that change, she was going to have a similar transformational effect on Abigail.

That meant the diary was everything.

When I set out to write the *The Shape of Mercy* in 2006, which was named one of *Publishers Weekly's* Top Ten Novels for 2008, I had pages and pages of research notes from studying every angle of the Salem Witch Trials, plus note cards from a dozen books on the topic, and character sketches of Lauren and Abigail. But after writing Lauren's current-day opening chapter I couldn't get past the notion that it was the diary that I needed to write first, even though I knew I wanted to have

the diary's entries appear in stages throughout the book and not all at once. It was more of an intuitive decision than anything else. The diary came together rather quickly as fictional Mercy Hayworth's story, set in 1692, against a historical backdrop unlike any other. Once I had the diary done, it was amazing to me how Lauren's story began to materialize, and then Abigail's.

This is when I fell in love with dual time-period stories—I have written seven since then. It's also when I realized that, for me, it's the historical part of a dual-time period novel that is the tutor for the contemporary sections, and not just with *The Shape of Mercy*, but with every book since then. It is the historical angle that informs and inspires the contemporary thread. History has always been a mentor; this is why we say if we don't learn from our mistakes we are bound to repeat them. History has the word "story" in it. That's what it is. It's the story of everyone and everything, including what we love, what we hate, what we fear, and what we desire.

Just as there isn't just one way to write a book, there isn't one way to write a dual-time periods book. I can share with you my way and I can also assure you it works for me. As with any how-to article though, you will need to decide what will gel for you. Here are my five keys to making it work.

Choose a historical event or era in which you will fully enjoy immersing yourself

You will spend a lot of time researching the event or era that you choose. Perhaps I should say you should spend a lot of time in research. There is nothing quite as disappointing as a novel with a historical angle that is inaccurate. You can use your literary license to bend historical fact only here and there and I would say only when you have no other choice. I research for a couple months at least before I write one word of story. I absorb as much information as I can—not just the dates and details, but also the effect on culture and on the common individual. I look for eyewitness accounts and memoirs—even if they are poorly written—because these show me what it was like to live through it. This research becomes a wonderful grocery store for you as you write. You will shop from it as you pen the story.

Vow to include NO information dumps

If you're like me, you will amass more information in the research stage than you will likely need to write the book. To rationalize all the time you spent gathering this data, you may be tempted to find a way to include it all. Or you may think the more information you toss in the more accurate your novel will come across, because, hey, you've included oodles of historical tidbits. Just remember that details that have no bearing on the story won't fool any of your more astute readers. They will know you're just dumping in details to show off that you know them. Your less astute readers will just get bored. Either way you will likely lose readers who probably won't pick up your next book. As mentor Tim Gunn says on *Project Runway* regarding the accessory wall, "choose very thoughtfully" what you will use.

Find the universal, timeless truths

When you've decided on your historical event or era, make a list of all the apparent universal truths therein that transcend time. These truths, being global and timeless, can easily make an appearance in your contemporary thread—hooray for you!—and will dovetail the two stories thematically. For example, if you were to dovetail the story of a contemporary woman coping with her military husband's PTSD with a story of a young woman involved in the French Resistance in WWII, a timeless truth could be "War is hell." If they are both in love, a timeless truth could be "Love is stronger than hate." If they both make sacrificial choices for love, the timeless truth could be "Love is worth the price you pay to honor it" or something like that. At least one of the timeless truths you uncover can serve as your controlling thought and keep you from having two stories that seem irrelevant to each other.

Write as much of the historical sections first as you can

This is probably the most preferential step I can recommend. I prefer to do it this way and that is because, for me, it is the historical story that informs the contemporary. Everything I include in the contemporary story is almost always suggested by the historical event. I will often write just the first few chapters of the

contemporary story (maybe 50 pages or less) so that I can have a feel for my current-day main character's persona and vibe, but then I will stop and write all or much of the historical sections. I did this with *A Fall of Marigolds* (set on Ellis Island in 1911 and Manhattan in 2011), *The Girl in The Glass* (set in current day and sixteenth-century Florence, Italy) and *A Sound Among the Trees* (set in the same antebellum house in Fredericksburg in the current day as during the years of the Civil War). I am also presently doing it this way for my upcoming 2015 release, *Secrets of A Charmed Life* (set in 1940 during the London Blitz and also in today's picturesque English Cotswolds). This does not mean that the historical dictates the contemporary—not by a long shot. But history reveals. History shows us what we've done and what we wish we had done. This method has yet to fail me.

Identify a tangible link

For me, I like having something you can see, touch, taste, hear or smell that shows up in both sides of the whole story that links the two threads tangibly, just as the universal truths link them thematically. In *The Shape of Mercy*, the diary is present in both sections. In *Lady in Waiting*, a book where I dovetailed the story of the nine-day Queen of England, Lady Jane Grey, with a contemporary main character also named Jane, it was a ruby and sapphire ring. In *A Fall of Marigolds*, it's a scarf. In *A Sound Among the Trees*, it's the house itself. It could be a person, or the scent of something, or a weather phenomenon, or a song, or a photo, or even an idea. I have found it to be helpful to keep the stories married to each other in terms of believable relatedness if there's something tangible I can weave into the story threads.

A great way to get a feel for dual- or multiple-time period stories is to read how other writers handled this kind of story construct. I have already mentioned *The Thirteenth Tale*, but here are a few of my other favorites:

The Forgotten Garden and *The Secret Keeper*, both by Kate Morton

Those Who Save Us by Jenna Blum

People of the Book by Geraldine Brooks

Revolution by Jennifer Donnelly

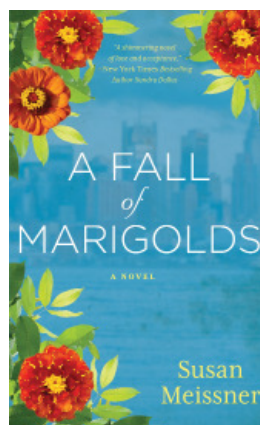
The Time Traveler's Wife by Audrey Niffenegger

Sarah's Key by Tatiana de Rosnay

So there you have it. These are my top five pointers to crafting a dual-time period story. How have you approached constructing this kind of novel? What would you add to this list of five helps? What have you found works well for you or that you will now avoid? •

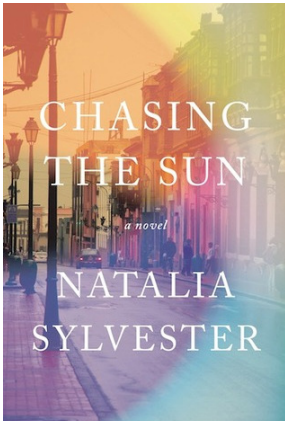


A native of San Diego, **SUSAN MEISSNER** is a former managing editor of a weekly newspaper and an award-winning columnist. She is the author of *The Girl in the Glass*, *A Sound Among the Trees*, *Lady in Waiting*, *The Shape of Mercy*, and *A Fall of Marigolds*.



MEMBER NEWS

We're excited to share these new member releases coming out this quarter.



Chasing the Sun

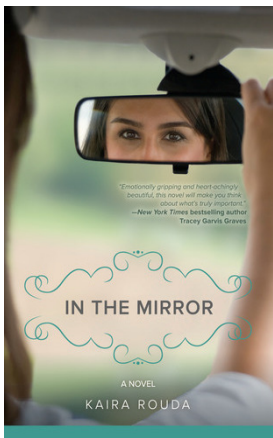
By Natalia Sylvester

Release Date: June 3rd

Synopsis from Goodreads:

Andres suspects his wife has left him—again. Then he learns the unthinkable has happened: she's been kidnapped. Set in Lima, Peru, in a time of civil and political unrest, this evocative page-turner is a perfect marriage of domestic drama and suspense. Too much time and too many secrets have come between Andres and Marabela, but now that she's gone, he'd do anything to get her back. Or will he?

As Marabela slips further away, Andres must decide whether they still have something worth fighting for, and exactly what he'll give up to bring her home. And unfortunately, the decision isn't entirely up to him, or to the private mediator who moves into the family home to negotiate with the terrorists who are holding Marabela. Andres struggles to maintain the illusion of control, while simultaneously scrambling to collect his wife's ransom, tending to the needs of his two young children, and reconnecting with an old friend who may hold the key to his past and his wife's future.



In the Mirror

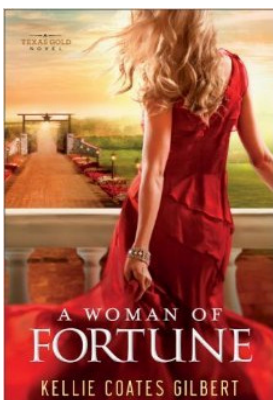
By Kaira Rouda

Release Date: May 1st

Synopsis from Goodreads:

If you knew you may die soon, what choices would you make?

Jennifer Benson has it all: a successful career, a perfect husband, two kids, and abundant friendships. The only problem is she may be dying. *IN THE MIRROR* is the realistic love story about a woman facing a deadly illness, and her loves past and present. It's a story that unfolds with a delightful blend of humor and poignancy, ringing true in the heart of anyone who has ignored a warning of her own.



A Woman of Fortune (Texas Gold #1)

By Kellie Coates Gilbert

Release Date: June 3rd

Synopsis from Goodreads:

Texas socialite Claire Massey is living the dream. Her world is filled with designer clothes, luxury cars, and stunning homes. But her Neiman-Marcus lifestyle comes crashing down when her charming cattle broker husband is arrested for fraud. Suddenly, she finds herself facing attorneys, a media frenzy, and a trail of broken hearts. Betrayed and humiliated, Claire must start over against incredible odds to save her family—and discover a life worth living.

Poignant and emotionally gripping, *A Woman of Fortune* reveals the many ways we deceive ourselves and how resilience of the heart is essential to authentic living. Drawing on her experiences as a legal investigator, author Kellie Coates Gilbert delivers emotionally gripping plots and authentic characters. Readers will love Claire's unbending determination as she strives to keep her family from falling apart and learns to embrace the kind of fortune that lasts.

Have something being published between July and October 2014? Please send an email to writeon@womensfictionwriters.org.

We'd LOVE to get your news in the next e-zine!

How to Write Your First Draft in Just Two Months



Erin Bartels

Once upon a (very brief) time, I was a runner. For about three months in 2013, I trained to run a 5k. Three or four days every week, I'd insert myself into a sports bra, lace up my shoes, and hit the treadmill. I was dedicated to conditioning my body for this race because I didn't want to go through the humiliation of having to stop and walk—especially since I knew so many (much more athletic) people who were racing. My only goal was to jog the entire time and finish the race.

Now, I am not really a runner. I wish I was. I wish I felt exhilarated while running instead of feeling like my body is just one misstep away from breaking apart like a porcelain figure dropped on the floor. Instead, I have to force myself to run further than I think I can.

I'm a pretty firm believer that a person can do almost anything for set amount of time when there is an endpoint in sight. When I was training for the 5k, I convinced myself to go further and run longer by forcing myself to "at least get to the end of this song" and then "at least get to the chorus of this next song" and then "at least go one more lap."

Not surprisingly, that kind of attitude—one that says I can stand the pain until I reach this goal—works for writing. In fact, it can help you achieve goals that seem at first blush to be a little . . . audacious.

I recently completed a first draft of a novel manuscript in 65 days. Just two months. This took me very much by surprise as it was happening. 92,615 words, averaging out to 1,425 per day, though I didn't write every single day, and I don't even necessarily

advocate writing daily (though, if that's your thing, more power to you).

Beyond writing, I work full time, teach Sunday school, take my son to karate, teach English to a family of Burmese refugees, attend choir practice and Bible study, commute halfway across the state once a week, and make halfhearted attempts to keep up on housework (well, sometimes).

I know what you're thinking. How?! How can someone with a full life still find the time to write the draft of a full length work of fiction in a little over 2 months?

I'm glad you asked. Because I bet you can do it too—if you want it badly enough. Here's my best advice on how to make it happen.

1. Spend a long time thinking about, researching, and sketching a rough outline of the novel before writing anything.

Go ahead and make notes of scenes or particular phrases or clever dialogue you think of, but don't start the real writing until you are ready. Really ready. So ready that you can't hold back any longer. I put this first not only because it comes first chronologically, but because it was so obviously the most critical factor for me. I was thinking and researching and outlining for almost a year before I put pen to paper. By the time I started writing, the story was practically bursting out of me. I simply couldn't stop. It wasn't an option.

2. Build in some concentrated blocks of writing time.

I probably could have managed most days to write something on my manuscript, but to write fast and in the moment, I needed to have a string of empty days where nothing was on my schedule except writing. That's how I got momentum. But wait. Don't you work full time? Remember those writing vacations I mentioned in the last issue of *Write On*? Well, I took one week of vacation at the very beginning of my drafting period and another six weeks later. More than 50,000 words were written in those two weeks alone—just over half the book. It's great to write an hour every day, but the mental boost you get from that

kind of concentrated time is incredible. I like to think it's something like the "runner's high" (which remains elusive to me).

3. Write first.

Write before you go to work, before you do the dishes at night, before you collapse in bed and binge on *House of Cards*. Put the writing first—always—for this limited amount of time while you're working hard to get that first draft done. If you have to write instead of cooking dinner, do it. Just for now. Because once you get that first draft out of the way, you'll have plenty of time to make up for what you put off. But if you don't put the writing first for a while, it will always get pushed back down the priorities list until it's the last thing you do with the dregs of your energy—or it may fall off entirely.

4. Resist getting bogged down.

This is a biggie for a lot of us. We want to make it nice and pretty and perfect as we go. But that will hamstring your momentum if you're not careful. There were times when I was drafting, especially near the end, when I had to slow down and look at the big picture again before I could see the way forward. But if you stand still too long in the muck in the middle of your book, you may find that you're cemented there. Or if you don't make the time and you leave your story alone too long, you might give up on it. Push forward whenever you can.

5. Eliminate your biggest distractions.

TV? Facebook? Video games? Friends? Networking? They're all crouching on the sidelines waiting to devour your time and brain cells. Do whatever it takes to control these distractions. Have a friend take your TV and your X-box for a while. Block all those time-sucking Internet sites. Have your mom dog-sit for a couple months. Schedule some special times with your friends for a few months from now (maybe to celebrate finishing your first draft!) so you have something to look forward to. Don't let silly little things in life take your focus off of your dream. They'll be there waiting for you once you've typed "The End."

6. Schedule in time for the really important things.

Yes, we want to reach our goals, but we also don't want to lose sight of the really important things in life while we're striving to succeed. Schedule in family time, worship time, and down time alongside your writing time. Your spouse and your kids will tolerate a crazy writing schedule for a limited amount of time, but they also need to know you still care. And those special times with the ones you love are going to be essential times for your brain to take a break. When I was training for the 5k, I didn't run every day. My body needed down time between workouts in order to heal and rest. Your brain needs that too. And your family needs you.

As it turns out, I was able to finish the 5k without stopping to walk (and without a heart attack—huzzah!). I set my goal to go from a non-runner to a runner and then put that first for just three months and reached my goal. My time may have been pretty wretched, but I finished.

What I find most interesting about my quick drafting experience this winter is that I didn't actually set out to write this first draft at breakneck speed. I fully expected it to take at least twice as long as it did. The speed happened naturally because the story wanted so badly to be told after my copious research. It was all wound up inside my brain and once I let it go, there was no stopping it. But along the way I had ample opportunities for it to get derailed. And that's where the right attitude—the one that says I can stand the pain until I reach this goal—came in.

Once I saw that it was possible to finish the book within two months, you can bet that I wanted to do it. I wanted to get the first draft over with so that I could get to the revision and editing process, which is where I find myself now. Because this is my favorite part of the writing process, the part where the text really comes alive.

If you've been stuck in drafting mode for way too long, or if you've been afraid to even start drafting as you think about what a big time commitment it is, consider what

you could do if you made your writing priority number one for just a couple months. I think if you do, you'll be amazed at what you can accomplish.

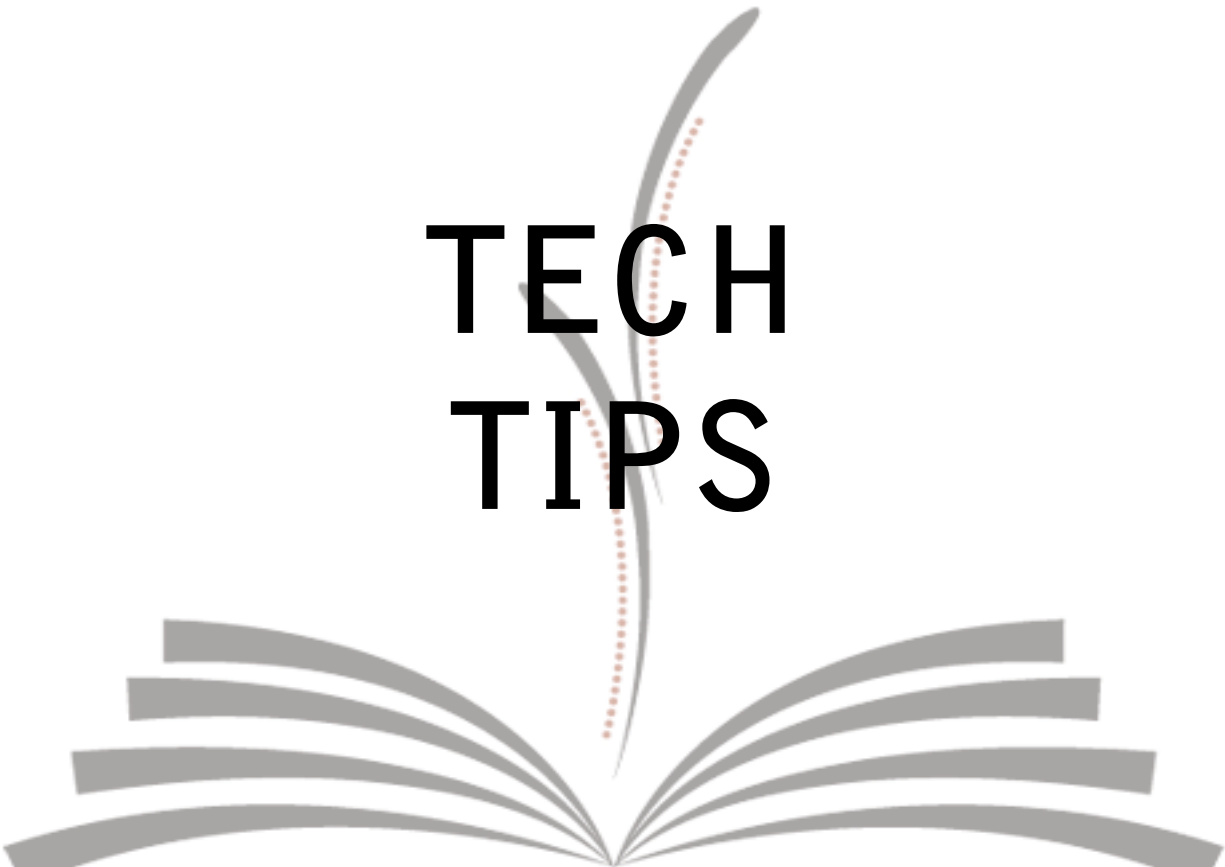
Remember, if the writing is so important to us and feels so vital to our lives, we should treat it that way. We have to want it. And we have to be willing to sacrifice for it, if only for a time.

So, can you give yourself an ambitious (yet reasonable) time frame and tell yourself that you can write for "at least this one hour today" or "every day for just this next week" or "1000 words a day for just this one month?" If you can do that, push yourself a little harder. Give yourself an audacious deadline.

Then beat it. •



Named by the *Saturday Evening Post* among "the greatest up-and-coming fiction writers today," **ERIN BARTELS** has worked in the publishing industry for twelve years. Her ebook, *The Intentional Writer*, offers more great ways to put your writing first. She is currently editing her novel—and dreaming up the next one. You can find her at www.erinbartels.com.



TECH TIPS

from Tasha Seegmiller

The WFWA website was designed with you, the members, in mind. Each time I go, I'm amazed at the breadth and depth of content that has been collected in a single location.

On April 11th, the remarkable team that runs the WFWA website completed an update. If you haven't been there in a while, there are several things that are run a little different.

The first thing you will need to do is update your profile page. In the update, the links and personalization of profiles got lost. However, the update has made it *very* easy to add all the ways people can contact you on the Internet. It takes less than five minutes.

A new feature that was also added is the possibility to tag people in your updates much like you would on Facebook and Twitter. You

just need to know how they have set up their username, put the @ before it and you are set.

The Hub:

This is similar to the landing page you might see when you open Facebook or Goodreads. The Hub gives you the opportunity to scroll through information that has been shared by *anyone* who is your friend. With the recent update, all previous friend relationships were lost, but because of the update, sending and accepting friend requests is very easy. This is an essential step as it will add activity to your hub. The Hub is a great way to glance through what is happening with the other members, see announcements regarding events that may be coming up, and after just a few minutes every day, you can be a little more aware of what is happening in this new but fast growing organization.

The Forum:

I think there are several people who get this and The Hub confused. The Forum is grouped by topic, and serves our WFWA community as an incredible resource. Here, members can peruse through the general topics that take a writer from the beginning stages clear through publication. By clicking on a specific topic, you can then either ask a question applicable to that area, or read through what people have been asking already. This is for more directed interaction, and allows you to see what everyone has said regarding that topic, not just friends. This is the heart and soul of what WFWA is about—"...a community of career-focused women's fiction writers providing networking, education, and continuing support in their career growth."

Toolboxes:

Located under the resources tab, there are toolboxes for the Aspiring Author, Debut Author, and Book Club, as well as toolboxes for the Craft, Marketing, and Business of Writing. I looked at them again a few weeks ago and was blown away at the information that has been gathered for WFWA members. There are lists of Women's Fiction agents, suggestions of writing craft books, and examples of queries that worked with feedback from the agents about why that query worked.

Workshops:

You can find the list of upcoming workshops under the programs tab. In March, WFWA members had the chance to be taught by Donald Maass with assignments and feedback from Mr. Maass. The first week of May, members were treated to five informative lessons on building your platform. Attendees gained invaluable tips on building an online presence, as well as things to consider throughout each step of the publication process.

The next workshop will be in early August. Agent Katie Shea Boutillier, Donald Maass Literary Agency, will present on Building the Novel World. Be sure to check this tab

often and take advantage of the professional presentations offered with WFWA members in mind.

Groups:

This is a new feature included in the update. It is viewable while in The Hub on the right hand side. Members can join groups that are close geographically, giving everyone a chance to meet and mingle with likeminded people who are nearby. Also, there is the option of creating a group that narrows the focus of what you write (i.e. magic realism, historical fiction, etc.). If there isn't a group set up near you yet, simply click the "Create Group" button at the top of the page.

The bottom line is, if you have a question about any step of the publication process, the WFWA site probably already has the answer you are looking for. Take advantage of this information and cut the time filtering through the endless links scattered across the internet. •



TASHA SEEGMILLER (pronounced T + ash + a S + egg + miller) is a high school English teacher in Southern Utah for part of the day, mom to three for the rest, and writes contemporary women's fiction with a dash of magic. She loves owls, runs on Diet Coke, chocolate and cinnamon bears, and a life immersed in words. You can find her at www.tashaseegmiller.blogspot.com.

Guiding Scribe: Creating Our Women's Fiction Stories with Intent



Marilyn Brant

Every once in a while, I'll read a book, listen to a song, or watch a film that leaves me reflecting for hours or longer on the motives of the author/lyricist/screenwriter. This happened to me with a movie recently. Major director. An A-List cast of actors. Big Hollywood budget. Enough critical acclaim to garner a few Oscar nominations. Yet...to my eye, the excesses of the production seemed to call attention to themselves, and I was left wondering to what degree that was intentional. Had the screenwriter, the director, and the lead actor colluded to push a number of envelopes primarily for the purpose of being shocking enough to cause water-cooler discussions? I couldn't help but question this since I was having a harder time than usual identifying with the "art" in the production.

But, I'll admit, that film kept me pondering for days. It succeeded in inspiring several thought-provoking discussions with family and friends afterward, too, on what we suspected the movie's meaning might be. Perhaps, from the viewpoint of the creators, that was their main target. That the ability to incite this kind of discussion defined their idea of cinematic success. (Additionally, they earned many millions at the box office. I'm sure no one at the studio forgot that perk!)

I've reacted similarly to a handful of bestselling novels, although it's hard to deny the variability of

literary taste. What some would call a "slice of life," another might term a "self indulgent" portrayal. What one writer would say is a protagonist's "honest" internal monologue, someone else would claim that, no, the character in question is merely "unlikable" or "un-heroic." There's no objective judge out there and I, for one, am grateful for that.

But it does leave us to make these decisions for ourselves. To collect our own set of definitions for good storytelling based upon what we value most within the realm of fiction. Is it to get people talking? To draw attention to the artist behind the art? Or is it to disappear so seamlessly that the readers forget there ever was a narrator? Do we strive to pull our audience so deeply into the POV of a character that they find themselves transformed emotionally into the story's hero/heroine? Or do we choose instead to create a voyeuristic scenario so riveting that only a few will be able to turn away from its compelling action?

As novelists (or musicians, filmmakers, artists of all kinds), I think we have a responsibility to our readers to do whatever we're doing for a reason. It's unlikely that everyone will appreciate it, and unlikelier still that everyone will enjoy it, but one of the things I respect most about those who are seriously involved with the arts is that there's almost always a dedication to creating with intent. That

there's some very real significance to what we do. Even when I cannot understand the motivation behind the creation personally, I can't help but trust that there is one...

What about you? Why do you write the particular brand of women's fiction that you do? What do you hope to say to your readers? What message means the most to you? As with any art form that's close to our hearts, I think it's worth revisiting our purpose from time to time, just to make sure we know where we're headed and why...and also to see if, maybe, our direction has changed.

Best wishes, everyone! •



MARILYN BRANT is the USA Today bestselling author of *According to Jane*, *Friday Mornings at Nine*, and *A Summer in Europe*. She's also a #1 Kindle and #1 Nook bestseller and has written a series of fun and flirty contemporary romantic comedies, available exclusively as original ebooks. Two of these, *On Any Given Sundae* and *Pride, Prejudice and the Perfect Match*, have hit both Barnes & Noble's and Amazon's Top 100 Bestseller Lists. Her coming-of-age romantic mystery, *The Road to You*, was released in October 2013, and she contributed the novella "All About Us" to the new-adult romance anthology *All I Ever Wanted*. Her next release will be the sequel to 'Perfect Match'—*Pride, Prejudice and the Perfect Bet* coming out Summer of 2014. Visit her at www.marilynbrant.com.

About the GUIDING SCRIBE Position

The Guiding Scribe serves as the respected guiding voice within the Association. S/he is published in Women's Fiction and provides advice to members and the Board about topics related to the genre of Women's Fiction.

The WFWA Founding Team

Do you know the founders of the Women's Fiction Writers Association?

Orly Konig-Lopez
President

www.orkoniglopez.com

Kerry Lonsdale
Vice President, Programs
www.kerrylonsdale.com

Laura Drake
Vice President, Finance / Treasurer
www.lauradrakebooks.com

Linda Avellar
Secretary
www.lindaavellar.com

Marilyn Brant
Guiding Scribe
www.marilynbrant.com

Maggie Marr
WFWA Legal Counsel
www.maggiemarr.com

If you haven't already, send them a Friend Request on the WFWA site to stay connected and see their newest posts in The Hub.



WFWA RISING STAR CONTEST

WFWA's Rising Star Contest is the first industry contest dedicated to women's fiction. No categories, just women's fiction. The Contest opened for entries on May 1 with a cap of 75 entries. Less than 24 hours later, the Contest reached the maximum number of entries.

A key benefit to the Contest is feedback from published authors during the first round. With the unexpected early closing, we're giving our generous first round judges an extra month to read their entries. Finalists will be announced on August 13 and the five finalists will then have one week to make changes to their submission based on feedback from their first round judges.

Those five finalists will then go to five agents who are actively soliciting women's fiction submissions.

The stellar final round judges:

- Katie Shea Boutillier, Donald Maass Literary Agency
- Susan Brower, Natasha Kern Literary Agency
- Natasha Kern, Natasha Kern Literary Agency
- Donald Maass, Donald Maass Literary Agency
- Carly Watters, P.S. Literary Agency

Winners will be announced on October 10, 2014.

Good luck to all entrants!



WOMEN'S FICTION
WRITERS ASSOCIATION