

WINTER 2023



The Quarterly Magazine of the Women's Fiction Writers Association

# WRITEON!

## CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF WFWA

+ PHOTOS FROM  
THE CHICAGO  
CONFERENCE

TJ BUTLER'S FIGHT  
OUT OF PUBLISHING'S  
DARK ALLEYS

GUIDING SCRIBE:  
10 LESSONS  
FROM 10 BOOKS

MEET STAR AWARD  
WINNER ERIN  
LITTEKEN

THE BOOK BIZ:  
BETWEEN BOOK  
LAUNCHES



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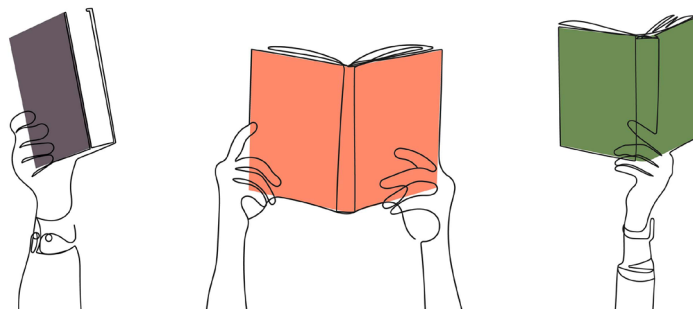
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Check out our calendar of events, workshops, and webinar information on our website.

# 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](mailto:membership@womensfictionwriters.org)

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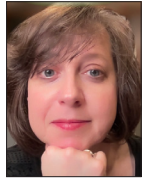


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[www.womensfictionwriters.org](http://www.womensfictionwriters.org)

# STAFF

## SHARON RITCHEY Executive Editor

Sharon is WFWA's former Vice President of Communications and creator of Women's Fiction Day. She is a 30-year communications professional now following her magazine passion with *WriteOn!* and writing fiction. She lives in Northern Virginia.



## SHERI TAYLOR-EMERY Art Director

Sheri is an art director who longs to be a novelist. She loves seeing her kids grow into amazing adults, volunteering at a dog rescue, and playing tennis. She lives with her husband in Atlanta.



## JEN CRAVEN Copy Editor

Jen works as a professional copywriter for various brands and companies. Her contemporary women's fiction/suspense debut *Best Years of Your Life* was released in August 2022.



## LORRAINE NORWOOD Proofreader

Lorraine is a writer and certified book coach. Her debut work *The Solitary Sparrow* is a dual timeline novel set in the 14th and 20th centuries. It will be published in 2023. She is at work on the sequel.



## KATHI JENKINS Proofreader

Kathi is a former environmental engineer now focusing on her debut novel. She loves empowering women, spending time outside, and engaging in inappropriate humor.



## CAMILLE PAGÁN Guiding Scribe

Camille is the #1 Amazon Charts bestselling author of 10 books, a journalist, master certified coach for authors, and the founder of Even Better Co. She is the WFWA Guiding Scribe through 2023.



## 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](mailto:writeon@womensfictionwriters.org). Submitted letters are considered for publication and may be edited for clarity or space.



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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# It's My Time to Say Farewell

**A**s I approach the end of my two-year term as president of this remarkable organization, I'm filled with profound joy. These past two years have been a journey of growth, creativity, and community, and it humbles me to have had the privilege of serving in this role. I am excited and grateful for what we have accomplished together and the future ahead as new leadership takes over.

Being at the helm of WFWA has surrounded me with writers who share a passion for the written word. The energy and enthusiasm of our members are infectious, making every interaction a delightful experience. Looking back on our organization, I'm overwhelmed by pride and accomplishment. Over the years, we have grown from a small group of writers to a thriving community of storytellers. Together, we have achieved major milestones such as hosting more workshops, hiring our first employee, increasing scholarships, showcasing member talents, and celebrating our 10th Year Anniversary with a conference.

Serving as the president has also been a journey of personal growth and development. I have learned valuable lessons about leadership, communication, and resilience. I've had the privilege of working with diverse people, each bringing unique perspectives and insights. These experiences have broadened my horizons and enriched my understanding of the world.

While I step down from the role of president, optimism about the organization's future excites me. New leadership brings fresh perspectives and ideas, and I do not doubt that WFWA will continue to flourish and evolve. I encourage you all to be a part of that continued growth and lend your talents to the organization.

As I leave, I hope you will follow your passion for writing. It can open countless opportunities. Writing has the power to inspire, educate, and change the world. Great writers have influenced society, challenged norms, and shaped history. You, too, can impact the lives of others, whether by telling stories that can touch someone's heart or sharing your knowledge to help enlighten minds.

I will always carry the memories and experiences with me, and I'll share some of them with others as I talk about this fantastic writing organization. Now, I get to return to my regular writing habits and take a much-needed rest, but I'll always be standing off to the side, watching all the wonderful things happening with WFWA.

Farewell, my dear friends! May your pens never run dry, your imagination always amaze you, your characters never disappoint, and your stories find readers and touch hearts worldwide.



**SERVING AS  
THE PRESIDENT  
HAS ALSO BEEN  
A JOURNEY OF  
PERSONAL GROWTH  
AND DEVELOPMENT.  
I HAVE LEARNED  
VALUABLE LESSONS  
ABOUT LEADERSHIP,  
COMMUNICATION,  
AND RESILIENCE.**

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*Jackie*





We've come to the last issue of *WriteOn!* for 2023! What a year it has been. I've had the honor of working with an amazing editorial staff, a dedicated Board of Directors, and fantastic writers who have answered my many calls to write for the magazine. And the best news: We've got exciting plans for next year in the works!

But first, a look back. Coming off our 10th anniversary conference in Chicago, I am struck by how our personal stories and our collective wisdom lifts us all. It is our willingness to share our stumbles and celebrate our wins that creates this dynamic community.

### **Here are ten lessons I've learned (and relearned!) this year.**

- There is no easy stage in writing a book. Whether you are writing, querying, on submission, editing for publication, debuting, or writing your tenth book, there are challenges that will test you.
- You can never be too organized.
- Forgive yourself if you're not organized.
- Social media is both awesome and the worst!
- Rejection is merely a moment, though it hurts like hell every single time.
- Everyone has imposter syndrome. Yes, everyone.

- Your book is never finished, you just need to decide when the work ends.
- Celebrate every win no matter how small.
- Don't write alone. Don't wallow alone. Don't celebrate alone.
- Remember to write first, second, and always for yourself.

Thank you to everyone who has been part of my editorial year, whether it was working with me on *WriteOn!* or Women's Fiction Day. Likewise, shout out to those who have lifted me high as I've learned the new lessons of what it takes to release my debut novel. (See "forgive yourself for not being organized" above.)

As this is our last issue until 2024, you'll find information on our proposed new board of directors. Please take a moment to read their statements and get to know them.

About 350 members made it to our anniversary conference in Chicago. We're delighted to include some of the hundreds of photos from the event through these pages. Thank you to Melinda Canny for serving as our volunteer photographer.

A sincere congratulations to Maggie Smith and Erin Litteken, our 2023 STAR Award winners, and Susan Poole, our Rising STAR winner. Thank you to the volunteer army that runs both of those programs.

This year we met, we hugged, and we have been inspired to write. I hope you all continue to *WriteOn!*

**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@WOMENSFICITIONWRITERS.ORG](mailto:DI@WOMENSFICITIONWRITERS.ORG)**

# Essential Reading: Fiction That Expands Our Personal Landscape

By Gisèle Lewis and Janet Rundquist

We are experiencing a golden era in literature for authors who have traditionally been marginalized or unheard. As writers in WFWA, it is essential that we read and learn from this growing body of work. Why? If for no other reason, it is good literary citizenship. If we are to support writers, we need to support *all* of them.

The publishing industry, for too many years, has made it easy for readers to see white, straight, cisgendered, neurotypical, able-bodied worlds with only the occasional offering of a "Black" novel, an "Asian" novel, or a "gay" story. If this is your world (and it might be), then we think you deserve more. And if it's not your world, then we still think you deserve more. If we believe that stories are windows into other worlds, but the only world offered is, for example, white, then it's not really much of another world, is it?

Simultaneously, we like to see ourselves in stories. As writers, we want to offer that to our readers, which means we need to understand people different from ourselves. Reading stories by authors who offer diverse backgrounds and experiences that vary from our own is a great way to develop this understanding. It's research! And why not enjoy ourselves and bond together in this research of great literature?

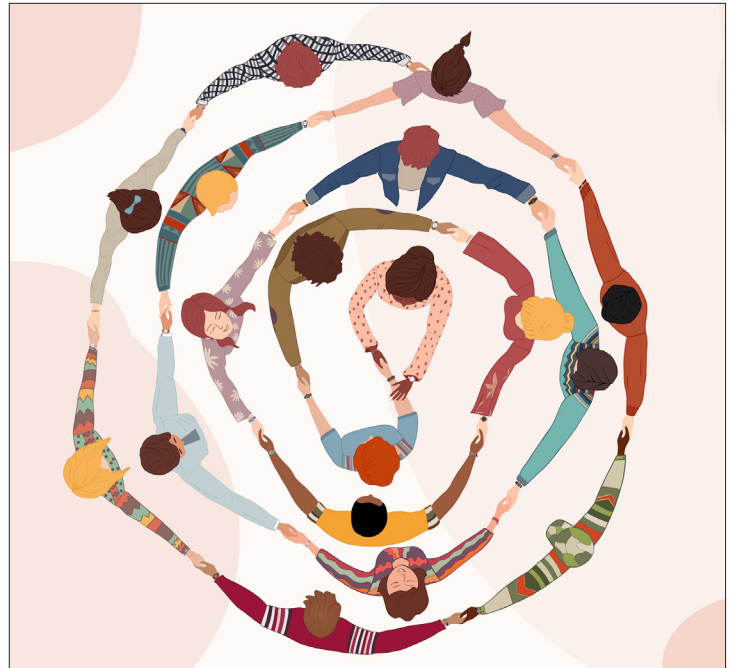
WFWA hosted the inaugural meeting of the Diversity Book Club last September. Our gatherings strive to celebrate the voices of diverse authors and their characters, especially because many of us have never read such essential work. Our first gathering began on a high note as we delved into a currently beloved novel that we believe will become a classic over time, *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett. Everyone asked acutely important questions and voiced opinions with care and curiosity. We're certain the same spirit of inquiry will continue throughout all five remaining books.

Please join us! Our next book club will be November 8, where we will discuss *The Guncle* by Steven Rowley. You can find more details about time and how to join the Google Meet-based virtual discussion on our [website](#). We can't wait to expand our personal landscapes together.



**Gisèle Lewis**, a proud WFWA member since 2016, hosts the Diversity Book Club and has a passion for global literature. She lives and works in Tampa, teaching sewing to refugee women and overseeing product sales at local venues as part of the Refugee and Migrant Women's Initiative. Learn more about her at [giselelewis.com](http://giselelewis.com).

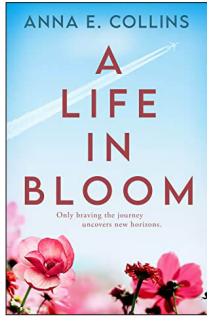
**Janet Rundquist**, writing under the name of J. Marie Rundquist, is the author of two novels: *All I'm Asking* and *As Though You Were Mine*. She lives on Dr. Pepper and cold Minnesota winters. Currently, Janet serves as Secretary on the WFWA Board of Directors.



## UPCOMING SELECTIONS:

- November 8, 2023: *The Guncle* by Steven Rowley
- January 10, 2024: *Detransition, Baby* by Torrey Peters
- March 13, 2024: *The Candid Life of Meena Dave* by Namrata Patel
- May 8, 2024: *The Plague of Doves* by Louise Erdrich
- July 10, 2024: *A Brush with Love* by Mazey Eddings

# MEMBER RELEASES



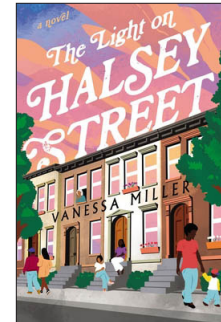
**ANNA COLLINS**  
A Life in Bloom  
7/4/2023



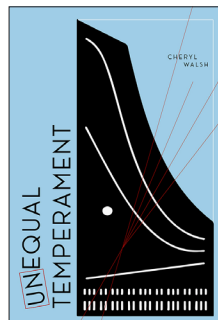
**DELISE TORRES**  
One Tough Cookie  
7/18/2023



**MARCY FOGAL/MARCY LANE**  
A Mercy of Widows  
8/23/2023



**VANESSA MILLER**  
The Light on Halsey Street  
9/5/2023



**CHERYL WALSH**  
Unequal Temperament  
9/5/2023



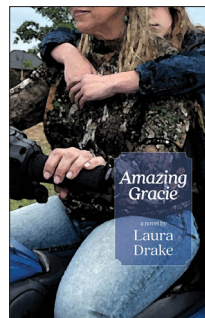
**KRISTEN SEELEY**  
Beverly Bonnefinche is Dead  
9/5/2023



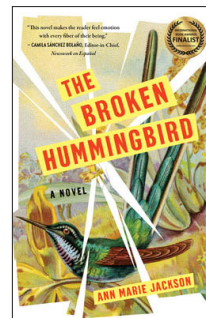
**DEBBIE ROMANI**  
Mendocino Music  
9/5/2023



**KATIE SCHENCK**  
When Cardinals Appear  
9/19/2023



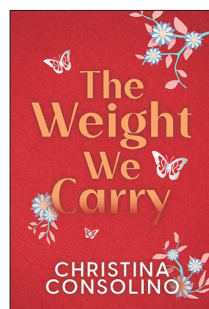
**LAURA DRAKE**  
Amazing Gracie  
9/26/2023



**ANN MARIE JACKSON**  
The Broken Hummingbird  
10/3/2023



**RACHEL C. STONE**  
The Blue Iris  
10/3/2023



**CHRISTINA CONSOLINO**  
The Weight We Carry  
10/12/2023



**TIFFANY BUTLER**  
Dating Silky Maxwell  
10/20/2023



**JUDE HOPKINS**  
Babe in the Woods  
11/21/2023



# CELEBRATING 10 years OF WFWA



Honoring our WFWA Founders, Kerry Lonsdale, Laura Drake, Maggie Marr, Orly Konig

By Lorraine Norwood

On Friday, September 22, the Women's Fiction Writers Association (WFWA) celebrated its 10th anniversary and its annual awards gala in Chicago, Illinois. In celebration, we welcomed Orly Konig, Kerry Lonsdale, Laura Drake, and Maggie Marr—four of the six\* founders of WFWA—to the stage to share the history of WFWA. Here is a recap of their remarks.

Originally, the founders of WFWA were members of a chapter of the Romance Writers Association (RWA). When RWA tightened its rules and required every chapter to be romance-focused and chapter board members to be romance writers, “it became clear that women’s fiction in the broader sense of the genre no longer fit there,” said Orly Konig, founding president of WFWA.

Orly, Kerry, Laura, Lynda, Marilyn, and Maggie met to discuss what they wanted to do.

“We as women’s fiction writers wanted more,” Orly remembered. “We wanted to build a home for ourselves and

writers like us. We wanted workshops that spoke specifically to the genre we were writing, we wanted to meet critique partners that wrote what we did, we wanted resources that made sense for the worlds we were creating.”

As the women made plans to start their own organization, Orly revealed how petrified they were to create a new group. What would happen if no one signed up?

In January 2013, the group members stepped down from the RWA board and left RWA with the promise of organizing a new association. Privately they were terrified. Kerry Lonsdale, founding vice-president of programs said, “Hundreds of writers were relying on us to deliver. They were waiting on the promise of a new association. They were waiting for this beautiful organization we sold them on.”

What followed was a “winter of insanity,” Kelly said. Orly agreed. She remembered a time when she “barely had two brain cells left to rub together” after months of making organization plans, basically taking on a full-time job that didn’t pay.





But the founders persisted. They selected a name for the association, drafted bylaws, found a mailing address, applied for tax exemption, opened a bank account, bought a website domain, designed a logo, created email accounts, and debated about membership. Overriding every decision was the important question: How do we make all this appealing to both published and unpublished authors?

Over the next three months, they built a WordPress site, set up a social media feed, and a robust forum area for workshops and discussions. They created a payment interface and a resource center.

Now they just needed a guinea pig to see if it all worked. On August 14, 2013, Kerry, the chosen tester, logged on to the WFWA website and joined the association as Member #1. The other founders joined next, and for just under a month, they played inside the website to work out the bugs.

Then they announced the official founding date.

At 12:00 a.m. PST on September 9, 2013, the JOIN WFWA button went live. By the end of the day, they had over 100 members. By the end of the week, they had over 350 members. Only remembers elation followed by terror. “We finally launched and a new wave of ‘what the hell were we thinking’ panic hit because now we had to deliver.”

The first members described those early feelings as they thanked the audience at the awards ceremony and those members who couldn’t come to the conference. “We remember how petrified we were,” Kerry told the group. “We also remember how relieved we were that it worked out. And how awed we are today to see everyone here, ten years later.”



Continued on page 10





For Laura Drake, founding treasurer, early priorities included a careful use of money and human resources. To add value to a WFWA membership, the group began hosting workshops on critiquing and polishing first pages.

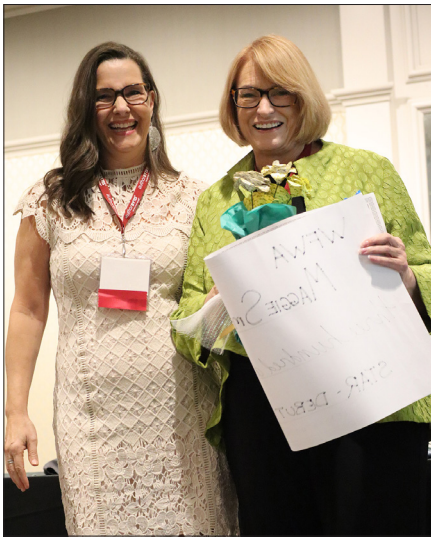
“We had a lofty goal to become the voice of women’s fiction in the marketplace. We wanted to offer all the things, but had to prioritize what we could afford, money-wise, but even more, resource-wise—we are a volunteer organization, after all, and the board was the volunteers at that point,” Laura said.

Orly, who Laura calls “the energizer bunny,” was pushing for a retreat. “She killed herself finding the perfect venue, our beloved Hotel Albuquerque in Old Town,” Laura remembers. “She organized the best writer event I’ve ever been to, hands down. We’ve met there every year since, and I hope it’s something we can expand upon in the future.”

Today, WFWA has grown in membership with over 2,000 members worldwide. Visibility in the marketplace has increased with events such as pitching, mentorship, and even the 10th anniversary conference.

Looking back at the last 10 years, Maggie Marr, founder and legal counsel, said WFWA “has outgrown what each of us individually and perhaps even what the six of us collectively imagined that WFWA would possibly become. Ten years ago, the question was; Are we really going to do this? And we did. Yes we did.”

With challenges such as a possible new name for the association and the worrisome spread of AI, the next question for WFWA members is: Where do we go from here? The answer, Maggie said, depends on all the members—the writers, the volunteers, and the board members.



*Continued on page 11*





From the beginning, WFWA was based on the needs of the membership, she said. “We as an organization are only as strong and robust as the participation of our members; whether that be in online writing sessions, critiques groups, local meet ups, writing contests, classes, our Facebook group or our website. The participation of WFWA members dictates what happens with WFWA and what our future holds.”

Maggie predicted that WFWA will see more retreats, meet ups, and perhaps even more conferences. But most of all, she offered a promise that for as long as WFWA remains, writers will continue to have a place, a home, a community to share our writing journey.

When the founding members pulled out of RWA and worked out the challenging logistics for creating a new organization, they agreed that the primary goal of the new association was the building of a community where women’s fiction and the emotional journey of characters would be front and center.

“We’d stepped away from being a chapter on the fringes of RWA to forming a new writers’ organization that put women’s fiction in

the spotlight,” Marilyn Brant, the original Guiding Scribe, reported. “No matter which subgenres our stories explored—romance, domestic drama, suspense, magical realism, mystery, etc., in contemporary settings or historical ones—we were all welcome.”

In her final comments, Maggie talked about the personal satisfaction that came from being part of WFWA’s founding. While the women’s dreams were lofty, their goals were personal. “I think that’s what all of us—Orly, Kerry, Marilyn, Lynda, Laura, and myself—ever really wanted for us and for all of you. We wanted a community in which to share our writing journey, a place to be our writing home.”

Ten years later, thanks to the passion of the founders and the enthusiasm of early members, WFWA celebrates a growing international community of like-minded writers who have also found a place to be their writing home.

*\* Linda Avellar and Marilyn Brant were unable to be with us during our celebration, but their contributions are significant and deserve our applause.*

## MEET YOUR WFWA BOARD CANDIDATES

# VOTE! 2023 BOARD ELECTIONS

Our Board elections will be held from November 15–21, and we need your vote! You will be voting for four positions, and the elected candidates will serve two-year terms (2024–2026). Next year, the remaining board positions will be up for reelection, thus ensuring there are always members on the board to provide continuity. We have a great slate of candidates this year—all wonderful members prepared to keep this organization moving and growing no matter what. Please read their candidate statements, written in answer to the following series of questions, and visit their websites and social media to learn more about them.

1. Tell us something about your background and how it has prepared you for this position.
2. When and why did you join WFWA?
3. How has WFWA impacted your personal and professional writing journey?
4. What prompted you to stand as a candidate for a WFWA board position?
5. If elected, what would you like to see happen over your 2-year tenure?



### 2023 Board of Directors Candidates:

PRESIDENT:  
KRISTI LEONARD

VP-PROGRAMS:  
TARA LYNN BAISDEN

VP-DIVERSITY & INCLUSION:  
MARIE WATTS

TECHNOLOGY DIRECTOR:  
CATHERINE MATTHEWS

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## PRESIDENT: KRISTI LEONARD

My journey as WFWA VP of Programs has been transformative, allowing me to immerse myself in the organization's heartbeat. I've fostered profound connections with our members, enabling me to discern their desires and the organization's current trajectory. This perspective gives me the insight to lead WFWA towards a vibrant future.

In 2020, as an effect of the pandemic, I closed the nonprofit I had passionately nurtured for many years. This pivotal moment prompted me to rekindle the creative writing I had cultivated during my academic years. During this time, I discovered WFWA, which has enriched my life and writing journey.

Attending the Write-ins and actively participating within the community gave me unwavering support and ignited my creative fire. Volunteering let me give back to an organization that had captivated my heart. WFWA's warm embrace and the friendships I forged helped me overcome self-doubt and sustained my writing.

My motivation to run for President stems from my commitment to this organization and its incredible community. As VP of Programs, I initiated projects I am passionate about and wish to see to fruition. Furthermore, I wanted to continue collaborating with our exceptional board and nurture the organization's emerging talent.

As President, I hope to build on the current board's progress. I will steer us towards the future while safeguarding the unique WFWA culture and keeping the member experience at the core of every decision. Together with the board, I aspire to prepare the organization for a flourishing decade, where WFWA continues to be a nurturing haven where writers thrive and grow.



Continued on page 13



## MEET YOUR WFWA BOARD CANDIDATES

### VP-PROGRAMS: TARA LYNN BAISDEN

From volunteering to working in the stock market, insurance, and retail, I have embraced many roles. Becoming a mother guided me to creative work and I ran a home-based business for 21 years and worked remotely in a publishing house. I have authored six non-fiction books and 14 magazine articles, gaining a wealth of knowledge across different domains.

The pandemic helped me to rediscover my childhood writings and a teacher's encouraging words. My reignited passion for writing led me to WFWA. I found knowledge and a sense of community, particularly through the welcoming and nurturing "Write-Ins." Before long, I committed to giving back to WFWA. Volunteering first as a Workshop Assistant then as Coordinator, I blended my organizational skills, creativity, and deep-rooted belief in education. Witnessing members' growth reinforced my desire to contribute.

I am eager to bring my passion and experience to the board by maintaining excellent programs and enhancing the sense of community. I aim to foster an inclusive environment where every writer, from beginner to multi-published, finds belonging and purpose.

Engagement and collaboration drive thriving communities, and I am eager to listen to members' thoughts, needs, and ideas. Together, we can shape the future of WFWA and ensure it remains nurturing and inspiring for all.

I am committed to elevating WFWA's presence within the broader writing community, positioning it as a beacon for writers seeking a supportive and enriching environment. My goal is to ensure we are "the" place where writers feel at home, welcomed, and part of a like-minded tribe.



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### VP-DIVERSITY & INCLUSION: MARIE WATTS

Thirty years of my career has been focused on diversity and inclusion in organizations. Besides working for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) for ten years and being a contract discrimination investigator with the federal government, I have trained thousands of employees to recognize one's own biases and prejudices and avoid discrimination against others in the workplace. Additionally, I worked in private enterprise as a human resource manager and director as well as owned my own consulting business. I am a certified mediator and disabled.

I joined WFWA shortly after the pandemic hit to keep from going stir crazy. WFWA literally saved my life, allowing me to surround myself with supportive individuals who encourage my creative writing juices.

I believe in WFWA's diversity and inclusion statement and feel I am currently the right person to help the organization build on its strong foundation. My goal is to ensure the organization continues to live up to its objective of accepting individuals who are different.



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### TECHNOLOGY DIRECTOR: CATHERINE MATTHEWS

By day, I am the Director of Assessment and Research. In that capacity, I've led implementation of assessment and data analytics programs including selection, systems design and integration, user management, training, and support. Through WFWA, I served as project manager in the implementation of Google Workspace. I've volunteered with Writing Dates, Rising Star and Star awards, Work Our WIP, Mentorship Program, and social media.

In 2020, I joined WFWA for the quality writing resources and programs, but I stayed because of the community. From my first Writing Date, I felt welcomed and supported. Members shared their knowledge freely and helped me grow as a writer. None of those connections would have been possible without technology.

With a first draft in hand and no idea what to do, I struck gold with WFWA. The programs and resources are priceless. The support and expertise of members has been instrumental to my growth as a writer. Like women's fiction, WFWA is truly transformative.

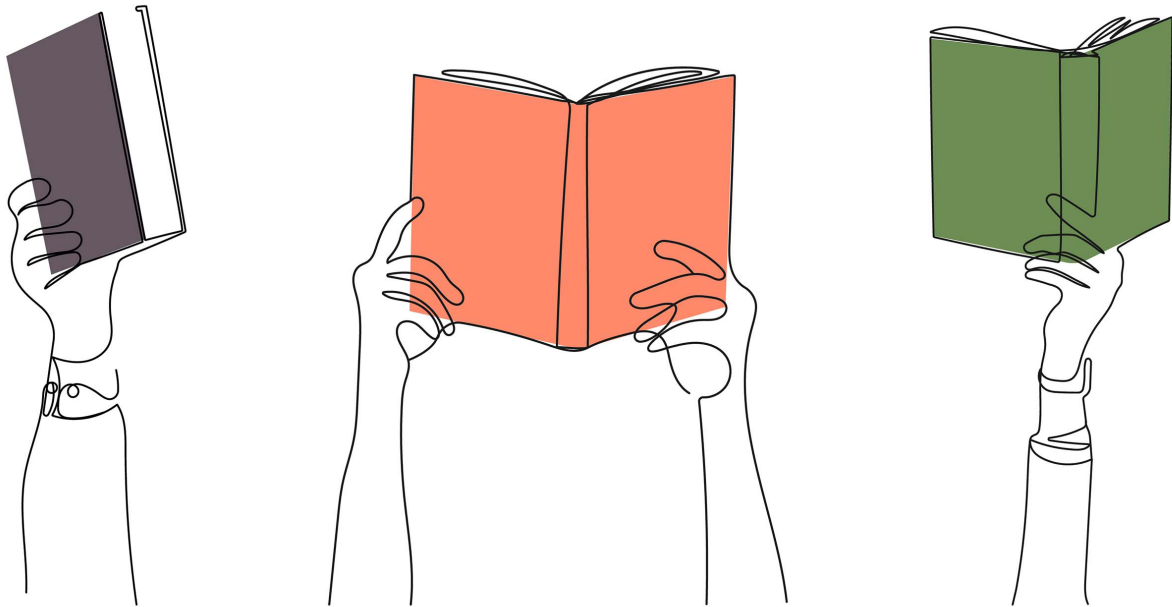
I am standing as a candidate for Director of Technology to give back to the organization from which I have benefited tremendously and to continue the visionary work of past directors, Sophie Krich-Brinton and Jennifer Klepper, implementing technology to support WFWA's mission.

In collaboration with the board and members, I would like to improve areas in which technology is underutilized, while ensuring it continues to promote community engagement. I would also like to provide technology training for members to support their individual work. This could be short videos or step-by-step guides.





# **BETWEEN BOOK LAUNCHES: CRAFTING A SUSTAINABLE AUTHOR CAREER**



**Y**ou've released your book, pitched influencers, run social media campaigns, sent newsletters to subscribers, written guest blog posts, hosted and attended events, participated in interviews, and more. Whew! But a few months later when the launch is over, what then?

First, celebrate all you have accomplished. Launching a book into the world is a worthy achievement. Then, take a break. Not only did you earn it, you need it. These breaks are crucial to maintaining the stamina you need to sustain your author career. Once you've built up enough steam to get back to work, start by focusing on writing your next book. Your next book should be your priority between launches because nothing sells your last book better than your next one.

Of course, that doesn't mean you should completely ignore book marketing between launches. In fact, the period between launches is the perfect time for many marketing strategies.

## **BUILDING YOUR PLATFORM**

Platform-building activities will vary from author to author. Focus on the activities you enjoy, are good at, are intrigued by, or have had success with in the past. Forget about the rest.

One component of your platform that you might want to focus on is credibility. Winning awards builds your credibility as an author, builds the credibility of a book, and gives you something new to mention when you periodically market your backlist. The year following a book launch is the ideal time to submit your recently launched book for awards.

Another platform-building activity to consider is content creation. Between book launches is a great time to write articles around themes related to your book, create bonus materials, and start (or maintain) a podcast or blog. Some authors find tremendous success by writing a short story related to their book, pitching the book at the end of the story, and then using the short story to build their email list and sell more books. These authors first offer the story as a thank-you gift to their loyal newsletter subscribers. Then they offer the story to anyone who signs up for their email list. To promote this offer, they often run an ad campaign for the free short story through Facebook. Readers who enjoy the story may go on to purchase the book, so this strategy can build your list and sell your book.

## THE BOOK BIZ

Getting more email subscribers can be one of this interim period's most effective marketing focuses (and if you don't have an email list, now is a great time to start one). Creating lead magnets, like the short story discussed above, is a great way to do this. Another common strategy to build your list is through giveaways with other authors. These can be arranged by a third party, like [BookSweeps](#), or can be put together by participating authors.

### NETWORKING

Besides platform building, authors should use the lull between book launches to network with other authors and book influencers. Connecting with fellow authors can lead to future collaborations, like giveaways, newsletter swaps, panels, and more. You can make these connections in person at conferences and other book events and online. Finding author collaborators with similar readerships is key from a marketing perspective. Organizations like WFWA make this much easier! The best way to make an author friend is by supporting them and their book by reading, reviewing, and spreading the word. Make sure you tag them and let them know! Conveniently, supporting book influencers and their programs is the best way to network with them as well.

### ENGAGING WITH READERS

One of the most rewarding ways to market your books between launches is by engaging with readers. Tap into your current fan base by sending regular newsletters to your subscribers. You can use the newsletter to share glimpses of your writing life, discuss your writing process, and tease out themes of your next project and backlisted books. Another effective use of your newsletter is recommending books of your author friends and sharing information about the programs of the bookish influencers you plan to pitch for

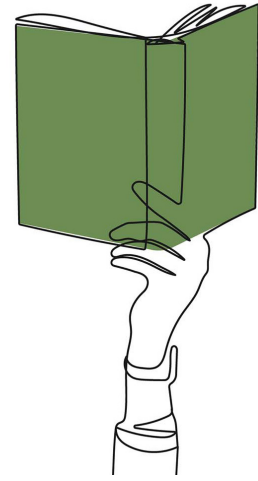
your next book (don't forget to forward them a copy). Attending book events can be a fantastic way to make some personal connections with readers. Book clubs are especially amazing venues for this. Finally, social media is an easy way to connect with readers.

### PROMOTING YOUR BACKLIST

Don't forget about promoting your backlist between book launches. Be sure to leverage seasonal opportunities and current events, as appropriate. A lot can go into one of these mini-marketing campaigns, so much that I wrote an entire chapter on the topic in [Launch Pad: The Countdown to Marketing Your Book](#). One of the big takeaways is strategic discounting of your backlist books can lead to more book reviews, more word-of-mouth, new opportunities, and more sales. This strategy is particularly appropriate for indie authors who have control over the price of their books. The situation for traditionally published authors is more nuanced. Some traditionally published authors report that their publishers are open to collaboration and price changes are a point of discussion. If you have this sort of relationship with your publisher, suggest discounts and jump on any discounts they agree to. Note that it isn't enough merely to discount the book; you'll need to promote the discount. You can do so on your own platform, through discount newsletters, with your professional network, through a BookBub Featured Deal, with ads, and on blogs, podcasts, etc.

### PREPARING YOUR NEXT RELEASE

You can also use the time between launches to learn more about book marketing and to experiment with new strategies in preparation for your next release. And that leads us to the final interim book marketing focus: preparing



**YOU CAN USE THE NEWSLETTER TO SHARE GLIMPSES OF YOUR WRITING LIFE, DISCUSS YOUR WRITING PROCESS, AND TEASE OUT THEMES OF YOUR NEXT PROJECT AND BACKLISTED BOOKS.**

for your next release. You can do this by writing an amazing book, ordering a professional cover design, and designing a marketing plan. If the thought of designing a marketing plan overwhelms you, check out [The Ultimate Book Launch Workbook](#) available on Amazon.

In navigating the roller coaster of book marketing, it might be helpful to think of the seasons. Preparing for a book launch is like spring, a time to nurture your new book's promotional potential and awaken dormant marketing efforts. The book launch, when you are out and about in the sunshine actively promoting your book, is like summer. Then comes fall when you wrap up your launch commitments and cozy up to your next book. The time between launches then is like winter. While many of your marketing activities can go dormant, it's a great time to plant new trees and focus on your evergreen efforts.



**Mary Helen Sheriff** serves as an [Author Marketing Coach](#) helping authors save time and money on their journey to sell more books. She's the author of women's fiction *Boop* and *Eve's Road Trip*, the CEO of Bookish Road Trip, and is currently co-editing a collaborative anthology entitled [Launch Pad: The Countdown to Marketing Your Book](#) (released June 2023).

# 10 LESSONS FROM 10 BOOKS

Here's what I wish I'd known at the beginning of my author career

Earlier this year, I published my tenth book, *Good for You*. Like WFWA's 10-year anniversary, it was a big milestone—and an opportunity to reflect on what I've learned. Here are 10 things I wish someone had told me when I set out to write my first novel and become a career author.

**1 WHAT SELLS MAY SURPRISE YOU.** My third novel, *Forever is the Worst Long Time*, made many best-of lists and received starred reviews. And ... it's one of my lowest-performing titles. I was certain my fifth novel *I'm Fine and Neither Are You*, would flop. It became an Amazon Charts and *Washington Post* bestseller. Sometimes you get a hunch that a story will resonate with readers. But often, you just don't know how a book's going to land. Which is why it helps to ...





## GUIDING SCRIBE

**2 FOCUS ON BUILDING A BODY OF WORK.** While runaway bestsellers get a lot of press, success as an author is rarely owing to one novel. And isn't that a relief? You've got plenty of chances to get it right. Every book you write makes you a better writer—and each one you publish has the potential to bring in passive income and new readers.

**3 "ALL IN" DOES NOT MEAN GOING BROKE.** It's okay to do other jobs or have a second career. I love fiction, but I've always had another income stream: first as a health journalist and editor, and now as an author coach. Being multi-passionate and/or supporting yourself (and if applicable, your family) doesn't mean you're not serious about your author career.

**4 WHEN IT COMES TO YOUR BUSINESS, YOU ARE THE ULTIMATE EXPERT.** When faced with big decisions, ask yourself: *What would I do if I didn't care what other people thought?* Your intuition can lead you to the right path for you in a way that no editor, agent, or other publishing professional ever will.

**5 MINDSET MATTERS MOST.** Marketing advice ages fast; strategies I learned even a few years ago aren't applicable anymore. But every mindset technique I've adopted—even from twenty years ago as a junior editor at *Fitness* magazine—continues to help me today. Why? Because when you feel optimistic, you take more action toward your goals. When you feel lousy, you don't. It's truly that simple.

**6 OPTIMISM ISN'T THE SAME AS FEELING GOOD ALL THE TIME.** Research shows that hope and optimism motivate us and make us more likely to reach our goals. But that doesn't mean being a Pollyanna or buying into toxic positivity. While you don't want to wallow in them, so-called negative emotions can be helpful. For example, disappointment is a sign you're invested in your goals. Jealous? That means you've figured out what you really want. Discomfort—which is arguably *the* secret ingredient to success—means you're growing. You can experience these feelings without losing hope.

**7 YOU DON'T NEED THICKER SKIN. YOU NEED BOUNDARIES.** Other people have the right to their opinions about your work. They *don't* have the right to make sure you know about that opinion by, say, emailing you their criticism or tagging you in negative reviews online. Protect your mental health however you need to—and don't feel guilty about that. Your writing may depend on it.



**8 REMEMBER WHY YOU DO THIS.** Yes, this business can be tough. And sometimes, so can the act of creation. But you chose writing because you love it—so let yourself love it! Every time I allow myself to write for the sake of writing, I draft faster, and my story requires fewer edits. That's not a coincidence.

**9 SIMPLE IS OFTEN BEST.** Complicated is not synonymous with better. You don't have to learn plot structures that don't make sense to your brain, figure out TikTok, or set up color-coded grids (unless you want to, of course). Research shows that reducing or eliminating friction—that is, anything that makes it harder for you to take an action—increases follow-through.

**10 STOP WAITING TO GET CHOSEN AND CHOOSE YOURSELF.** I know, I know—no matter what publishing path you take, you're still ultimately asking readers to pick you. But here's the thing I wish I'd known even five books ago: when you choose yourself first, others are more likely to, too. Respect, advocate for, and be proud of your work. However imperfect it may be, you can't hate what you've created and expect readers to love it. Focus on what lights you up. Pay less attention to your weaknesses and more to your strengths. Your stories—and yes, your readers—will thank you.

**Camille Pagán** is the author of *Good for You*, *Woman Last Seen in Her Thirties*, and many other novels. She is the WFWA Guiding Scribe through 2023. If you missed her closing keynote speech at the 10th Anniversary Conference, you can listen to it on her podcast, *You Should Write a Book*, which you can access at [www.evenbetter.co](http://www.evenbetter.co).



By TJ Butler

**L**ast year, I made a New Year's resolution for the first time. I was determined to publish my short story collection no matter what.

In the fall, I'd finished a novel better suited for a drawer than a query letter. My collection, which I'd written before the novel, had languished on my laptop for what felt like forever. When I realized I didn't have the patience for yet another novel revision, I returned to the collection as a bright beacon of hope; despite its long and arduous journey, I knew it needed another chance.

In my mid-forties, I began taking writing seriously after many university creative writing courses and publishing melodramatic poetry in my university's literary journal. As an adult, I returned to writing with a wealth of lived experience to draw from. I immersed myself in workshops and summer conferences. I joined a writing group and had good luck publishing in literary journals. Writing short stories naturally followed. A workshop instructor suggested I continue writing short stories and publish a collection. My fragile writer's ego felt validated that a professional instructor thought my work was good enough to be a book.

A few weeks later, an agent posted in a Facebook writing group that she was open to submissions. At the time, I knew nothing about querying. So, I poured a glass of wine, composed a short email about my short stories that would make a great collection, and attached what I now know were decent drafts. She responded that she was new to agenting and loved the stories. Two days later, I had a contract in hand. I naively believed having an agent was all it took to be successful and I was certain a book deal was on the way. My agent shopped the partial collection to a few kind editors, but, as is common for debut short story collections from unknown authors, they said no. My agent was optimistic that something great would come along, and I completed the collection over the following months. My agent and I were both naively hopeful about the collection's future.

Then the pandemic hit.

My agent left the business.

And I fell apart.

*Continued on page 19*

Without knowing debut short story collections were a hard sell, I queried scores of new agents. My impatience won and I moved onto small presses that didn't require an agent. I'd failed to check Writer Beware or The Author's Guild when I was querying, and the first publisher who sent a contract had a few bad reviews on Writer Beware. I ignored the reviews because they were a few years old. In my desperation to have a book deal, I believed nothing like that would happen to me. Losing my agent hurt so badly that I decided to proceed with the contract. It required me to purchase 50 copies of my book, which I rationalized because I knew I'd want to buy them for book signings and events.

I was thrilled to have a "real" publisher. However, going into my late forties, I wondered if I was running out of time. We've all seen the "Thirty Under Thirty" lists with bright young things who've written brilliant novels. We've also heard about the novelists fresh out of their MFA programs who reach the bestseller lists. The irony behind lists celebrating youthful authors is that writers of a certain age bring wisdom and decades of life into our work. Regardless of age, everyone has seen publicity about a younger person with a book that skyrocketed to the top. My writing gets better with age, just like wine and cheese. I saw a happy life ahead of me. I had a book deal. So what if I had to buy books in advance? I was on top of the world. How little I knew.

The publisher missed every deadline. He ignored most of my emails, answering only those with a certain *tone of voice*. I began to think I'd spent almost \$700 on books that might never come, but I was patient as the months passed without action. It was fine, everything would eventually pan out as promised. But I was wrong. Everyone knows publishing takes time. In my case, I wasted over a year waiting for a book that never materialized. I watched deadlines come and go and I

## I WAS THRILLED TO HAVE A "REAL" PUBLISHER. HOWEVER, GOING INTO MY LATE FORTIES, I WONDERED IF I WAS RUNNING OUT OF TIME.

counted emails in the double digits that were never answered. In my final email. I canceled my contract and ironically, this was the only email he responded to immediately. Once again, I was crushed. I'd lost yet another marker of success. I wondered if my book was cursed. However, I believed in the book and returned to the query trenches.

The land of querying agents is a familiar, lonely place. I had plenty of notes and knew more about publishing this time around. Armed with a more polished submission package, I began querying again. It was about ego and emotions, not just a book deal. Within the space of two years, I'd gone from being agented to having a book deal to having nothing. Querying felt like I was gasping for air. The collection was no longer precious. It was now a math problem I didn't have the tools to solve. I gave up querying entirely and decided to write a novel. This will fix everything, right?

I powered through and finished the novel in a year with weekly marathon writing sessions and multiple writing retreats. I believed it was a masterpiece. Don't we always think that about our first novel? I thought it was so good that when my old agent reappeared, I signed with her for the short story collection *and* the novel. Once again, I felt like I had it all. We fantasized about a two-book deal. "This is how authors make it," we said to each other.

I did not make it. In the summer of 2022, life got in the way for her. She meant well but missed the mark once too often, and we parted company amicably. Whoever said the third time's the charm has never been a hopeful, emotional debut author at the end of her rope.

Back into the querying trenches I went. This time, I targeted reputable small presses. I'd taken WFWA workshops on

improving my query package and knew so much more than I'd known the other times. In addition to querying, I focused on freelancing and built up my bylines in outlets such as *Huffington Post* and *Insider*. Meanwhile, I took part in a free novel assessment, certain my book would garner praise. After all, I'd poured my heart into it. The coach was honest: it needed an overhaul beginning on page one. I was crushed, but at least I had my bylines.

In December 2022, I made a single New Year's resolution: publish my short story collection in 2023. I had no other goals. I was more knowledgeable than ever. My bylines validated my position as a writer and removed the desperation and fragile ego I'd had previously, so I knew I'd make better decisions this time.

In early January 2023, I submitted to a small but reputable independent publisher's 48-hour pop-up call for submissions. A few days later, I had a contract in hand. After my initial elation, I realized it was no longer an emotional journey. Every bump in the road was a learning experience, not just a setback. The years I spent studying craft, revising my work, learning about query packages and book marketing, and persevering in an unforgiving industry hadn't been wasted. Instead, my small press contract came when I was more ready for it than ever.

My collection *Dating Silky Maxwell* was released on October 20. The publishing industry can feel cruel and without compassion, but despite all that, I'm grateful for the tough journey. Whether authors choose an agent, an independent press, or self-publishing, there is a light at the end of the tunnel for everyone who is determined, patient, and willing to be surprised at what the future holds for our manuscript.



**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](https://TJButlerAuthor.com)



# MEET STAR AWARD WINNER ERIN LITTEKEN

By Sharon Ritchey

Congratulations to STAR Award winner Erin Litteken on her book *The Memory Keeper of Kyiv*. *WriteOn!* talked with Erin about her book, her family connection to Ukraine, the ongoing war, and the importance of historical fiction to readers today.

When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Erin watched in horror as history repeated itself. And she should know. As a child, she had listened to her great-grandmother tell stories of escaping Ukraine in a hay wagon during WWII and traveling across Europe with her three young children, eventually making her way to America. It was these family stories that inspired Erin's STAR Award-winning novel, one she had spent close to a decade researching and writing. When the war broke out, she was in the final edits of her book slated to be released in May of that year. The timing felt prescient. But it wasn't.



**WO: What were you feeling when the war broke out just months before your book's debut?**

**Erin:** I was heartbroken and worried that people would think I was capitalizing on the war to promote my book. I had been researching and writing the story since before Russia invaded Crimea in 2014. Readers don't understand how long it takes to write and publish a book. I wasn't sure what to do. I didn't want to promote it on social media or talk about it. Thankfully, my publisher offered to donate a portion of the book's proceeds to a charity supporting Ukraine. To date, they've donated £8,278 (US \$9,850). This gave me something to talk about. Additionally, several of the foreign publishers also made large donations. It felt good to be able to help in this way.

## FEATURE

### WO: Where did this story idea come from?

**Erin:** My grandfather was born in Ukraine and my great-grandmother lived with us. I grew up hearing stories about Ukraine. As I became an adult, I wanted context to those stories to better understand the places she spoke about. I was originally writing a story based on my family's history but when I learned about the Holodomor and how the Soviet Union created this famine, I knew I had to start with the history in the 1930s.

**WO note:** *Holodomor means extermination through hunger. In 1932, Stalin forced Ukrainian farmers to join collectives to suppress Ukrainian nationalism. This caused a man-made famine that killed millions of people.*

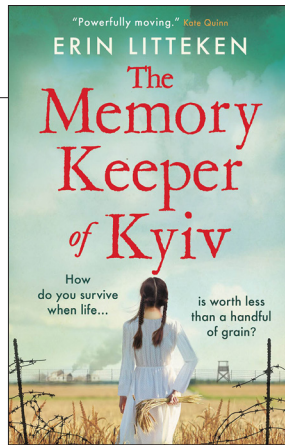
### WO: Why did you choose a dual timeline instead of setting the entire story in the past?

**Erin:** I wanted to show how the past is still relevant. There are echoes across generations. People won't always read a book of nonfiction or watch a documentary, but they will read novels. I wanted to bring awareness to all the lives that were lost. The Holodomor is a hidden history.

### WO: How did you conduct your research?

**Erin:** I've been informed by other writers such as Anne Applebaum and her book *Red Famine* as well as several books of first-hand accounts. Unlike the Nazis who keep records of everything, the Soviets didn't. It wasn't until the 1980s that many archives were made available. And Russia denies that there was a man-made famine. Additionally, Harvard University has a Ukrainian research institute with lots of information online. And before the war, I was able to access online information in Ukraine using Google translate.

### WO: Ukraine is important to your family history. Will you continue to write about it?



1

CASSIE

Wisconsin, May 2004

Cassie's facial muscles twitched in rebellion, but she forced her mouth into a big, fake smile as her daughter entered the kitchen. She hoped if she smiled long enough, hard enough, Birdie would respond, but the little girl stared back, expressionless.

Cassie fought the urge to bang her head into the wall.

Birdie's wide blue eyes contrasted sharply with her dark, tangled hair. The pink princess pajamas she'd wanted so badly for her fourth birthday now rode halfway up her calves and forearms. They'd shrunk. Or she'd grown. Maybe both. Cassie didn't seem to be good at noticing these things lately.

Harvey plopped down at Birdie's feet, his tail thumping the floor as his shaggy brown fur warmed her bare ankles.

"The dog keeps a better eye on Birdie than I do." Cassie rubbed her hands over her face and resumed her typical routine of forcing out meaningless banter. She couldn't bear the quiet. It gave her too much time to remember.

"Good morning! Did you sleep well? What would you like for breakfast? I have overnight oats, eggs, or I can make some quinoa, fruit, and honey if you want."

Cassie was failing on many levels of parenting, but no one could say she didn't feed Birdie well. The pantry overflowed with organic snacks bought in bulk, and the fruit bowl on the counter always contained several different options. Cassie didn't care if she skipped dinner or ate saltines for breakfast, but she was determined to make sure Birdie received all of the nutrition she needed, even if her clothes didn't fit or she never spoke again.

Birdie pointed to the carton of eggs Cassie had taken out of the fridge and the frying pan on the drying rack in the sink. Cassie picked them both up and brought them to the stove while Birdie got out a spatula and the butter dish.

"One egg or two today?" Cassie asked. She did this all the time, trying to trick Birdie into answering without thinking. It never worked. Birdie hadn't talked in fourteen months, one week, and three days. No reason why today should be any different.

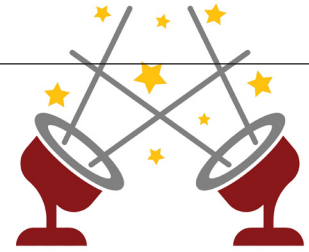
Excerpt From  
The Memory Keeper of Kyiv  
Erin Litteken  
This is protected by copyright.

**Erin:** My latest novel *The Lost Daughters of Ukraine* is the story I originally set out to tell and is based on my family stories. If anyone is curious about what happened to the baby in *The Memory Keeper of Kyiv*, this is her story. My family is supportive of this, especially one of my great uncles who lives in Croatia. I've had three trips

planned to Ukraine, two canceled because of COVID and the last due to the war. I have more to write.

*As the war continues to rage on, Ukraine still needs international support. Erin recommends the charity Nova Ukraine, [www.novaukraine.org](http://www.novaukraine.org).*





## **WFWA TECHNOLOGY WIZARDS: LINDA PAUL AND SOPHIA KRICH-BRINTON**

Technology is the heart and soul of our virtual organization. This issue, we celebrate two amazing volunteers who make it possible for us to connect and thrive. Thank you both for your talent and the considerable time you put into your roles. We couldn't function without you!



### **LINDA PAUL, WFWA WEB DIRECTOR**

One of her many recent contributions was the implementation of the *Whova* app used during the 10th anniversary conference. Whova allowed attendees to have the conference schedule in the palm of their hands, send messages, organize events, and share photos and documents. We will be sure to use this for future events. As WFWA explores new technology solutions, Linda will be with us to help.



### **SOPHIA KRICH-BRINTON, VP OF TECHNOLOGY**

Sophia or Sophie as so many of us know her, oversaw one of the biggest technology transformations in WFWA's history when the organization migrated to the Google workspace. Sophie has been involved in all aspects of the organization from the technology needed to run our contests, updating our websites, webinar registrations, membership renewals, and most recently helping to establish all the tech needed to run the 10th anniversary conference.

“Writing is a job, a talent, but it’s also the place to go in your head. It is the imaginary friend you drink your tea with in the afternoon.”

—ANN PATCHETT

