

FALL 2021



The Quarterly Magazine of the Women's Fiction Writers Association

WRITEON!

WRITING AS A CAREER

**BUILDING YOUR
AUTHOR PLATFORM**

**HAPPY HARSH TRUTHS
OF A WRITING CAREER**

**IN THEIR WORDS:
SARAH PENNER**

+

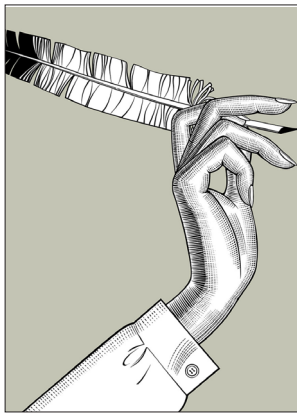
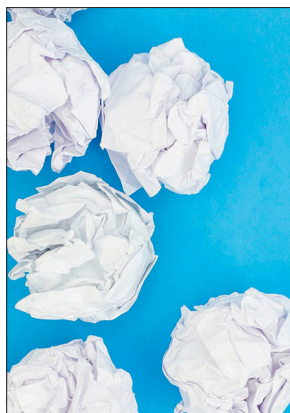
**LET'S FIX THIS!
BACKSTORY**

**SHOW
US YOUR
OUTDOOR
WRITING
SPACE**



FALL 2021

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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.



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Join the closed WFWA Facebook group by sending an email to:
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IF YOU LIKE WHAT YOU'VE READ IN WRITEON! ...

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

STAFF

KAY ARTHUR Managing Editor

Kay is now retired after working 30 years in Healthcare Administration. She splits her time between Phoenix and a cabin in the mountains of Prescott, Arizona, where she loves to write, paint, and enjoy the great outdoors. Of course, spending time with her husband, two dogs, and family is the best part of her life. She is fully engrained in the writing community and has three novels in various stages of creation. Her website is www.kdarthur.com.



SHERI TAYLOR-EMERY Art Director

Sheri is an art director at a parenting publication who longs to be a novelist. She rejoices in seeing her son and daughter turn into amazing young adults, working at a dog rescue once a week, and corralling two dogs and four cats at home. She lives with her husband outside of Atlanta.



CASEY DEMBOWSKI Copy Editor

Casey is a contemporary romance and women's fiction author. Her debut novel *When We're Thirty* was released in April 2021 from Red Adept Publishing. Casey earned her MFA from Adelphi University and has over ten years of professional experience in corporate communications. She lives in New Jersey with her husband, daughter, and their two cats.



BROOKE WILLIAMS Staff Writer

Brooke is a novelist, childcare provider, fitness instructor, and Girl Scout leader. When she isn't writing or devouring stacks of good books, she's helping out at the local elementary school, working on her MFA, or haunting her favorite local taco joint. She lives in Ohio with her husband and four children.



TIFFANY YATES MARTIN Guiding Scribe

Tiffany has spent nearly 30 years as an editor in the publishing industry, working with major publishers and *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today* bestselling, award-winning authors as well as indie and newer writers. She's the founder of FoxPrint Editorial, and author of the bestselling book [Intuitive Editing: A Creative and Practical Guide to Revising Your Writing](#). Under the pen name Phoebe Fox, she's written six published novels.



PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Do you remember the moment your writing career began?

I wrote my first magazine article on a boxy desktop with a monitor that swallowed my desk and submitted it via snail mail with a SASE (self-addressed stamped envelope) to a regional publication. It was my initial, tenuous step on the road to a publishing career. I still have a framed photocopy of the check I received.

What I'd soon learn is that publishing is a professional industry like any other. If you don't keep growing and learning, you'll be outpaced by those who do. Whether you are new to writing or the organization, or an old-timer like me, we have plenty of tools to ensure you keep growing in your field:

- Check out our WriteON! [archives](#); you'll find plenty of gold in its pages to help you along your career journey.

- Join the conversation in our online [writing community](#), and be open to all there is to know. And if you've been walking this road for a while now, don't dismiss how much valuable knowledge you have. WFWA is the perfect place to share it with writers starting out. We were all newbies once.

- Consider [volunteering](#). Our volunteers keep WFWA running, and they have built it to be the incredible organization it is today.

My skills have grown exponentially since that first published article, in large part because of WFWA. Every workshop I took, and writer I met, taught me how to improve my craft. But they also taught me there was much more to learn. The value I found here, and the desire to expand on what we can offer members, is why I've served on the Board of Directors for six of the nine years that WFWA has been in existence: to contribute to its [mission](#) of helping foster writers' careers.

WFWA has grown and evolved too. Today, we have over 1,675 members worldwide, all of whom have access to dozens of publications, contests, events, tools, and more. We are the industry leader for Women's Fiction writers. We are expanding our Board of Directors to include a VP of Diversity and Inclusion, and are currently in the process of hiring a Diversity Consultant. We also have many new programs and plans in the works for the coming months and beyond.

The candidates for the 2022–2023 Board of Directors bring a wealth of talent, experience, and knowledge to the organization, assets that will be critical to informing the direction and continued success of WFWA. They are the reason I feel comfortable stepping down from my role as President at the end of this year. We will remain in great hands.

Writing may be a solitary endeavor, but you're never alone. By lifting each other, we all win. That's what community—and WFWA—is all about. I'm proud to have been part of the organization's leadership team for so long. I'm grateful for every experience I've had and friend I've made. And I can't wait to see where we go next.

Write on!

Christine Adler



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ENDEAVOR,
BUT YOU'RE
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BY LIFTING
EACH OTHER,
WE ALL WIN.
THAT'S WHAT
COMMUNITY —
AND WFWA — IS
ALL ABOUT.**



ca·reer | \ kə-'rɪr

a job or profession that someone does for a long time

That's the definition Webster gives us for "career." Eleven words that paint a picture of our dreams and our yearning to fulfill a goal that seems so difficult to achieve. Add the word "writing" before it and it has a whole new level of meaning. I'd love to know how many of us have heard "do you know how hard it is to get published?" or "you've written a book, great! Is it on Amazon?" I know I'm not alone in hearing those well-intended-but-naïve people insert doubts into our heads, that stubborn prick of uncertainty that breeds with each rejection or difficult spin of our story. A writing career is not easy, but then nothing that is truly wonderful is really *easy* to achieve.

I worked as a healthcare administrator for 30 years—one of those careers that just happens, as we motivate through life with opportunities and a talent for certain things. Organization, leadership, management, and financial skills were key to my job, but, missing in that list of attributes was *creativity*, that right brain function that inspires and gives *me* the most pleasure.

Now, in my sixties, I am eagerly pursuing a writing career. Yes, some days are better than others, and those stubborn doubts creep in, but, for the most part, I want to do it regardless of my age or what level of success I obtain.

All of us have a preconceived notion of what constitutes *success*.

Does it mean writing "the end"? Maybe
Does it mean getting an agent? Maybe
Does it mean being published? Maybe
Does it mean meeting others, who like us,
love words? Maybe

Our successes *are* infinite as we each pursue our passion of writing. Will we all be successful in a writing career? That depends on your definition. But the love of writing is the common thread among us, connecting us tightly together and wrapped in a pretty bow called WFWA.

In this issue, we have much to talk about. Take your fingers off the keys, grab a cup of coffee, sit back, and enjoy the celebration of writing. However we cross paths, we are all a part of each other's journey and for that, we celebrate.

Enjoy the ride.

Best,
Kay

MEMBER RELEASES



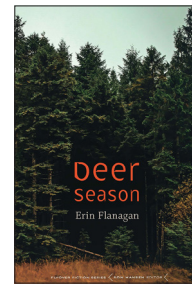
JEANNE MATHEWS
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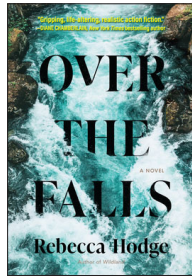
AMY O. BARKER
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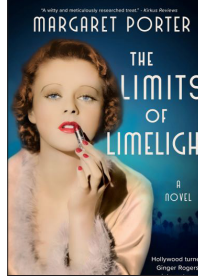
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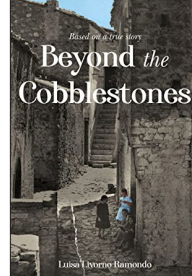
ERIN FLANAGAN
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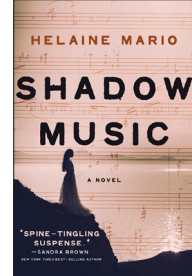
REBECCA HODGE
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9/7/21



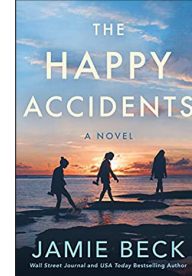
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JAMIE BECK
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PAULETTE STOUT
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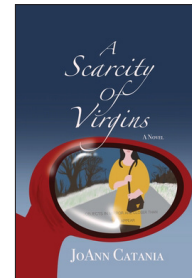
RAMSEY HOOTMAN
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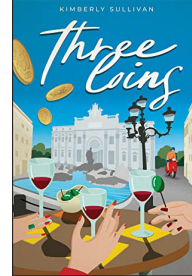
KATHY STROBOS
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10/18/21



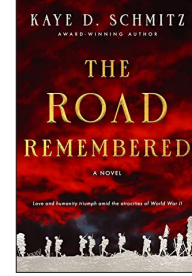
JUDY STANIGAR
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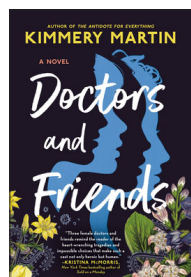
PAMELA STOCKWELL
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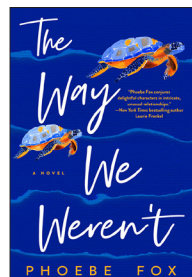
KIMBERLY SULLIVAN
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KAYE SCHMITZ
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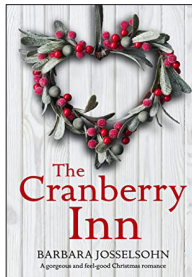
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PHOEBE FOX
The Way We Weren't
11/9/21



REBECCA TAYLOR
The Secret Next Door
11/9/21



BARBARA JOSSELSON
The Cranberry Inn
11/15/21



KERRY CHAPUT
Daughter of the King
12/16/21

SHOOT AND SHARE CONTEST: SHOW US YOUR OUTDOOR WRITING SPACE

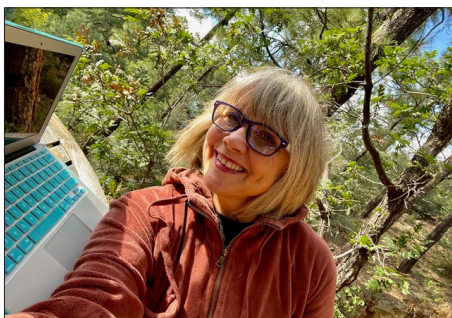
We received some great shots for this issue's Shoot and Share Selfie contest theme, the great outdoors. The random winner of the \$25.00 gift card is Carolin Le. She submitted a shot taken at Yellowstone National Park on a self-imposed writing retreat. Congratulations and thanks to all who contributed. We love seeing your smiling faces!



Carolin Le



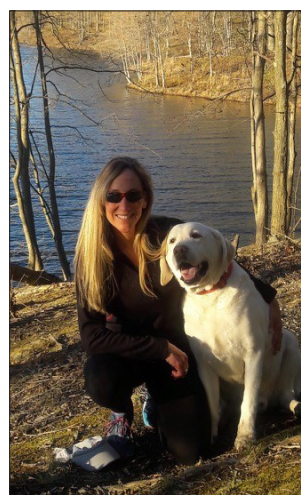
Kristi Leonard



Kay Arthur



Suzanne Adams



Sherri Leimkuhler



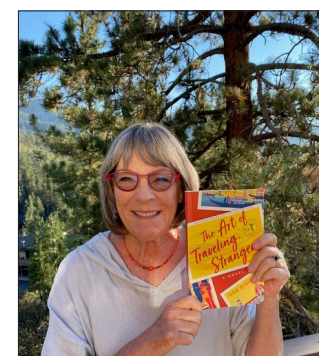
Barbara Probst



Gloria Mattioni



Heather Wild



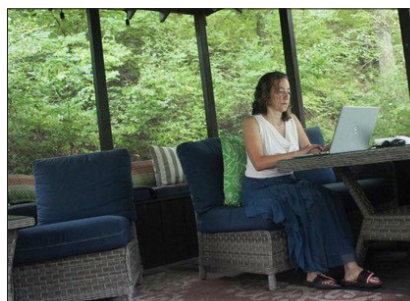
Zoe Disigny



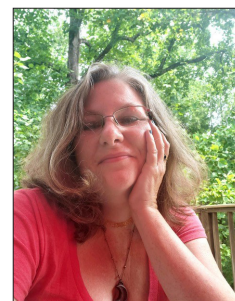
Sandy Young



Ramsey Hootman



Kathleen Basi



Dr. Kelly A. Dorgan

WFWA'S DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION PROGRAM

Calls for increased diversity and inclusion are happening throughout the publishing world, including at WFWA. We strive to create an organization that lives up to our mission statement:

We believe that women's fiction heightens human connection, engenders empathy, and illuminates new perspectives. By consciously supporting all voices and providing tools and resources to rigorously develop craft, the Women's Fiction Writers Association fosters successful careers, meaningful relationships, and the creation of resonant, diverse stories.



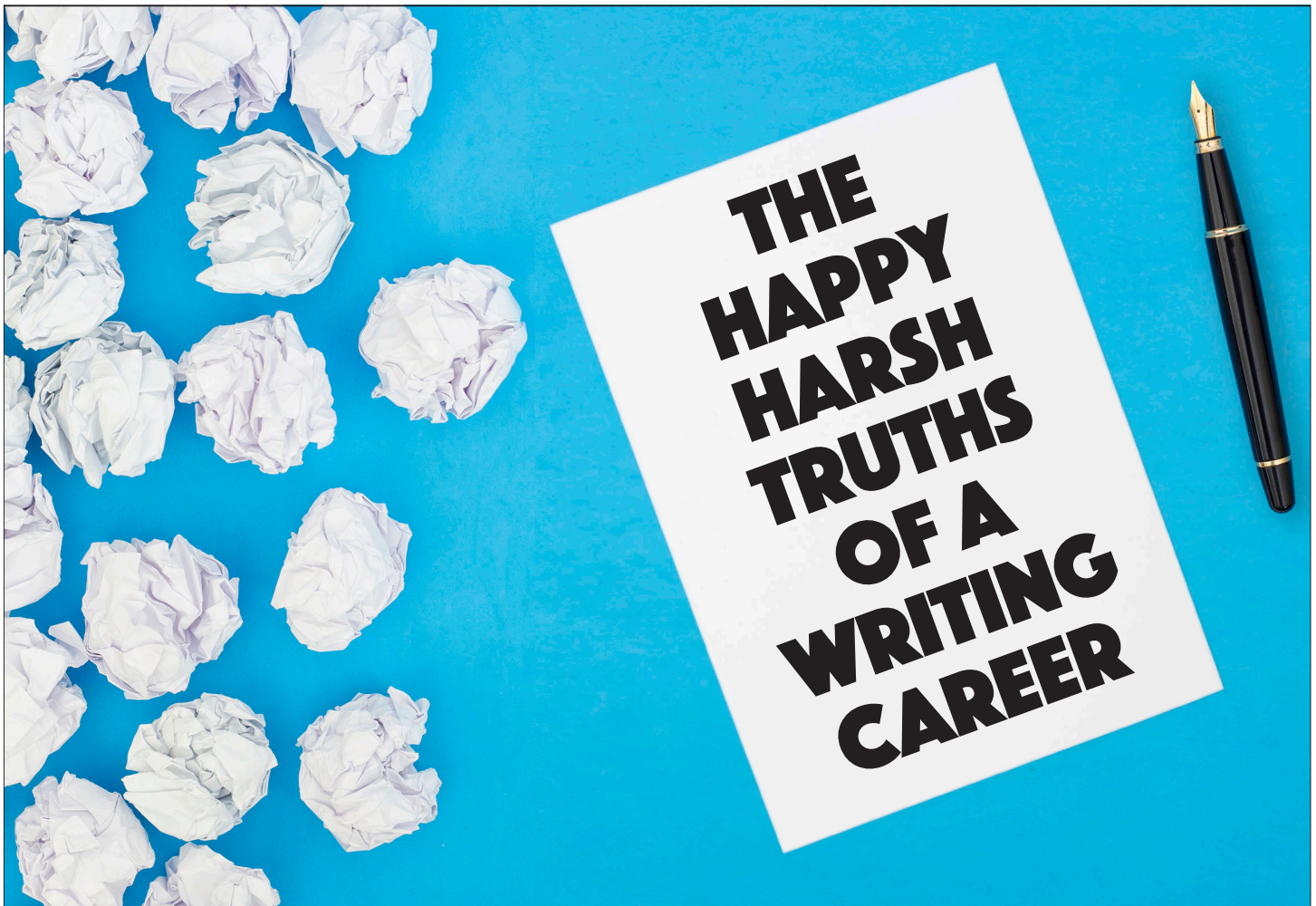
Some diversity and inclusion efforts have already occurred behind the scenes as we adjusted contests and programs to improve fairness for all writers of women's fiction. As we made progress in these areas, we began to implement more visible programs such as last year's webinar "[Understanding Diversity: Avoiding Harmful Depictions in Your Writing](#)."

More visible efforts include adding a Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion. In December, members will elect the first person to serve in this position. Over the summer, we formed the WFWA Diversity and Inclusion Committee, and 13 members have volunteered to serve on the inaugural committee. The committee currently is

reviewing proposals from consultants to help us address the following issues:

- Ensure the organization's language around diversity and inclusion is appropriate.
- Identify a diversity and inclusion training program that will be required for volunteers and open to the membership.
- Review WFWA's programs and publications and suggest ways to improve diversity and inclusion.

Enhancing diversity and inclusion is an ongoing effort, and we believe progress will make the organization and the genre better for everyone. – Sharon Ritchey



A writing career is unlike any other career you may pursue—not just because the job description involves getting to invent people and worlds and tell stories, but because more often than not you won't make a living at it. Often a “writing career” turns out to be continuing to work a day job so that you are able to pursue your writing.

Let's get depressing for a moment, shall we? And then I promise things will look up—but let's start with some publishing-industry realities.

PUBLISHING STATISTICS

A 2018 Authors Guild survey of more than 5,000 survey respondents among 15 writers' organizations revealed a median annual writing income of \$6,080, a decrease of 42 percent since 2009. Authors who identified as “writing full-time” reported a median income of just \$20,300—that's not a living wage.

Industry estimates suggest that only one to two percent of all submitted manuscripts are published. A smaller fraction of those still are published by a major publisher. Various industry sources estimate the number of books published yearly at somewhere between 300,000 and a million—and that doesn't account for the tens of millions of books previously published that are still on the market.

The average first-book advance with a major publisher is around \$5,000–\$15,000. That amount is what the author earns *before* deducting her agent's 15 percent (if she has an agent) as well as all marketing and business expenses and self-employment taxes. It is also against sales—meaning that if the author doesn't “earn out” by selling more books than the minimum per her contract, when royalty payments will kick in, that's all the money she'll ever see.

The vast majority of authors never earn out or begin receiving royalties.

Authors also won't receive that advance money in a lump sum, but in installments—usually upon signing, turning in the manuscript, and after publication.

Factor in the costs of marketing—which authors are expected to do the lion's share of in today's publishing environment regardless of whether they are self-published or with a major house—and writing books as a way to make a living or even augment your income begins to look like buying a lottery ticket for the same reasons.

GUIDING SCRIBE

SO, WHAT'S THE GOOD NEWS?

While it's unpleasant to face these grim statistics about the career most of us dream of succeeding in, it's crucial for framing the way we approach it, and for letting ourselves savor all the good parts—and there are plenty. But I'll wait if you want to get a glass of wine and recover first...

■ GOING INTO THIS CAREER OPEN-EYED ABOUT THE FINANCIAL AND LOGISTICAL REALITIES FREES YOU AND YOUR WRITING.

I've spoken with many authors who've told me the most they've ever enjoyed writing was before they signed a publishing contract, or when they were dropped by their publisher or between agents.

That's when the pressures and expectations are off of you, and you're free to write whatever you want; however, you want to write it—not worry about what an agent or editor will think, or whether your publisher will accept it, or readers will buy it.

It's when you can lose yourself in unfettered, joyous creativity, and free the most original stories, the most unique voice.

Deadlines, genre expectations, sales figures, and market considerations are like corporate “golden handcuffs.” You have the brass ring of being published, but it can straitjacket your writing and leach the joy of writing that may have drawn you to this career in the first place.

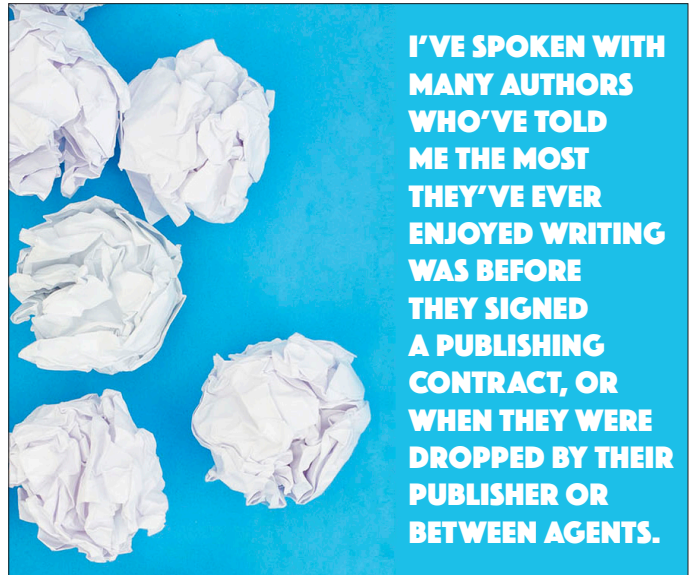
If you adjust your expectations, you can focus on your love for the work itself, not the gritted-teeth scramble to the top of the ladder.

■ IT PUTS YOU IN CHARGE OF YOUR CAREER.

Once you sign with a publisher, you no longer own your story; they do. You may get “meaningful consultation” (an ironically meaningless term), but they will decide every element of it, from the cover to the formatting to the marketing to where it will be sold to whether you get to publish another one.

That's what you're selling. And for what's often a mere four or low five figures, on top of the hours of work of writing the story itself.

That can be worth it for many writers—but you're also then a product provider for their business, and that comes with expectations and demands that may or may not be part of what you dreamed when you wanted to be a writer.



In a pursuit that feels as if so much is out of your control, letting go of defining “success” by money or a publishing contract puts you right back in the driver's seat of your career. It lets you create your own definition of success, one that comes organically from you.

What do you want your writing career to look like? Take away that artificial carrot of fame and fortune and decide *why* you write, what makes it meaningful for you, how you choose to do it. You give yourself back the power of taking ownership over your career—even if you do decide to sell your rights to a publisher.

■ IT LETS YOU FIND A LIVELIHOOD THAT FULFILLS YOU.

Maybe you can use your passion and skill for writing in a way that offers you a living but also feeds your creative soul. The same Authors Guild survey I cited above also showed a shift in book earnings to other writing-related activities such as speaking engagements, book reviewing, and teaching—markets that are growing. That's how I wound up becoming an editor—which turned out to be my true passion. Maybe you will find you have other fulfilling passions as well.

Accepting these long odds can allow you to pursue a lifetime of creativity on your own terms, one that lets you savor every step along the way and keeps you in touch with the important part of the phrase “writing career”: *writing*.

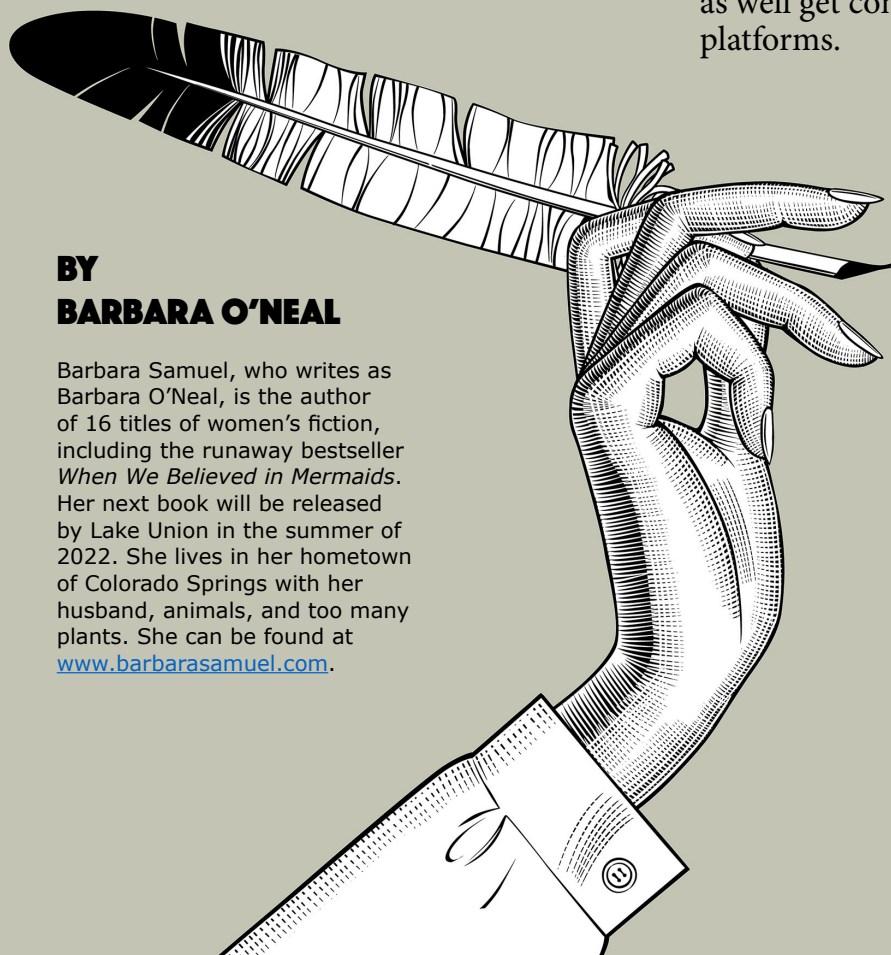
Tiffany Yates Martin has spent nearly thirty years as an editor in the publishing industry, working with major publishers and New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, and USA Today bestselling and award-winning authors as well as indie and newer writers, and is the founder of FoxPrint Editorial and author of the bestseller [Intuitive Editing: A Creative and Practical Guide to Revising Your Writing](#). Under the pen name Phoebe Fox, she's the author of six novels, including the upcoming *The Way We Weren't* (Berkley). Visit her at www.foxprinteditorial.com or www.phoebefoxauthor.com.

10 THINGS I WISH EVERYONE KNEW ABOUT MAKING A CAREER OF WRITING

BY BARBARA O'NEAL

Barbara Samuel, who writes as Barbara O'Neal, is the author of 16 titles of women's fiction, including the runaway bestseller *When We Believed in Mermaids*. Her next book will be released by Lake Union in the summer of 2022. She lives in her hometown of Colorado Springs with her husband, animals, and too many plants. She can be found at www.barbarasamuel.com.

- 1** You will never learn all there is to know about writing. It's impossible.
- 2** Because it's impossible to master, it is an endlessly fascinating way to spend your time.
- 3** You can't please everyone. Not every reader is YOUR reader. The ones who don't love you will post mean reviews, and sometimes email you all the reasons you're a terrible writer, but don't let them get in your head.
- 4** Your job is to please that reader who loves YOU.
- 5** You can't chase trends. It will ruin your voice.
- 6** You have an obligation to be as true to yourself as you possibly can.
- 7** You absolutely will have to engage with social media to find your readers, so you might as well get comfortable and master a few platforms.
- 8** A heartfelt reader letter is one of the great highs of the writing life.
- 9** Professional behavior is wildly important. Meet your obligations, make your deadlines, and don't get drunk at publishing events.
- 10** Enjoy yourself. This has to be one of the most fun careers that exist. We get paid to make stuff up. How amazing is that?





UNIQUELY YOU: BUILDING YOUR AUTHOR PLATFORM

by Brooke Williams

If the term “author platform” fills you with existential dread, you are not alone. It might seem like creating a platform is far removed from anything to do with writing. But the skills that led you to being a writer in the first place are exactly what you need for this indispensable part of your writing career.

An author platform is essentially the ability to reach readers in order to market your work. When I say “market,” I’m not talking about salesmanship, but rather finding a community who cares about your work and what you have to say. And since publishers count on authors to do a large share of their marketing, a platform will come in handy when it comes time to sell your books.

FEATURE

For fiction writers, platform grows out of your individual story and body of work. It's about the message you want to share and who you want to share it with. Building an author platform is an opportunity to develop your personal brand and help your future (or current) readers learn about you and your work. Say, for instance, your stories are all set in big cities, your Instagram feed might contain lots of pictures of city life. Or maybe your work has dark undertones and those show up in your website design. Maybe your work is funny, so your monthly newsletter also has a humorous tone. Let your platform represent you and your work and act as a tool for engaging with people, rather than just a megaphone through which to shout, "Buy my book!"

5 WAYS TO BUILD YOUR PLATFORM

1. PARTICIPATE IN WORKSHOPS AND CONFERENCES.

Workshops and conferences are opportunities to further develop your craft and network with other writers, agents, and publishers. Speaking on author panels is a great way to grow your readership since a room full of writers is likely a room full of booklovers as well. And don't forget about bookstore readings. Your local booksellers and librarians are definitely people you want to get to know.

2. PUBLISH ONLINE AND IN MAGAZINES.

This is a great way to expose yourself to new readers while also flexing your writing muscles. Look for websites and magazines you think your target audience will be reading. Don't be afraid to think outside the box here, but be sure to choose publications you want to be associated with. Keep an eye on the brand you're building for yourself.

3. ENTER CONTESTS.

Awards and accolades sound great in a bio. They lend credibility to your work and pique readers' curiosity. Plus, contests are often a great learning experience—they can help you refine your work and familiarize yourself with what other writers are producing.

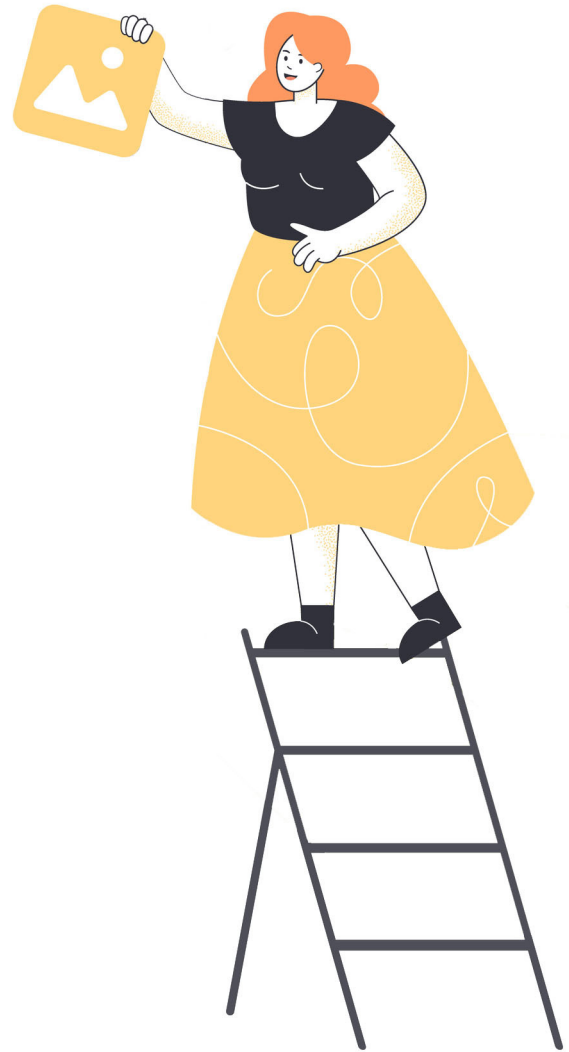
4. ESTABLISH SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS.

The best social media account is one you'll use. There's no need to be on every single platform, so choose the one or two that you're familiar with and enjoy. Participate in existing communities on those platforms that align with your personal interests. That way, you can make authentic connections with other people rather than just using it as a marketing tool.

5. CREATE A WEBSITE.

A website is your home base. It's a place for readers to look you up and find out more about you and your work, and maybe sign up for your newsletter if you have one (another great platform-building tool). The key is to maintain your website and keep it up to date, so it reflects you and the brand you're building.

Building your platform is a process, one that will require consistent effort throughout your writing career. So, employ your writerly brain, use that creativity, and have fun building!



LET YOUR PLATFORM REPRESENT YOU AND YOUR WORK AND ACT AS A TOOL FOR ENGAGING WITH PEOPLE, RATHER THAN JUST A MEGAPHONE THROUGH WHICH TO SHOUT, "BUY MY BOOK!"

MEET YOUR WFWA BOARD CANDIDATES

By Gabi Coatsworth, WFWA Nominating Committee Member



VOTE! 2021 BOARD ELECTIONS

Our Board elections will be taking place from December 1-7 this year, and we need your vote! There have been some minor changes to the election process this year. You will only be voting for four positions, and the elected candidates will serve two-year terms. Next year, the remaining board positions will be up for reelection, thus ensuring that 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 the world throws at us. Please read their candidate statements, written in answer to the same series of questions, and check out their online presence to find out more about them.

It is my pleasure to introduce your 2021 Board of Directors Candidates:

President
Jacki Kelly

Vice President, Programs
Kristi Leonard

Vice President, Diversity & Inclusion
Micki Morency
Janet Rundquist
Marie Watts

Technology Director
Sophie Krich-Brinton



MEET YOUR WFWA BOARD CANDIDATES

JACKI KELLY – CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT

I joined WFWA in 2018 because I love reading and writing women's fiction. The organization has so much to offer the women's fiction community, and I'd love to see it continue to grow and celebrate women's fiction writers. To that end, I want to continue to offer my skills and experience to help. As a published writer of over fifteen books, short stories, and personal essays, I've belonged to other writing organizations, so I believe I have something beneficial to offer.

I've served as the WFWA VP of Programs for two years and understand the organization and its membership. I've talked with both published and non-published writers to see what they need and want from WFWA.

With the country shut down most of the year because of COVID-19, I've grown to appreciate the organization even more. In organizing the webinars and workshops, I've stayed connected to this writing community. I love the way WFWA has managed to keep the members involved through this challenging year and even managed to have the Albuquerque retreat. As the VP of Programs, I have enjoyed providing craft activities for the membership and aiding the membership in their writing journey.

I believe WFWA can continue to lead and set the standards for the women's fiction genre. If elected, I'd like to develop a robust strategic plan that looks out five to ten years to help the organization grow and offer more support and guidance to members at all levels of their careers.



I'VE SERVED AS THE WFWA VP OF PROGRAMS FOR TWO YEARS AND UNDERSTAND THE ORGANIZATION AND ITS MEMBERSHIP.

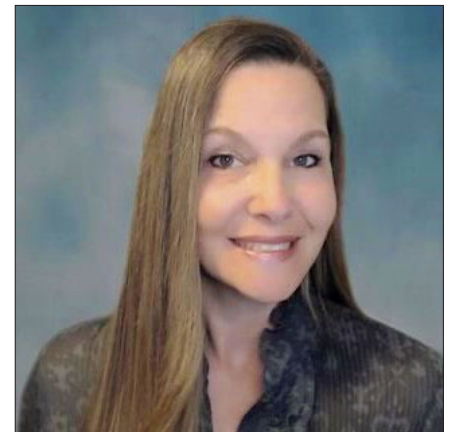
KRISTI LEONARD – CANDIDATE FOR VP PROGRAMS

I am a candidate for this position because I'm interested in helping new members to understand and use the amazing programs we offer. I joined WFWA last year, and it's the best decision I've made in regards to my writing life.

I became Workshop Chair in answer to a desperate request. I have a lot of nonprofit experience, so I was familiar with how difficult it can be to get volunteers to step up. Having what I believed to be the right kind of experience, I stepped up and never looked back. The best part of volunteering for me is getting to work with amazing people who share my passion for writing women's fiction and for creating excellent resources to help members improve their craft.

I'd like to create programming for the published authors out there that might think they don't need WFWA, or authors that get published and don't see the validity of sticking around. And I'd like to work with the technical team to solve tech issues so we can keep the platform we've invested so much time with and make it easy for our users. Finally, I'd like to ensure that each volunteer position within the Programs area has a "how-to manual" for each role with videos and descriptions.

I found this invaluable community, which has been guiding and supporting me—especially through the pandemic. I am so excited about what this organization is doing and the benefits it offers women's fiction writers, that I wanted to step up and take on a bigger role.



I'D LIKE TO CREATE PROGRAMMING FOR THE PUBLISHED AUTHORS OUT THERE THAT MIGHT THINK THEY DON'T NEED WFWA, OR AUTHORS THAT GET PUBLISHED AND DON'T SEE THE VALIDITY OF STICKING AROUND.

MEET YOUR WFWA BOARD CANDIDATES

MICKI MORENCY – CANDIDATE FOR VP DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Diversity and inclusion to me mean organically providing opportunities to marginalized segments of society to become part of the larger group and seamlessly blend in—not because they are “different” but because they can contribute to the conversation in a way that will educate writers and readers about our differences and similarities. I want our organization to be a beacon of what unity can look like.

Clearly, this depends on the openness and the reception of the majority, and I know WFWA is willing to listen, understand, learn, and integrate.

I joined WFWA in 2016 at the invitation of Amy Sue Nathan, and I continue to be a member because the association has given me a community

that makes the lonely act of writing feel shared, understood, and supported in what is to me, a non-competitive atmosphere. I believe WFWA can attract more diverse voices through this kind of word-of-mouth outreach.

Although I have not volunteered for WFWA, I have made friends with other members, both in person, before the pandemic, and virtually. I met new friends at the ABQ retreat in 2019, and some of us in Florida organized a weekend retreat and lunches.

I was born in Haiti and have lived in the US as a citizen for over four decades. My work background is in finance and social services, where I mentored at-risk children and always advocated for the disadvantaged. I write so I can tell their stories. I love



that the organization provides a place to ask a writing-related question, know members, and to learn via webinars. Members are generous with their time, experience, and expertise, and make me feel like a member of the community. I want to give back as much as I'm able and ensure others feel that way too.

JANET RUNDQUIST - CANDIDATE FOR VP DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

I have served on WFWA's inclusion committee, and I want to have a deliberate and active role in moving that work forward. In that committee, we worked to put more emphasis on actively seeking strategies for diversifying our workshop leaders and webinar presenters, passing on recommendations for a website redesign that will contribute towards a more welcoming front for attracting members from all walks of life and experience, and organized a survey of all members to help us understand our membership demographic as well as our strengths and weaknesses. I've also worked as the coordinator of the Star Award.

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice are all major passions of mine,

and have been throughout my career in K-12 public education. I have learned so much over the years, only to be continually reminded that my learning about history and its impact has not ended. I recognize how I knowingly and unknowingly have been part of the dominant class (white, cis, het-, able-bodied, neuro-typical, etc.) that has consistently built structures to keep ourselves in that upper stratum. Recognizing my role as someone who benefits from those structures, I especially want to have a new role in dismantling any of these harmful systems within our organization.

A huge step already in place is our investment in providing an equitable and inclusive environment that will encourage increased diversity of



our membership and sustain it. If elected, I will continue the work of hiring a consulting team to offer our leadership insights and guidance in this regard, and implementing and monitoring their suggestions. I know that I won't be able to do this alone. I look forward to taking this journey together with all of you.

MEET YOUR WFWA BOARD CANDIDATES

MARIE WATTS – CANDIDATE FOR VP DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

I am standing as a candidate for this position, because, having been an active member of WFWA since June 2020, I've personally benefitted from the community professionally and socially. I am a current member of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee, I've assisted with the financial audit, taken a number of online classes with WFWA, and attended the Albuquerque writers' retreat.

I believe WFWA can be more upfront and transparent about its diversity and inclusion initiative by assuring information regarding the policy is front and center on the website, requiring new members to acknowledge they will abide by the policies of the organization regarding diversity before joining or renewing their membership, and developing

a system where issues can be easily reported and addressed. And I would like to see more webinars focused on helping our members understand and write about characters different from themselves in an appropriate manner.

I believe my career as a certified mediator has given me the skills and ability to guide the WFWA on its journey to be the most welcoming and open organization it can be. I have taught diversity, investigated thousands of workplace discrimination cases, and acted as a consultant to write anti-discrimination policies and set up systems to report and resolve diversity issues.

If elected, I hope to build trust and understanding within WFWA so that we support each other rather



than simply draw lines in the sand and issue edicts. That being said, I am not afraid to take tough action when necessary.

As a team player, I appreciate that members of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee have a varied array of talents that can be utilized to assist the organization in its diversity and inclusion journey.

SOPHIE KRICH-BRINTON – CANDIDATE FOR TECHNOLOGY DIRECTOR

I'm standing as a candidate for this position after volunteering on the tech team since February 2020, and have a good grasp of many of our tech requirements. Volunteering for the WFWA has given me a sense of family within our community and a connection to the inner workings of the group. I've worked in the tech industry since 2007, from teaching software to web design and development, to project management, and now to customer success. WFWA needs someone, so when Jennifer Klepper asked me if I'd be interested, of course, I agreed.

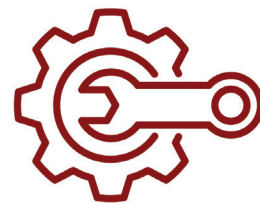
When I finished the first novel I planned to revise in January 2020, I had no writer friends and no community, so when I happened upon

WFWA, I was delighted. I'm so glad I found it. The WFWA workshops and the writing dates, the pitch events, and the online community attracted me to the organization. And the Albuquerque retreat was my favorite event of the year, hands down. It was fantastic to meet other members in person.

If elected, I'm keen to follow up on Jennifer's idea of involving more of our volunteers in the technological aspects of the organization. I would encourage the idea of having a tech support person on every team, to assist with that team's needs and make them more autonomous from the tech team. I also support WFWA's diversity initiatives in supporting all writers of women's fiction.



**I'VE WORKED IN THE
TECH INDUSTRY SINCE
2007, FROM TEACHING
SOFTWARE TO WEB DESIGN
AND DEVELOPMENT, TO
PROJECT MANAGEMENT,
AND NOW TO CUSTOMER
SUCCESS**



BACKSTORY WORKSHOP

Backstory is a huge topic that falls squarely under the “show-don’t-tell” umbrella. How much backstory do you give? When do you give it? How do you give it in a way that feels natural and organic to the story instead of dumped in? And what’s the difference between info dumping and backstory, anyway?

Info dumping happens when the author stops the story to tell the reader something they think you need to know. Often this information is extraneous to the current action. The purpose of backstory, on the other hand, is to help a character (and thus the reader) make sense of what’s happening in a particular moment within a particular scene, by recalling a directly-related past event. The action and the backstory are intimately linked. Done well, backstory is woven in so unobtrusively that the reader doesn’t even notice it’s there. This can happen in a number of ways. For example: in a flashback, through dialogue, or using carefully placed snippets of memory.

Let’s take a look at using backstory given in the form of a childhood memory.

In this snippet of historical fiction, we meet Sam, who is desperate to enlist in the military and facing the possibility of being denied. Sam’s backstory is that he (probably) had scarlet fever as a child. Because there’s so much at stake in this moment, when the doctor asks the question, Sam tells a lie of omission.

ORIGINAL TEXT

The doctor switched on his headlamp and looked into Sam’s ears and eyes, and told him to stick out his tongue. Then he placed the stethoscope to Sam’s chest.

“Deep breath.”

The doctor moved the stethoscope around Sam’s chest, asking him for more deep breaths, his expression shifting to concern. After a minute, he removed the stethoscope.

“Have you ever had scarlet fever?”

“No, sir.”

The doctor shook his head. “I detected a heart murmur, the kind you would get from the disease.”

Sam thought back to when he was five, to a night when a fever raged through him, when his very skin felt like it was on fire. His mother had sat by his bed for hours, holding his hand, placing cool cloths on his brow to bring down the fever.

He remembered the night too clearly because that was the night she took ill. A week later she was gone, dead at twenty-five, leaving him and Da on their own.

Now he swallowed hard, unsure how to respond to the doctor. He wasn’t certain it had been scarlet fever, he’d recovered, but months passed before he was strong enough to leave the house. His father never spoke of it, never gave a name to the fever that had claimed his mother.

“No, sir, no one ever told me I had it.”

“Get dressed, son. I’m afraid you won’t be enlisting today.” The doctor wrote across the enlistment form Not Fit to Serve.

And with one heartbeat, his future vanished.

LET'S FIX THIS!

We have here a lovely example of backstory being correctly placed in the narrative. Why? *Because Sam's memory of having had scarlet fever is directly triggered by the doctor's question.* And bonus: it supports the stakes and scene goal. The backstory explains Sam's dilemma and creates tension. After all, Sam desperately wants to enlist. If he admits the truth to himself and the doctor, he will be denied enlistment. Remember, the purpose of backstory is to drive and/or explain your character's actions and/or motivations. Even (especially!) those actions and/or motivations the character may not even be aware of.

WHAT CAN BE IMPROVED IN THIS SNIPPET OF BACKSTORY?

First, there is some info dumping, and the backstory is told instead of shown. Remember that backstory and info dumps both live under the broader show/tell umbrella. To even out the balance of show/tell, I recommend our author work on getting Sam's emotions onto the page—the uncertainty, fear, worry, and hope. The good news is that our author has used backstory to set herself up very nicely to really dig deep into Sam's psyche as she revises by getting his fears and doubts onto the page. Below I've included a few questions that I asked to get our author thinking.

■ THIRD PARAGRAPH:

Getting into the army is of vital importance to Sam. When he sees the doctor's expression "shifting to concern," he is going to be affected. What is Sam's internal reaction to this shift in the doctor's expression?

■ FIFTH PARAGRAPH:

Tying the previous comment to this one... does Sam experience a visceral reaction to being asked if he's ever had scarlet fever? Or is he honestly perplexed? What questions might he be asking himself right now? What doubts and fears might he be experiencing? The stakes are high, so show us Sam's reaction to the threat and his decision to lie. Here is a place to add in some internalization. Put us in Sam's head.

■ SEVENTH PARAGRAPH:

Here is where the backstory begins. "Sam thought back to..." is a tell. One way to show instead of tell is to put us in Sam's body. For example, is there a corresponding physical reaction? Does he begin to sweat, the way he did when he was five and the fever raged? As is, it feels info-dumpy.

■ NINTH PARAGRAPH:

As we come back to the present, bring the reader right in and show us Sam's prevarication. You've already set it up with the backstory around scarlet fever, so keep the momentum going. What does it mean to Sam to be put on the spot this way? Another way to show instead of tell is through internal thoughts, perhaps by phrasing it as a question asked and answered. For example: "Had it been scarlet fever? Probably." Will he tell a lie by omission? Is he afraid of saying "maybe"? How does he justify this lie of omission to himself? Show us his dilemma because a dilemma creates tension.

Second, the scene ends with an idiom. *And with one heartbeat, his future vanished.* This may seem like a very picky comment, but I want to point out that here is an opportunity to once again support backstory in a very sneaky way (because writers are all about sneaky, right?) For example, instead of saying "with one heartbeat," she can reinforce both backstory and the stakes of the scene (the desire to enlist in the military) by using a military reference instead: The scratching of the doctor's pen played "Taps" on Sam's future. Or perhaps there is other backstory or aspects of world building she wants to reinforce. For example, if Sam was a farmer before he decided to enlist, our author might say something like: The smooth sweep of the doctor's pen severed him from his future as cleanly as a scythe sweeping through a stock of wheat. Thus reinforcing his previous life as a farmer (backstory.) Play around with it and have fun.

PRO TIP: Make every idiom and metaphor earn its keep. Use metaphors, similes, and idioms to reinforce world building, the point of the scene, or backstory where you can.

Thank you to our brave author for submitting this piece of historical fiction for critique!



Nita Collins is a writer and an Author Accelerator certified book coach, helping writers do their best work possible. A happy Canadian, she lives and works in a very small house on the top of a very large hill overlooking Shuswap Lake, in British Columbia. She loves coffee, sunflowers, and good conversation.

IN THEIR WORDS: SARAH PENNER

By Kay Arthur

WFWA loves to celebrate the successes of our members. In this issue, we're thrilled to interview *New York Times* bestselling author Sarah Penner. Her debut novel *The Lost Apothecary* has continually risen in popularity since its release in March and was an instant *New York Times* Best Seller, remaining on the list for several weeks. If you haven't been to Sarah's website (www.sarahpenner.com), we encourage you to check it out—she shares her experience in publishing and offers guidance for aspiring writers on their path to publishing. Always eager to support WFWA and gift us her time through volunteering, Sarah shares her own path to success with us below. Congratulations, Sarah, we are so proud of you!

■ **Have you always wanted to write? And what was your job before you became a writer?**

I've loved writing since childhood and always kept a journal. In adolescence, I wrote some pretty terrible poetry, too. But I took a different career route and worked in finance for 13 years. Only in my late 20s did I get serious about writing and craft. The wait paid off, though. This year, given the reception of *The Lost Apothecary* and the opportunities that have unfolded, I was able to quit my day job. I'm thrilled now to call myself a full-time writer!

■ **How did you come up with the initial idea of *The Lost Apothecary*?**

When the idea for *The Lost Apothecary* first came to me, I envisioned a woman—an apothecary—working from a hidden shop in a dark London alleyway. But I knew I wanted there to be something sinister about her, and this quickly led me down the path of poison. I clung to this initial vision throughout the writing of the book. The word “apothecary” is evocative, drawing forth visions of a candlelit storefront with sash windows, its walls lined with mortar bowls, pestles, and countless glass bottles. There is something beguiling, even enchanting, about what might lie within those bottles: potions that bewitch us, cure us, kill us.



I WROTE ANOTHER MANUSCRIPT A COUPLE OF YEARS BEFORE THE LOST APOTHECARY. OVER A PERIOD OF 18 MONTHS, THAT MS WAS REJECTED BY 130 AGENTS. SO, I KNOW THOSE QUERYING TRENCHES.

■ **Are you a plotter or a pantsier? And how long did it take to write this book?**

With *The Lost Apothecary*, I wrote a two-paragraph pitch and then pants-ed my way through the narrative. Since I was working full-time in finance, it took about 12–14 months to write and revise. Now, my methods have shifted. With my current WIP, I pulled together a three-page outline before getting started, and then I drafted the book in 12 weeks. I'll never “pants” my way through a book again. Outlining is so effective for me.

FEATURE

■ Long hand or computer?

Silence or not (music, coffee shop)?

A laptop and complete, utter silence. I write with noise-cancelling headphones on. I “hear” the words as I write them and any music or noise whatsoever tears me out of the zone.

■ Do you share your work before it is finished? (Critique partner, writing group?)

In a perfect world, yes. Lots of people read *The Lost Apothecary* before I queried. With my WIP and the deadlines I’m under now, I’m doing things a little differently. I have a few critique readers who are reading portions alongside my editor. I’m still trying to figure out how best to incorporate critique readers and deadlines. I’ll get there!

■ How long did you query before you found an agent?

Within a period of three weeks, I queried 12 agents with *The Lost Apothecary* and received five offers of representation. But let’s keep in mind, I wrote another manuscript a couple of years before *The Lost Apothecary*. Over a period of 18 months, that MS was rejected by 130 agents. So, I know those querying trenches. I’ve been through it. I’ve cried the tears. Something was different about *The Lost Apothecary* from day one, though. Agents loved the elements of female empowerment, poison, and magical realism.

How did it feel to hit the NYT best seller list?

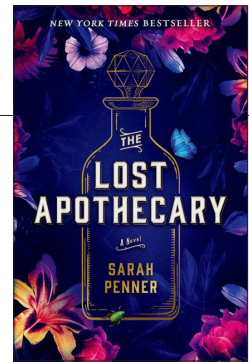
I remember the physical sensation the most. I was in the car with my husband when my editor and agent called me on a three-way call. My editor said I’d debuted at #7 on the hardcover fiction list. My entire body went numb and then tingling. I was overwhelmed with gratitude and relief. No one could ever take this away from me. NYT status stays with authors forever! I didn’t cry; I just kept saying “thank you.” This was a team effort; my publishing team worked so hard for it, too.

■ What additional pressures has the success added to your life?

I get a lot of event, book club, and speaking requests. I said “yes” to most earlier this year. Now, I say “no” to most, and/or have my publicist decline for me. Despite this, I’m still the girl who grew up middle-class in a little log cabin in the woods. I’ll never forget my roots. I’ll never forget the humility my parents instilled in me. And I believe that hard work trumps everything. You can’t buy accomplishments. So, the success of my debut doesn’t really feel like pressure, so much as an opportunity to grow and inspire others.

■ Is there anything you wish you’d done earlier in your writing career?

I think I did the right things. I found a writing community early via conferences and online groups. I asked for feedback on my manuscripts and query letters. I researched agents extensively on Publishers Marketplace. I read countless craft books and practiced techniques. I have no regrets, nothing I would have changed. My journey has been a



I
NELLA
February 3, 1791

She would come at daybreak—the woman whose letter I held in my hands, the woman whose name I did not yet know.

I knew neither her age nor where she lived. I did not know her rank in society nor the dark things of which she dreamed when night fell. She could be a victim or a transgressor. A new wife or a vengeful widow. A nursemaid or a courtesan.

But despite all that I did not know, I understood this: the woman knew exactly who she wanted dead.

I lifted the blush-colored paper, illuminated by the dying flame of a single rush wick candle. I ran my fingers over the ink of her words, imagining what despair brought the woman to seek out someone like me. Not just an apothecary, but a murderer. A master of disguise.

Her request was simple and straightforward. *For my mistress's husband, with his breakfast. Daybreak, 4 Feb. At once, I drew to mind a middle-aged housemaid, called to do the bidding of her mistress. And with an instinct perfected over the last two decades, I knew immediately the remedy most suited to this request: a chicken egg laced with nux vomica.*

good one. Not perfect, but right. And I still have so much to learn. Characterization, backstory... those are definitely areas for improvement. I can write cliffhangers all day, but fully-fleshed out characters? I’m working on it.

■ What do you feel is the hardest part about writing?

I despise drafting. Creating *something* from *nothing* is mentally fatiguing. I love revising, though. I especially love structural revisions—the shifting of scenes and chapters. I’m very analytical!

■ Can you tell me how being a member of the WFWA Community has helped with your writing and career?

I’ve attended many of the craft webinars! And I’ve met some great friends, too. Just last week I had coffee with Micki Berthelot Morency (if you haven’t heard, her debut *The Island Sisters* comes out in 2023!)

■ What are you working on next?

It hasn’t been announced so I’m limited on what I can share, but I can tell you that my next book is also set in an atmospheric historical setting, and it features brave, rebellious women and plenty of twisty cliffhangers. Readers who loved *The Lost Apothecary* are sure to love what’s coming next!

We all know how important it is to recognize each steppingstone of our writing career. We write, we revise, we revise some more, and then we keep revising until we get it right. Somewhere along that path, we show it to others and hope that they see the beautiful words and story that we have told. At WFWA, the Rising Star Award does that. It gives applause and accolades to unpublished and unagented writers of women's fiction and provides a chance to break out of the slush pile and get in front of agents. The winner of our 2021 Rising Star award was announced at the annual retreat in Albuquerque in September, and congratulations goes to Hadley Leggett for her manuscript, *A Better Mother*.



But what goes on behind the scenes of the Rising Star program should also be celebrated and that is exactly what we're doing for our Volunteer Spotlight this issue. Thanks to all of our Rising Star Team members Sarah, Theresa, Densie, and Lynn. Also, a big shout out to Marie Parsons and Laura Daprano, who were part of this amazing team.

SARAH PENNER

■ How did you become a member of WFWA?

I learned about WFWA through some other authors in the writing community. I was impressed with how inclusive, active, and welcoming the organization is.

■ When and how did you first volunteer?

In 2019, around the time I was agented myself, I helped with an agent pitch event. I ensured pitches met all requirements and assisted with some of the back-end administrative tasks.

■ When did you get involved with Rising Star, and what is your favorite role you play in this?

I got involved in 2021 as co-chair. My favorite part? Emailing the five semi-finalists, letting them know their manuscripts had come in at the top!

■ What are your favorite resources that you use in WFWA?

Definitely the webinars. I've watched a number of the archived webinars and love attending them live when possible.



THERESA MUNROE

■ How did you become a member of WFWA?

While googling women's fiction, I came across WFWA and joined back in 2015.

■ When and how did you first volunteer?

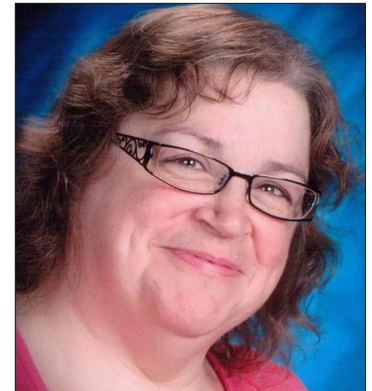
My first volunteer position was a judge for Rising Star. Since then, I've been a mentor, the recent Rising Star co-judge coordinator, and I'm currently the Goodreads page coordinator, an ongoing position.

■ When did you get involved with Rising Star, and what is your favorite role you play in this?

A few years ago I responded to a call for judges. I also entered once. This time, Hope Ashby mentioned on one of the writing dates that volunteers were needed, and I raised my hand. I was always curious about how everything was coordinated for the contest. And now I know.

■ What are your favorite resources that you use in WFWA?

The critique group coordination, the WFWA writing dates, and workshops and webinars.





DENSIE WEBB

■ How did you become a member of WFWA?

I've been a member of WFWA from the beginning. In fact, I remember following a Yahoo message thread about starting the group. It sounded like something I would really like to be a part of, so I joined early on.

■ When and how did you first volunteer?

I first volunteered a few years ago for the Inside WFWA newsletter. I worked on that with other volunteers for a couple of years.

It was great to keep up with all the WFWA news—the new members, member publishing news, and upcoming events.

■ When did you get involved with Rising Star, and what is your favorite role you play in this?

I volunteered for Rising Star when the call went out for volunteers. As the co-chair, along with Sarah Penner, I was involved with editing documents and answering contestants' and other volunteers' questions. I do love editing, so that was probably the role I most enjoyed.

■ What are your favorite resources that you use in WFWA?

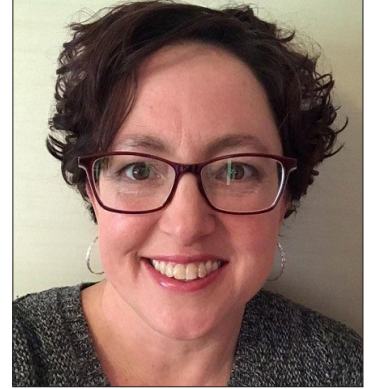
I always read Inside WFWA and I've participated in several workshops and watched many webinars. I can't really say which is my favorite. They are all valuable. And, of course, the annual WFWA Retreat. I've missed it the last couple of years, but when I've gone it's been such a fun and worthwhile gathering. I highly recommend it.



LYNN DIENER

■ How did you become a member of WFWA?

I'd been reading Amy Sue Nathan's blog on women's fiction. It was the first time I heard someone describing the type of fiction I wrote, and when she mentioned the inception of Women's Fiction Writers Association, I jumped at the chance to join. I have been a part since the beginning and am so grateful for this community.



■ When and how did you first volunteer?

I didn't volunteer in the beginning because of timing. I was volunteering in a lot of other places, and it left little room for what WFWA needed of volunteers then. Over time, the organization grew and so did its needs. Eventually, things started popping up that I could help with, like Rising Star.

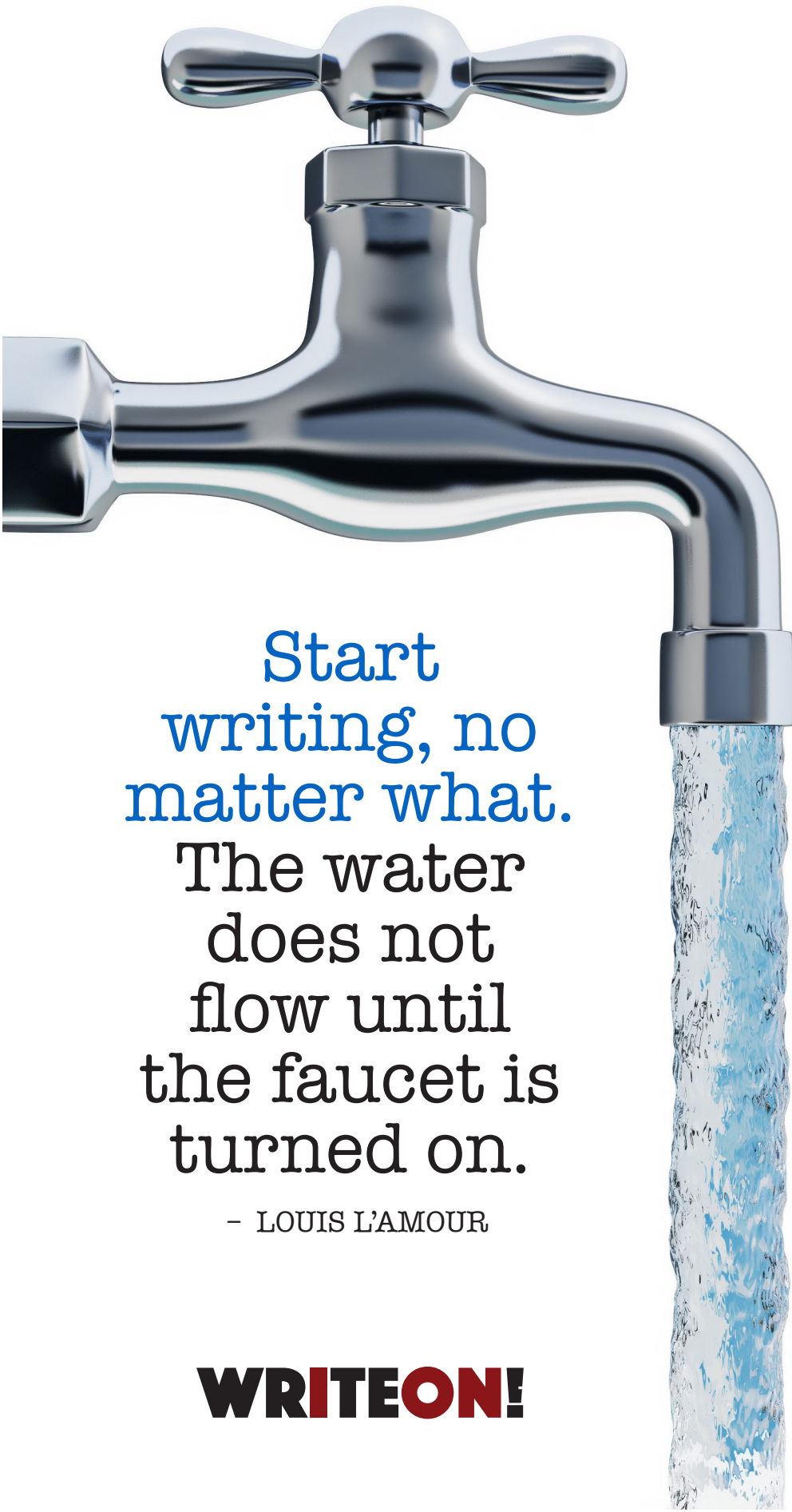
■ When did you get involved with Rising Star, and what is your favorite role you play in this?

I believe I began helping with Rising Star during 2020. As it turned out, there was a bit of spare time that year for helping. My favorite role in Rising Star is getting to email our entrants that didn't place in the final round, because I get to remind them that their effort wasn't wasted and that getting their manuscripts to that point is a huge feat to be congratulated, regardless of whether it moves on to the final round.

■ What are your favorite resources that you use in WFWA?

My favorite resource that I use in WFWA, is the community. I love taking part in the Work-our-WIPs challenge in February, I love the write-ins, and the support that our members show each other is heartwarming.

Did you know WFWA is 100% run by volunteers? That means every WFWA program, newsletter, event, resource and benefit you enjoy is put together by your fellow members on their own time.



Start
writing, no
matter what.
The water
does not
flow until
the faucet is
turned on.

- LOUIS L'AMOUR

WRITEON!