

FALL 2024



The Quarterly Magazine of the Women's Fiction Writers Association

# WRITEON!

## THE PATH TO PUBLICATION

- WORKING WITH  
A SMALL PRESS
- A PRIMER ON  
BOOK CONTRACTS

A CONVERSATION  
WITH KIMBERLY  
PACKARD

+

STAR  
AWARD  
FINALISTS

# FALL 2024

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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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*Write ON!* is published quarterly by the  
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### IF YOU LIKE WHAT YOU'VE READ ...

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

# Your Voice Matters

**W**hen I first started writing, I envisioned securing an agent, landing a traditional publishing deal, and seeing my book on the shelves of bookstores across the country. This remains my primary goal, and I am diligently working towards it. However, as I delve deeper into the writing community and learn more about the publishing industry through WFWA, I have come to appreciate the value and validity of all paths to publication. But more than that, I am inspired by the wealth of resources and support available through our organization.

WFWA has been instrumental in broadening my understanding and acceptance of diverse publication paths. Our organization offers extensive support through workshops, webinars, mentorship, and our comprehensive Learning Library. These resources are designed to empower and equip you, whether you are pursuing traditional publishing, self-publishing, or working with independent or hybrid presses.

Our [workshops and webinars](#) provide invaluable insights from industry experts and successful authors who share their experiences and strategies. These sessions cover a wide range of topics, from mastering the craft of writing to navigating the intricacies of different publishing paths. They offer practical advice and inspiration, helping you to make informed decisions and take confident steps forward.

[Mentorship](#) is another cornerstone of WFWA's support system. Our mentorship program connects you with experienced writers who can offer personalized guidance and encouragement. Whether you are crafting your first novel or preparing to publish, they can help you navigate the often overwhelming landscape of the publishing industry.

[The Learning Library](#), in our private online community on Mighty Networks, is a treasure trove of resources. It includes articles, links to relevant resources, and webinar recordings, all accessible at your convenience. It also contains a Self-Publishing Toolbox loaded with resources, and there are multiple places to learn about indie presses.

Additionally, WFWA offers a self-publishing affinity group with its own Facebook group, providing a dedicated space for those pursuing self-publishing. This group is a fantastic resource for sharing experiences, seeking advice, and finding support from peers who understand the unique challenges and rewards of self-publishing. It is a vibrant community where you can exchange tips, celebrate milestones, and find camaraderie.

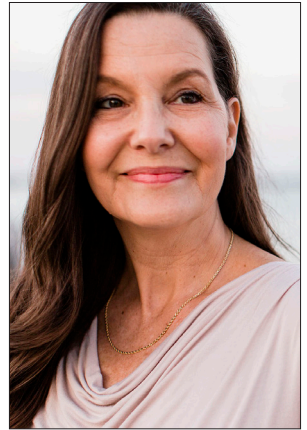
In my four years as a member of WFWA, I have had the privilege of witnessing the incredible diversity of experiences and successes within our community. Whether you are a published novelist or a writer still honing your craft, your journey is your own. I have been inspired by members who have achieved great success through traditional publishing, those who have found fulfillment and financial independence through self-publishing, and those who have built meaningful careers with the support of independent presses.

WFWA's resources and community support are here to help you navigate your chosen path. We are all part of a community that understands the challenges and celebrates the successes of the writing journey.

Your voice matters.



Kristi Leonard



**I HAVE BEEN INSPIRED BY MEMBERS WHO HAVE ACHIEVED GREAT SUCCESS THROUGH TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING, THOSE WHO HAVE FOUND FULFILLMENT AND FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE THROUGH SELF-PUBLISHING, AND THOSE WHO HAVE BUILT MEANINGFUL CAREERS WITH THE SUPPORT OF INDEPENDENT PRESSES.**

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# DON'T WAIT TO WRITE

This issue of *Write ON!* focuses on indie publishing and small press publishing. We have a growing list of members who are changing the playbook (writing a new one!) when it comes to their stories and how they are succeeding in their writing and publishing dreams.

All writers work hard and have goals (me included), but I would be remiss not to acknowledge that the level of dedication and energy needed for this publication path is next level.

I read an article recently that explained why you shouldn't wait to make a change in your life or start a new project. People often say, "once life calms down," or "after the kids go back to school," or... [fill in the blank], they will embark on a job search, exercise plan, pet project or dream... such as making time to write and finish or edit a novel.

The author explained that statistically speaking, something happens on average every two to three months that puts you into a tailspin. That event could be significant, like a death or illness, or it could be your refrigerator went kaput and all the food spoiled, forcing you to come up with the money for a new refrigerator.

Take a moment to think about what has happened in your own life in the last few months. I bet there is at least one event (perhaps even something good) that has kept you from your goals. Now ask yourself if you've ever said something like, *as soon as my life calms down I will...*

Here's the reality: *life is never calming down*. If disorder isn't in your corner of the neighborhood, all you need to do is tune into the news.

I have had times in my career when I've had to stop and wait to write or finish a project. I have also been guilty of magical thinking that soon my calendar would become blank, and no one would need me. That usually happens every third Thursday between 10:30 and 11:00 p.m., but then I fall asleep, and the magic is gone.

We are living in a season of distraction and crisis. But if I can, I'd like to nudge you to work toward your goals. We need more power of the pen and less power of the pundits.



We need stories that take us out of the chaos and into the world of possibilities, solutions, fresh ideas, and love. We need community support and friendship.

What does any of this have to do with indie and small press publishing? A lot. In these pages, you'll hear from members who are writing cutting-edge fiction and using creative marketing to place their books in readers' hands. They are generous with their lessons learned. They are a vibrant part of our community, and they will tell you that they have succeeded because they have focused on their goals.

No matter your plans or hopes for your own path to publication, remember your story matters. Don't wait to tell it.

Write on!  
Sharon

## 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@WOMENSFICTIONWRITERS.ORG](mailto:DI@WOMENSFICTIONWRITERS.ORG).

# Make a Diversity Review Part of Your Prepublishing Routine

by Marie W. Watts

As a writer, you may develop characters in any fashion you wish. However, assuring that your manuscript accurately portrays characters different from yourself is vital to your book's success. There is no shortage of horror stories about works that failed to do just this. Indeed, numerous books have been panned because they've been deemed to portray marginalized individuals without authenticity. Examples include *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett and *American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins.

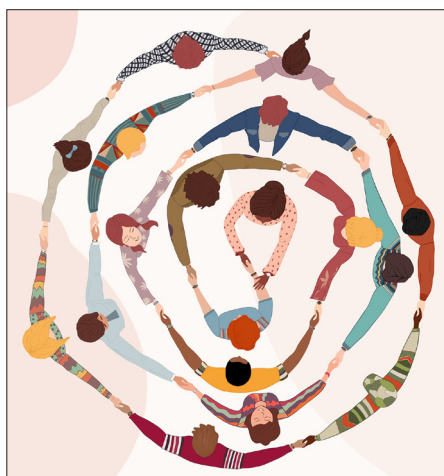
Whatever route to publication you are planning to take, build a diversity review into your process. The marginalized spectrum includes race, color, ethnicity, national origin, age, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, religion, marital status, or political affiliation.

Here are eight questions to ask yourself to make sure your writing is on the right track:

■ Have you stereotyped your characters? Is your greedy person fat or is the elderly lady technologically incompetent?

■ Are the characters rich and complex? Or are they one-dimensional? i.e.: All evil? All good?

■ Have you composed your characters with empathy? Have you related to their circumstances and flaws?



Did you create their experiences with vibrant detail?

■ Are marginalized characters tokens? Did you add them just for the sake of trying to promote diversity?

■ Are tropes present? Two examples are the white savior trope, when the white character saves the black character; and the magical Negro trope, when the person of color has magical powers.

■ If you have one stereotypical character, do you have another who is not? i.e.: One African American character may be an ex-convict while another is an attorney.

■ Have you appreciated the culture, or have you appropriated it by using elements or objects of a nondominant culture in a way that does not respect their original meaning, give credit to

their sources, or otherwise reinforces stereotypes?

■ Have you used food to describe a skin tone? This practice is frowned upon in the literary community.

Consider a sensitivity reader. These individuals are beta readers you pay to review your manuscript and provide feedback on whether you have developed your marginalized characters well, identifying potential issues or concerns.

The D&I Committee is dedicated to assisting you. Please visit our [Writing and Description Guides](#) to facilitate a review of your manuscript for D&I issues. Specific information is located in the Online Community, Diversity and Inclusion Section titled [D&I Craft](#). And we invite you to join us on August 20 at 7:00 pm ET for “Frank Table Talk: Tackling Our Writing Fears,” an open forum to discuss our writing fears and how we can support each other. More information is available on the [WFWA homepage](#).

### Additional Recommended Resources:

■ [Writing the Other](#)

■ “Ask an Expert: Sensitivity Reading and Diversity,” *Publisher's Weekly*

■ “Writing Across Difference: Responsibility Writing Characters Different From You,” *Writer's Digest*

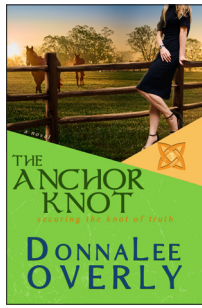
■ [Writers for Diversity](#)

■ [Writing Diversely](#) (offers sensitivity reading packages)

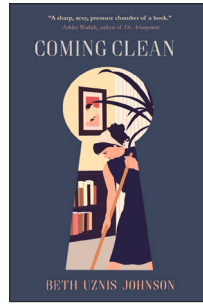


**Marie W. Watts** is a former employment discrimination investigator, human resource manager, and human resource consultant. Coauthor of *Human Relations*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Marie also penned the award-winning fiction trilogy *Warriors for Equal Rights* as well as the novel *Tough Trail Home*. Marie and her husband live on a ranch in central Texas.

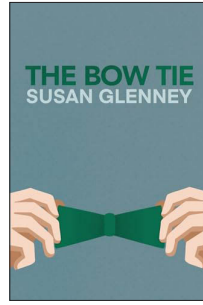
# MEMBER RELEASES



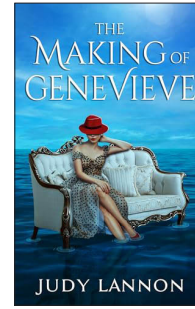
**DONNALEE OVERLY**  
The Anchor Knot  
7/27/2023



**BETH UZNIS JOHNSON**  
Coming Clean  
1/9/2024



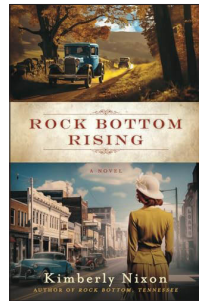
**SUSAN GLENNEY**  
The Bow Tie  
1/30/2024



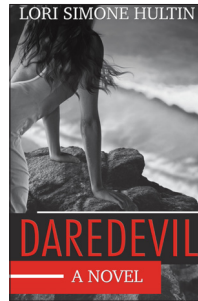
**JUDY LANNON**  
The Making of Genevieve  
2/4/2024



**M.E. DELANEY**  
Plain Sight  
2/4/2024



**KIMBERLY NIXON**  
Rock Bottom Rising  
2/27/2024



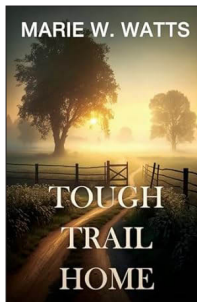
**LORI SIMONE HULTIN**  
Daredevil  
3/11/2024



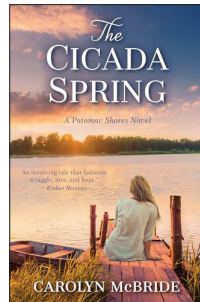
**JANN EVERARD**  
Blue Runaways  
3/12/2024



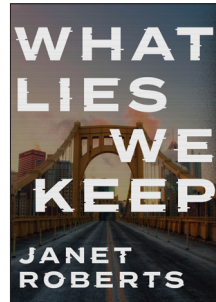
**S.M. RADJY**  
Flight of an Orphan Thief  
3/20/2024



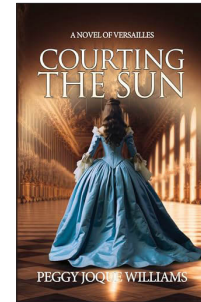
**MARIE W. WATTS**  
Tough Trail Home  
3/28/2024



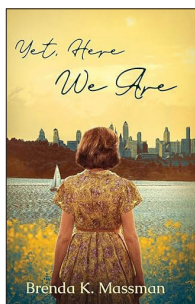
**CAROLYN MCBRIDE**  
The Cicada Spring:  
A Potomac Shores Novel  
4/12/2024



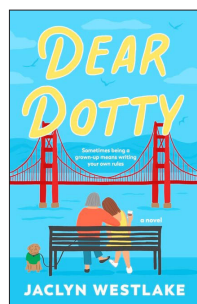
**JANET ROBERTS**  
What Lies We Keep  
5/7/2024



**PEGGY JOQUE WILLIAMS**  
Courting the Sun  
5/9/2024



**BRENDA K. MASSMAN**  
Yet, Here We Are  
5/14/2024



**JACLYN WESTLAKE**  
Dear Dotty  
6/4/2024



**WENDY HALLER**  
The Flannigan Girls  
6/10/2024

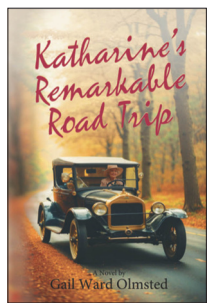


**SHARON J. WISHNOW**  
The Pelican Tide  
6/11/2024

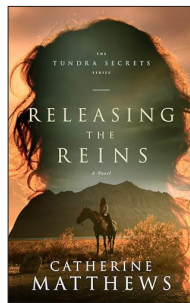


**MELISSA R. COLLINGS**  
The False Flat  
6/11/2024

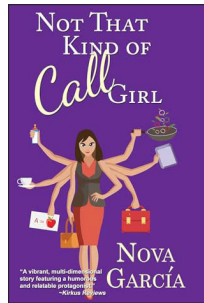
# MEMBER RELEASES



**GAIL WARD OLMSTED**  
Katharine's  
Remarkable Road Trip  
6/13/2024



**CATHERINE MATTHEWS**  
Releasing the Reins  
6/18/2024



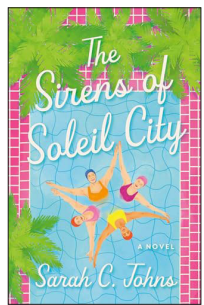
**NOVA GARCÍA**  
Not That Kind  
of Call Girl  
6/19/2024



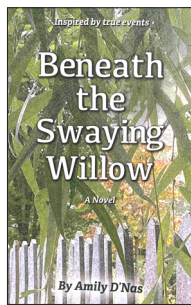
**KARIN GILLESPIE**  
The Pitch Queen  
6/24/2024



**CATHY JEAN-FRANCOIS**  
The Box  
7/2/2024



**SARAH C. JOHNS**  
The Sirens of Soleil City  
7/9/2024



**AMILY D'NAS**  
Beneath the  
Swaying Willow  
7/23/2024



**REBECCA J. SANFORD**  
The Disappeared  
7/30/2024

## WHY ISN'T MY BOOK LISTED IN WRITEON!?

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

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

### THE PROCESS IS SIMPLE

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

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

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

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

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

### WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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

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

If you have a question about your submission, email: [president@womensfictionwriters.org](mailto:president@womensfictionwriters.org).

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

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**BROADCAST** Members! Share your publishing news and submit your published women's fiction book for inclusion on WFWA's women fiction platforms!

**Inside WFWA Newsletter**  
Submit news of book contracts and releases, published shorter works, receipts of awards, and successes with contests.  
Submit here

**WFWA Public Women's Fiction Platforms**  
Submit your book for the WFWA Goodreads Page, Pinterest Boards, Read/On! Reader Newsletter (new releases only) and Podcast Interview (debut authors only).  
Submit here

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**WOMEN'S FICTION WRITERS ASSOCIATION**

**Book Submission Form**

Instructions:  
Thank you for your interest in sharing your book through the WFWA platforms! Please note:

- Although our members write in many genres, only women's fiction books are featured on WFWA platforms.
- Women's Fiction is defined as: layered stories in which the plot is driven by the main character's emotional journey.

## NEWLY RELEASED BOOKS GUIDELINES COMING SOON TO THE BOOK SUBMISSION PAGE

Friends, as we've grown as an organization these past years, so have our members' accomplishments. To be fair to everyone and ensure your women's fiction titles are featured in a timely way, we are in the process of updating the guidelines for including newly released books in the magazine. Please keep an eye out for the new criteria on the WFWA website and in the next issue of the magazine.

# SHOOT AND SHARE CONTEST: **YOUR BOOKCASE**

We asked to see you and your bookshelves, and you shared these amazing photos. This edition's random winner is Laura Drake. Thanks to everyone who entered.



Grace Santamaria



Sarah Vance Thompkins



Rochelle Weinstein



Laura Labarde



Kathryn Moore



Laura Drake

# A JOURNEY INTO INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING FROM A TRAD GAL



Hello WFWA Friends,

The subject for this quarter's article is indie publishing, self-publishing, or independent publishing. Call it what you will.

Well, guess what? I am not an indie or hybrid author (at least not yet)!

So, what am I doing writing about indie publishing? I'll tell you. I've been around the industry for a few years. I'm a fan of observing how publishing has evolved, or in some cases, staggered backward or leaped forward. I also like to keep a handle on what readers want to read, what writers are writing, and the best approach to getting the right books in front of the right readers.

Yes, I am starting out with some snark—but bear with me! :-) I want to share some of my observations over the years. I debuted in 2021 (traditionally published), but I've been around publishing for twenty years. (Wow! That is a long time to me. I didn't realize it until I wrote that number!) But I digress.

In 2010, indie publishing was the hot ticket for many authors. Indie authors were making bank (slang for money) (if you believed the grapevine). But there were several notable names in indie publishing during the early 2010s, like Hugh Howey (*Wool* series), Amanda Hocking (paranormal romance series), and E.L. James (*Fifty Shades of Grey*, indie-published initially).

Indie romance authors had a system. They wrote fast and delivered engaging, sought-after stories. Their process got their books into readers' hands quickly—the romance market known for its appetite was being fed wonderfully.

## GUIDING SCRIBE

Back then, there was this mentality, whether true or false, that the way to make money in indie publishing was to keep the books coming. There was also the attitude that if you chose one path, you'd always be on that path, whether successful or not.

Thankfully, publishing has matured.

Authors who choose to publish indie are business owners, just like traditionally published authors. They write (and have written) excellent books and continue to do so! And rightfully so, we've witnessed the negative stigma surrounding indie publishing drop sharply.

For example, here are a few authors you may know about who started off in the world of indie publishing: Chanel Cleeton (romance), Kennedy Ryan (romance), Leslye Penelope (fantasy and paranormal romance, who is also a prolific independent publisher), and Vanessa Riley (historical romance). And that's the tip of the iceberg! Today, many romantasy and dark romance authors are killin' it in the indie marketplace.

Women's fiction is also a leader in the independent marketplace. Some authors who have been in the game for a while include Barbara Freethy, Bella Andre, Colleen Hoover, Melanie Harlow, Kristen Ashley, Vi Keeland, and Sarina Bowen.

The other day, I posted a question on the WFWA Facebook group to gain some insights on how (or if) WFWA authors plan their writing schedules/annual publishing goals, and the responses were consistent. WFWA authors PLAN!

This is not a willy-nilly business where authors step into the fray without having a sense of direction. Planning is critical. Whether it's a three-month plan, a six-month plan, or a 12-month plan, having an idea of what you want to accomplish is the first step on the best path to success. Notice: I did not distinguish whether respondents were indie or traditional. If you're writing books, you need a plan, period. A plan does not mean a rigid schedule that you can never change, adapt, or tailor to who you are or where your life is at that moment. It is establishing benchmarks that help you stay on track.

Now, what can I share about indie publishing so that you, as an author, can decide what path you want to take to kick off your career or if this path is one you may wish to add?

Here is a down-and-dirty list of what many consider upsides of self-publishing:

- Creative control
- Faster time to market
- Higher royalties
- Flexibility in pricing and distribution

- Direct audience engagement
- Marketing control
- No gatekeepers
- Potential for higher earnings
- Global reach (an eBook is everywhere)

So, with all of these benefits, why doesn't everyone indie publish? Because it's HARD WORK. Okay. I know that all of publishing is hard work, but I believe that running a business where you are the CEO responsible for sourcing, selection, and management of the expert team you will need to have in your arsenal can be daunting. I ran a marketing and PR firm for twenty years with up to five full-time employees and 20 freelancers. That history might be why I started in the traditional publishing business (and excuse me, but when I have "that" side of my brain on, writing is a business): I didn't want the responsibility for everything needed to get the job done falling to me and only me.

Now to the flip side. Here are commonly shared disadvantages of indie publishing:

- Upfront costs
- Quality control
- Limited market reach—Independent bookstores are challenging, but not impossible!
- Time-consuming
- Marketing challenges—However, this is where organizations like WFWA come in with support systems and authors who share their experiences in the world of indie publishing!
- Stigma and perception—I believe this has diminished almost to the point of vanishing. As long as indie authors approach their businesses with the same commitment and care that they heed when writing the best book they can write.
- Visibility and discoverability
- Lack of critical acclaim

Okay, I definitely do not wish to end on a downer, but I'll let you in on a little secret: these same pros and cons also apply to traditional publishing. So, the takeaway is [uses both sides of the brain]: planning, creativity, and a business mindset are all essential, whether you choose indie publishing or traditional.

And who knows? Maybe one day you'll see me on the hybrid path in publishing.

Wherever you're headed, good luck.

Yours in the business of happy publishing,  
Denny S. Bryce



**Denny S. Bryce** is the bestselling, award-winning author of five novels: *The Other Princess: A Novel of Queen Victoria's Goddaughter*, *In the Face of the Sun*, *Can't We Be Friends* (co-written with Eliza Knight), *Wild Women and the Blues*, and *The Trial Of Mrs. Rhineland*. She is also an NPR book critic, an adjunct professor at Drexel University, and a freelance writer who has written for *Harper's Bazaar* and *USA Today*. She is a member of the Historical Novel Society, Women's Fiction Writers Association, and Tall Poppy Writers. You can learn more about her work at [www.dennysbryce.com](http://www.dennysbryce.com).

# EXPLORING THE LINES

## OUTSIDE OF TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING



By Katie Tammen

If you're anything like us, getting to the publishing stage of writing creates a mix of exhilaration, absolute terror, and Anne Shirley "depths of despair."

Type "book publishing" into any search engine and you'll get zillions of hits. Thousands of websites that promise if you do x, y, and z, your manuscript will be a published book in no time. Then you look a little closer, realize that publishing is not a single pathway but rather a labyrinth, and suddenly it seems easier to tuck that manuscript in a drawer and move on with your life.

But before the unregulated mess that is the internet makes you go sob in a corner, take a deep breath, and pat yourself on the back for joining an organization filled with people who have been there, waded into the depths, and come out the other side armed with knowledge they're more than happy to share.

Rather than try to tackle publishing as a whole, we reached out to members with experience in two of the more misunderstood types—hybrid and self-publishing—and asked them to share their experiences and insights.

### LEARNING FROM THE EXPERTS

With thousands of books published each year, authors have more routes than ever to get their words into print, and choosing your preferred path should start with identifying your goals.

"There's no right and wrong," says **Lainey Cameron**, who is giving a presentation at the upcoming Albuquerque retreat based on her masterclass, *12 Weeks to Book Launch Success*. "[It's about] what's your dream."

Author **Rachel Stone** thought her dream was to be traditionally published. Everywhere she looked, traditional publishers were lauded as the gold standard. The thing that would set you apart and shepherd your book to readers.

"In the beginning I was so desperate for that validation," Rachel says. "I thought that [traditional publishing] was the only path."

Then she wrote a story with nine points

of view, and even though literary agents liked it—and her writing—they couldn't place it in the market. They passed. Despite a stack of 150 rejections, Rachel wasn't ready to give up on her "book baby." Instead, she joined WFWA, where she learned about hybrid and self-publishing.

During a call with one of the publishing houses she considered, Rachel asked how she could trust that her book was any good since she'd had so many literary agent rejections. The publisher told her that getting a book traditionally published was not a "stamp of quality." His words stuck with Rachel and freed her from her final misgivings about seeking an alternative route for a story she really believed in.

She eventually landed on what she calls "the muddy middle," or hybrid publishing, which requires a vetting process similar to querying agents. Once she signed a contract, her publisher

handled the editing, page design, cover design, and the uploading of her book onto various sale platforms.

"You at least feel like you're not going through that by yourself," she says of working with a hybrid publisher. "There was a comfort level."

But it wasn't perfect.

Most of the hybrid publishers Rachel reached out to cost between \$5,000 and \$10,000. And although Rachel had more input than she would have had with a traditional publishing contract, her publisher still had the final say on everything. When she needed something changed, she had to reach out to them and wait for their response.

The timelines to publication also vary widely among hybrid publishers. The press she went with (Koehler Books) took one year from start to finish, but the ever-popular She Writes Press would have taken closer to three years.

With great reviews on her first release and her second book on the horizon, Rachel is considering the self-publishing route this time to have even more control over the final product. It's a sentiment indie authors **Elaine Aucoin Schroller** and **Kimberly Sullivan**, who are part of a committee that recently self-published a historical fiction anthology featuring stories by twenty-three WFWA members, understand well.

They both considered the traditional route until colliding with its unforgiving business model, which they say has no room for unproven creative license.

## FEATURE

“Publishing houses are so strapped for everything right now, they’re going to take the path that costs the least amount of money and gives the biggest return,” Elaine says.

But like Rachel, Kimberly found that your publishing path is rarely a reflection of the quality of your writing.

“Had we gone the traditional route, it [the anthology] never would have been published,” Kimberly says. In fact, when Kimberly first ventured into publishing, multiple literary agents told her they wouldn’t be interested in anthologies, and it’s part of why she’s self-published from the start.

Since the historical fiction anthology went live in June, it’s sold well and is earning great reviews. Elaine and Kimberly say they have no regrets about taking the nontraditional publishing route for the anthology or themselves.

“If you put out good content, people will read it,” Kimberly says.

According to **Paulette Stout**, who helps oversee [WFWA’s indie publishing Facebook group](#), that’s the experience of many self-published authors.

“The gatekeepers have an idea of what does and doesn’t make a good story,” Paulette says, but they’re not always right or able to spot upcoming trends, and that’s where the other publishing paths excel and empower authors.

### FROM MANUSCRIPT TO NOVEL

Are you interested in exploring other publishing avenues, but still intimidated by it? It’s a feeling even experienced authors told us they know well.

“It certainly was the most nerve-wracking time for me when I published my first book,” Elaine recalls with a laugh. “My fingers were shaking as I was trying to do the upload onto Amazon.”

“You will get overwhelmed, which is why there’s people like me and Lainey,” says Paulette, who co-hosts a book marketing podcast with Lainey.

Self-publishing means you are the publisher, Paulette says, but it doesn’t mean you have to do all the work. Just like

### DID YOU KNOW?

- The terms indie and self-published are often used interchangeably.
- Amazon allows you to purchase targeted ads, and if you don’t get it right the first time, you can always try again.
- You don’t need a PR agent to sell your book.
- Many authors have more success selling their books at craft fairs than at book fairs.
- Lainey Cameron will give a three-hour workshop about book publishing and marketing at the Albuquerque retreat.
- Most hybrid publishers accept submissions directly from authors and if accepted, the author bears financial responsibility for their book’s production while the publisher provides a team of professionals to bring the book to market.
- Two popular hybrid publishers among WFWA members are [Acorn Publishing](#) and [She Writes Press](#).

a publishing house, you’ll need to seek out people who are experts in the various aspects of the process. She recommends approaching self-publishing like you would a kitchen renovation: read reviews, talk to people to see who they’ve used and liked, or find out who worked on books that impressed you.

Step one—regardless of your publishing path—is to get the book right. For most first-time authors, that means hiring developmental and copy editors plus a proofreader. (After the second or third book, you’ll likely only need copy editors and proofreaders.)

“You don’t know how to write a novel,” Elaine says with a laugh. “Nobody does until somebody who does shows you how.”

Once your book is in the hands of editors, it’s time to start thinking about marketing. That’s right. Don’t save it until the end.

Surprised?

We were too, but before the panic about endless Facebook and Instagram posts takes over, Lainey has great news: “Social media does not sell books.”

It’s a much more lucrative use of your time to develop a regular newsletter or Substack advancing your brand and cater your content to your intended audience. “Start building your super fans,” she says.

It can be as often or infrequent as you want. Just be consistent with it and make sure your readers know when to anticipate

hearing from you. Once the newsletter is live, it’s time to consider your book’s design. Some people might choose to do the page design themselves with programs like Atticus or Vellum, but paying a professional to lay it out is also an option.

“There’s so many ways to do this,” Paulette says.

The one element every author we interviewed agrees is necessary? Paying a professional to design the cover.

“You have seconds to capture someone’s attention when they’re looking online,” Paulette says.

Once these steps are complete, it doesn’t mean the book immediately has to go live. In fact, Lainey encourages writers to build in time before the launch. Take a month or two to ensure the category and subgenres are right, learn how ads on Amazon work, send out advance review copies, and reach out to literary magazines.

“I wish I could give people a recipe and say ‘do these six things and you’re done,’” Lainey says, but it doesn’t work like that.

Every author’s experience will be slightly different, but the most critical part to remember as you go through the process is that self-publishing, like good writing, isn’t a solo endeavor.

Don’t be afraid to reach out to an established author if you get stuck.

“It doesn’t have to be so difficult,” Kimberly says. “WFWA indie authors really want to help one another.”

### Recommended resources:

- [WFWA Member-Only Indie Publishing](#)
- [Jane Friedman’s Publishing Paths](#)
- [Author Accelerator](#)
- [20 Books to 50K](#)
- [Author Nation](#)
- [Writing Wives](#)
- [David Gaughran](#)



**Katie Tammen** is a recovering news junkie who began her writing career at daily newspapers. These days she avoids all stories related to super obedient police dogs, but never misses an opportunity to highlight the unspoken realities of womanhood.

# BIG TALK ON SMALL PRESS PUBLISHING

**MEMBERS  
SHARE TRUTHS  
AND SURPRISES  
ABOUT  
WORKING WITH  
A SMALL PRESS**

By Brittany Clair

**S**mall press publishing falls under the umbrella of “traditional publishing” in that it still requires authors to go on submission with their manuscripts and follows the traditional publishing model (in terms of editing, design, production, printing, and payment). It’s a pathway many WFWA authors love—and we’re thrilled to be able to bring you some of their voices and perspectives. There’s nothing like hearing from those who’ve walked the path.

Most small presses carefully curate their annual lists, and print fewer books per year than the bigger houses. Some have a regional or thematic focus. Some concentrate on certain genres. Many accept direct submissions from authors, removing the middle step of querying agents. They also tend to be more open to debut authors; receptive to novel, literary, or experimental work that larger houses may shy away from; and highly communicative.

But there are some downsides, too. They generally pay less, and often don’t have much (if any) resources to market and promote their books. And the small press market itself is always in flux; sometimes houses are forced to fold.

Because every press is different, it’s impossible to generalize about small press publishing across the board. But one thing is certain: the quality of books small presses are bringing to market is remarkable—and it’s still getting better. In addition to academic presses and numerous recognizable houses such as Graywolf Press, Tin House Books, Coffee House Press, McSweeney’s, and Akashic Books, many newer small presses are putting out incredible work, too. Work gaining national attention and earning award nominations. It’s an exciting time, and for many successful WFWA authors, it’s not a back-up plan, it’s The Plan.

If you’ve been rethinking the traditional route for whatever reason, join us in learning from our fellow members who’ve played a direct role in advancing small press publishing for all of us. We spoke with Jill Caugherty, Beth Dotson Brown, Amy Dressler, and Nancy Taber about the best parts of going this route, and some of their frustrations. Here’s what they had to say:

**JILL CAUGHERTY**, a former senior product manager and marketing manager, is the author of *The View from Half Dome* (Black Rose Writing, 2023) and *Waltz in Swing Time* (Black Rose Writing, 2020). She lives in Raleigh, NC with her husband and daughter.

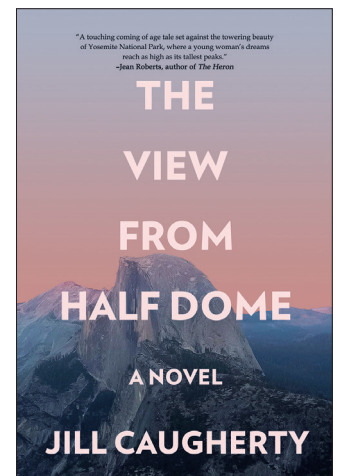
## THE GOOD:

■ The autonomy I had throughout the publishing process. I was able to choose my own title and provide input on my ideal cover. And although my publisher offered editing suggestions, I was ultimately responsible for the final edits and content for both of my manuscripts.

■ My publisher arranged several BookBub promotions for my novels, which significantly helped with overall ratings, reviews, and visibility (they paid half the costs). They invited authors to sign up for list builder, BookBub follower, and Amazon promotions. On top of that, they submitted my latest novel to *The New York Journal of Books*, which gave it a favorable review and tagged me in several social media posts.

■ In general, I found my publisher’s small team to be responsive and prompt.

■ I’ve enjoyed the online community Black Rose Press established: a private Facebook group where authors can share tips and ask questions, plus regular live broadcasts in which the publisher’s founder provides updates on the publishing industry and answers questions. To that end, my publisher is one of few who holds annual writing conferences for its authors.



## FEATURE

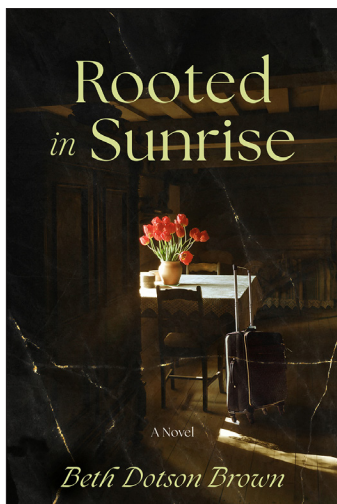
### THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

■ Because my publisher uses a print-on-demand model, most of its sales are online, not through bookstores. As a result, my novels did not receive the widespread distribution they might have with one of the Big Five publishers. That said, my publisher does work with distributors such as Ingram. However, it is generally the author's responsibility to approach individual bookstores about stocking his/her books.

■ I found it more difficult to secure talks and signings at bookstores, since many local owners preferred to work only with authors who published with big traditional presses.

■ In today's publishing climate, most marketing—regardless of whether the author works with a Big Five press, a small press, or is indie-published—falls on the author to handle. My publisher is no different.

**BETH DOTSON BROWN'S** debut novel *Rooted in Sunrise*, published by Koehler Books, will be released in September 2024. She is also the author of *Yes! I Am Catholic*, *Mothers, Daughters and the Spaces in Between*, and contributor to *A Cup of Comfort for Breast Cancer Survivors*, *Scenes from the Common Wealth*, and *The Bandana Book*. Her short stories have been published in literary magazines and aired on the BBC. Beth earned her journalism degree at Ball State University, and lives in a small Kentucky town where she enjoys family, friends, and cooking.



### THE GOOD:

■ I have a voice. The editors and designers solicit my opinion and listen, even if they don't always agree and do what I suggest.

■ My publishing house is responsive. That helps me feel like I'm working with real people who care about the book.

■ My publishing house gave me an orientation to its process from start to finish and the team has mostly done what they said when they said. I appreciate the clarity.

### THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

■ I would like to have more help with marketing. The publishing house is good for sharing some things that work, but having a marketing person assigned to my book would be a gift.

■ I also have to send the book out for reviews, which means I'm paying for those. I would be happy to have someone else handling this.

■ It's up to me to submit the book to contests, which again means I have to pay for those copies. I would love to have someone else dedicated to handling this as well.

### AMY DRESSLER

writes contemporary fiction featuring heroines who wrestle with their emotional baggage while maintaining a sense of humor. She lives in the Seattle suburbs and when she isn't writing she can be found at her day job in local government, on a brisk walk, or ogling cheeses at the fancy grocery store. Her debut novel, *How to Align the Stars*, was published in June by Egret Lake Books.



### THE GOOD:

■ Getting to work with a small, woman-owned business.

■ I received a generous royalty split in my contract.

■ I was able to offer input for things like my cover design and the book's marketing plan.

■ The editorial process was detailed, thoughtful, and collaborative.

■ I built wonderful relationships with my publisher and other authors at the press.

### THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

■ The resources available for marketing my book, obtaining paid reviews, and promoting my work have been limited.

■ My press's print-on-demand model meant customers couldn't preorder my book, and paperbacks weren't available anywhere except Amazon for three weeks.

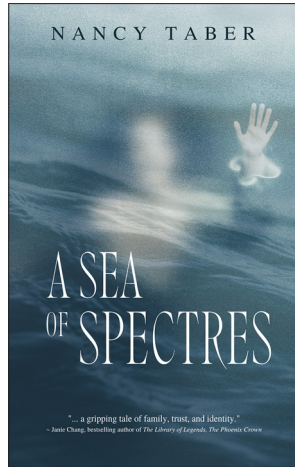
■ I had some FOMO [fear of missing out]. Might I have gotten a deal with a bigger house if I'd queried longer?

■ It's been more difficult getting my book onto bookstore shelves.

■ Since my publisher is small and getting oriented to the business, there are some things the group is still trying out and learning how to do, such as ads.

## FEATURE

**NANCY TABER** is a retired Canadian military officer and a current professor at Brock University. Her qualitative and fiction-based research explores the ways in which learning, gender, and militarism interact in daily life, popular culture, museums, academia, and military organizations. Her debut novel, *A Sea of Spectres*, is published with The Acorn Press (Canada).



### THE GOOD:

■ The press I'm working with, a well-respected and established publishing house based in Prince Edward Island (PEI), was uniquely positioned to understand, publish, and market my novel. Acorn Press publishes books "with local interest and global appeal," and my novel's narrative is inextricably connected to PEI history and folklore. It was an excellent fit.

■ I seem to have similar experiences as several mid-list Big-Five authors I know, in terms of editorial, marketing and sales support with respect to developmental editing, copy editing, proofreading, and cover design; potential event bookings and interviews, award submissions, social media assistance, and related marketing; and distribution to North American online and in-store booksellers. A paperback version and e-version of my novel has been released, with the possibility of an audiobook in the near future.

■ My relationship with the publisher feels like a partnership, in that the success of my novel is also their success. I have a direct line of communication with the publisher and have been involved in all decisions about my novel, with my thoughts and questions consistently taken into account.

### THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

■ My advance was likely smaller than what is often given by larger presses, but the royalties are standard.

■ Lead authors for Big Five presses seem to have much greater marketing budgets that enable greater bookstore and reader reach, but there's no guarantee that an author who signs with a Big Five press will see their book become a lead title.

■ There was some difficulty in getting the paperback version of my novel up on Amazon.ca, for reasons that are only known to Amazon, even though other Canadian booksellers had it available. For Amazon.com, the paperback release date was several weeks after it was available in Canada, even though other US bookstores had it available.



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

**Nancy Taber shares questions to consider if you are thinking about publishing with a small press:**

- 1 Does the press** have a specific niche that's a great fit for your book?
- 2 Is it well-established and respected?** [Newer presses aren't "bad," but they may entail some element of risk; on the flip side, taking a chance and working with a new press can pay off if the press expands in size and reputation.]
- 3 Does the press** have an agreement with a distribution company, so bookstores can easily learn about, order, stock, and return your book? (While returning books might seem counter-intuitive, bookstores are reluctant to stock books they can't return, so are less likely to order them in the first place.)
- 4 Does the press** have a publicist who will contact news media, enter your novel for awards, and work to book you for events? Will they send out ARCs (advanced review copies) and media copies? Although authors can do some of this, in many cases, the publisher is more likely to have the relevant contacts and to get a positive response. It seems that authors will always be doing much of their own marketing (social media, book reviewers, etc.), but having publishers also actively involved is of great benefit.

**There are many resources available to learn more. Here are some great places to start if you're interested in additional information about small press publishing:**

- Poets & Writers maintains a database of small presses; you can [search it here](#).
- The AWP recognizes a small press publisher annually—review the [finalists and previous winners here](#).
- ["Art Over Numbers: On Independent Publishers and Small Press Practices,"](#) by Jess Alessandrelli in the *Cleveland Review of Books*.
- ["Should You Publish Your Book with a Small Press? Two Literary Agents Advise,"](#) by Sangeeta Mehta on Jane Friedman's website.
- Webinar from the Authors Guild: ["Paths to Publication: Alternatives to Traditional Publishing."](#)
- Webinar from The Authors Guild: ["Paths to Publication: Traditional and Small Press."](#)



# A PRIMER ON BOOK CONTRACTS

By Brittany Clair

Whether you are agented or unagented, published or unpublished, knowing your way around the basic points in a book contract can be helpful career-wise as well as offer a lens into the publishing industry and how it's changing. Experts say that no matter your situation, it's always best practice to review your contract yourself.

There are so many fabulous resources available delineating book contracts these days (see suggested resources below) it's easy to get bogged down in fine print, legalese, and various clauses. We're not here for a Tell-All. Instead, this article spells out the most basic agreements included in book contracts, plus some perspective from people who know what they're talking about.

Speaking of which, disclaimer: this article is not

legal counsel. If you need formal guidance on book contracts, The Authors Guild offers a wealth of vetted materials designed by experts to help writers navigate publishing contracts, and it has a team of attorneys who can review members' contracts within a one- to two-week turnaround time. Dues increased this year to \$149 annually, so it may not be feasible for everyone, but access to professional legal contract review is a fabulous perk included with membership. I confess I was tempted to open and close this article here: *Join The Authors Guild and have an attorney review your book contract with you. The end.*

Alas, the role of "author" continues to balloon as new opportunities for publication arise, and contract negotiation is as important as ever.

Continued on page 18



## THREE THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT NEGOTIATING BOOK CONTRACTS

### 1. DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR CHANGES.

Matt Knight, a writer and lawyer who blogs regularly about the intersection of the law and publishing, says, “A publishing contract, like any contract, is meant to be negotiated.” Even if you are a new author without much leverage, you can always ask. Indeed, *nothing’s going to change if you don’t*. New authors may be hesitant to negotiate at all, but responsible publishers won’t run the other way on account of questions. Remember, you’re at this stage because they want to print your book. Advocate for yourself.

### 2. ASSUME THE WORST.

It may sound odd, but when thinking through the terms of your contract, assume everything will go wrong. As Victoria Strauss at [Writer Beware](#) explains, “Don’t assume that every single word of your contract won’t apply to you at some point.” If your contract says [insert remote possibility here], it could really happen. Ask yourself: If this scenario played out, would I be okay with it?

### 3. THINK ABOUT WHAT MATTERS TO YOU.

There are industry standards, and you won’t be able to negotiate everything, but many elements of a book contract are subjective. Some people may care more about foreign language translation rights, or their cover design, or the right to participate in selecting an audiobook narrator (the list goes on). The Authors Guild advises that “the best way to help yourself is to choose the issues most important to you, rank them in order of importance, and concentrate on negotiating the corresponding terms.”

## WHAT KEY ELEMENTS DOES A BOOK CONTRACT COVER?

### ■ A DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK AND THE PARTIES INVOLVED.

Book contracts open with a statement of who is entering the agreement (you and the publisher), when the agreement begins (the date), deadlines, and the basics about

**“AS CREATIVES, WE OFTEN DON’T THINK OF OURSELVES AS ENTREPRENEURS OR BUSINESS OWNERS. BUT AS AN AUTHOR TODAY, THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT WE ARE REGARDLESS OF PUBLISHING PATH. THE CONTRACTS AND AGREEMENTS THAT DEFINE OUR BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS OFTEN CREATE THE FOUNDATIONAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF OUR AUTHOR CAREERS. SO IT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT THAT THEY BE THOROUGHLY UNDERSTOOD. AND THANKFULLY, THERE ARE RESOURCES AVAILABLE WHERE AUTHORS CAN GO TO GET HELP WITH THAT, INCLUDING ATTORNEYS WHO SPECIALIZE IN PUBLISHING, AND THE AUTHORS GUILD WHICH OFFERS LEGAL SERVICES TO ITS MEMBERS.”**

~ LISA MONTANARO, RECOVERED ATTORNEY, AUTHOR, AND 20+ YEAR ENTREPRENEUR

your book (title, genre, word count, etc.).

When thinking about deadlines, leave yourself more time than you think to return a revised manuscript. And make sure your contract doesn’t include a stipulation that “time is of the essence.” Attorneys say this language isn’t standard in publishing, and it can leave you legally vulnerable for even a single-day delay in a courtroom setting (whereas otherwise there’s some general leeway).

Regarding deadlines for your publisher, make sure there is a clear mandate for publication within a certain time frame (often, this is 12-18 months after acceptance) and that rights revert back to you if the publisher fails to abide by this.

By the way, *you automatically have copyright protection over your work*. You don’t need to do anything special to register or claim copyright over your manuscript. In a publishing contract, you are agreeing to grant some rights to a publisher. This leads us to the main event:

### ■ RIGHTS

*What are you granting your publisher the right to do with your work?*

When you sign a book contract, you are granting rights to your book to a publisher.

Generally speaking, the rights being granted are for publishers to print and sell your book. Note that with regard to the copyright, you are not actually signing over or transferring copyright to the publisher,

you’re granting the publisher the right to use it. \*Make sure the copyright remains in your name.

Rights also cover formatting, location, and language. What kind of book can the publisher print (hardcover, paperback, mass market paperback)? Where? In what language(s)? The Authors Guild recommends asking publishers to spell out every right granted and avoiding blanket statements like “grants all rights to the work.”

### ■ SUBSIDIARY/SECONDARY RIGHTS (SUBRIGHTS)

These encompass rights granted to the publisher to share your work with third parties. There are many categories of subrights, including audio, dramatic rights (film/television), merchandising, and foreign market or translation rights. As with the grant of rights, watch out for tricky umbrella language that benefits the publisher.

### ■ PAYMENT

Book contracts cover author payouts and payment schedules. An advance is a payment of royalty sales before your book starts earning royalties. You won’t earn additional royalties until your book “earns out” your advance. While advances are extremely subjective and dependent upon both the author and the publisher, royalty rates should align with industry standards.

## FEATURE

Check [The Authors Guild's Model Trade Book Contract](#) for standard market royalty rates.

**A note:** Most publishers pay royalties as a percentage of a book's list price (so a 10% royalty on a \$30 book would pay \$3), but sometimes publishers, especially smaller ones, pay based on net receipts. It's important to know how this is different. Instead of paying the royalty based on the list price, these terms stipulate the royalty is calculated based on the wholesale price of the book (the price a wholesaler or retailer pays for the book), not the list price. Since retailers pay a much lower cost for books, royalties based on net receipts result in much lower payments.

### ■ WARRANTY AND INDEMNITY

The warranty is a guarantee the author makes about the book to the publisher. It includes language about plagiarism, defamation, and privacy rights, among other things, as well as promises that the work doesn't infringe on anyone's rights or cause anyone harm. While this may sound straightforward, it's impossible to promise some of these things in perpetuity and could leave you vulnerable if anyone ever sued the publisher (see below). The Authors Guild recommends inserting "to the best of the author's knowledge" with the warranty clause to protect yourself.

If the warranty is considered breached, the indemnity comes into play—essentially, it holds you financially responsible for legal challenges to the warranty. \*This could be hugely expensive. Across the board, lawyers and agents stress that **the warranty and indemnity are possibly the most critical pieces of any book contract; they demand meticulous review.**

### ■ A FEW OTHER NOTABLE ITEMS:

A contract's **out of print clause** should state that once the work is out of print, you can reclaim the rights granted (or that the rights revert to you). It may seem straightforward, but you want to check that there is a clearly stated definition for "in print" and "out of print."



**"EVERY CONTRACT SHOULD PROVIDE THAT 'ALL RIGHTS NOT SPECIFICALLY GRANTED IN THE CONTRACT' ARE RESERVED BY YOU. IF YOURS DOES NOT, ADD IT. ABOVE ALL, DO NOT ALLOW THE REVERSE, THAT IS, FOR THE PUBLISHER TO BE THE OWNER BY DEFAULT OF ANY RIGHTS THAT YOU DID NOT SPECIFICALLY GRANT."**

~ THE AUTHORS GUILD, [THE WRITER'S LEGAL GUIDE](#)

**Editing** is a major consideration. Who has the final say on the book and when it's deemed ready for publication? You want to ensure that you have a say in revising the book and reviewing all work associated with it. Many authors care deeply about other aspects included here, such as the book's title, cover design, interior design, audiobook narrators, and promotional copy.

**Options clauses** involve promising the publisher first right of refusal on your next project, but know that they can be greatly detrimental to writers (often, by limiting authors' publishing options). If your contract contains any options clauses, make certain the details are clearly stated.

If you can, negotiate for your **advance to be nonrefundable.**

We could dive down the rabbit hole on any one of these topics—and there is much, much more to book contracts than we have space to cover here. Especially if it's your first ride around the park, even boilerplate contracts can send your head spinning. But rest assured that there are resources and experts available that can help you navigate negotiation effectively. The key things to keep in mind are that book contracts *are* essential tools for authors (this is your opportunity to shape something that can exert a huge influence on your career); you don't need to rush to sign on the dotted line; and clear communication is essential. Good luck!

### Recommended Resources:

■ The Authors Guild has a wealth of articles and webinars on navigating book contracts (some are member-only) and a team of attorneys available to answer legal questions and review publishing contracts. For a healthy start, check out [Book Contract Basics](#) with agent Rebecca Matte, [Deal Memo 101](#) with a panel of experts, [Book Contracts 101](#) with the Guild's director of legal services, the [Annotated Model Trade Book Contract](#), and [The Writers Legal Guide](#) (chapter 11 covers book contracts).

■ [Writer Beware](#) has many posts covering book contracts and occasionally flags publishers engaged in poor contract practices. If you're publishing with a small press, it's a good place to check.

■ Matt Knight's blog [Sidebar Saturdays](#) offers many articles on book contracts. They're accessible and range from broad overviews (major deal points in publishing contracts) to more specific (negotiating editorial control in publishing contracts).

■ Mark Levine's book [Negotiating a Book Contract](#) comes highly recommended from multiple experts.



**"CONTRACTS AREN'T THERE FOR WHEN TIMES ARE GOOD & EVERYONE IS WELL-INTENTIONED. THEY NEED TO WORK FOR YOU WHEN THINGS GO TO HELL."**

~ JANE FRIEDMAN ON X

# CONGRATULATIONS TO THE STAR AWARD FINALISTS!

By Brittany Clair

We touched base with all six finalists to hear more about their individual paths to publishing success, what they love about where they landed, and what they might do differently.

As we contemplate and celebrate all of our members' successes, it's worth pointing out that half of the six STAR finalists this year were self-published (the other half published traditionally). Regardless of which route they took, most of the finalists touched on similar thrills and struggles throughout the publication process—a poignant reminder that writing is writing, editing is editing, publishing is publishing, marketing is marketing, no matter what your path to publishing looks like. And universally the aftermath of all of it is filled with big emotions, pride, excitement, and some disappointment too.

Join us in saying congratulations, and learning more about how these authors put their work out into the world.

## GENERAL CATEGORY

### GIRL BRAIDING HER HAIR BY MARTA MOLNAR

This is the second book in a series, and I decided to self-publish after my agent sent the first book around to publishers and they passed. Since I've self-pubbed over a dozen novels before in another genre, I am very comfortable with this path. The best part is being in charge of every aspect. The book could stay true to my vision, including the title and cover. What made the biggest difference is that I am in charge of marketing. Nobody will ever be as passionate about my book as I am. A traditional publisher never would have provided the marketing package I put together and paid for myself. On the downside, I suppose, some people in the industry still look down on self-published books. I sent out a press release to local papers. A few of the bigger ones ignored me, but there are so many ways to promote books. Writers are creative by nature. We are very good at finding our way around obstacles.



## GENERAL CATEGORY

### ONCE UPON A LIE BY REBECCA TAYLOR

After traditionally publishing my two previous titles, this book marked my return to self-publishing. Having both traditionally published and self-published titles has taught me a lot about both options (and the truth is, this is a very hard business no matter which path you take). I appreciate that traditional taught me about the amount of work and editing it takes to make a book really shine. For me, the worst part of traditional publishing was a lack of control over almost every aspect of the process once you turned in your last round of edits. With self-publishing, you become the project manager while also gaining a deep understanding of publishing as a business: book production, distribution, marketing, and retail. I'm very grateful I not only know how to write a book, but how to actually make and sell one as well. On the downside, self-publishing demands complete internal accountability—it's always up to me to execute my project plans.



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## FEATURE

### GENERAL CATEGORY

#### **FIVE WINTERS BY KITTY JOHNSON**

I published traditionally with Lake Union Publishing. I have a great relationship with my editor and the whole team, and I adored my cover! I'm thrilled to have made such strong bonds with other Lake Union authors—it's such a bonus to feel as if you have a team encouraging and supporting you! I'm using a publicity company for my second novel, *Prickly Company*, but the jury's still out on whether it will end up being worth the financial investment.

### DEBUT CATEGORY

#### **LA VIE, ACCORDING TO ROSE BY LAUREN PARVIZI**

I published with Lake Union Publishing, Amazon Publishing's book club/women's fiction imprint. Their dedicated editorial and production teams, as well as the marketing support, has been invaluable to me as a debut author. I especially loved the editing experience. After so long working alone, turning to other professionals to help me take my manuscript to the next level was both a thrill and a luxury. Copy editors are worth their weight in gold.

Working through self-doubt and not succumbing to overthinking spirals have been my biggest challenges, but I'm sure I'd experience both no matter how I published. Leading up to my publication date, I was convinced there was a "right" way to do everything and put so much pressure on myself trying to figure out what that was. But every journey is unique. The next time around (book two is scheduled for spring 2025!), I want to enjoy the ride.

### DEBUT CATEGORY

#### **FOLLOW THE SUN BY LIZ LOCKE**

I published with Random House Canada. It was important to me to see physical copies of the book in major retailers, and I wanted a chance at national press coverage. It took more time than I anticipated, but it was worth it. My favorite part of the journey was the audiobook! My main character is an aspiring singer/songwriter in the 1960s, and my publisher found an amazing narrator who is also a musician. She came up with original music for lyrics I'd written and performed them for the recording! It's no exaggeration to say I was literally crying when I heard the final version. I never imagined I'd get a chance to hear this story come alive like that.

One misconception I had was that once you've been traditionally published, you've "made it." It was a rude awakening to realize that having one book on the shelf means exactly that: you have one book on the shelf. I'm still out there on sub with my next one, anxiously awaiting news like everyone else!

### DEBUT CATEGORY

#### **THE ART OF BECOMING ANOTHER PERSON ENTIRELY BY BRENDA ARNOLD**

I self-published through Amazon and IngramSpark because I was eager to get my book out into the world rather than going through the traditional route, which can take several years. I was surprised by how many different layers were involved, from designing the book (so much fun!) to marketing (not fun at all!). To know that readers have been buying and reading my novel has been enormously gratifying, though it was frustrating to realize books on Amazon don't sell without ads. (Even worse has been working to get reader reviews.) In the future, I would send out more ARCs and try to obtain more editorial reviews in advance.

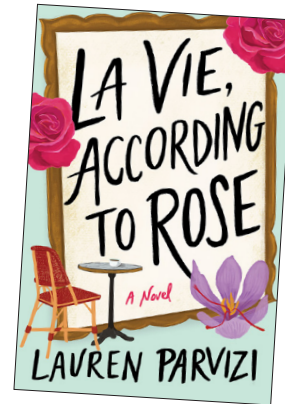


Photo by Nazaneen Gangi



# AUTHOR PROFILE:

## KIMBERLY PACKARD

By Brittany Clair

This issue we caught up with Kimberly Packard, the award-winning author of seven titles, to hear about her journey to publication. A veteran of the communications industry for nearly two decades, Kimberly also has a journalism degree and loves traveling, (trying to) practice yoga, and running. She's genre-hopped over the course of her writing career, and her newest title, *This Time Around*, sits squarely on the women's fiction shelf. Here's what she had to say:

**WO:** Tell us about your new release, *This Time Around*. What inspired you to write it?

**Kimberly:** *This Time Around* is about Josie Gardner, an almost-single mom trying to feed her children and grow her small business. After Josie's ex asks for custody of the kids and she finds out a big deal fell through at work, she spirals into a panic attack. When she recovers, she's back in her high school bedroom at the start of her senior year—a year full of heartbreak and regrets. The book follows Josie as she returns to school and tries to fix her past mistakes, in the hopes that doing so will send her back to her children.

I've always wanted to write a time-slip story and examine the idea of "paths we didn't follow in life." Several years ago, a high school friend posted some videos from our senior year. When I saw myself in one of the pictures, it made me really think about who I was then and who I am now.

I started writing this story in the summer of 2020. At the time I was in the final edits of my previous novel, *Dire's Club*, a story that examines life and death—and in the midst of a pandemic it was a bit too heavy for me. So, in a parking lot, during socially distanced write-ins with some of my closest writing friends, I started what we lovingly called The Parking Lot book.

**WO:** You published your first novel with a small publisher just delving into fiction and have since gone on to self-publish your books (six of them!). What did you learn from that first experience and why did you make the transition?

**Kimberly:** I learned so much! First of all, fiction and nonfiction are different beasts. Generally, you can charge more for nonfiction, and in some cases you'll have built-in readers (think of all the diet and workout books sold in December and January). This isn't necessarily true of fiction.

I'm eternally grateful for what my publisher did for me, but looking back, the cover wasn't right and the book was priced too high.



After my first book, *Phoenix*, came out, the publisher decided to make a career change and closed her publishing business. It was a shock, but the good news was that I received my full rights back. Around that same time, I took a class on how to self-publish, so rather than jump back into pitching agents, I republished *Phoenix* with a new cover and fiction-friendly price and finished out the series. From there, it just made sense to continue publishing my books myself.

**WO:** You have three books in a series (*The Phoenix Series*)—how do you approach writing a book for a series differently from a standalone novel?

## FEATURE

**Kimberly:** They are really very different experiences. My editor and I joke that I wrote eleventy-billion drafts of *Pardon Falls* (book two) because I thought it needed to be more like *Phoenix*. When I finally got out of my own way, the book was better for it. I wrote the final book in the series in five months because I knew the characters and the story so well. The downside to finishing a series is that I really miss all the characters. In a way, these characters saw me grow from a baby author to who I am now.

The appeal to me of a standalone is I have the opportunity to explore completely different stories and characters. I love that women's fiction as a genre has a really big tent, meaning that my action/adventure books, my general fiction books, and my romance novels still fit together.

### **WO: What advice would you give a writer friend considering self-publishing?**

**Kimberly:** Don't panic. It can feel really daunting, but make a checklist of everything you need to do and make a plan.

Build your team. I have a professional editor and cover designer. The beauty of the publishing industry now is that many of these people have worked for publishers, so they understand the industry.

Along those lines, listen to your team. My cover designer is amazing, and while I'll give her some initial thoughts to get the juices flowing, she often comes back with something much better. Don't fall too much in love with some of your own ideas.

Lastly, give yourself time. It can be really tempting to want to hit publish the day after you get everything ready, but set a roll-out plan—find ARC readers, invest time in preorder publicity, and set a launch day far enough into the future that you can build buzz before the book launches.

### **WO: What role did WFWA play in your publication journey?**

**Kimberly:** So much support! I joined WFWA midway through publishing *The Phoenix Series* and it was such a relief to collaborate with this amazing and varied group of writers. Before finding WFWA I often felt like the little bird in the children's book *Are You My Mother?* I didn't write romance, so I didn't fit with that group. Didn't write thrillers, so didn't fit that group either. Finding WFWA was like finding my home.

I love how easily we come together during the retreats—even if you're meeting someone for the first time, it's like catching up with a long-lost friend. Everyone cheers one other on and genuinely wants to see one another succeed. That's one of the things I love most about this writing community: we are so incredibly giving of our time and support.

### **WO: What are three books on your summer reading list?**

**Kimberly:** *The Pelican Tide* by Sharon Wishnow  
*Funny Story* by Emily Henry  
*What is Mine* by Lyn Liao Butler



There is a special place in Heaven for women who juggle it all. Successful career. Loving, harmonious marriage. Well-adjusted children who don't require an armada of pills to make it through the day. And, never forgetting a PTA meeting or snack duty.

It's my goal in life to make it to this heavenly retreat. I can almost see it now. Quiet and serene as a spa. Hushed music. Always-flowing champagne. The softest bathrobe. Bookshelves filled with an eternity's worth of romance novels.

However, I won't be lounging on a chair, having my feet rubbed by a handsome, muscled masseuse who is also an incredible listener. Nope. I'll be outside looking in. Left off the guest list of an exclusive club, standing there waiting while my friends party, holding all their coats.

"Josie, are you even listening to me?"

The sardonic tone of my fifteen-year-old daughter, Aubrey, told me I'd zoned out at a crucial moment.

It's still jarring to hear her use my first name. Obviously, a phase, but I can't help but imagine the dressing down my mom would've given me if I'd done that.

"Yeah, you were saying..." I don't even finish my verbal tap-dance; Aubrey's dark blue eyes are focused on her phone.

There it is again, a brief moment where we could speak in the same language, but it passes and now my daughter's back to the world of communicating in modern hieroglyphics, likes, and atrocious spelling.

**Kimberly Packard** is an award-winning author of women's fiction. When she isn't writing, she can be found planning her next trip, asking her dog what's in his mouth or curled up with a book. She resides in Texas with her husband Colby, a clever cat named Oliver and a precocious black lab named Tully. Her debut novel, *Phoenix*, was awarded Best General Fiction of 2013 by the Texas Association of Authors. She is also the author of a Christmas novella, *The Crazy Yates*, the sequels to *Phoenix*, *Pardon Falls* and *Prospera Pass*, and standalone titles *Vortex*, *Dire's Club*, and *This Time Around*. She was honored as one of the Top 10 Haute Young Authors by Southern Methodist University in 2019. *Vortex* was the 2019 winner of the Pencraft award in Women's Fiction, and *Dire's Club* was awarded the 2021 General Fiction of the Year by the North Texas Book Festival.

# DEBBIE ABBOTT: ONLINE COMMUNITY DIRECTOR FINDS MEANING IN POSITION



If you ask Debbie Abbott how she became the Online Community Director for WFWA, she smiles and shares a story that involves multiple career changes, an angel, and a brain tumor.

While the malignant tumor was removed more than a decade ago, the ripples it caused in the urban contemporary fantasy writer's life continue today.

"It does seem like serendipity to me that I'm in this position now," Debbie says.

Long before she designed the [Mighty Networks platform](#) WFWA uses to host its workshops, Debbie was the managing editor of a struggling magazine. Instead of shuttering it, the owners asked the employees to temporarily work remotely. Debbie thrived outside the office environment and wondered if she could find a way to make the change permanent.

Then, in 2003, she was riding in the car with her husband and saw an angel standing on the corner.

"[It was] one of those earth-shattering moments," she says.

A strong believer in signs, Debbie stayed alert, knowing the angel had shown itself for a reason. That reason came two years later when her symptomless cancer was discovered by accident.

"When you face those life-or-death situations... You have to be able to reason and rationalize all these fears you're having," Debbie says. "I knew I had to make some changes in my life, but I also know the kind of person I am—I'm a go-getter."

Debbie left her magazine position and pursued jobs that would reduce her stress and let her work from home. Eventually she began designing web pages for a blogging service. When that became too taxing, she quit and decided to try writing a book, which led her to WFWA.

She filled out the volunteer skills form as soon as she joined, and jumped at the chance to create a new website from the ground up. It was the meaningful position she'd craved since her cancer diagnosis. And though it's snowballed in ways she never imagined, she can't wait to grow it further.

All WFWA members are welcome to join [Mighty Network's Online Community](#) where they can reap the benefits of Debbie's hard work as they chat with other members and find numerous writing resources and workshops.



**Debbie Abbott** is WFWA's Online Community Director and has overseen the design and development of our Online Community on the Mighty Network platform. She's in the process of querying an urban contemporary fantasy manuscript.



“Publication is a marathon,  
not a sprint. Writing the book  
is only the start.”

JO LINSDELL