

SPRING 2022

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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



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instagram.com/womensfictionwriters/

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

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WriteOn! is published quarterly by the
Women's Fiction Writers Association
www.womensfictionwriters.org

IF YOU LIKE WHAT YOU'VE READ ...

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

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 three 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.



KELLY HARMS Guiding Scribe

Kelly Harms is the bestselling author of six works, including *The Overdue Life of Amy Byler*, a WFWA Star Finalist and Goodreads top ten fiction book of the year. She has worked in book publishing for two decades, first in New York, NY, and now in Madison, Wisconsin, where she lives between lakes with her fiancé, son, and dog. Her latest novel, *Wherever the Wind Takes Us*, will be released in fall of 2022.



Following the Trends

It has taken me many years, and many lessons, to understand that it's not intended for me to do all things, and that all things aren't intended for me. It took a bit of wisdom for me to find my way on this path with so many shiny and promising genres.

Trends in writing are as plentiful as flowers in a garden. One season vampire books were popular and selling faster than hotcakes. And even though I never put serious consideration into writing one, there were a few moments when I rubbed my forehead in contemplation. Then romantic comedies became popular, and I thought about penning one, but my funny bone does not extend to that end.

In women's fiction, I fell in love with some best friend stories. Indeed, I could write one of those. I have best friends, and a few used-to-be best friends. There's got to be a story in there somewhere. So, I have outlines and chapters floating around that I've never quite been able to turn into something.

The trends in publishing are like a roller coaster with plenty turns and twists and ups and downs. But that's not to say I haven't considered any and every option. As a creative content provider, I feel it's my duty. But I know my strengths, and they don't extend to all genres. And I've learned to be okay with that knowledge. Besides, I looked at some of my favorite authors, like J. California Cooper, who wrote about family, and Jane Green, who writes women's fiction with interesting characters. They've found their writing lane and success writing what they love. I realized I needed to do the same thing; I wouldn't be happy or content until I did.

Women's fiction has always sat in the middle of my writing heart. They were some of the first books I read and the ones that stuck in my head. The tentacles of women's fiction extends to comedy, romance, thriller—and on and on and on. The depth of emotion laced through the women's fiction story drew me in and allowed me to live and breathe with the characters. It has no set rules and will never get categorized as formulaic. The story's end can be happy, sad, or none of the above. The protagonist might find love or realize the love found doesn't fit. It's possible that the best friends may never see eye to eye and might go their separate ways. The mother and daughter might find common ground or sever all ties. You just never know, and that's the part I love.

I learned so many things while on my writing journey. Each one is important and has helped provide guidance as I maneuver through my writing career. While I marvel at those writers who have the imagination to pen anything they want, I am not one of those lucky ones. And that's okay with me. Women's fiction gives me an outlet for my writing that can fuel my creativity for years to come.



THE TRENDS IN PUBLISHING ARE LIKE A ROLLER COASTER WITH PLENTY TURNS AND TWISTS AND UPS AND DOWNS. BUT THAT'S NOT TO SAY I HAVEN'T CONSIDERED ANY AND EVERY OPTION. AS A CREATIVE CONTENT PROVIDER, I FEEL IT'S MY DUTY. BUT I KNOW MY STRENGTHS, AND THEY DON'T EXTEND TO ALL GENRES.

Tactixi



Create Your Masterpiece

My mother was an artist, and I used to watch her hands move gracefully from palette to canvas, her mind connecting with her fingers in a way I couldn't understand, creating something so individual and beautiful, from nothing. I still marvel and miss that talent.

Writers' stories are no different. We take a blank page and with a stroke of a key, our story is born. We build our protagonists into someone who we paint with the individual characteristics and souls that our mind breathes into them. We reach into our memories, feelings, and observations and peel away the outer coat of minutia to penetrate the core of our "person," and we dress our protagonist with the color of individuality, humanity, and love.

How do we make them real to our readers? They are vivid in our mind. We love them, we admire them, we give them personalities that are daring and bold, or simple and frail. We add distinguishable characteristics that we've possibly seen in our girlfriends, our family, maybe even ourselves. Their eyes twitch when they're nervous. They blush when flustered. They stumble over their words. They are awkward in a crowd. They hate the dreaded scales. They love their wine. They cuss like a sailor. They cry when they're lonely.

They are human, in a beautiful and messy world.

We writers are on a journey right beside our

protagonist—that emotional ride we strive to portray, that every reader pictures, connects with, and rallies behind. We want to know more about where the story is going. We turn the pages ferociously, because we are invested in her world.

As women fiction writers, we must reach into the crevices of our emotions and put our soul into the emotional journey our protagonist is muddling through. We must make her real. We must carve a path as honest and characteristic of authentic life as we can. Like my mother breathing life onto an artist's canvas, we must breathe life onto the page through the imagery in our own minds pouring out onto the page.

In this issue of WriteOn!, we want to help you make that relationship connection. Through our members' stories, we bring real life to our readership as Kelly Hartog and Patricia Armstrong Stockwell share their "Traveling Kidney" story by connecting relationships through WFWA. Maggie Smith, as our featured author. Savannah Gilbo, our guest editor, helps craft our protagonist's emotional journey through descriptive examples. And so many more stories and tips are featured to help you navigate your own journey as a writer of women's fiction.

Paint your canvas. Breathe life onto the page of your stories. Navigate this beautiful and messy world, right here alongside your WFWA community.

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@WOMENSFIXIONWRITERS.ORG



AS I CLEARED MY THROAT, A WHITE WOMAN WALKED IN BEHIND ME SOUNDING THE BELL. THE SALESLADY LOOKED UP AGAIN.

MY ALLY

by Micki Berthelot Morency

On a sunny Florida day, I turned my car in the direction of the mall. The excitement almost moved the car faster than I usually drove. My daughter was graduating from her medical residency program, and I wanted to buy her something that would show her all the love I'd been feeding her since she was born. Besides, she'd earned this gift.

The mall was almost empty in the middle of the week. Senior citizens in sweatsuits and headbands walked back and forth getting their steps in the air-conditioned atrium. I hastened my pace hoping to raise my heart rate as well.

The middle-aged saleslady looked up from the computer screen when a bell rang as I entered the store. The beginning of a smile disappeared from her face, and she went back to whatever she was doing. I stood there for a few seconds, deciding what to do. That was the only place to buy the purse, and I'd already driven almost half an hour for it.

As I cleared my throat, a white woman walked in behind me sounding the bell. The saleslady looked up again. This time the smile spread over her whole face.

"May I help you find something, ma'am?" she said to the newcomer.

The white lady turned to me and nodded. The gesture full of apology and understanding. "I believe this lady was here first," she said, pointing to me. "I'll wait."

Sometime later, I left the store with not just a designer bag for my daughter but full of hope.

I never knew her name, but white lady was my ally.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS:

■ **Pride in the End: Stories About Allyship and LGBTQIA+ End-of-Life Care**

Megan Perkins PharmD (Author), Amy Vaughn PhD (Author), Frank Collins MD (Author), Julie Olds (Author), et.al. Independently published

■ **It's Time to Talk (and Listen): A Handbook for Healing Conversations About Race, Class, Sexuality, Ability, Gender and More**

Anatasia S. Kim and Alicia Del Prado (New Harbinger Publications)

■ **Dents in the Ceiling: Tools Women & Allies Need to Breakthrough**

Angel G. Henry, New Reads Publications

WOMEN'S FICTION DAY IS COMING!

Are you ready for the best day of the year? June 8, 2022, is Women's Fiction Day.

If you're a published author, indie or traditional, this day is for you to promote your women's fiction titles. WFWA is planning a day of promotion, and we want you to join in. Visit the WFWA website and download the Women's Fiction Day logo and toolkit.

Not a published writer? This day is for you, too! Share your favorite women's fiction titles on social media, post this year's logo, and visit participating author websites for free books and fun.

Special thanks to WFWA member Jen Craven for this year's beautiful logo. Jen writes contemporary women's fiction from her home in northwest Pennsylvania. A former college instructor, she is now a full-time copywriter and mom to three young children. Her current manuscript is deep in the query trenches.

Women's Fiction Day

June 8, 2022



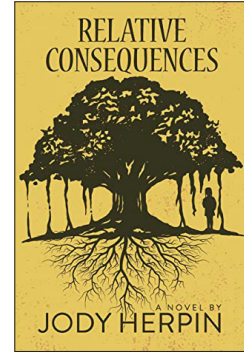
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MEMBER RELEASES



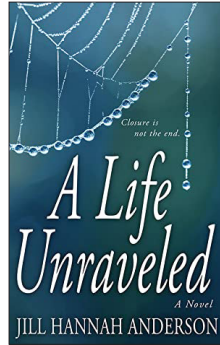
JUDY LANNON
Nine Days
3/5/2022



JODY HERPIN
Relative Consequences
3/12/2022



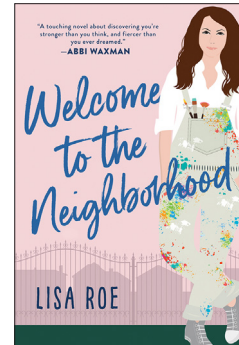
JEN GILROY
The Sweetheart Locket
3/17/2022



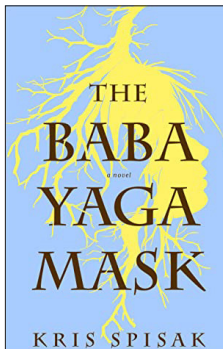
JILL HANNAH ANDERSON
A Life Unraveled
3/22/2022



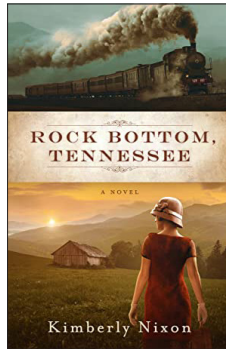
SHAIL RAJAN
The Recipient
3/30/2022



LISA ROE
Welcome to the Neighborhood
4/5/2022



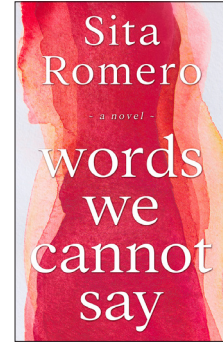
KRIS SPISAK
The Baba Yaga mask
4/5/2022



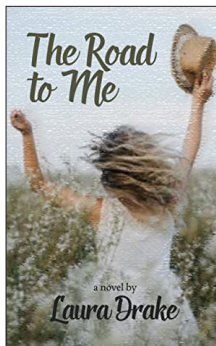
KIMBERLY NIXON
Rock Bottom, Tennessee
4/5/2022



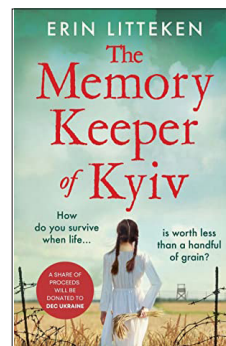
SARAH BRANSON
A Merry Life
4/9/2022



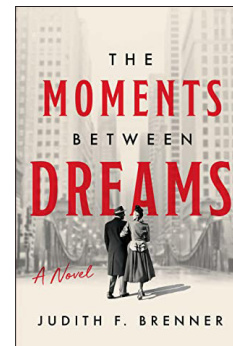
SITA ROMERO
Words We Cannot Say
4/19/2022



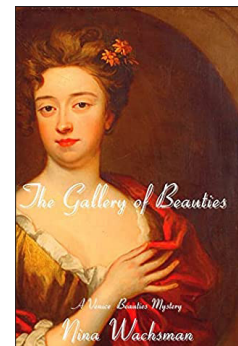
LAURA DRAKE
The Road to Me
4/19/2022



ERIN LITTEKEN
The Memory Keeper of Kyiv
5/16/2022



JUDITH F. BRENNER
The Moments
Between Dreams
5/17/2022



NINA WACHSMAN
The Gallery of
Beauties
6/29/2022

SHOOT AND SHARE CONTEST: SHOW US YOUR FAVORITE OUTDOOR SPACE

Spring is in the air and we are all happy to be in our favorite outdoor spaces. We received some amazing shots of our members celebrating spring! The random winner of \$25.00 is Meghan Redmile. Congratulations and thanks to all who participated!



Kathleen M Basi



Nita Collins



Regina Buttner



Meghan Redmile



Lisa Montanaro



Debbie Burns

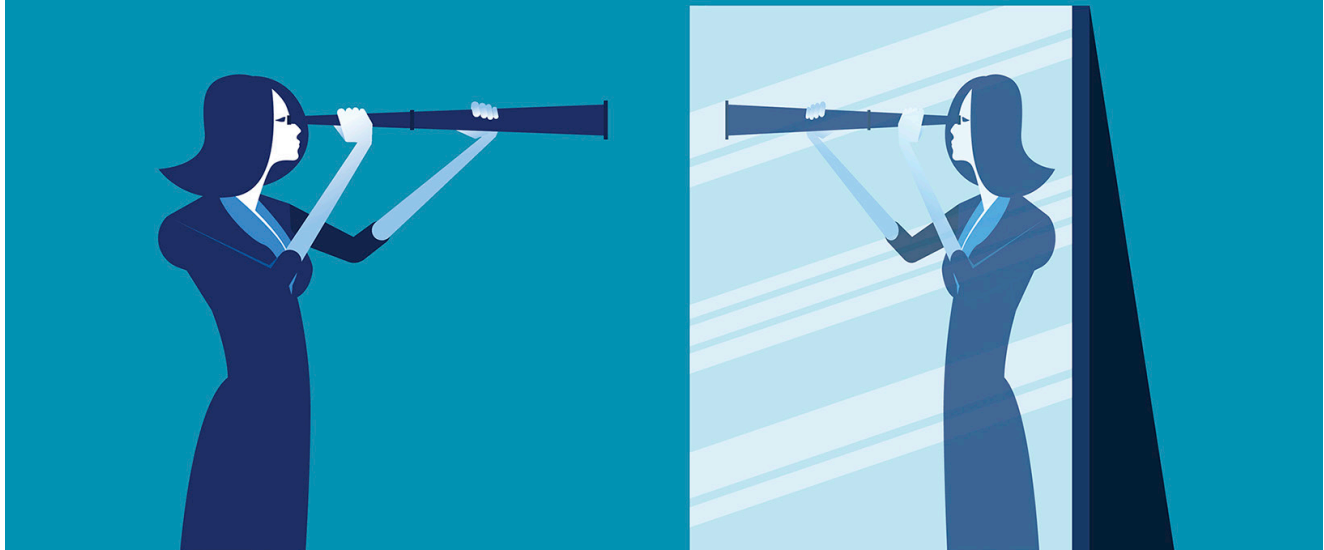


Delise Torres



Dawn Hogan

FINDING THE PROTAGONIST INSIDE YOU



Spend too long around published authors, and you can be sure the conversation will at some point come along to the death of publishing. I've been warned about our industry's *impending dome* since my very first day at HarperCollins, twenty years ago. Many times since then authors, editors, or agents have wondered aloud if the proliferation of e-books, self-publishing, APub, the Random House/Penguin merger, or the absorption of Harlequin's US operations were all signs of the *apocalypse publishing*.

Still, 2022 is the closest I've ever seen to the sky actually falling from the roof of book publishing. This is a truly hard time for most industries, not just another shift in the sands. Supply chain problems, political division, staffing shortages, inflation, and winnowing profit margins have made for an especially hard time for aspiring authors looking for a

path into the field.

There. We've said it. It's not your imagination—this business is tougher than ever. Whether you are multi-published, releasing a debut, uploading a new ePub, or hunting for your first agent, things are sticky. Responses are slower and sometimes never come. Contracts are smaller and harder to win. Agents are fried, editors are out of pocket, and blurbers are lying down in a pool of flop sweat and Girl-Scout-cookie fumes (or is that just me?).

And yet.

There has never been a better time to make yourself the protagonist of your story. For while every publishing professional I know is stretched too thin, every author is typing as fast as possible, and every agent's query tracker seems to say "closed," there is one thing that will never change across all the ups and downs of business.

That constant is you.

SO NOW, IN THIS MOMENT, MOVE YOURSELF BACK INTO THE STAR ROLE OF YOUR PUBLISHING LIFE. GRAB YOUR JOURNAL AND FOLLOW ALONG TO FIND OUT HOW...

1 A well-drawn protagonist is uniquely matched to her external and internal challenges. She is the only person in the world suited to face her set of plot points. If we posit that you are the protagonist of your publishing story, what unique skills do you have to soldier on through hardships this business might offer? List those unique skills. Vision board them. Tweet them. Celebrate them. I have a friend who is connected to everyone in the industry, whether she knows it or not. In someone else's story, she is always making the introductions and paving the way for a new friendship or working partnership. When she is her own protagonist, she must choose to be the matchmaker for her own dreams. That's scarier than being someone's sidekick. But it's what you were born to do.

What's something that makes you the star of this journey, and how does it offer you inroads for progress even in tough times?

GUIDING SCRIBE

2 A great protagonist must make key changes in her thinking, not just in her life, to reach her objectives. What shifts in thinking might you need to make to reach your end goal? For example, many authors need to change how they measure their own success. Do you need to reexamine the myriad ways to see yourself in print and figure out what they would mean to you now? Do you need to sit in on alternative option workshops, learn about audio originals or serial projects, team up with a co-writer or take on a ghost project? Somewhere in your world is something you thought you'd "never do." A good protagonist learns never to say never, just before she wins the day.

What is one path to success that you would never currently consider? Journal about what the BEST thing to come out of that path could be, and how it would make you feel. No action is necessary. Just draw the framework and let your subconscious decide if it could one day be a fit.

3 At some point in the best stories, we need to wonder if it's possible for the protagonist to actually succeed. I'm thinking of the moment in *Anne with an E* when we genuinely don't know how Anne will get back to the Cuthberts. Or when it suddenly hits you that Frodo and Sam are not going to make it into Mordor. Or when the hot guy in any one of Julia Quinn's delicious romances makes it absolutely impossible for the heroine to love him, and we think, well, maybe I'm reading the first ever regency romance without a HEA. (Nope, we never are; JQ pulls the magic off every time.) Are you at that point in your writing journey? Do you think there is no possible way forward? Congrats! That's just more proof of your excellent storytelling skills. Remind yourself that your arc isn't over yet. You wouldn't have the dreams you had if you didn't have the power to achieve them. You are the protagonist, and darnit, you're going to get through this plot point, no matter how hard it might be to believe at the time.

Where are you in your own writing arc? There will be many, many arcs in your career, and this answer will change all the time. Are you pushing through the second act, or are you ready to face down the crossroads between certain failure and glorious success? Either way, wherever you are, know you will be here again, and each time, your challenge will be new, and you will be worthy to it.

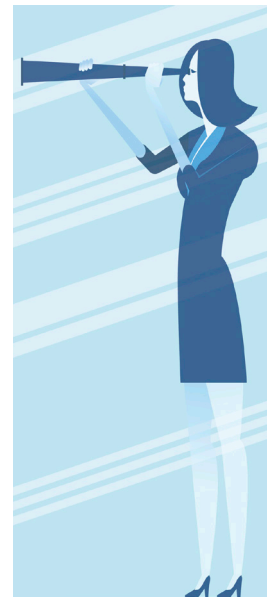
And lastly:

4 A protagonist never knows where her next inciting incident is coming. Every time we check our email, we get a hit of dopamine, that brain chemical that says "something great might be waiting for us this time." This is bad for productivity, but when it comes to story mechanics, our brains aren't really so far off. Every day that you sit down and work toward your writing goals is another day when the author of your life—God, the Universe, yourself, or some combination of the three—can write in a new inciting incident. When your book's protagonist shows up to the grocery store, you can throw her in the path of love, drama, thrills or surprises. Likewise, when you show up at your desk, you throw yourself in the path of surprise opportunities, writing contests, new critique friends, or pitching fests. But it can only happen when you're where you need to be, moving forward in spite of the obstacles.

What would your ideal inciting incident look like today? Write it down on a sticky note near your workspace. Let your brain know what kind of dopamine hit you'd like to enjoy exactly. Then watch as the miraculous happens... After all, we know this story is gonna be a great one!



Want to share how your personal hero's journey is going today? Start a conversation on the WFWA Facebook group page letting us know how you're starring in your story and tag me (@kellyharms)—I'd love to hear!



REMINDE YOURSELF THAT YOUR ARC ISN'T OVER YET. YOU WOULDN'T HAVE THE DREAMS YOU HAD IF YOU DIDN'T HAVE THE POWER TO ACHIEVE THEM.

Kelly Harms is the bestselling author of six works, including *The Overdue Life of Amy Byler*, a WFWA Star award finalist and Goodreads top ten fiction book of the year. She has worked in book publishing for two decades, first in New York, and now in Madison, Wisconsin, where she lives between lakes with her fiancé, son, and dog. Her latest novel, *Wherever the Wind Takes Us*, will be released in fall of 2022.

YOUR CHARACTER AT A CROSSROAD

by Brooke Williams

Your story's midpoint is the moment that decides your protagonist's fate. This point determines whether or not the character chooses enlightenment and comes out victorious, and if readers will keep turning pages.

The midpoint can be one of your biggest and most visual scenes (or sequence of scenes). It should be *stirring* and charged. It must engage your readers and create fresh tension leading to a satisfying story conclusion.

To write your midpoint scene(s), you need two elements: the external discovery and the internal revelation it causes. Essentially, the external and internal conflicts are coming to a head here and becoming permanently intertwined. And it starts with the protagonist gaining new information about her reality. Let's take a closer look.



EXTERNAL DISCOVERY

The main purpose of this external discovery is to provide the protagonist with the most important piece of information about *why* her endeavors to gain the plot goal haven't been successful yet.

This discovery is an unearthing of the truth that has been slowly building over the course of the story so far. Even if the events of the midpoint are shocking and unexpected, they should still *feel* like a logical culmination. And while the external discovery can be communicated through dialogue, because this is such a pivotal scene, it's often more effective to dramatize the protagonist coming upon the information.

For the midpoint to move the plot, however, the protagonist must *act* upon her discovery. And that starts with her internal revelation.

INTERNAL REVELATION

Up to this point, the protagonist has been acting based on a mindset in which she holds to some foundational and increasingly dysfunctional misinformation about her reality. This misinformation has prevented her from succeeding in the external conflict. But her failures have been teaching her a new truth.

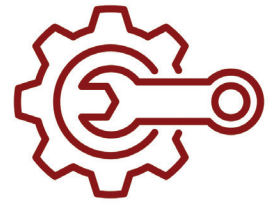
It is the internal revelation, prompted by the external discovery, that fully illuminates this truth for the protagonist. She learns where she's been going wrong in the external conflict, and recognizes, at least indirectly, the mindset that caused her to make these mistakes.

While the external discovery is something that *happens to* or is *given to* the protagonist, the subsequent internal revelation is about her using that information to enact a major shift in her perspective.

This new perspective is the main theme of your story. The theme is something that can be helpful to figure out before you start writing because it can guide your entire writing process. It's helpful even if you're a pantser because it keeps you focused on what you're trying to say as you're writing. And for plotters, it provides the crux of the protagonist's emotional journey, which can sometimes be missing in your structural outline.

If the protagonist accepts this new perspective at the midpoint, she will be able to move forward into increasingly successful interactions with the external world. However, this is only the *middle* of the story. So, although the character realizes the essential truth of her story, she does not yet feel able to completely reject her previous misconception. Her growth will continue in the second half of the story until the climax when she finally realizes that the truth cannot be fully effective unless she's also willing to entirely reject her previous misconception.

Together, the external discovery and internal revelation create the immense change needed and give your story the centerpiece it deserves.



WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN TO "SHOW, DON'T TELL"

The ultimate goal for every fiction writer should be to evoke emotions in readers. But how do you do this on a scene-by-scene basis?

You've probably heard the advice to "show, don't tell"—and that this is the way to create a more immersive and emotional experience for readers. This is true, but it's only part of the equation.

Most writers interpret this advice to mean that you should relate information to readers through sensory details and actions rather than exposition. Here's an example of what that looks like:

TELLING: *I walked through the forest. It was already Fall and I was getting cold.*

SHOWING: *The dry orange leaves crunched under my feet as I pulled the collar up on my coat.*

The second example is a lot more engaging than the first, right? We're being shown a bit more about the setting so that we can start to picture ourselves in the character's shoes. In this case, showing illustrates something, while telling merely states it.

This is an important skill for authors to master because when readers consume stories, their brains create images. So, we need to "show" them enough sensory details and actions to help them create those images in their minds. Which is why this same advice to "show, don't tell" can apply to physical reactions and body language.

It's not ideal to "tell" readers that Jane is feeling sad—we need to show them she's feeling sad. Here's an example: *"Jane's eyes were dull and lifeless. She felt pain in her chest, despite her sluggish heartbeat. Her body felt like it was going to collapse on itself."* That's a lot more interesting than, "Jane felt sad," right?

But here's the thing...

Although body language and physical reactions *can be* a handy way of showing readers what your characters are feeling, they're not always the best way to get the emotion across. Your character may slam their fist on the table or clench their jaw, but I promise you the reader will feel nothing.

ORIGINAL SUBMISSION FROM: ELIZABETH A. HAVEY

Midnight. Home. A room, solid darkness. Ella waking, eyes adjusting, head turning to the left. No David. Alone. But if she closes her eyes, it swims there—all of it...the terror... *I'll never sleep again...*

Sitting up, the bedroom emerging from shadows, the clock ticking on the bedside table: *Sa-rah, Sa-rah*. The door to the hallway closed. Her abdomen, a cramping familiar pain, day one of her cycle; no child, no *Sa-rah, Sa-rah*. No child in the room across the hall.

She closes her eyes. Think it and it won't be true: *a muscular hand slapped Sarah across the face. A man climbed onto Sarah's body—*

Throwing off the covers, sliding out to stand, pace, but wobbling, grabbing a bedpost, the clock ticking, a half-moon emerging from clouds, her mother Cecile's old bedside table, a leg breaking off when Ella lifted it from her trunk; David's glue still oozing, a mark he can't wipe away.

You never get burned twice. Cecile. Platitude. "Shut up, Mom, your stupid, stupid words!"

A man is locking Sarah in a dark room. A man is driving Sarah out of state.

Think it and it won't be true.

Yesterday, men at the maternity admittance window, men on the maternity floor, strange men, unknown men. Almost fathers? Not all men are fathers...not all men are evil...because Griggs said someone tried to take a baby from the nursery...but who...

She tries to breathe. Is there a sound she can make, one undiscoverable, a sound conveying pain, a whelp from a jungle, a dessert, a place devoid of human logic?

A voice: "And I don't give a fuck about Luce or her kid or the staff. Just Sarah, Sarah!" Her voice, in the shadowed room—the floor so cold. "But no, I do, I do care. Forgive me. I do."

Then lying still, life distorted, incomprehensible evil, time to remember, hateful but necessary...the stumbling from a police car, someone blathering about Aunt Rib's neighborhood, folks giving up their Sunday to search for Sarah. Her child. Don't say her name. Fire in the mouth.

Rib's house chilly. So, slump on the couch, keep a distance from the old woman's cloying touch, arthritic fingers in your hair. *Don't touch me.* Endure. Wait, hope. But then no one—no one through the door with Sarah, only feathery evening light receding from the carpet; the shouts of someone's grandchildren at play across the street—assault through a screen door.

Ella sat up—she would fight the drug. Stop the Valium stupor, think it and it won't be true: *Sarah is dead*. Moments passed. Ella breathed, maternal instinct kicking in—*Sarah is alive*. Then back against the pillows, closing eyes, finding sleep, but needing to cover any distance, search for her child, search Sarah's map of the neighborhood, the green celery, the orange candy, the strip with its stores sprawling, everything moving from the trees in front of Rib's house to beyond, water spilling into an ocean...

LET'S FIX THIS!

Looking at our example, *Jane's eyes are dull and lifeless. She feels pain in her chest and has a sluggish heartbeat. Her body feels like it's about to collapse in on itself...* But do you really get a sense of who she is or what she's feeling? Is it really that much better than telling us that this character is sad? In this example, we can picture what Jane must look like, and how Jane must feel, but this isn't enough to evoke an emotional reaction in readers.

So, what *should* we do to convey our character's emotions so that we can evoke emotional responses in readers? Here are three tips:

TIP #1.

USE BODY LANGUAGE AND PHYSICAL RESPONSES SPARINGLY (AND HIGHLIGHT THE UNEXPECTED).

If you show too much body language or too many physical responses in your draft, it's super easy to slip into melodrama. A lot of the drafts I critique are filled with too many familiar reactions (clenched fists, eyes bulging, slamming hands on tables, rapid heartbeats) to familiar situations. But here's the thing—unless what the character does is unusual or unexpected, the reader will most likely issue the response you want them to have without being told. For example, if your character just found out that their wife (who is otherwise an upstanding citizen) has murdered someone—and is about to get caught by the police—we might not need to see his sweaty palms or rapid heartbeat. However, if your character is happy that their wife is about to get arrested, that's a different (and more interesting) story!

TIP #2:

FOCUS ON IDIOSYNCRASIES AND UNIQUE BEHAVIOR TO HIGHLIGHT YOUR CHARACTER.

Instead of focusing on familiar or expected reactions to things, you're better off highlighting things that are unique to your character—habits, tics, unexpected reactions to things, meaningful interactions with certain objects, etc. For example, let's say you have a character who is a bridesmaid in her sister's wedding. Maybe she wears her mother's bracelet (that doesn't go with the dress, but is

almost like a safety blanket of sorts), and maybe she touches it when she's nervous or sad. That's a much more interesting thing to highlight than a character slamming their fist or having a rapid heartbeat.

TIP #3:

MAKE READERS UNDERSTAND YOUR CHARACTER'S ACTIONS OR REACTIONS.

In addition to showing physical reactions, we must also *show* readers what our characters are thinking and feeling. So, what causes these physical reactions? Or what thoughts follow these physical reactions?

To illustrate this point a little better, I'm going to use an example of a very emotional moment from *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. (Note: The below text is *not* an exact copy from the novel—I have tweaked it to look more like the novels I see from beginner writers). Here it is:

"It's time for the drawing," Effie Trinket says as she always does, "Ladies first!" and crosses to the glass ball with the girls' names. She reaches in, digs her hand deep into the ball, and pulls out a slip of paper. The crowd draws in a collective breath and then you can hear a pin drop.

Effie Trinket crosses back to the podium, smooths the slip of paper, and reads out the name in a clear voice. And it's not me.

It's Primrose Everdeen.

Somewhere far away, I can hear the crowd murmuring unhappily. And then I see her, the blood drained from her face, hands clenched in fists at her sides, walking with stiff, small steps up toward the stage, passing me, and I see the back of her blouse has become untucked and hangs out over her skirt.

"Prim!" The strangled cry comes out of my throat. "Prim!" I don't need to shove through the crowd. The other kids make way immediately, allowing me a straight path to the stage. I reach her just as she is about to mount the steps. With one sweep of my arm, I push her behind me.

"I volunteer!" I gasp. "I volunteer as tribute!"

That's not a terrible example, right? But it could be better. We don't really understand what's going on with Katniss here. Yes, Prim just got selected as tribute, and we know that she'll go to the arena

and fight to the death. We also see that everyone, including Katniss, is upset. But is Katniss upset for the same reasons as everyone else?

This is similar to Elizabeth's writing sample in the sense that we don't really know what to make of Ella's reactions. Yes, we know her daughter has gone missing, and we can imagine what that might feel like... but what if Elizabeth dug deeper into Ella's thoughts? And what if she displayed those thoughts on the page? What if we saw Ella picturing the worst-case scenario for her daughter, Sarah? For example, Sarah's dead body lying in a ditch with her socks and shoes missing (Won't her little toes be cold? She hates when her toes are cold.) Or maybe she's imagining that Sarah's being held captive in a strange man's basement. What would those worries look like? What specific scenario does she fear Sarah could be in? As readers, we want to know more—we want to be in Ella's shoes, and to understand why she's feeling this way—but we're kept at an arm's distance.

Now, let's look at the actual example from *The Hunger Games* to see how Suzanne Collins evoked emotion in us by including Katniss's thoughts.

"It's time for the drawing," Effie Trinket says as she always does, "Ladies first!" and crosses to the glass ball with the girls' names. She reaches in, digs her hand deep into the ball, and pulls out a slip of paper. The crowd draws in a collective breath and then you can hear a pin drop, and I'm feeling nauseous and so desperately hoping that it's not me, that it's not me, that it's not me.

Effie Trinket crosses back to the podium, smooths the slip of paper, and reads out the name in a clear voice. And it's not me.

It's Primrose Everdeen.

One time, when I was in a blind in a tree, waiting motionless for game to wander by, I dozed off and fell ten feet to the ground, landing on my back. It was as if the impact had knocked every wisp of air from my lungs, and I lay there struggling to inhale, to exhale, to do anything.

That's how I feel now, trying to remember how to breathe, unable to speak, totally stunned as the name bounces around the inside of my skull. Someone is gripping my arm, a boy from the Seam, and I think maybe I started to fall and he caught me.

There must have been some mistake.

EDITED VERSION (SAVANNAH'S COMMENTS IN GRAY ITALICS)

Midnight. Home. A room, solid darkness. *This reads like a screenplay more than a novel. I would try to ground us in Ella's perspective first, and then show readers the setting through her eyes. I'm also wondering if this is the best place to start the story—would it be more impactful to show readers the day Sarah goes missing?*

Ella waking, eyes adjusting, head turning to the left.

No David. Alone. *I'm wondering how she feels about being alone? Is she surprised by this? Is it expected? Does she want David to be home or is she glad he's gone?*

But if she closes her eyes, it swims there—all of it...the terror... *I'll never sleep again...* Because this is the opening paragraph, readers have no context re: what any of this means. What causes terror? What kind of terror is it? *Instead, I might show the reader what she's afraid of via the things she imagines or thinks about. For example, if she was stabbed, she might see the knife coming at her or feel it piercing her flesh. Specifics like this will help evoke the feeling you want.*

Sitting up, the bedroom emerging from shadows, *This is a bit hard to imagine. Does she mean the room comes into focus more? If so, why? Is there more light now than there was when she opened her eyes?*

the clock ticking on the bedside table: *Sa-rah, Sa-rah. I love that the clock is ticking to the rhythm of Sa-rah, Sa-rah! But we don't know who Sarah is, so this might not have the impact you're hoping for. The door to the hallway closed. How? Does this scare her? How does she interpret the door closing on its own?*

Her abdomen, a cramping familiar pain, *Is this what woke her up? day one of her cycle; no child, no Sa-rah, Sa-rah. No child in the room across the hall. What does this feel like for Ella? And how do you want readers to interpret Sarah not being here? For example, readers might think she's with David (whenever he is). She could be at Grandma's, she could be dead, she could be in the hospital. Each of these options elicits a different emotional response, so if you want readers to feel a specific way, I would get specific with the details.*

She closes her eyes. Think it, and it won't be true: *It won't be true that*

Sarah is not in the room across the hall? Or that what happened to Sarah wouldn't be true? a muscular hand slapped Sarah across the face. A man climbed onto Sarah's body—

Throwing off the covers, sliding out to stand, pace, but wobbling, grabbing a bedpost, the clock ticking, a half-moon emerging from clouds, her mother Cecile's old bedside table, a leg breaking off when Ella lifted it from her trunk; David's glue still oozing, a mark he can't wipe away. *This is a lot in one paragraph, and as readers, we don't know how to interpret any of it. Can you give us more insight into what Ella thinks and feels about each of these things?*

You never get burned twice. What does this comment (You never get burned twice) mean? Which "thing" in the list above is she referring to (mostly)?

Cecile. Platitude. "Shut up, Mom, your stupid, stupid words!"

A man is locking Sarah in a dark room. A man is driving Sarah out of state. Okay, so Sarah was taken by a man? Is there a way to indicate how long she's been gone for?

Think *About anything specific?* it, and it won't be true.

Yesterday, men at the maternity admittance window, men on the maternity floor, strange men, unknown men. Almost fathers? Not all men are fathers... not all men are evil... because Griggs said someone tried to take a baby from the nursery... but who... *Okay, so this gives us a little more insight into what happened, but is she trying to figure out who took Sarah? Because above, it says "think and it won't be true." So, what is she trying to do here?*

She tries to breathe. Is there a sound she can make, one undiscoverable, a sound conveying pain, a whelp from a jungle, a dessert, a place devoid of human logic? *An actual sound in her bedroom/house? Or in the past moment when she was in the hospital?*

A voice: "And I don't give a fuck about Luce or her kid or the staff. Just Sarah, Sarah!" Her voice, in the shadowed room—the floor so cold. "But no, I do, I do care. Forgive me. I do." Who is she talking to? And who is Luce?

Then lying still, life distorted, incomprehensible evil, time to remember, hateful but necessary... the stumbling from a police car,

someone blathering about Aunt Rib's neighborhood, *I get that these memories are flooding her mind right now, but as a reader, I don't understand what any of it means. I would love to though! It sounds like something major happened to her daughter, and if I had more information, I would be able to empathize with her more and care more.*

folks giving up their Sunday to search for Sarah. *This makes me think Sarah has been missing for awhile. At least long enough to get a search party together... how does she feel about folks giving up their Sundays? Grateful? Something else?*

Her child. Don't say her name. Fire in the mouth.

Rib's house chilly. So, slump on the couch, keep a distance from the old woman's cloying touch, arthritic fingers in your hair. *Don't touch me. Endure. Wait, hope. Is this another memory? Or is she speaking about a time in the past? But then no one—no one through the door with Sarah, only feathery evening light receding from the carpet; the shouts of someone's grandchildren at play across the street—assault through a screen door. Okay, so we're still in the past here—what's happening in the present moment when she's in her bedroom?*

Ella sat up *Earlier, it seemed like she got out of bed already. Is she still in bed here?*

—she would fight the drug. Stop the Valium stupor, *I would put some indication that she's in a stupor earlier, maybe when she wakes up? It would help make sense of why she has so many scattered thoughts.*

think it, and it won't be true: *Sarah is dead. I'm still wondering what this means. Think about what? And how will that make Sarah's death not true?*

Moments passed. Ella breathed, maternal instinct kicking in—*Sarah is alive. Or is she unsure that Sarah is dead? It's unclear.*

Then back against the pillows, closing eyes, finding sleep, but needing to cover any distance, search for her child, search Sarah's map of the neighborhood, the green celery, the orange candy, the strip with its stores sprawling, everything moving from the trees in front of Rib's house to beyond, water spilling into an ocean... *I do feel bad that she is missing her child, but I would be more emotionally affected if I had more details!*

LET'S FIX THIS!

This can't be happening. Prim was one slip of paper in thousands! Her chances of being chosen so remote that I'd not even bothered to worry about her. Hadn't I done everything?

Taken the tesserae, refused to let her do the same? One slip. One slip in thousands. The odds had been entirely in her favor. But it hadn't mattered.

Somewhere far away, I can hear the crowd murmuring unhappily as they always do when a twelve-year-old gets chosen because no one thinks this is fair. And then I see her, the blood drained from her face, hands clenched in fists at her sides, walking with stiff, small steps up toward the stage, passing me, and I see the back of her blouse has become untucked and hangs out over her skirt. It's this detail, the untucked blouse forming a ducktail, that brings me back to myself.

"Prim!" The strangled cry comes out of my throat, and my muscles begin to move again. "Prim!" I don't need to shove through the crowd. The other kids make way immediately allowing me a straight path to the stage. I reach her just as she is about to mount the steps. With one sweep of my arm, I push her behind me.

"I volunteer!" I gasp. "I volunteer as tribute!"

That's a lot better, right? We really feel like we're in the moment with Katniss, and this is why getting into a character's head is so important.

A novel that simply describes what happened when is most likely going to fall flat.

It doesn't matter how dramatic the events of the story are—or how many times a character pounds their fists, feels weak in the knees, or experiences a racing heartbeat. Without a sense of why something matters to a character, it will be hard for readers to have an emotional experience.

From the get-go, you have to work on building empathy for your character. And one of the fastest and most effective ways you can do this is by getting into your character's mind and revealing their thoughts to readers.

If readers know the source of the emotions your characters are feeling, then

REVISED SUBMISSION

I shouldn't have taken that second Valium. Ella sat up and threw the bedsheets off her sweat-soaked body. The clock on the nightstand read 3:45, and the other side of the bed was unmussed. *Where are you, David? Have you found Sarah? Is she alive?*

The Valium had done nothing to calm her horrifying thoughts. Sarah bound and gagged. Sarah crushed under a strange man's weight. Sarah hurt, screaming out in pain.

Would she ever sleep through the night again? She knew she wouldn't—at least not until Sarah was home safe.

The clock mocked her with the sound of its ticking: *Sa-rah. Sa-rah. Sa-rah.*

Ella couldn't stand it, so she slid out of bed and made her way to the room across the hall. She eased open the door, careful not to make any noise, and looked at the empty crib. How many hours had it been since she held her baby girl in her arms?

She pushed through the brain fog to remember... There was pushing. There was pain. And then there was Sarah—her perfect baby girl, with her perfect newborn cry.

But there were also men in her memories, too. Strange men. What were they doing on the maternity floor? Were they all soon-to-be fathers? Or was one of them a wolf in sheep's clothes? The man who would take her baby away?

Ella lifted the onesie from the side of the crib and traced her fingers along the front buttons. *Where are you, Sarah? Who took you?*

She sat down in the rocking chair next to the crib, suddenly dizzy from the Valium. Or was she finally tired? It was hard to tell.

Cradling the onesie, Ella rocked—back and forth, back and forth. If only she could remember *something* about the moment Sarah had disappeared. If she could just *think* hard enough, there might be a clue hidden in her memories.

But all she could see were Sarah's beautiful baby toes. And the way Sarah's little eyes would open and search Ella's face. How could one day be both the best and worst day of her life?

Ella's eyes were becoming heavy, but she was determined not to sleep. *Think, Ella. Think.* She saw so many memories flash by—stumbling out of a police car, neighbors gathering for a search party, Aunt Rib's arthritic fingers running through her hair... but of Sarah, nothing.

Ella closed her eyes. Sleep was coming, whether she wanted it to or not.

Where are you, Sarah? Please be alive.

they can empathize with your character. And if they can empathize with your character—if they can put themselves in your character's shoes—they'll feel the complex emotions that your character is feeling, too.

This is one of the most important skills to learn if you want to write stories

that move readers and that create lasting emotional resonance. Yes, it will require you to dig deeper into your own emotions! And yes, it might take you longer to write scenes like this! But with practice, you'll become a master of emotions in no time—and your writing will be so much stronger for it!



Savannah Gilbo is a developmental editor and book coach who's passionate about helping fiction authors write, edit, and publish stories that work. She's also the host of the top-ranked *Fiction Writing Made Easy* podcast, where she provides simple, actionable, and step-by-step strategies that writers can implement in their work right away. Get in touch at www.savannahgilbo.com

IN THEIR WORDS: MAGGIE SMITH

By Kay Arthur

You might know Maggie Smith's voice. You might have listened to it through your ear pods, in your car, or while exercising. Maggie is the host of WFWA's Hear Us Roar podcast, a podcast she suggested and developed for our debut authors. If you haven't listened to an episode yet, you should; there's a wealth of information in listening to other writers' stories. Maggie is a good listener and interviewer, and a respected member of our WFWA community. She's also now a debut author herself. Her novel, *Truth and Other Lies*, was published in March 2022 by Ten16 Press. In 2019, it placed third in the Rising STAR competition. We are delighted to give back and share Maggie's story, in her own words, as this issue's featured debut author spotlight.



I WASN'T ONE OF THOSE KIDS WHO ALWAYS WANTED TO WRITE—I CAME TO IT LATER IN LIFE WHEN I FELT LIKE I HAD EXPERIENCED MORE OF THE WORLD AND HAD SOMETHING TO SAY.

■ **Tell me about your career? Have you always wanted to write? And your job before writing was? And how did it play into your book and becoming an author?**

My career as a writer started about five years ago. Prior to that time, I'd had several careers, one as a journalist early in my college days at Northwestern, then as a Ph.D. psychologist working as a therapist, then as the founder and CEO of a national art consulting company. When I got a chance to sell that company to a competitor, I took it and began writing full time. I wasn't one of those kids who always wanted to write—I came to it later in life when I felt like I had experienced more of the world and had something to say. The major talents I developed in my previous jobs were listening skills (which have come in handy as the WFWA podcast host) and a strong knowledge of marketing, which, once my book was under contract, proved invaluable.

■ **Tell me your publishing story. How long did you query your novel before obtaining an agent? And then again before it was published?**

Like most authors, I initially went after agents, but with no success. Then I found a woman-owned press that seemed ideal, didn't require me to have an agent, and wanted to publish my book. I worked with one of their editors for eight months on revisions, only to have the company go bankrupt right before I was due to start work with their cover designer. I scrambled, canceled the audio narrator and publicist I'd lined up, and went looking for another small press, which I found three months later. I'm so happy now that that happened, because my new publisher is very supportive, motivated, and hard-working, and best of all, located only twenty minutes from my home. They've been open to incorporating my ideas about cover design, layout, marketing, and promotion, so it feels like a true collaboration.

■ ***Truth and Other Lies* is your debut novel, can you tell those of us who haven't read the book, why we should read it?**

My novel can best be described as a braided tale of three generations of women: a world-famous older journalist (think Diane Sawyer) whose career is threatened by an online troll; a newly-minted politician running for Congress who longs to reconnect with her estranged daughter; and the young reporter with ties to each, who must choose between the two after she unearths a decades-old lie. It's ideal women's fiction in that it deals not only with relationship issues like friendship, romance, and family but also many social issues facing women today.

■ **At the end of the story, what do you hope the reader will take away from it? What is the theme and why is the setting necessary for this story?**

I guess you could say the theme is centered around the corrosive nature of secrets—everyone in the story is keeping some kind of secret, some more serious than others, and we see the effect that has on not only the person but those around them. How those secrets are keeping them from feeling “known” and can lead to disastrous results. The setting is Chicago just prior to the pandemic, but it could have taken place in any larger metropolitan city with a diverse population.

■ **The book touches on several social issues facing women today—reproductive rights, the effects of social media on privacy, sexual harassment, and more. How do you balance these themes so that the reader isn't weighed down by them?**

Some of those topics occur in only one scene—for example, sexual harassment and the #MeToo movement—although I've been amazed how often that is mentioned in early reviews. I tried very hard to not necessarily take sides but to use the situation to reflect how different women react. For example, during a lunch in which an older gentleman is obviously behaving in a predatory manner toward my protagonist, Megan, she is incensed, ignores him, and tosses away his business card. Jocelyn, the older journalist, on the

AT ITS HEART, MY NOVEL IS ABOUT HOW YOUNG WOMEN OFTEN PATTERN THEMSELVES AFTER SOMEONE OLDER AND SEEMINGLY WISER AND HOW THAT CHOICE CAN AFFECT THE TRAJECTORY OF THEIR LIVES.

other hand, flirts around with him and urges Megan to use his interest to advance her career. What was important to me in that scene was not to make a stand against sexual harassment so much as to point out the generational difference in the two women's reactions which helps us see how an older woman might deal with such unwanted attention compared to today's millennials.

For the more substantive issues in the book, like pro-life vs. pro-choice, I tried to modulate the two characters on different sides (Megan and her mother) so that by the end of the book, they each understand the other in a more nuanced way and hopefully, that also applies to the reader. I'm always happy when a reviewer mentions that I've written a story where, even when they don't agree with one of the characters, they are able to understand and respect their stance. As for the toxicity of the media, that's also a fine line, because what seems at first a vendetta to smear an innocent person winds up being the mechanism through which an important injustice is resolved. If there hadn't been social media available, would that lie ever have been exposed?

I hope the reader finds herself thinking about how quickly we often stereotype others without truly understanding what has led to their behavior, and second, how we often hide the truth to protect the people we love, only to wind up hurting them in the end. And finally, how time and age change us and shift our perspective and values.

■ **They say your first book has a lot of yourself or connection with the characters. Is this true with *Truth and Other Lies*?**

At its heart, my novel is about how young women often pattern themselves after someone older and seemingly wiser and how that choice can affect the trajectory of their lives. That theme resonated with me because of my own experiences growing up and the prickly relationship I had with my own mother. Our values were very different and in no way did I view

her as a role model. That made the scenes between Megan and Helen easy to write because I'd lived them. I never had a role model like Jocelyn Jones, and I never did mend my relationship with my mother, who died a decade ago. So, in some ways, writing this novel was my attempt to come to terms with both those facts—to write a story where my 25-year-old protagonist was able to achieve what I could not. A way to give my own life story a better ending, to tell a story in which a mother and daughter with opposing world views ultimately reach out to one another and learn to accept and love each other for who they are.

■ **Are you a plotter or pantser?**

I definitely fall in the plotter camp. I mainly use the Save the Cat method and break my novels down into scenes so I'm working off a long developmental outline. That said, I do leave room as I'm writing for scenes to go in a different direction if it fits with the story I'm telling. Right now, I'm working on a psychological suspense novel for my second book, so it involves more planting (and hiding) of clues than my first, which lent itself more to a well-controlled and thought-out plot.

■ **How long did you mull the story in your head before you sat down to write? How long did the first draft take and did you have to do multiple revisions?**

This first novel was written three entire times over four years. Initially, it was an adoption story, but still had the three generations in it. Kathryn Craft, who did an early developmental edit, told me I should consider making it one point of view and the younger character might be the best one to pick. I dropped the adoption plot line and made it about the dilemma of a young woman torn between her mentor and her mother. That version only took three months to write. I will say that, in my opinion, your first novel always takes longer to write because you are also teaching yourself TO write. That's a learning curve in itself and for me, involved many workshops, roundtables, and craft books.

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

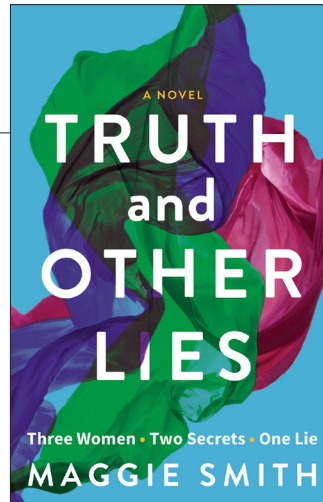
I'm so glad you asked that, because I consider joining a writing community to be the most important thing any new writer should do. Four years ago, I approached the WFWA Board about doing a podcast featuring members and their debut novels, and we're now on Episode 140 with distribution on Apple, Google, Spotify and others. I not only get to shine a light on these talented writers but also have learned so much from their stories, both practical marketing tips as well as insights into the creative process and how different the paths to publication can be. I've also made so many friends through WFWA who I have turned to throughout my publishing journey, not only as early reviewers, but also as critique partners, advisors, and shoulders to cry on. I've learned from the webinars, been encouraged by other's ideas, and hired mentors who helped me with marketing, editing, and craft. And when I need a laugh, there's always someone on the Community Facebook page who posts a funny meme.

■ **What would you have done differently in your path to publishing?**

I'm not sure anything. I used to think it would have been nice to sign with an agent but in retrospect, I think going with a small press the first time around allowed me to call a lot of my own shots and learn a lot about the business end of publishing. Next time around I'd like to go the agent-publisher route, but I'll be a better-informed writer and know the right questions to ask.

■ **What are you working on next?**

I'm halfway through my second novel, which I started during NaNoWriMo in 2020. It's tentatively titled BLINDSPOT, and it's women's fiction with psychological suspense elements. The tagline is: "An ambitious district attorney, desperate to stop a stalker who's threatening her and her teenage daughter, is charged with murder when he turns up dead." I'm halfway through the rough draft, although as a plotter, I do know both the ending and the twist.



The media coined a term for people like me: boomerangs. Young adults launched by relieved parents with great fanfare into the world, perfectly crafted missiles brimming with lofty dreams, only to turn around mid-flight, tail tucked between our legs—out of a job, out of money, and out of options.

God, I hated being a cliché.

When I phoned from New York, my mother said she'd be out of town until tomorrow night, but of course I was welcome to stay as long as I wanted. By the time I landed at O'Hare, it was dusk, the height of rush hour, and traffic was a snarl, so the trip out to Evanston took over an hour. I drummed my fingers against the seat cushion, wondering if the house would be different.

If *she'd* be different.

Once the Uber driver unloaded my bag and drove off, I retrieved the key from under the fourth flowerpot on the right. Not the most original hiding place, but this was the northern suburbs. Most of the crimes here happened behind closed doors.

I punched in the alarm code, flipped on the lights, and was stifled by my mother's signature gardenia fragrance. Nothing had changed. The mahogany banister still gleamed with polish, the brass sconces on either side of the fireplace sparkled, the white carpet showed fresh vacuum lines. Straight out of House Beautiful. Mother was still the dyed-in-the-wool Martha Stewart acolyte she'd always been. Everything clean, tucked away, not even a scrap of mail scattered on the hall table.

Now her only child was back, messing everything up.

Learn more about Maggie Smith at www.maggiesmithwriter.com. To listen to the Hear Us Roar podcast, go to the WFWA website under Programs, Debut Author Podcasts or your regular podcast app.

OUR STAR VOLUNTEERS: THE STARS BEHIND THE STAR

By Kay Arthur

The STAR Award for women's fiction is awarded each year by WFWA to an author of book-length women's fiction. It recognizes the richness of this genre and the talents of authors who are publishing the highest quality stories. This is a competition with many moving parts, and like all our programs, is only made possible by dedicated and talented volunteers. As we have recently announced the 2022 STAR Award finalists, we also want to recognize this year's STAR Award co-chairs, Susan Morris and Angela Ames. The intricacies of coordination, attention to detail, and organization skills are just a few of the attributes that are needed, and these volunteers have it all.



2022 STAR AWARD FINALISTS

General Category

The Wilderness Between Us
by Penny Haw

He Gets That From Me
by Jacqueline Friedland

Behind the Lens
by Jeannée Sacken

Debut Category

Waiting for the Night Song
by Julie Carrick Dalton

The Audacity of Sara Grayson
by Joani Elliott

A Day Like This by Kelly McNeil

Thank you, Susan and Angela, for all that you do for our organization.

SUSAN MORRIS

■ How did you become of member of WFWA?

I found WFWA online and decided to join because I was looking for a writing community that would allow me to meet other writers and collaborate virtually.

■ When and how did you first volunteer?

I first volunteered as a co-chair of the Rising STAR Award in 2020.

■ When did you get involved with the STAR Award and what is your favorite role you play in this?

This is my first year with the STAR Award. My favorite parts of the role are seeing all the awesome books that come in from entrants and collaborating with WFWA's volunteers, including our first-round judges.

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

I have learned a lot from the webinars and workshops. I benefited greatly from the mentorship program and have built lasting relationships through the critique group match.

■ With your work, family, hobbies, and writing, where do you find the time to squeeze in volunteering?

I have about a million things going on most of the time, but giving back is a priority. WFWA's programs are valuable. Also, WFWA is investing in streamlining the contests, so I have a say in helping to make future years' contests easier to run. Being a volunteer for such a great organization is a win-win scenario.



ANGELA AMES

■ How did you become of member of WFWA?

I became a member through my work and passion for the literary arts.

■ When and how did you first volunteer?

Winter of 2021, realizing that I needed to change things up a bit, I began researching new volunteer opportunities. I wanted something that revolved around supporting new writers. This is when I came across an email from WFWA looking for volunteers.

■ When did you get involved with the STAR Award and what is your favorite role you play in this?

I believe it was late in the year of 2021. I had the opportunity to co-chair, to which I gladly accepted.

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

There's so many! I'm a huge fan of the mentorship programs!

■ With your work, family, hobbies, and writing, where do you find the time to squeeze in volunteering?

Late at night, early mornings, and most weekends.



Plot grows out
of character.
If you focus on
who the people
in your story
are, something is
bound to happen.

- ANNE LAMOTT



WRITEON!