

SUMMER 2020



The Quarterly Magazine of the Women's Fiction Writers Association

WRITE ON!

MESSY MIDDLES



HOW TO FIX A SAGGING MIDDLE

NOW YOU'RE PUBLISHED: PARTY ON!

IN THEIR WORDS: WILLIAM SCHREIBER

**+ RISING STAR
CONTEST 2020**

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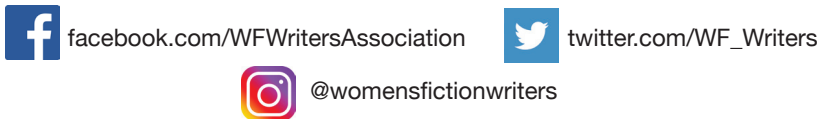
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You love reading Write ON! Now write for it! If you're interested in being a Write ON! contributor, pitch your one-time feature article (2,000 words) or your regular column idea (750-1,000 words) to Managing Editor Kay Arthur at kdarthur@yahoo.com.

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.



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

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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.

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Kay is a retired healthcare administrator who is enjoying early retirement and writing full-time. She lives both in Phoenix and a cabin in the mountains of Arizona with her husband and dogs — a griff and a doodle of some kind. She is a featured writer for the online publication *Sixty&Me*, and is querying her debut novel, *Beautifully Strange* while working on her second novel.



SHERI TAYLOR-EMERY Art Director

Sheri is an art director who longs to be a novelist. She's still in awe that her *Rising Star* manuscript, *The Fifty-Week Wife*, landed her an agent. When she's not grinding her teeth from stress, she's rejoicing 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. She's repped by Carly Watters of P.S. Literary.



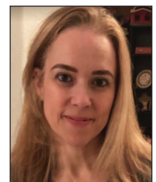
BROOKE WILLIAMS Copy Editor

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.



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Patricia is a writer, professor and associate dean at Arizona State University. A bit of a grammar nerd, she is the author of seven non-fiction books, including *The Literary and Linguistic Construction of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and Applied Linguistics in the Real World*; the romance novel *A Love Made to Measure* (as Eliza Emmett); and two forthcoming Women's Fiction novels—*The Art of Always* and *All the Parts of Your Soul*. She can be found on Instagram as [eliza.emmett.author](https://www.instagram.com/eliza.emmett.author).



PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Thus far, 2020 has been a helluva ride. Like our books' characters, we've faced obstacles aplenty and yet we're still muddling through the middle of this year. Call me an optimist, but I love middles. That's where the real work is done, in writing and in life. In the middle, complications abound, forcing characters to dig in and make serious decisions. It's where they face their fears, take risks, and grow. It's where they discover what they're capable of and who they really are. In truth, middles are necessary. They remind us that there's no going around one's problems—the only way out is through.

One problem we now find ourselves in the middle of is a global pandemic. Despite the vast challenges, I've also discovered benefits to running a virtual organization during a pandemic. We had no office to shutter, so work has continued unabated. Members who are no longer commuting to their jobs found themselves with more time in their day, and many offered to volunteer that time with WFWA.

Together, we've improved our Platform Submission process by expanding our committee to five members and broadening the appeals process for maximum book inclusivity. Thanks to our bylaws update, we've increased the number of voting Board members from five to seven to better serve our needs. In June, we held our very first WFWA Day event with great success. We have some new webinars in the works for fall, and we're implementing a Volunteer Recognition Program. Finally, we're creating a sponsorship program where members can receive discounts on sponsors' products and services.

No matter how the rest of this year goes, or how long this "middle" lasts, WFWA volunteers will continue to do good work for our membership. Together, we hope to carry you through to the other side.

Be well,

Christine Adler

Christine Adler, WFWA President



CALL ME AN OPTIMIST, BUT I LOVE MIDDLES. THAT'S WHERE THE REAL WORK IS DONE, IN WRITING AND IN LIFE. IN THE MIDDLE, COMPLICATIONS ABOUND, FORCING CHARACTERS TO DIG IN AND MAKE SERIOUS DECISIONS.

Enjoy the Ride



Hello fellow readers, lovers, and writers of women’s fiction. Welcome to our summer edition of WriteOn. We are thrilled to share another great publication with you, smack in the middle of our strange and precarious world.

How appropriate for this edition as we navigate our focus toward the “middles” theme of our series. The middle of your career, middle of your novel, middle of sentences, middle of your life can often lead to a yawn of the mind. You sit back, with a blank look, thrumming your fingers, and a dulled state of restlessness takes over. We’re here to move past that to the good stuff.

In this issue, you’ll find a few answers including a bit of writing wisdom in an interview with 2019 Rising Star winner William “Bill” Schreiber, debut author of *Someone to Watch Over*. Tiffany Yates Martin provides writing calisthenics for your novel’s saggy middle. Mindy Stockfield helps us plan the ultimate book promotion party, while Patricia Friedrich helps us with the dreaded dash. Our Guiding Scribe, Kathryn Craft provides thoughtful advice for the middle of your writing career.

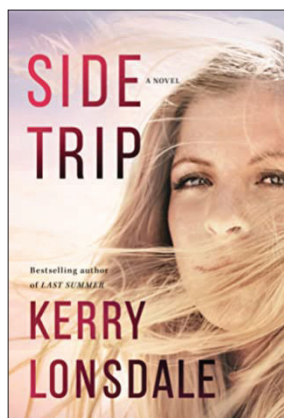
And our issue also celebrates our wonderful volunteers, new releases, and Rising Star Finalists.

Whatever state of “middle” you’re in may seem a bit challenging and even boring at times. But that glance in your rearview mirror shows something different. You’ll find that the middle really mattered, that the minutia (as it may seem at the time) adds to the flavor and blossoming of your story, written or otherwise. Now direct that glance to your eyes in the mirror and you’ll see the joy shining back at you—the journey was worth it.

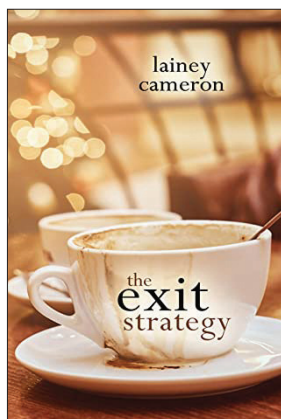
Wake up that mind and wrap your writers’ heads around the fact that, with a little information, attitude, and perseverance, this too shall pass. The current state of pandemicity will be just a blur in our passage of time. These “middles” will someday be looked at, by you, as joyous times. Perhaps the words you read today can stifle the yawn and your mind can trip headfirst into your best book ever. As Bill Schreiber wisely stated in our interview—the words that stuck with me the most, the ones that matter—enjoy the ride.



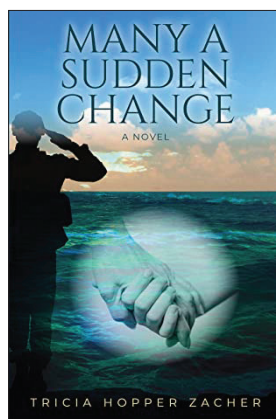
MEMBER RELEASES



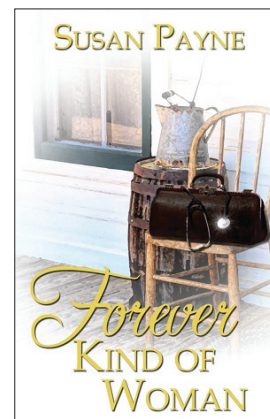
KERRY LONSDALE
Side Trip
7/7/20



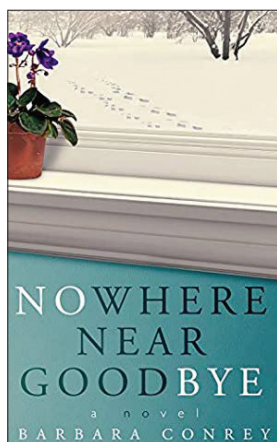
LAINey CAMERON
The Exit Strategy
7/8/20



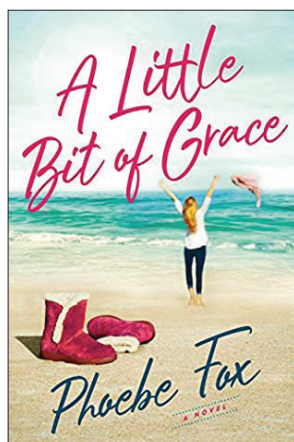
TRICIA HOPPER ZACHER
Many A Sudden Change
7/19/20



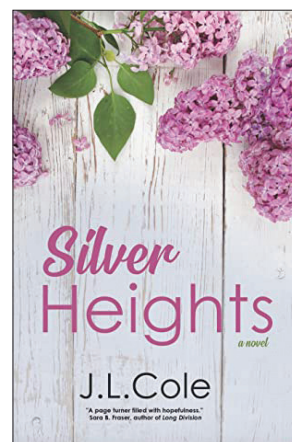
SUSAN PAYNE
Forever Kind of Woman
08/03/2020



BARBARA CONREY
Nowhere Near Goodbye
8/4/20



PHOEBE FOX
A Little Bit of Grace
8/11/20



J.L. COLE
Silver Heights
8/13/20



How to Fix a Sagging Middle

By Tiffany Yates Martin

Is there anything more thrilling for the creative soul than starting a shiny new story? That sexy little minx seduces you effortlessly, promising you a dazzling future. In the heady flush of new love, it feels as if this perfect communion between the two of you will never end.

Then you reach the middle of the book.

But when the writing becomes difficult, it doesn't mean the story isn't worth fighting for. Figuring out the problem and propping up the sag can often add even more depth and dimension.

When a manuscript loses its momentum, the issue is often one of several culprits:

- The plot has lost its cohesion.
- The characters aren't progressing on their arcs.
- The story stakes have deflated.
- Tension and suspense have lagged.

Here's how to spot what may be derailing your story, and ways you can get it back on track.

PLOT

The best way to spot a sagging middle due to plot is to examine the story's "bones" to see whether your plot holds together and consistently propels readers along the story arc. My favorite way to do this is to sketch out what I call an X-ray. This is a brief list of every single plot event, basically an outline you make after the fact. I recommend bullet-point format.

The number of story events per chapter will depend on how your story is structured, but each bullet point should be no more than a line or two, around three pages total for the whole story. An X-ray takes only an hour or so to create and offers a crystal-clear image of whether and where your plot line meanders or peters out with just a few simple questions.

ASK YOURSELF:

- Is every plot event a direct result of the event that preceded it?
- Does every event inexorably lead to the next?
- Is each plot event essential to propel the story toward its destination (its resolution)?

If you answer no to any of these questions for a story event, examine it to determine why. Are you lost in backstory, or taking a plot detour that's not intrinsic to the central story question? Does the story flow lose direct cause and effect and become episodic? Then determine whether you can fix the event or whether it can be cut altogether.

Try using the South Park creators' "but/therefore" technique: does every event connect to the one following it with "but" or "therefore," rather than "and then"? You might also try introducing or developing a key subplot or new, unexpected information that deepens and complicates the plot.

Continued on page 8

CHARACTER ARCS

If character arcs are the culprit in a sagging middle, your protagonist may have lost sight of her goals, whether immediate or long-term; what's driving her may have become fuzzy; or you've forced the characters somewhere they don't want to go.

ASK YOURSELF:

- Do each main character's goals remain clear and strong throughout? Make sure that we see your character's overarching main goal throughout the story, and that in each scene your protagonist has a clear, strong, immediate objective, ideally in service to that overarching goal: Inigo Montoya wants the six-fingered man, but to find him he must rescue and partner with Westley.

- Do their motivations remain strong and clear, both external and internal? Do we know why your character wants each goal, and do we see those reasons vividly and compellingly throughout? Inigo reminds us frequently why he's so driven toward his goal: The six-fingered man killed his father (and thus should prepare to die).

- Does this choice or development make sense for the character's journey, or am I puppet-mastering? Sometimes stories don't go where you want them to: Depending on how they develop, characters' goals may need to change, or their feelings about their goals may shift. If you're shoehorning your characters into a predetermined path that no longer fits their story, they may rebel and go on strike.

STAKES

If readers lose sight of what your protagonist(s) might gain or lose in the pursuit of their goals, the momentum can drop out of your story.

ASK YOURSELF:

- Do the consequences for failure (or the reward for success) remain strong and clear throughout, both on a big-picture story level and within each scene?

Often the middle of the book sags because the character's potential risk or reward has grown stale. If we learn early on that your protagonist desperately wants to escape her unhappy marriage because she feels stifled, that may start us off at a great clip, but unless we see those stakes rise, change, or complicate, readers may lose investment in her journey. Find ways to keep stakes high and taut throughout:

Introduce new obstacles, challenges, or dangers.

Maybe the woman's husband receives a terrible medical diagnosis that makes her feel guilty about leaving; maybe she thinks she's pregnant; maybe she catches herself almost deliberately overdosing on medication and realizes she has to leave for her own self-preservation.

Add more reward. Perhaps she runs into an old friend who left her unhappy marriage and the other woman is radiant with happiness and pursuing her life's dreams. Or maybe the protagonist once gave up her chance at her dream job to relocate for her partner's and now the position is open again. Or maybe she's fallen wildly in love with someone else.

Make it more urgent. What if the exclusive two-year culinary program in France she applied to offers her a position, but there's an imminent deadline for her decision. Or the money her family left in a trust is due to roll over to her, and her husband will gamble it away?

Raising stakes doesn't necessarily mean you have to layer on more danger or threats or melodramatic plot developments ("Plus she's in an accident! Plus, her husband gets addicted to drugs! Plus, their house is foreclosed on!"); just that the existing risks and rewards take on more impact, more meaning, and more weight as the story progresses.

SUSPENSE AND TENSION

These two tools are related but are not quite the same. They serve as the motor of story, and if either one lags, it can deflate the middle of the manuscript. Suspense creates a question in the reader's mind, and tension generally results from conflict, an obstacle, or friction. Both belong on every single page of your story: They're what keep readers turning pages. Even if you start with strong suspense and tension elements, middle-of-the-book sag can result from resolving them too soon.

ASK YOURSELF:

- What suspense elements—questions, mysteries, secrets, etc.—have I paved into every scene to keep the reader guessing?

- Where do I show forces opposing the protagonist's movement toward what she wants?

- Does every scene compel readers forward?

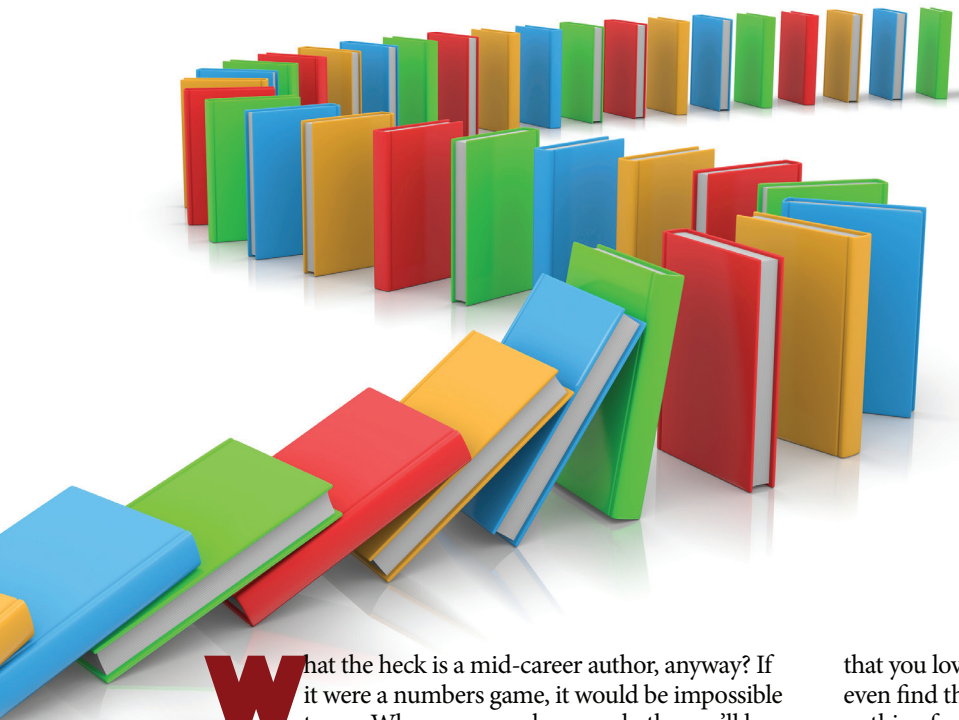
If you feel these are the culprits in your sagging middle, see if you can create more questions in the reader's mind: Why did he do that? How will she react? Can he fix this? Try introducing a new conflict, or intensify an existing one, and layer in more micro conflicts (e.g. averted eye contact, charged pauses, or rebuffed bids for attention).

Pay special attention to ends of scenes and chapters; leave readers on some unresolved tension, question, conflict, etc. to compel them to turn the page to discover the resolution.

Don't give up on a promising relationship (between you and your story) too soon. If you can identify the issues you may be having and address them, you can keep the spark alive all the way to the finish line.



Tiffany Yates Martin has spent nearly thirty years as an editor in the publishing industry, working with major publishers and bestselling authors as well as newer writers, and is the author of *Intuitive Editing: A Creative and Practical Guide to Revising Your Writing*. She's led workshops and seminars for conferences and writers' groups across the country and is a frequent contributor to writers' sites and publications. Visit her at www.foxprinteditorial.com, and connect on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.



4 TIPS FOR THE MID-CAREER AUTHOR

(Help! WFWA has tied me to a chair and assigned this topic. Writing under duress. Send doughnuts.)

What the heck is a mid-career author, anyway? If it were a numbers game, it would be impossible to say. Who among us knows whether we'll have three published books or thirty? If you on-ramped at Debut and are still driving through the Valley of Hope, picking up riders as you go, why would you pause to say, "Oh wow, I'm a mid-career author?" You wouldn't. You'd simply keep driving, eye on the prize, wind in your hair, enjoying the company and the view.

"Mid-career" means you were humming along, and then boom—your agent's interests changed, your editor left, your health took a nose-dive, a proposal (or two, or three)

that you love didn't sell. Your GPS has broken and you can't even find the Valley of Hope. Your engine knocking, there's nothing for you to do but roll off onto the shoulder.

You already knew that writing for publication was tough because you earned every moment of career success you've already experienced. But while sitting in shock, watching your colleagues rush past, you suddenly wonder: did you earn this, too? More importantly, you want to know—*right now*—how to get this broken car back on the road.

The following are a few truths, personally tested, that will help you negotiate this complex emotional terrain. The first is super easy and works for me 100 percent of the time.

1. YOU CAN ALWAYS QUIT.

I don't mean close out of your current document and start writing something new. I mean walk away from the writing life altogether. It is so darned freeing.

Creativity is all about allowing your inner child to express itself, after all, and when the Universe says "No," your inner child throws a tantrum. You had your book-a-year career all mapped out—this isn't fair!

So?

Quit. The word itself is so decisive, with its harsh consonants and slicing sound. It sends a clear message: *I am no longer sitting by the side of the road. I have taken action!*

And you will have done yourself a huge favor. Why feel enslaved to a task that is so hard, so demanding, and yet offers such uncertain rewards? You've heard the cry from your soul: *go pursue something that makes you happier.*

Allowing myself to quit reminds me of a simple truth: this writing path was a choice. Other than a handful of loyal and patient readers, no one is waiting for the next

Kathryn Craft novel. It turns out, no one *is* making me do it!

So I'll walk away, whether for ten hours or ten days, and allow the ensuing miracle to once again take me by surprise: sweet air refills my lungs. My creative well gains depth. Love—a rush of pure, glorious *love!*—rushes back into my constricted heart. And I long, once again, to immerse myself in story.

Do you need to refresh your writing mojo? Let me give you a shove. Permission to quit: granted.

2. NO TWO CAREERS LOOK ALIKE.

A publishing career, like the city of Tokyo, is built atop the juncture of tectonic plates (today let's call them The Economy, What's Hot, Socio-Political Upheaval, The Coronavirus), and a sudden shift in any one of them will have everyone scrambling to protect their bottom line.

It is difficult to build a high-rise on uncertain ground—but it's not impossible. Japanese architects have learned to build

flexibility into their design from the outset, mitigating the damage a quake will inflict.

When it comes to your career, you are the architect. Editors and agents can be valuable advisors, but they have enough buildings going up that if one topples, they have others to work on. This is your one life—don't give it away.

Take it upon yourself to keep exploring new options. I've seen novelists follow their creative whims into all sorts of side gigs, from graphic novels to speechwriting to cookbooks. A side benefit of such exploration is that you'll be too busy to entertain the bouts of colleague envy to which the mid-career author is susceptible.

Truth is, not everyone thrives as a book-a-year novelist, and staying in this lane is not the only measure of success. Donna Tartt has written three novels in 21 years, and for her efforts, won a Pulitzer for *The Goldfinch* and was included in *Time* magazine's "100 Most Influential People" list.

3. MOTIVATION IS A RENEWABLE RESOURCE.

The mid-career author knows that a life in publishing will offer many opportunities for the rush of your idealism to crash against the rocky shore of reality. But consider the nature of a wave: it draws back, gathers strength, and tries again. In doing so, it tells a story of relentless, heroic renewal.

Soldiering forth, on the other hand, only leads to cynicism. It looks like this:

We clearly aren't doing our best work, so we redouble efforts. We lengthen our workdays, rely upon wine to induce sleep and, scant hours later, caffeine to shock us awake. Soon we're snapping at our loved ones. No, you can't explain why the pantry hasn't replenished itself. Who needs nutrition anyway? You've been subsisting for weeks on trail mix from your bottom desk drawer.

At some point you throw up your hands because no amount of effort reaps the reward you seek.

This is no way to reclaim the childlike wonder with which you first approached story. And if you don't nurture yourself, body and soul, your creative well is in danger of running completely dry.

Obviously, cranking out words is key to developing a manuscript. But constant sitting removes us so far from our physical selves that the only sensations of which we are aware are pinched nerves and aching backs. We've lost touch with the lives that once inspired us to write. No longer able to access the joy of human movement, even our stories become a sedentary string of conversations at kitchen tables.

The coronavirus was a wakeup call for me in this respect. As the virus closed in around me, I paid more careful attention to the ways I contribute to my all-round health. I took more time for simple pleasures like an hour's walk with my husband each night before dinner. I did my exercise program each morning, centered myself with a daily meditation, cooked more. Perhaps because I was thinking more clearly, these extra activities magically fit into my already over-busy schedule. Once I set aside my adrenaline-fueled

OBVIOUSLY, CRANKING OUT WORDS IS KEY TO DEVELOPING A MANUSCRIPT. BUT CONSTANT SITTING REMOVES US SO FAR FROM OUR PHYSICAL SELVES THAT THE ONLY SENSATIONS OF WHICH WE ARE AWARE ARE PINCHED NERVES AND ACHING BACKS. WE'VE LOST TOUCH WITH THE LIVES THAT ONCE INSPIRED US TO WRITE.

determination to muscle through with my rewrite, I started enjoying the process of writing again.

Mid-career authors who are destined to revive their careers don't rely on soldiering. I suspect they replace lost innocence with something more powerful: yearning.

The source of yearning is a mystery, and as individual as a thumbprint. But it is profoundly human, and easily recognized by the soul. Yearning is *I want this so bad I can taste it. It's I've come too far, I can't give up.* It's hunger. It's success, calling your name.

You had it, once. Follow your curiosity until you find it again.

4. OBSTACLES CAN BECOME OPPORTUNITIES

Take, for instance, someone who failed to make it in TV and is now writing novels. A local cable channel contacts her to see if she'd step in as host of an on-air book club. She thinks, *Oh great, I'm trying to write a novel and now someone offers me a job on TV?* Her first thought is no because her sights are set on her debut. Her agent is awaiting revisions. And the show won't pay much—what if her novel hits it big?

On the other hand, who's to say this is the best year to seek publication? We live in politically, economically, and biologically unsettled times and publishers are twitchy. Many titles slated for 2020 have been put off, sending schedules into disarray. What if getting published three years from now might get her to her author goal quicker—and in the meantime, she could put those years to good use, fleshing out new novels while gaining a side gig that could increase her platform? Let me tell you how many publishers would like to see "cable TV host" in her query letter.

That may be a silly example, with either option a clear win. But maybe we can consider all options that way.

I'll be the first to admit I don't have the answers. While I'm happy to play God in my novels, I am overjoyed I wasn't cast as the master of the universe. I would have bungled the job by giving myself an easy path rather than challenging myself to explore the deep, lasting rewards of prevailing over rockier terrain—that's what ultimately stoked my own yearning to write.

I have seen writers hold onto a publication goal until the winds of change shredded them apart. I'm just saying, this might not be the best use of your time on earth.

Maybe all obstacles are opportunities. Maybe those opportunities can open more doors.

Maybe walking through those doors could make you happy.

I was moved by the self-written, 2013 obituary of Seattle-based writer Jane Lotter. Yes, you read that right: dying slowly of endometrial cancer, Lotter had the time, courage, and presence of mind to summarize her own life. She wrote to her daughters:

"May you, every day, connect with the brilliancy of your own spirit. And may you always remember that obstacles in the path are not obstacles, they ARE the path."

If you are a mid-career author, you are no longer blind to the obstacles standing in your way. They've caused you to hit pause and reassess while you reframe "frustration" and "disappointment" into "experience" and "wisdom."

If your car is broken on the side of the road, get out and start walking. Go live your obstacles. Make of your life a good story.

(Oh, and could someone untie me now? I have a WIP I'm yearning to get back to...)



Kathryn Craft is loath to admit it, but she is a mid-career author. Since *The Art of Falling* (2014) and *The Far End of Happy* (2015), she has written numerous failed proposals, followed ill-conceived agent advice, switched agents, written the same novel in two different genres, gone out on sub, and is now re-plotting to address pacing issues noted by several of the editors, all while mentoring other writers through developmental editing, her Your Novel Year course, and Drexel University's MFA program.

IN THEIR WORDS

By Kay Arthur

We had the pleasure of interviewing William “Bill” Schreiber, 2019 Rising Star Winner and author of *Someone to Watch Over*.

■ Why did you write the book?

The initial seed of Someone to Watch Over—two adult siblings who set aside their decades-long estrangement to honor their recently deceased father by retracing a childhood vacation—grew out of my family asking me to write my Dad’s eulogy. I felt overwhelmed, crushed by the realization that I didn’t know him. I knew him as “Dad,” whose life I came into when he was 30 years old. But I didn’t know his life’s journey. What were his dreams as a boy? Did life turn out the way he thought it would? I didn’t have any of these answers because I was busy building my own life, and we always think there will be time.

I found my way into writing his eulogy by recalling us five kids with our parents in a station wagon visiting Old Florida roadside tourist spots. I wrote the story originally as a screenplay. It resonated at film festival competitions, winning multiple best screenplay awards, so I adapted it into a book.

■ Is there an area in the book that you struggled with?

When I wrote the screenplay, I didn’t outline. Something was pent up in me that poured out, so I just rode the wave where Lennie and her brother, John, took me. It was a structural mess. I knew the beginning, and I knew how I wanted it to end. The problem was act two, that daunting desert we have to cross in the middle that comprises roughly fifty percent of a three-act story.

I broke act two into manageable chunks. I worked out major structural points where complications, twists, setbacks, and reversals of fortune forced Lennie and John to make decisions to deepen their emotional stakes. I wrote from tentpole to tentpole, allowing myself room for creative wanderings and discovery. Because I put the structural work in, I was able to use the screenplay as an outline for the book.



MY PATH STARTED WITH A RECOGNITION THAT I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO WRITE A NOVEL.

Continued on page 12

FEATURE

■ Once the book was revised and ready, what was your publishing path?

My path started with a recognition that I didn't know how to write a novel. I was certain the first draft would be a mess, and I didn't disappoint! I worked with a wonderful editor who taught me how to transition from screenwriter to novelist as I deepened the characters and story beyond what I could do within the constraints of a screenplay.

Once the manuscript was ready, I looked for a community of supportive, like-minded writers, and discovered WFWA while also researching and querying agents. I was in the middle of my rejection phase (a phase everyone must go through) when I was named a finalist for the Rising Star Award last summer.

*Meanwhile, I attended the Willamette Writers Conference in Portland. I networked, listened, and continued to learn about publishing. I met and pitched my future publisher there, Benjamin Gorman. I was able to lead with the Rising Star Finalist credential and, his interest piqued, he requested the manuscript. I was fortunate to win a Rising Star Award and sign with Ben at Not A Pipe Publishing. *Someone to Watch Over* was published on May 26, 2020.*

■ Did the publisher have you change anything major with the book?

Ben was interested in the paranormal aspect of the story, and he asked me to sprinkle the presence of Lennie's deceased mom into the story in a nuanced way that fit with the story's tone.

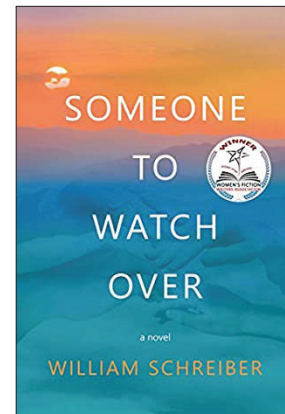
As originally written, I revealed the family's mother, Roselyn, died when Lennie and her brother were young, but I didn't reveal how Roselyn died. I went back into the manuscript and discovered Lennie's mom died giving birth to her. This ember of guilt Lennie has carried her entire life grew into an inferno of determination to find the child she gave up two decades ago. Remaining open to suggested changes added what I think is one of the deepest, most emotionally poignant aspects of the book. I would have missed that had I not been willing to listen.

■ Advice to new writers

Enjoy the creative journey. Celebrate the small victories. Scream into your pillow every rejection milestone—10, 20, 50, 100—just don't take it personally. Resist the urge to chase the market, because by the time you get there, it will change.

Don't rush into writing; give your imagination time to work first. Figure out the big plot moments, the frame over which the story will stretch. Write from point to point (it's less scary than facing the entire storyscape at once), wandering at will in between. Allow for sideways thinking; that is, let your mind roam. The story's bits and pieces coalesce when you're not thinking directly about them, even while you sleep!

Life experience provides a rich well of story possibilities, and the longer we live, the more we go through, the more people we meet, the deeper that well gets. As strange as it may sound, I never felt more alive than after writing this story inspired by my father's death. It's a story only I could have written. We all have stories within us. Tell yours.



CHAPTER ONE

What do I look like? She couldn't remember. And she'd given up on mirrors long ago. Consarned things never revealed anybody's true self anyhow. Folks would be better off ponderin' themselves in the surface of Chickamauga Lake during a Spring blow. The wavering image looking back at them from its wind-whipped water was more likely to reflect the peculiar forces at work on them every day of their natural-born lives.

She held fast to the notion that folks' bodies were the least interesting thing about them, mere pickle jars to the sprouts of life within. There was some comfort in that because she could no longer perceive her physical self. She couldn't remember the last time she'd felt the skin of another human being brush hers. Or had been aware of her age.

She could be eight. Or twenty. Or fifty-seven. What did it matter? She was all of them at once, carried all the years of her life inside, along with the emotional baggage that had always fed the gossip mill, until folks had nothing left to whisper about. No, ma'am. Age made no nevermind, especially in these grinding foothills of Tennessee's Great Smoky Mountains. Souls around here had their hands full merely bearing up under the circumstances with which the yoke of strenuous living had burdened them. This she knew.

Some were brave enough—some would say foolhardy enough—to stand their ground against a surefire destiny of deprivation. They squared off and schemed to get out. Others simply rolled over. Folks here either surrendered to fate or fought their way out of the corner into which it had jammed them.

She hadn't expected to come back to this place, but maybe it was fitting. After all, it held her beginnings . . . as well as her end. Without a sound, she made her way through the foggy dawn toward a sagging car cloaked in a muted gray akin to sodden field cotton. The decrepit station wagon slumped all catawampus in front of the town's lovely bookstore; the former antebellum church, now home to a landmark bell steeple, brought a gust of memories, here and then gone. The historic cobblestone town square of red-brick buildings stood as it had years and years ago, but she barely noticed it—she couldn't take her eyes off the car.



RISING STAR CONTEST – 2020

WFWA's annual Rising Star competition for unpublished and un-agented authors is the only competition dedicated to the Women's Fiction community. Unlike competitions where entries seemingly fall into a void, and entrants receive a yes or a no, Rising Star offers all entrants valuable feedback on their stories.

Each year the five highest scoring entrants move onto the final round judges, all acquiring agents of women's fiction.

The winner of the award will be announced in the fall.

We also want to take you behind the scenes to give a round of applause to the Rising Star team. This is a new team who came together with amazing ideas, coordination, job sharing, and insight. Not to mention, blending it all with a lot of fun. They are the ones who work tirelessly to deliver the great news to these talented finalists, after all, who doesn't want to be a Rising Star!

Suzanne Adams, Co-chair

Susan Morris, Co-Chair

Jessica Smith, Judging Coordinator

Lynn Diener, Entry Coordinator

Marie Parsons, Entry Coordinator

BEST OF LUCK TO THE 2020 RISING STAR FINALISTS

KILBY BLADES

Crocodile Tears

MELISSA LANNING

Crooked Lake

BARBARA RISTINE

Faces of War

BRIGETTE RUSSELL

Practically Perfect in Every
Way

REBECCA SANFORD

Scarves

THANK YOU TO THE RISING STAR TEAM!

CONNECTING THE MIDDLE WITH PUNCTUATION

Today we are talking about middles. I will focus on hyphens, en dashes, and em dashes, in this order, from the shortest to the longest. After that, we will get to parenthesis and semicolons. Finally, we will talk a bit about style and how to use these forms of punctuation in ways that do not interrupt your prose.

A little en and em history. Before the miracle of word processing, and even before typewriters, professional typesetters set lines of type. The en dash was the width of the letter n. The em dash was the width of the letter m. Today, word-processing programs automatically adjust the spacing between letters and spaces. This is called kerning and also why you only need one space between the end of a sentence and the beginning of a new one (for those of us who learned to type in a certain age.)

HYPHENS

The most common use of the hyphen is to create compounds. There are two major situations in which compounds are necessary.

- When words are in a process of linguistic evolution from being two to becoming only one.
- When two words are brought together to function as an adjective followed by a noun.

e.g. Ice cream used to be two nouns. Many people now write it as icecream. The intermediate level is writing it with a hyphen, hence ice-cream. Other examples of that stage include ping-pong and pic-nic.

e.g. A person would write *The use of first person* but also *First-person use*. Likewise, we write *An apartment on the third floor* but also *Third-floor apartment*.

EN DASHES

When it comes to en dashes, the most common use is that of separating inclusive dates or, more broadly, to indicate some kind of range. For example, in a bibliography or parenthetical in a technical text, you may find p. 23–25. Note that many keyboards do not have a specific key for the en dash, in which case you would need to see if your computer has a shortcut or use the “insert symbol” function. Finally, depending on the style guide you are using, the advice on which dash to use might differ. Thus, Chicago style, MLA, and APA—three common guides—might lead you to different specific uses (notice my em dash?)

EM DASHES

The em dash introduces the longest break. In fiction, the two most common uses are to establish a piece of parenthetical information or to offer a break in narrative. Thus,

e.g. I stood in front of the house—a much beloved, but almost forgotten place—and admired its Victorian architecture.

e.g. “I didn’t mean to—”
“Of course you did!”



NOTE THAT MANY KEYBOARDS DO NOT HAVE A SPECIFIC KEY FOR THE EN DASH, IN WHICH CASE YOU WOULD NEED TO SEE IF YOUR COMPUTER HAS A SHORTCUT OR USE THE “INSERT SYMBOL” FUNCTION.

GRAMMAR LIGHT



PARENTHESES

Parentheses often indicate to the reader that the material within is secondary or marginal to the understanding of sentence, so vital information and mandatory parts of sentences should not be in parentheses. In fiction, commas can be a good alternative to parentheses since they do not block the flow of the text like parentheses can.

e.g. Joe (my brother's friend) is a soccer player.

e.g. Joe, my brother's friend, is a soccer player.

Notice that while the second example is stylistically better, in both cases the parenthetical information can be removed without grammatical loss to the sentence.

SEMICOLONS

While I have previously dedicated space to semicolons in another column, I will offer a quick reminder here. In general, the semicolon should be where a period could also be used. That means that it separates independent clauses.

e.g. I like cake; my sister prefers pies.

e.g. I like cake. My sister prefers pies.

The decision is made on the basis of how connected you believe the two ideas to be. When there is a close connection between the two independent clauses, you can signal that by using the semicolon.

The other common instance is to use semicolons as commas when there is a lower-order comma already in use, and you need to indicate they are not in a parallel but instead in a hierarchical relation.

e.g. I have visited Phoenix, Arizona; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Chicago, Illinois; and San Diego, California.

If I had used only commas, the reader could think I had visited eight places instead of four, and that would have been weird because some are cities and other states. The use of the semicolon allows me to indicate the relationship between these places.

To sum up, while all these choices of punctuation are available to you, a person who is following a rhetorical grammar, rather than a traditional one, will ask themselves while writing what they are trying to convey, and they will let punctuation follow that lead. For example, if you are trying to make the reader stop suddenly as in the example above ("I didn't mean to—" "Of course you did!"), it makes sense to use the em dash. Even visually, it conveys a stop, a break. If, however, you are writing a highly descriptive passage of two people on a boat, sailing to a soft breeze and a mellow ocean, anything that causes an abrupt stop might seem incongruent. I believe, for example, in the very selective use of parentheses and a somewhat selective use of dashes in fiction for those very reasons.

Happy writing!



WHILE ALL THESE CHOICES OF PUNCTUATION ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU, A PERSON WHO IS FOLLOWING A RHETORICAL GRAMMAR, RATHER THAN A TRADITIONAL ONE, WILL ASK THEMSELVES WHILE WRITING WHAT THEY ARE TRYING TO CONVEY, AND THEY WILL LET PUNCTUATION FOLLOW THAT LEAD.

PARTY ON!

By Mindy Stockfield

You did it. You're a published author. Whether you chose to go the traditional publishing route or self-publish, your book is now out there. For better or worse, you established a marketing strategy to send your book into the world and find readers for it. Now, you need to maintain that momentum and prepare to launch your next project. It may feel more complicated with even more decisions to make, but once again, you can simplify your approach by looking at your author journey as an ongoing effort of party planning. As you recalibrate and prepare for this next festivity, you might have some reservations, especially if the first bash didn't go as planned. But there is a slight twist to how you will approach your next shindig.

■ **THE LAST PARTY WAS ALL ABOUT YOU. NOW IT IS ABOUT YOUR GUESTS.**

You need to celebrate them; they are your readers. For the first party, it was an open invite. You needed to see who would connect with you and your book. Now, you have more information. You know who showed up. You know who liked that Facebook post. You know who connected you to that amazing local bookseller. You know who your advocates are. You also know which of those connections drove something bigger and which did not. This is a time of reflection to understand the moments during your book promotion that felt authentic.

Continued on page 17



FEATURE

This connection to your readers is extremely important. If you are traditionally published, booksellers make decisions regarding the number of orders for your upcoming book based on the sales of your last book. What you need to do is reactivate those readers and prepare these *guests* to be part of your next celebration *before* your agent goes to market. Whether or not you decide to stay with your existing publisher, you are more marketable if they see you have an active following. This will drive interest from booksellers, which will secure you a higher advance and set you up for success.

■ WRITE THE THANK-YOU NOTES BEFORE SENDING THE INVITATIONS.

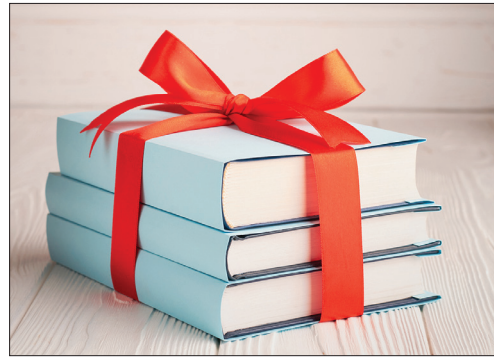
Remember, you are celebrating your readers, and you want to use every tool you can to entice those readers to buy your next book. These thank-you notes can also announce your next project and let readers feel appreciated. You may want to send out actual cards, send personalized emails, utilize some of the great free tools for online thank-you cards, or post on social media.

■ MAKE YOUR READERS FEEL LIKE VIPS.

Those who read your last book will be more likely to buy your next one if you continue to bring them on your journey. If you haven't finished writing your next book, consider reaching out and telling your readers you are working on your next project. Don't ask them to give you feedback on your writing, but seek their opinions on simple things to make them feel involved and invested. Use poll functions on social media and bring them on your writing voyage. Give them a sense of ownership in your process, and they will become your greatest ambassadors.

■ YOUR READERS ARE ONE OF THE BEST TOOLS TO HELP YOU DISCOVER NEW GUESTS FOR YOUR PARTY.

They are more likely to retweet, share, and use their platforms to tell their friends about your book. Think about clever ways you can offer them something that they can share with others. People look for words of wisdom, memes, and other icons to pass along. Consider sharing a short piece of writing from your first book that connects with a holiday. Search your book to find the perfect words to celebrate, whether it is Mother's Day or National Hot Dog Day.



THOSE WHO READ YOUR LAST BOOK WILL BE MORE LIKELY TO BUY YOUR NEXT ONE IF YOU CONTINUE TO BRING THEM ON YOUR JOURNEY.

Another great option is to use all that data you have collected on social media. You can see how many views, likes, and comments you have received. You can see what worked and what did not. Read those comments to gain a better sense of what your readers engaged with most. If you did not use social media the first time around, find your comp title authors and see what they did. Look at their platform to help inform your next approach.

■ TURN YOUR PARTY INTO A LASTING CELEBRATION AND ALLOW READERS TO TAKE OWNERSHIP.

This is about building a conversation your readers can be part of and eventually lead. Think about the key themes in your book. What are the larger messages you want people to see? What are those book club conversations you can imagine people having about your work? Write your own reading group guide. For ideas, review your comp titles' guides, usually found on their author websites or in the paperback edition. You can use these questions as part of your social media strategy and keep them in mind as you continue to evolve your author platform.

You may find that the celebrations are ongoing and your role becomes showing up to your readers' parties rather than hosting them yourself. This is such a rewarding way to connect with your audience and continue connecting with them throughout your writing career. So, party on, friends!



Mindy Stockfield has held senior positions in publishing, entertainment, and media with a focus on marketing and digital media. She has led critical launches for a number of new and culture-defining initiatives utilizing some of the latest approaches in digital and social media. Coming fresh from working several years at Scholastic as Senior Vice President of Marketing, Creative, and Digital, she has driven A-list publishing brands and helped build the careers of emerging authors. Prior to Scholastic, she held senior roles at MTV, Disney, and Cartoon Network. In addition to her consulting practice, she is an Adjunct Professor at NYU and teaches at The Writing Institute at Sarah Lawrence College.



JENNIFER KLEPPER ENGINE OF THE WFWA WEBSITE

As a virtual organization manned by scores of dedicated volunteers, the one tool holding us together is the WFWA website, www.womensfictionwriters.org. This essential piece of technology is a repository of writing resources, information on publishing, upcoming events, member services, and incredible networking through the searchable membership database. It is our face to the world and our internal, always-open meeting place. But what is not always known is that the engine behind the event calendar, electronic forms, and always current online resources, is WFWA's Director of Technology, Jennifer Klepper. Her role is so essential to the organization that the position was just made a full voting member of the board in the recent by-laws change. Jennifer provides advice regarding the WFWA website and solves any technical glitches that arise. She graciously agreed to an interview, so please enjoy five questions with Jennifer Klepper:



1 When did you join WFWA?
I joined in 2016. Julie Lawson Timmer (*Mrs. Saint and the Defectives*), a first-year associate with me in Dallas—right out of law school—introduced me to Orly Konig, one of WFWA's founders and past president. I was not part of a writer community then. Julie urged me to join. Thanks, Julie!

2 What was the very first WFWA resource that drew your attention?
I attended the 2016 WFWA conference in Philadelphia. It was fantastic! I met WFWA members face-to-face and have maintained friendships with them ever since. The sole focus of the conference was women's fiction, with craft and industry sessions and agents attending. One hundred percent of the conference was relevant to me. I have since attended two WFWA retreats in Albuquerque. I look forward to attending the one in Baltimore in 2021.

3 What is a particular source of pride for you in developing the WFWA website?
I'm an attorney, although not currently practicing. So the fact I manage the WFWA website is in and of itself a source of amusement. While I've always been pretty willing to click on buttons and see what happens (a critical trait when surfing around online), I gained familiarity with content management systems by working at a tech start-up and then Google. I was lucky to have been preceded in my WFWA role by Lainey Cameron, another button-clicker who got our current website up and running when WFWA switched web providers a couple of years ago.

4 What are your top two personal favorite resources among the many available on the WFWA website?
The podcast content is robust, thanks to Maggie Smith, as is the webinar archive under the current stewardship of Lisa Montanaro. Since the greatest value I have gotten from WFWA has been building personal connections and meeting other WFWA members in real life, the member directory is probably my top resource.

5 What can you share with members who balance careers and writing?
I was working full-time when I wrote and published my debut novel. I'm not working a paid job now. While I have more time to write than I did back then, I can't say it's easier to write. It's not. There's only so much my brain can do, and I've learned that, for me, time is not the magic key to reaching THE END.

While I've always been pretty willing to click on buttons and see what happens (a critical trait when surfing around online), I gained familiarity with content management systems by working at a tech start-up and then Google.

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



LISA MONTANARO

WFWA'S WEBINAR PROGRAM LEADER AND HOST

WFWA webinars cover a broad range of topics, and each one is so chocked full of helpful information, you'll want to watch the replay even if you caught the live show. And none of them would be possible without our Webinar Program Leader and Host, Lisa Montanaro. If you're ever in a bad mood or need encouragement, you need to be in a room with Lisa. Her ever-present cheer and boisterous sense of humor are the perfect medicine for even the bluest of writing days. She generously agreed to respond to our queries, so please enjoy five questions with Lisa Montanaro.



Lisa loves “being able to bring meaningful professional development to our members. We have so many wonderful opportunities to connect, write, and share with each other during a difficult time.”

1

How did you become a member of WFWA?

I joined in 2016 after meeting Kerry Lonsdale, one of WFWA's founders, online. I was trying my hand at fiction, converting a memoir project into a novel. While looking for a writing community, I came across WFWA. I attended the 2017 and 2018 WFWA retreats and loved them both.

2

When did you first volunteer for WFWA?

The WFWA Board tapped me a few months into my membership to help plan a Northern California WFWA Regional Conference. That event never happened, but working with the team made me want to volunteer more. Lainey Cameron then asked me to become the new webinar host. When the program leader stepped down a few months later, I folded the two positions into one. When the pandemic hit, I knew our members would crave more community online, so I beefed up the webinar series. I also wanted something informal, where we could see each other, so I started WFWA Video Chats to enable us to talk writing with supportive peers.

3

How do you deal with the difficulty of progressing with your writing?

Martha Beck created a life-coaching term I use with many of my clients—surround yourself with “believing eyes.” To make progress with my writing, I joined a group of local writers for weekly writing sessions. I'm also in touch with my writing partner on an almost daily basis, and I host the WFWA Video Chat every Friday, which is a fabulous way to connect, brainstorm, and stay on track. I schedule time to write, set boundaries to honor writing appointments with myself, and give my writing the attention it deserves. When necessary, I take intentional breaks to focus on my business, family, and hobbies—without feeling guilty.

4

What are two ways you have received support from WFWA members?

I participated in the WFWA Mentorship Program and loved it. I enjoyed working with my mentor and found the experience invaluable for pushing my manuscript forward. The other major boost to my writing was finding my long-time writing and critique partner, Ann Bremer. We met at the 2017 WFWA Retreat and hit it off. We are both grateful to WFWA for where we are now on our writing journeys and for bringing us together.

5

What advice do you have for writers switching from non-fiction to fiction?

Nonfiction writers should focus on how beneficial your nonfiction writing experience is to your fiction writing. Many nonfiction writers have experience meeting deadlines and word count, working collaboratively, and accepting criticism, all of which are valuable for a fiction writing career. Also, it's a misconception that nonfiction writers aren't good with story. A great nonfiction writer can weave facts into a narrative that tells a compelling story. My weaknesses were dialogue and description, so I sought as much craft training on those topics as possible. My advice is to take stock of your strengths from nonfiction writing and leverage those.

Writing is like giving
yourself homework,
really hard homework,
every day, for the
rest of your life.

You want
glamorous?
Throw
glitter at the
computer
screen.

— KATRINA MONROE