

SUMMER 2021



The Quarterly Magazine of the Women's Fiction Writers Association

WRITEON!



NEW PERSPECTIVES

**WELCOME BACK
TO THE RETREATS**

**HAND IN HAND:
OUR MENTORSHIP
PROGRAM**

**IN THEIR WORDS:
LYN LIAO BUTLER**



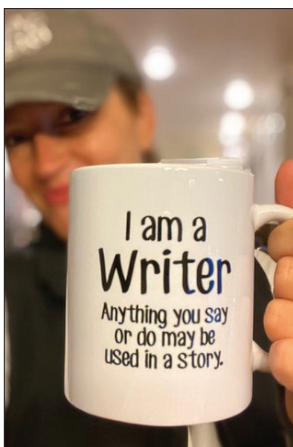
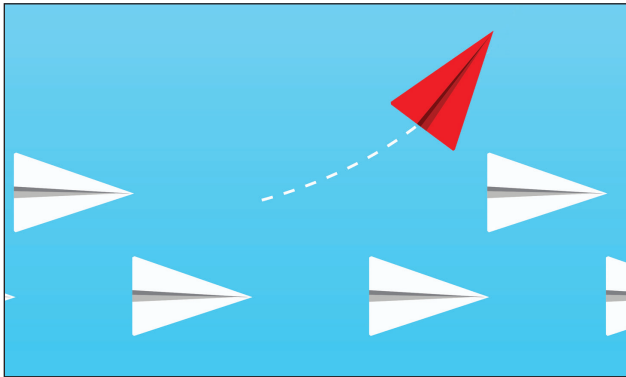
**LET'S FIX
THIS!
DIALOGUE**

**SHOW
US YOUR
FAVORITE
MUG**



SUMMER 2021

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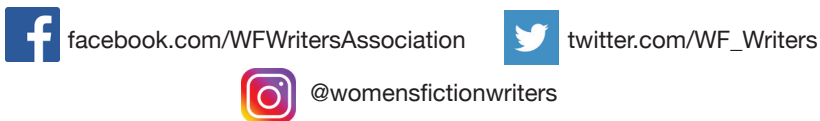
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Check out our calendar of events, workshops and webinar information on our website.

ABOUT THE WFWA

We began this organization in 2013 with the idea to create a safe, nurturing place for writers of women's fiction. The publishing industry is morphing—with new opportunities and, as yet, unknown futures. The founders of the Women's Fiction Writers Association wanted somewhere to amass and disseminate information to and about our chosen genre.

Defining women's fiction has proven as subjective as the types of books we read. For that reason, our guiding statement is broad and comprehensive: Stories that are driven by the main character's emotional journey. Our stories may have romance. Or they may not. They could be contemporary. Or historical. But what binds us together is the focus on a main character's emotional journey.



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

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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.



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



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.



TIFFANY YATES MARTIN Guiding Scribe

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



IF YOU LIKE WHAT YOU'VE READ IN WRITE ON! ...

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.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Every writer I know has been stuck at some point in their career. Whether we're out of ideas, struggling with revisions, or the words just won't come, being stuck stinks. When it happens to me, I go to an art exhibit. Viewing the world through other artists' eyes gets me away from my desk (which tends to fill me with dread when I'm in a writing funk), and the new perspective functions like Play-Doh for my creative brain.

A friend recently invited me to the Immersive Vincent Van Gogh exhibit in New York City. Like many people, I've been familiar with Van Gogh's artwork for decades. So, I wondered, what could possibly be different with this exhibit?

A lot, apparently.

One room held a hanging sculpture made from the hundreds of pages of drawings, sketches, and correspondence between Vincent and his brother Theo. Another had mannequins adorned with clothes highlighting aspects of Vincent's paintings: a sunflower dress; a black tuxedo with a crow's wing handkerchief; a suit with haystack accents. Art historians believe Van Gogh had a condition called chromesthesia, a sensory condition where hearing certain sounds causes a person to involuntarily see certain colors. At the exhibit, colors had each been assigned a sound frequency based on its wavelength in nanometers. Visitors could enter booths to "hear" different colors as the artist might have. But perhaps most stirring was *watching* Van Gogh's artwork, which had been animated and set to music. One could see the stars in *Starry Night Over the Rhône* light up one by one, watch each of the flowers in *Irises* slowly bloom, and travel through a golden pasture amid flying birds as *Wheatfield with Crows* came alive.

By engaging my other senses, this unconventional presentation helped me to experience the familiar artist in a completely different way. I've thought about the experience a lot since then. It gave me a new perspective of the painter's life, work, and struggles, and got my thoughts churning about my own characters as well.

For members who prefer more writing-focused ways for getting unstuck, WFWA has several:

■ If you can pinpoint what you're stuck on, there's likely a motivating craft [webinar](#) in our library to help you think about your story in new ways.

■ Has writing alone left you struggling to get words down? Sign up for a [WFWA Writing Date](#). You'll get to write with other members, as well as gain some friendly accountability and camaraderie.

■ Attend a writing retreat! There are still spots available in [Baltimore](#) for October's East Coast event. Come for an inspiring workshop, meet members face to face and soak up their creative energy. (Introverts welcome!)

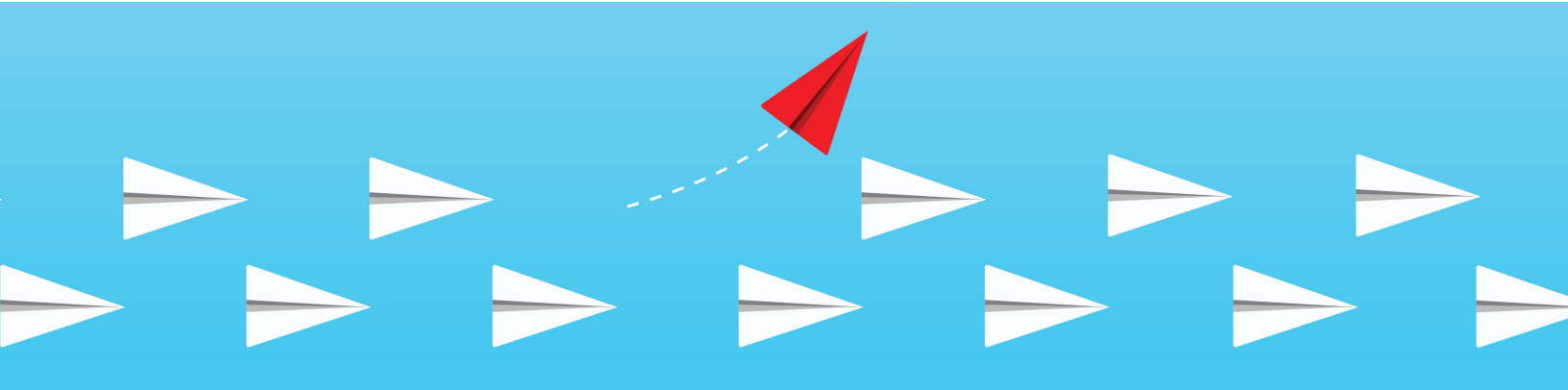
Sometimes trying a new perspective is fun and exciting. Other times, it means stepping outside one's comfort zone. Regardless, viewing the world from a position different than the one we're used to is guaranteed to be educational. And it might just get the writing mojo flowing again.

Write ON!

Christine Adler



SOMETIMES TRYING A NEW PERSPECTIVE IS FUN AND EXCITING. OTHER TIMES, IT MEANS STEPPING OUTSIDE ONE'S COMFORT ZONE.



Time keeps ticking forward and suddenly it's July, with almost half a year behind us. About this time, our minds summon up the same old musings of how quickly the year has flown by.

"We blinked and it was gone." But, this year feels different, doesn't it? Still reeling from a stalled life, it doesn't seem to me that it flew by. Rather, it felt endless. Now we've emerged from the fear and helplessness of a pandemic to a world of hope and appreciation where masks are no longer our constant accessory. Isn't it wonderful to see smiles again? It shines a whole new perspective on so many things.

New Perspectives is the theme of this issue, and how appropriate for our current state of being. After all we've been through, we all probably feel changed somehow.

As we move on, *cautiously*, to a new day, the remembrance of last year adds a layer of thoughtfulness and gratitude for the simpler things that is sometimes lost in the minutia of living.

As writers, we look inwardly, mull those feelings around, and reflect upon new emotions that weren't there before. Perhaps in our post-pandemic world, we'll have gained a new perspective to move us to write more beautifully, inspire creativity, and provide the spark of brilliance that might have been missing last year.

Inspiration comes in many forms. We take everything around us and digest it through writers' eyes. We see emotions in the way people walk, talk, and connect with others. We see stories where others see nothing. We create novels while others read. We immerse ourselves in our writers' world and that is why we are all part of the WFWA community.

As I gather articles for each issue, I am so amazed at the mass amounts of talent that we have in our membership. The new releases, the talented editors, the people who volunteer their time every day to bring this knowledge, wisdom, and supportive environment to you. WFWA is the birthplace for a successful journey in your writing career.

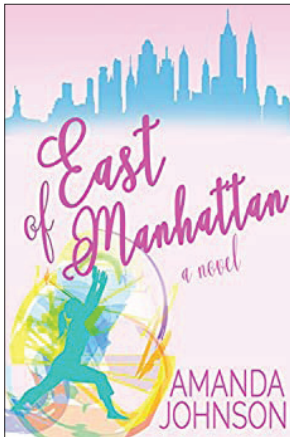
I have to admit that after I retired and wanted to dive into the world of writing fiction, I was intimidated by all of it. Writing is so much more than beautiful words and passages, and I had much to learn about the structure and *business* of writing. But, thankfully, I found WFWA and it has truly changed my writing life in more ways than I can count.

My wish for you is to find the "New Perspective" that moves you to a higher realm in your writing. Join a class, go to a retreat, network with other writers, and find your place in our organization to complement your writing and instill the confidence you need to write those beautiful words that give you and others such joy.

In this issue, we have much to inspire that new perspective you may be looking for. We have a debut novelist interview with Lyn Liao Butler, a wonderful dialogue edit by Lidija Hilje, a summary of our mentorship program, Volunteer Spotlights, and so much more.

New Perspectives are like new beginnings. Find your new beginning, feel the passion, and sit down and write. We will be here with you and will be the first to applaud your success.

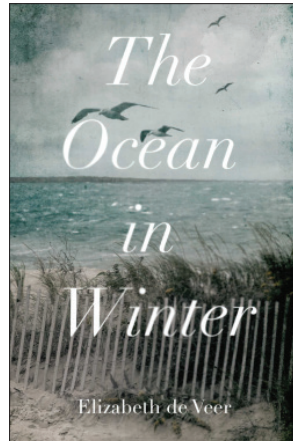
MEMBER RELEASES



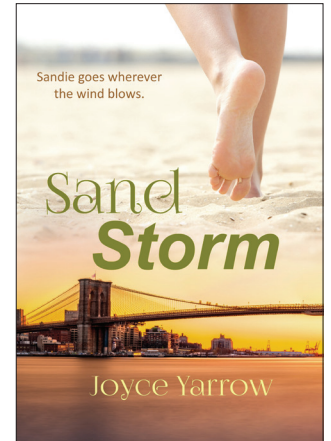
AMANDA JOHNSON
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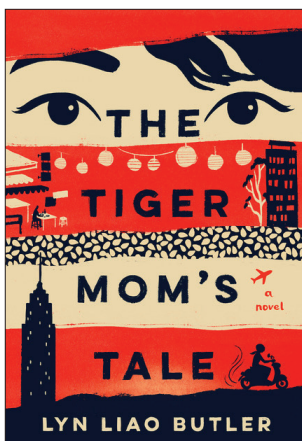
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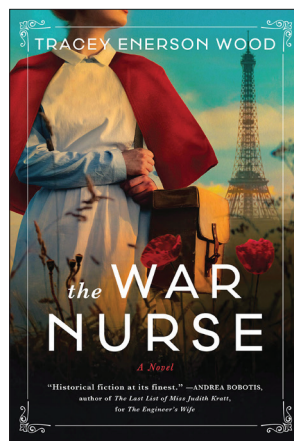
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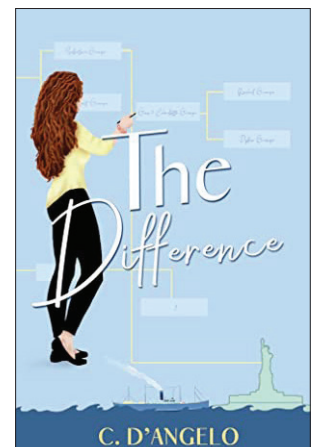
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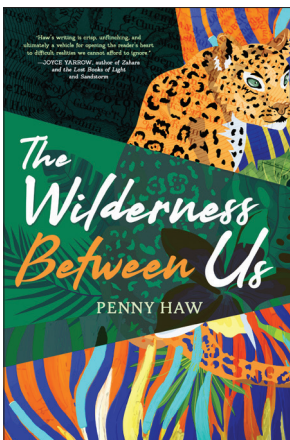
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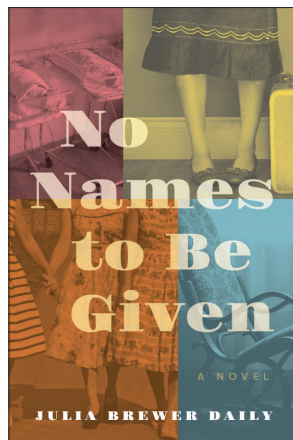
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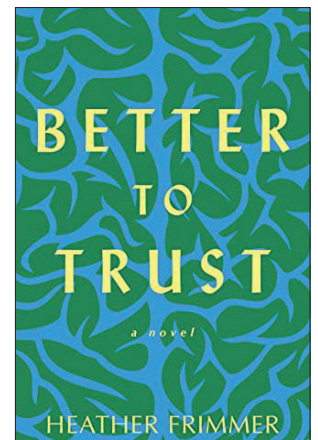
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SHOOT AND SHARE CONTEST: SHOW US YOUR FAVORITE MUG



Kathy Stillerman

Our “Favorite Mug Selfie Shoot and Share” contest was a hit! Thanks to all who participated and congratulations to Mary Camarillo as the random winner of a \$25.00 gift card for a book purchase. Now grab your favorite mug and enjoy our Summer issue — it’s sure to be a great way to start your day!



Mary Camarillo



Linda Aveliar



Caro Carson



Kathleen Basi



Rebecca Hodge



Jennier Craven



Elizabeth Solazzo



Mary Dezember



Leslie Hall



Barbara Conrey

HAND IN HAND

THE WFWA MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

by Barbara Linn Probst

If you're new to WFWA or simply haven't heard about it yet, the Mentorship Program is one of our hidden gems. Begun in 2019 and soon to embark on its sixth season, the three-month partnership between mentor and mentee offers several tracks, depending on the mentee's needs:

- a *deep dive* for writers with a completed but not-yet-published manuscript
- a *halfway there* option for those who've finished at least 50% of their manuscript and are looking for guidance on elements of the craft to complete it
- a *writing friend* option for those seeking general support

The best way to describe the program is through the words of people who've participated. Having served twice as a mentor, I've also drawn on my own experience—as well as the experience of another mentor-mentee pairing.

I spoke with four other participants: Michele Douglas, Susan Morris, Tara Maher, and Virginia McCullough. What was most striking to me was how alive, intimate, and meaningful the program was for each of them—not a dry task-oriented project, but a relationship that evolved and deepened over time.

Tara, a mentee, dubbed it “a respectful camaraderie.” Michele, another mentee, called the program “a craft book with a heart.” Virginia, a mentor, noted that “when people work on something as personal as a manuscript, a bond can develop that's unlike any other.”

The key, for all, was a spirit of open and honest communication—a willingness to listen, adapt, and co-create a highly personalized way of working together—as these comments, from different pairings, indicate:



My mentor and I had an initial Zoom call to talk about expectations and commitments and set up the goals for the first month.

As my mentor and I worked together, our approach shifted from the original framework to something more flexible. Each month, we would talk to coordinate and tailor our work to focus on the areas of my writing that I needed help with. Having the opportunity to send my problem scenes rather than the opening chapters allowed me a much greater opportunity to learn and improve my writing.

All three mentees I spoke with said that the quality of the program exceeded their expectations. As Susan told me:

It was so helpful to be able to ask for help in areas where I felt I needed it, and to learn from someone who cared about making this worthwhile for me—and wasn't afraid to be flexible and change things up a bit to make that happen. My manuscript is much better because of the

help she offered, and I've learned things that I will carry forward into future writing projects.

For the two mentors, Virginia and myself, there was the satisfaction of helping someone else and repaying the help we received from others. There was also the benefit—and joy—of learning through teaching. Working with another person on a manuscript can make you realize what you really *do* know, though you might not have articulated it for yourself. It can even bring insight and illumination, as you see more easily in someone else's work the very thing you've been struggling with—or blind to—in your own.

The WFWA Mentorship Program is a win-win opportunity that's ripe for expansion. For that to happen, however, mentors are needed, since there aren't enough to provide a match for everyone who would like one. For those of you who have published a book, no matter when or through what route—please consider volunteering!



Barbara Linn Probst is the author of two award-winning works of women's fiction, *Queen of the Owls* (April 2020) and *The Sound Between the Notes* (April 2021). An active member of WFWA, Barbara has co-presented two webinars for the community, one on marketing a debut novel and another on publishing with a hybrid press. Find her online at www.barbaralinnprobst.com

THE THREE PERSPECTIVES OF EFFECTIVE STORYTELLING



As authors we are tasked with the responsibility—the privilege—of taking on other perspectives and exploring them in the fabric of our stories.

But effective storytelling requires taking on other perspectives as well in various parts of the creative process: not just as writer, but as reader and editor.

How often have you begun revising your story shortly after reaching “The End,” paging back to the beginning and painstakingly fine-tuning, smoothing, and honing?

This is the most common approach to revisions I hear from authors, but it almost always results in highly—sometimes overly—polished opening chapters that slowly lose momentum or focus or cohesion as the story goes on.

The problem is that this approach (or the other common one I hear, which is “editing as you go”) keeps you firmly anchored in what I call “writer brain”—the author’s perspective. That’s exactly the perspective you want for drafting, and it’s essential for actual revising, but it skips over two necessary stages in assessing what you actually have on the page and figuring out how to address any weak areas of the story.

For that you need two other perspectives: “reader brain” and “editor brain.”

TAKING ON THE READER’S PERSPECTIVE

The reader’s perspective is one authors have likely honed at least as well as their writer brain: Most of us came to this craft from a lifelong love of books and reading.

We rarely get the chance to enjoy our own work from this mind-set, but there is one especially essential time to adopt this perspective and take in our stories simply as a passive reader: After we’ve completed a first draft.

Before you dive into what you already know are areas that can use strengthening, take this singular opportunity to simply read your story like a reader, to get a complete overview of your own work with the most objectivity you’re ever likely to have, short of taking months or years away from it.

GUIDING SCRIBE

When I'm doing a professional edit, that initial cold read of the full manuscript is the very first indispensable thing I do—not taking notes, not analyzing, just reading like a reader and planting my feet in the story. It's my first, best chance to see what the author actually has, what's coming across on the page. Without it I can't bring that 30,000-foot view to my actual edit passes, when I dive deep and start scrutinizing each individual moving part and how well they're working together.

The same applies to you as a writer—no matter how intimate you think you are with the story during the drafting process, how can you hope to know how it's coming across as a whole if you haven't had the experience of reading it the way your “end users” will—your readers?

Not to mention it's the greatest pleasure to finally see for the first time, while you're still fresh to it, how your creation holds together. Don't skip this key, irreplaceable step—it's essential to the next, most vital perspective of the creative process.

TAKING ON THE EDITOR'S PERSPECTIVE

If you're of the jump-in-and-revise or revise-as-you-go school, you're robbing yourself of the necessary groundwork to make your revisions as effective and efficient as they can be: editing your story.

Editing is what happens before you start doing the hands-on work of revising—it's how you know what work there is to be done.

Editing = assessing, revising = addressing.

You wouldn't want your surgeon plunging in with the scalpel before a thorough exam, diagnostic images, and tests so she knows exactly what she's operating on. That's what editing offers you.

But sticking with the medical metaphor, it has to be holistic—that's why the first read is so important. Just as your doctor needs to understand your health and lifestyle as a whole to most effectively treat you (like knowing you have high blood pressure so she can be vigilant for attendant complications in surgery), as an editor you first need to understand your story comprehensively before you can make an accurate diagnosis.

Once you know what's actually on the page—and what isn't—and how it's all working as a whole, you can decide on a “treatment plan” for fixing any weak areas.

Are your characters falling a little flat? Why, specifically—do readers not understand the forces that shaped them into who they are in the story? Are their motivations or goals unclear, or weak, or not urgent? Do we see clearly who they are, and if not, where exactly in the story did that strike you, and how could you flesh them out on the page through their actions, reactions, interactions, inner life, etc.? Or do you need to actually do a bit more character development work before you can begin addressing the issue in the manuscript?

Editing lets you take all the information you gleaned from that first read and start running diagnostic tests to pinpoint the source of any problems and figure out what's needed to fix them. Only then are you ready to go in and start cutting, transplanting, stenting, and strengthening.

Once you're finally at the revision stage, that's when you can slip back into writer brain, the perspective that will help you make those changes as you use your knowledge of craft to incorporate into the manuscript those insights you gleaned from the reader's and editor's perspectives.

And when you finish that next draft...you start the whole cycle again for each subsequent draft, so the process winds up looking something like this:



PRACTICE SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES

The best way to strengthen your skills taking on the editor's perspective stems from the reader's perspective: Once you've taken in any story as a reader or viewer—a more passive (not in a bad way), receiving mind-set—get into the habit of going back into the story and practice adopting the editorial mind-set, which is active and analytical.

That means when you're reading for pleasure, or watching TV or a movie, after your first read or viewing ask yourself what your impressions were—did you stay up late flipping pages? Check out halfway through? Could you predict the ending? Did you care about the characters and what happened to them? Were you on the edge of your seat at any point, or moved to tears? Did the plot make sense and get fully resolved?

Now shift into editor brain and go back into the story—reread or rewatch—and see if you can identify exactly why you felt that way, and specifically how the author evoked the reaction you had (or failed to evoke a reaction).

This kind of practice is one of the most valuable things you can do for your writing, getting you comfortable and conversant with shifting perspectives from reader to editor to writer and back again, so you can examine, diagnose, and formulate the most effective treatment plan for your own stories.

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



WELCOME BACK TO THE RETREATS

Our annual retreats are a unique feature on the WFWA calendar. Since we were forced to cancel our events last year, and we've recently experienced an explosion of new members, we realized that many members are in the dark about this special time of our writing year. We asked Kelly Farmer, a retreat veteran, to give us her inside perspective on what connecting with your community can do for your career and your spirit.

Imagine spending a long weekend in a beautiful location, talking to fellow writers who understand where you're coming from, being fed all day long, and learning so much, you head home with extra motivation to write. That's what it's like attending the WFWA annual retreat. Since we have yet to enjoy the Baltimore retreat, I can only recap the fun we've had in Albuquerque. I have been fortunate to attend two of the retreats. Here are some of the great things you can expect.

First of all, you learn how to spell Albuquerque. Okay, actually, the first cool thing is the Facebook group just for retreat-goers. It's nice to "meet" other people who are going ahead of time, particularly for us introverted types. I was able to secure a roommate and we've since roomed together for other conferences.

The Hotel Albuquerque is in itself an inspiring location. There are all these little alcoves and hidden, tucked away places if you want to go write in solitude, inside or outside. If you need to absorb other people's motivation, there's the comfy outdoor patio, as well as rooms designated for chats.

The structure of the workshop days is laid out perfectly. There are morning and afternoon sessions for the keynote speaker, followed by time to apply what we've learned. And snacks. (More on that in a bit.) There are also times for smaller breakout workshops. I found a lot of value in these casual chats as a way to make connections and find out what other authors are doing, what works for them, what doesn't, etc. There's a good balance of group workshop, small breakout sessions, and downtime. If you want to explore the city, go out for lunch with your new friends, or take a nap, there's plenty of time in the day to do so.

WELCOME BACK TO THE RETREATS

There are also opportunities to have your work critiqued based on what we learned in the keynote sessions. I could write an entire article about the things I've discovered about my own writing style and personality and, ugh, some bad habits to keep tabs on. It's so helpful to get fresh eyes to look at your work and directly apply what we've learned. A lot of times when I take notes, I understand the information, but don't know how to apply it. So it's great to have five people be like, "Here's where you're doing that." Very eye-opening.

While all of the workshops and breakout sessions have been helpful, the personal connections are what make the retreat so special. Writing is a solitary endeavor, and it's nice to be able to commiserate with like-minded people. Regardless of what exactly we're writing, we all share the common goal of crafting the best novels we can. Everyone is really encouraging—it's honestly one of the most positive and inspiring groups I've ever been around.

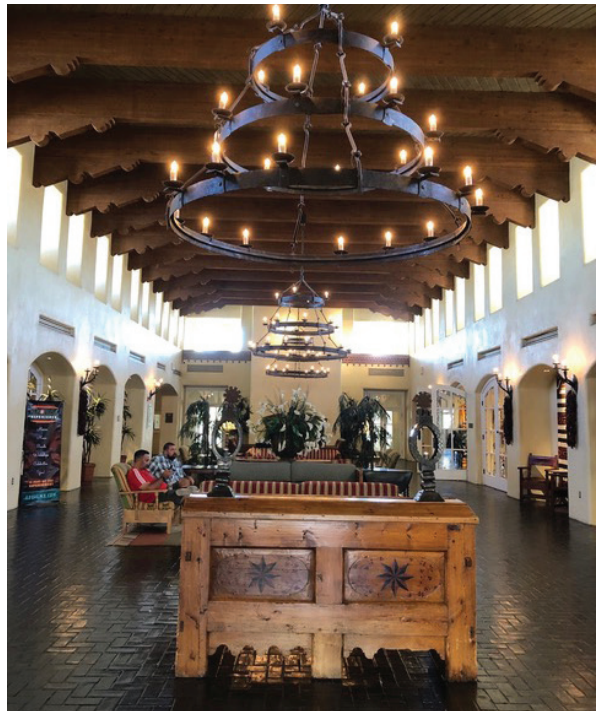
Can we talk about the food? You will not go hungry at the retreat. I say this as one of those difficult-to-feed people who normally struggles to eat at big events. They thoughtfully have meal and snack options for everyone. There are *snacks*, my friends. So many snacks. Morning and afternoon snacks. And lots of beverage options. They keep the coffee and tea station open well into the day because the coordinators understand our true needs. There's also water all day, which if you're in Albuquerque, be sure to drink a lot of it to avoid any yucky effects from the altitude.

NO EDITORS, NO AGENTS, NO PITCHING

One nice thing is this is a *retreat*. We're there to learn, write, and have a lot of fun. There are no editors or agents, no pitch appointments to freak out about, no having to be "on" because an industry professional is around. It's very chill. Dress comfortably...and bring a sweater or fleece, 'cause you know that conference room is always going to be cold.

There is a magic that follows you home post-retreat. I am always *so motivated* and armed with better knowledge on how to make my work in progress stronger. I still refer back to notes from 2018 keynote workshops—they're that helpful.

What can I recommend for you to get the most out of your retreat experience? If you're shy, know this is the right place for you. Everyone is so friendly. Like, "Hi, come sit by me" friendly. Try not to feel intimidated if it seems like everyone else knows each other. Some of us have had the good fortune to meet before, but a lot of attendees will only know people by their Facebook profile photo. Hopefully, the world will be at a better place this fall, and we'll be able to go out for lunches and dinners. People (especially those who've been around for a while) are really good about making sure no author is left behind and that you know where they're heading to eat.



Also, you may well make connections with fellow authors who live in your area. Maybe you can set up writing dates, or a critique group. But even at the retreat, you'll have lots of creative folks to brainstorm with or bounce ideas off of. Both the years I attended, there were breakout sessions about finding comp titles that were really helpful. Comp titles are so much easier to find for someone else's story!

Yes, everything is geared toward women's fiction, but you'll get value no matter what your current project is. The workshops apply to everyone. We all need to know about show vs. tell, deep POV, how not to info dump, what should go on your author website, and general writer's life tidbits.

It's so great that WFWA has grown and expanded for us to need a second retreat. Capping the attendance makes it feel warm and welcoming. You can get to know people rather than feeling lost in a crowd of attendees. Hope to meet you in person at one of our future retreats! You can find me at the snack table.



Kelly Farmer has been writing romance novels since junior high. The stories have changed, but one theme remains the same: everyone deserves to have a happy ending. She loves telling tales with a touch of snark and a lot of heart. Her debut novel, *Out on the Ice*, was released by Carina Press in 2020. When not writing, she enjoys being out in nature, quoting from 80's movies, listening to music, and petting every dog she comes in contact with. Kelly lives in the Chicago area, where she swears every winter is her last one there. www.kellyfarmerauthor.com



by Orly Konig

The WFWA retreats are a unique member opportunity and one we’re particularly excited to be expanding. Until now, we’ve only had one retreat in Albuquerque, New Mexico but this year (well, it was supposed to be last year but we won’t talk about that) we’re introducing Baltimore, Maryland, also known as Charm City to the mix.

WHY BALTIMORE?

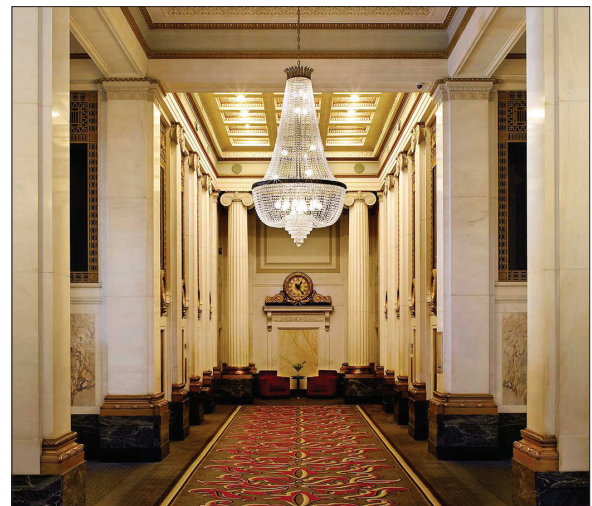
For one, we wanted an East Coast location that was easy to get to via plane, Amtrak, or driving, and a second retreat with a different vibe.

Here’s a teaser about the beautiful Kimpton Hotel Monaco Baltimore Inner Harbor:

“The four-star hotel is set in the historic B&O Railroad building, where the structure’s original Tiffany stained glass windows and marble staircases, along with regal chandeliers and stately furnishings, transport guests to the days of the American railroad. At one time, the 1906 Beaux Arts building buzzed with the comings and goings of the gilded age’s power players. Today, Kimpton Hotel Monaco Baltimore Inner Harbor travelers are plugged in to the exciting sights and sounds of Charm City.”

The elegant, cozy fireplace room sold me the minute I walked into the hotel, okay once I stopped gawking at the stained glass windows and fantasizing about walking down the marble staircase in amazing period clothing.

Both retreats will be similar in structure—workshop in the mornings with time to write and implement what you’ve learned in the afternoon, group meals, and free time to explore the surrounding area or just chill at the hotel. And similar in creating a welcoming environment for all writers, a place to focus on your writing, to re-energize the creative muse, and to connect with like-minded writers.



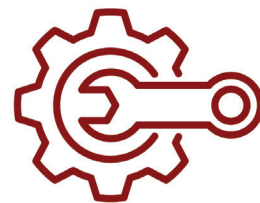
A LOOK AHEAD

Opening a second retreat allows us to offer retreat space to more WFWA members and also create a program that will address more of what our members are looking for. Our goal is to have speakers on craft and writer life, alternating between the two retreat locations.

As of this printing, we still have spots left. We’d love to have you join us.



Orly Konig is one of the founding members and founding president of WFWA. She’s an escapee from the corporate world who now spends her days chatting up imaginary friends, drinking too much coffee, and negotiating writing space around her cats. She is a member of the Tall Poppy Writers, a writing coach, and the author of *The Distance Home* and *Carousel Beach*. You can find her online at <http://orlykonig.com/index.html> or on Goodreads, Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.



DIALOGUE WORKSHOP

Writing dialogue may sound like the easiest part of writing a novel, but writing good dialogue is not as straightforward as it may seem. I've seen many a novel ruined by poorly written dialogue, and plenty of average novels uplifted by fantastic dialogue. There are quite a few rules and guidelines to follow for writing dialogue. I'll touch on some of

them as I go through the following pages submitted by WFWA author, Jessica.

Good dialogue should pull triple duty: move the story forward, emulate how people talk in real life, and provide the reader a deeper insight into characters or their world. So, let's see how Jessica's scene fares in those terms as well.

ORIGINAL TEXT

We went through dinner and I was fairly quiet, listening to Caleb and Priya banter back and forth. This was only the third or fourth time they had met but they had clicked from the beginning, which I both wanted and had feared. I hadn't even finished eating when Priya took a final drink of her wine and stood up.

"Well, Caleb, thank you for having me. Dinner was lovely. Your apartment is fabulous. I'll trade you anytime. But I must go."

"Why do you have to leave so soon?" I asked, my brows furrowed. We had barely been there an hour. I looked at Caleb, wondering if this were some conspiracy between the two of them, but his expression was blank.

"I have to meet someone."

"Who?"

"Just someone. Stop being so nosy." She wrinkled her nose as she awkwardly scratched the end of it for a weird amount of time. I narrowed my eyes at her suspiciously.

"What are you not saying?" I asked. She sighed and I widened my eyes at her.

"Fine! Rahul is coming to town tonight."

My mouth dropped open. "And when were you going to tell me this?"

"I'm telling you right now!"

"No. That was not telling me. That was me pulling it out of you."

"Whatever. It's not a big deal. He's a penis doctor and has really girly hair." The randomness of her criticisms made me tilt my head back and laugh.

"You're such a mess," I said.

"And I guess I should also tell you that I am considering hiking in Patagonia with him next month. In case that comes up."

"Excuse me?" She clenched her teeth and grimaced.

"Have you gone mad?" I asked then turned to Caleb. "Are you hearing this? Or am I the only one?"

"Sounds adventurous," he said.

"Trying to be. Trying to keep up with this girl," Priya said, motioning towards me. I stiffened. "You do know about Brynne's little hobbies, right?" Priya asked.

"Tell me," Caleb replied as he glanced at me.

"No. We don't need to tell," I cut in. "Go meet Rahul."

"No. She does need to tell," Caleb said.

"It's not that big of a deal," Priya said to me with a shrug. She furrowed her brows in question and I wanted to shoot her a warning look but Caleb was staring directly at me.

"Please tell me," Caleb said. "Because she probably won't."

"Can I really not tell him?" Priya asked. My face flushed as I finished off my wine and stood. I crossed into the kitchen and poured myself another glass.

"I'm taking your silence as a go ahead," she called. I didn't respond because I knew one way or another, this was going to come out. Caleb wasn't going to let it go.

"Our girl Brynne here has a thing for heights. Loves them. Not scared at all. Spent every free moment of last year jetting off to bungee jump off bridges all around the world or skydive. She went to South Africa by herself last October to jump off the highest bridge in the world and didn't even tell me until after the fact."

"That's enough Priya," I said.

"Oh and as if those weren't enough, she started taking flying lessons. And her instructor is a former Blue Angel and he let her talk him into doing crazy nose dives and such."

My pulse was pounding in my neck and the air felt heavy. Priya had no idea what she was revealing. I felt Caleb's eyes burning a hole through the back of my head but I didn't turn around.

LET'S FIX THIS!



GOOD DIALOGUE SHOULD PULL TRIPLE DUTY: MOVE THE STORY FORWARD, EMULATE HOW PEOPLE TALK IN REAL LIFE, AND PROVIDE THE READER A DEEPER INSIGHT INTO CHARACTERS OR THEIR WORLD.

Jessica's excerpt starts by providing the reader with some context (which is always a good thing): the scene has three characters eating dinner together. Priya and Caleb who don't know each other well and the protagonist, Brynne, who seems to be the connecting point between the two.

The plot starts unfolding when Priya finishes her drink and announces she's leaving the dinner early. What ensues is a back-and-forth between Brynne and Priya (who I assume is either her best friend or her sister) about the man Priya is about to meet. The conversation takes an unexpected turn when Priya playfully threatens to reveal a secret about Brynne to Caleb. (that Brynne has a thing for heights). Brynne is obviously afraid of Caleb learning this information, but with his eyes on her at all times, she's unable to stop Priya from disclosing it. Priya, on the other hand, is completely oblivious to this dynamic between Caleb and Brynne.

Jessica's excerpt is a good example of layered dialogue. There is the surface-level conversation taking place between Priya and Brynne, but the real conversation here (and the reason why we're seeing this scene) is the conversation between Caleb and Brynne; a conversation that is taking place entirely through nonverbal communication.

When Priya reveals that Brynne has a thing for heights (which is obviously a point of tension between Brynne and Caleb) Brynne gets up to refill her glass—not because she wants more wine, but because she's afraid to face Caleb. Yet, as she's pouring wine—and through Priya's cheerful small talk—she's feeling his eyes burning a hole through the back of her head. In other words, she knows Caleb's reaction without even having to look at him. This creates a lot of unspoken tension on the page. It's worth noting that the author could have made Caleb react verbally to what he just learned about Brynne. But, as it is often the case, it's the subtle reaction that engages the reader more, so it is actually the lack of an overt reaction from Caleb that makes the most powerful impact.

So, Jessica's excerpt really does pull triple duty. First, the fact that Priya disclosed about Brynne (her love of heights) clearly moves the story forward by complicating things between Caleb and Brynne. Second, in this excerpt Jessica emulated how people really talk. Not only does this conversation have two tiers (things being spoken aloud vs. things that aren't being said), but the author used language and expressions people use in day-to-day speech. One of

my favorite lines was when Priya said: *"Whatever. It's not a big deal. He's a penis doctor and has really girly hair."* The randomness of Priya's observations, blurted out in a seemingly nonsensical order is evocative of how people talk when they're insecure. The fact that she said 'penis doctor' instead of 'urologist' makes her sound like a real person.

Third, this dialogue gives us an insight into these characters and their personalities. The way Brynne challenges Priya about Rahul tells us that Brynne might be the stronger personality in their relationship. Maybe she's an older sister, or maybe she's the more serious friend who always takes charge. Caleb's reaction (or lack of an overt reaction) tells us a lot about his personality as well.

So many things are done well in Jessica's excerpt, but there is some space for improvement as well.

Sometimes, two characters will say and do things within the same paragraph. In dialogue, each character should get their own paragraph. When the writer switches to a new paragraph, it signals to the reader that they have switched to a different character—even if that character only gestures and doesn't say anything.

LET'S FIX THIS!

There were also some (very few) point-of-view slips. This excerpt is written from Brynne's (first person) POV, so we can only see what she sees. This means that, while she can furrow her eyebrows, she can't see her own eyebrows furrow.

There were instances where I wanted

to understand Caleb's reaction better. As he encouraged Priya to disclose her secret about Brynne, I wasn't sure if his reaction was playful and conversational, or if he was already aware that this reveal will cause tension between him and Brynne. A brushstroke of body language, facial

expression, or tone of voice that hints at what Caleb is thinking would have been helpful.

All in all, this is a well-done dialogue, and with a few small adjustments, it will shine. Thank you, Jessica, for submitting your pages for critique!

SO, LET'S RECAP DIALOGUE DO'S AND DON'TS:

DIALOGUE DO'S:

DO MAKE SURE THE SCENE MOVES THE STORY FORWARD

Don't write dialogue only to have your characters regurgitate the information the reader already knows. Good dialogue should surprise your reader, take the story in a new direction, or at the very least, offer a new, deeper insight into a previously existing situation.

DO EMULATE REAL-LIFE CONVERSATIONS

People rarely say what they mean, they veer around important subjects, and they never tell each other what they know the other person already knows. Oftentimes, the conversation is more about what's not being said than about what is actually spoken. Don't give your reader the obvious, surface-level exchange, give them the inside scoop on the internal power-play between characters. Think about it this way: how many times have you gone to the person who hurt you and confronted them about it? And how many times have you talked to them about something seemingly inconsequential, all the while trying to communicate your hurt feelings in less obvious ways?

DO USE DIALOGUE FOR CHARACTERIZATION PURPOSES

Different people react to things in different ways. Seeing how someone reacts in a conversation often paints a more vivid picture than flat out telling us what that person is like. Wield this power to your advantage; tell us who your characters are by showing us how they act and react in dialogue.

DO INTERSPERSE DIALOGUE WITH CONTEXT

Balance the dialogue with some internal monologue (how the POV character makes sense of what the other person is saying or implying; how they decide what to say and what not to say), POV character's physical sensations, and visuals (how the characters move in space, where they are in relation to each other, what we can glean from their body language). Also, be aware that the protagonist isn't the only person the reader is paying attention to. We are simultaneously tracking nonverbal communication of all the other characters as well. The POV character should give the reader enough cues to be able to "read" the non-POV characters' behavior as well.

DIALOGUE DON'TS:

DON'T USE DIALOGUE FOR EXPOSITION AND INFO-DUMPS

Dialogue is a powerful tool for showing. But be aware that the "show don't tell" rule applies to dialogue, too. Here are some examples of how telling comes up in dialogue: long, expositional monologues (where one character goes on and on to bring another character up to speed about whatever the author wants the reader to know); on-the-nose conversations (characters conveniently discussing exactly what the author needs the reader to know, even though there really is no need for them to be discussing that right now; characters who tell other characters what they already know.

DON'T USE COMPLEX WORDING OR STILTED SPEECH.

Writers will have their characters use complex sentence structure and words, and stilted speech for different reasons: sometimes they fear that simple words make for uninteresting conversation; sometimes they think that using simple words makes them (the author) or their characters seem simple or unrefined. Sometimes they feel that complex speech will give that literary, sophisticated quality to a novel. Truth is, the complexity of the conversation is not in the words being used, it's in layered meaning those words create—the conversation beneath the conversation. Using words like therefore, henceforth, thus—unless writing a Regency era novel—will just jolt the reader.

DON'T TURN YOUR CHARACTERS INTO TALKING HEADS.

Sometimes, in an attempt to avoid using dialogue tags, the writers will have their characters talk to each other without attributing speech—until the reader loses track of who's saying what. Most of the time, dialogue tags (he said, she said) are virtually invisible to the reader, so you can safely rely on those when you need to attribute speech. You can also use dialogue beats (actions, gestures, movements, and tone of voice that not only tell us who is speaking but how) though these should be used only sparingly—to give context to what a character is saying.

Lidija Hilje is a certified book coach and developmental editor specializing in Literary, Women's, YA, and Historical Fiction. As a former attorney turned editor, Lidija understands the importance of knowing the rules before one can (artfully) break them, and is passionate about helping writers elevate their voice (and craft) to the next level so they can write resonant stories that stay with the reader. You can reach her through her website (<https://lidijahilje.com>) or email (lidija.hilje@gmail.com).



IN THEIR WORDS: LYN LIAO BUTLER

By Kay Arthur

I had the pleasure of interviewing debut author Lyn Liao Butler for our “In Their Words” feature. Lyn is the organization’s Agent Liaison, and through her efforts WFWA is building strong, professional relationships with the agent community. This month, we are happy to congratulate her on the July 6 release of her debut novel, *The Tiger Mom’s Tale*. It’s a wonderful member success story, and we are so happy to join her in the celebration. Congratulations Lyn, and Happy Book Birthday to *The Tiger Mom’s Tale*!

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

I was a professional ballet and modern dancer in NYC, and also a personal trainer and fitness/yoga instructor. I love to read, but never thought I’d be a writer. But when I moved out of NYC to the suburbs in 2013, my friends wanted to know what I was doing in the “country.” So, I started a blog to update them and those posts turned into a book one day. I started writing it in 2015, about a personal trainer in NYC trying to find her heritage (very loosely based on me) and since then, the story has undergone dramatic revisions.

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

I queried for three-and-a-half years and wrote three manuscripts before I signed with my agent. And my agent sold it in about five months. Which isn’t that long in publishing, but at the time, felt like five years. I almost gave up after the second book, but pure stubbornness made me keep going. I really believe that a lot of publishing is just finding the right agent or editor at the right time, so if you really love to write and believe in your dream, keep going. Even when it feels hopeless and you want to give up. I’m glad I didn’t give up.



I LOVE TO READ, BUT NEVER THOUGHT I’D BE A WRITER. BUT WHEN I MOVED OUT OF NYC TO THE SUBURBS IN 2013, MY FRIENDS WANTED TO KNOW WHAT I WAS DOING IN THE “COUNTRY.” SO, I STARTED A BLOG TO UPDATE THEM AND THOSE POSTS TURNED INTO A BOOK ONE DAY.

FEATURE

■ ***The Tiger Mom's Tale* is your debut novel. Can you tell those of us who haven't read the book, why we should read it? Also, where did you get the idea for this book?**

My debut is about a Taiwanese-American woman who needs to reconcile the two halves of her life. She grew up with her blond American family, while looking more like Constance Wu. Because of an incident that happened in Taiwan the summer she was 14, she hasn't been back to Taiwan and is estranged from her father. When he dies unexpectedly, she must go back to confront what drove her away all those years ago, or her Taiwanese family will lose their home. Even though Lexa's (the MC) story is nothing like my own, we both struggle with looking Asian on the outside, but feeling American on the inside. There are not enough stories out there from the Taiwanese-American perspective, and I feel that now, more than ever, we need that representation in the books we read. Most people know little about the Taiwanese culture, and I want to share my experience. I hope more Taiwanese-American will be published to share their unique experiences as well.

■ **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?**

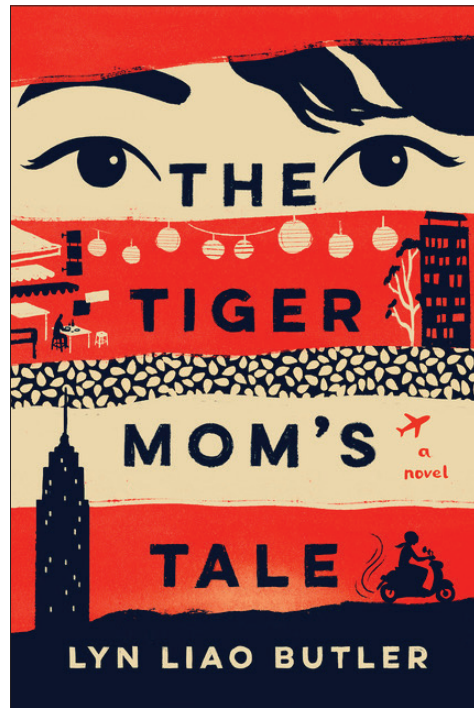
I'd like the reader to get a glimpse of Taiwanese culture while knowing this is only from one person's perspective. The book ultimately is about finding one's own heritage and learning to fully embrace it. I know many people struggle to reconcile the different parts of themselves, and I think people will identify with Lexa, even if they are not Asian-American. It's a story of belonging and finding out about all the parts of yourself. Because I was born in Taiwan and moved here when I was seven, I've felt pulled in two directions, which is how Lexa feels too. And she has to go back to Taiwan in order to truly find out who she is.

■ **They say your first book has a lot of yourself in it. Is this true with *The Tiger Mom's Tale*?**

Yes, but only in the theme of feeling pulled between two cultures. And I made Lexa a personal trainer in NYC, since I was one and it was easier to have her be something that I know a lot about. But everything else about Lexa's story is a figment of my imagination.

■ **Are you a plotter or pantsier?**

I pantsied my way through that first book and sent it off to agents without a single person other than myself reading it. I soon learned that was a big mistake. I now am a full-fledged plotter and won't even start to write a book until I have a detailed, chapter-by-chapter outline. This works much better for me because then when I start writing, it flows really easily.



■ **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?**

The first draft took me six months to write. I'd been thinking about it for a while, since starting the blog. After I realized that you can't query on a first draft, it took many, many revisions (too many to remember) and a complete overhaul of the plot before I came up with the version that my agent signed me on.

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

The critique partner I found on Twitter (hi Delise!) was the one who told me about WFWA. I've met so many author friends through WFWA, including my local writing buddy, Christine Adler. Christine was the president the year I joined, and we soon realized we lived in the same town, only ten minutes apart. Writing is such a hard and lonely profession, so to find people who understand the process and how hard it is has been absolutely wonderful.

■ **What are you working on next?**

My second book, *Red Thread of Fate*, comes out from Berkley on February 8, 2022, and I've also just completed a thriller/domestic suspense and a YA book, and am working on my third Women's Fiction novel. So, you could say, I've been very busy writing!



It's that weekly message that we all look forward to entitled *Inside WFWA*. It stands out among our flurry of emails, that special one that transports us from our computer screen into our writers' lives and keeps us all on track with the ongoing news of our writing community. It's fun to read, informational, and celebratory—all key ingredients to keep our readers involved in WFWA. Behind the scenes, there's a team of engineers who keep this machine moving, seemingly flawlessly. Please put your hands together and applaud the hard work of these members. We wouldn't be connected without you.

NANETTE LITTLESTONE: IW TEAM LEADER

■ How did you become a member of WFWA?

I joined online. I don't remember what prompted the joining. I may have come across the FB group or someone on FB mentioning the group. But I think I was looking for an organization that could offer help, advice, and information with regards to writing and publishing.



■ When and how did you first volunteer?

My first volunteering was around April 2019 as a judge for the Rising Star Award.

■ When did you get involved with *Inside WFWA*, and what is your favorite role you play in this?

I joined the *Inside WFWA* team in June 2019. We don't really have different roles. We're all editors for the newsletter. It's straightforward, doesn't take a lot of time (just once a month), and I enjoy interacting with the other editors. The best part of it is seeing a little of what's going on within the organization every week. I'm also lead editor, appointed by Sharon Ritchey some months ago—my second favorite role.

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

My favorite resource is the monthly (sometimes bi-monthly) webinar hosted by Lisa Montanaro. The presenters are incredibly knowledgeable, and the webinar topics have been amazing and so helpful. I love that they're available to the members at no additional cost and that we can attend live or by replay. My second favorite resource is the WFWA Facebook page. It's wonderful to interact with the members this way, to see their questions, projects, advice. I feel like I'm part of a community that cares and wants to help.

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

I'm self-employed and work from home, so volunteering with an organization that's about writing feels second nature to me, and it helps me "get out" of my house in a virtual way.

SHELLY DAVIS

■ How did you become a member of WFWA?

I was looking for a writing group specializing in women's fiction and found it via Google. I had no idea what a powerhouse WFWA was until after I joined.

■ When and how did you first volunteer?

I responded to a position for a newsletter editor, but it had already been filled. So, I signed up to help with tech and got started on webinar replays. Then a spot on the editing team opened up and I added that as well.



■ When did you get involved with *Inside WFWA*, and what is your favorite role you play in this?

I started in October of last year. I enjoy editing—clean copy makes me very happy.

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

Webinar replays are a wealth of information, and the directory is an excellent tool to find members who provide editing, coaching, web development, etc.

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

I think it's time well spent. It helps keep me involved in WFWA when I might otherwise let life take over.



CASEY DEMBOWSKI

■ How did you become a member of WFWA?

It was 2015 (I think), and I was getting ready to dive back into querying my novel. I really wanted to find a writing community, and when I saw the Women's Fiction Writers Association, it just felt like a great fit. And it was!

■ When and how did you first volunteer?

I started volunteering in 2016. I'd been a member for about a year, and I thought it would be a good way to get involved with the organization on a deeper level. I ended up taking over the goals posts on social media and did that for over two years! I loved following member journeys through goal posts and sharing my own with them as well!



■ When did you get involved with *Inside WFWA*, and what is your favorite role you play in this?

About a year ago, as my social media activity was picking up for the launch of my debut, I decided to transition out of the Facebook Goals Moderator, but knew I wanted to keep volunteering. *Inside WFWA* seemed the perfect since the time commitment fit within my normal schedule, and it utilized my editorial skills.

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

I'm a big fan of the workshops. I try to participate in at least one a year. I find the most helpful resource to be the community itself. I am active and engaged with members through our Facebook group. There's not a day that goes by that I don't scroll through the latest posts.

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

When I worked within the Facebook group, it was easy since I was already actively engaged there most days. Now with *Inside WFWA*, the position naturally falls into my day and my skillset, so it's not hard to switch tracks to put together and/or read the newsletter for a fellow editor.

BROOKE DORSCH

■ How did you become a member of WFWA?

About five years ago, I wrote my first women's fiction novel and knew nothing about craft, finding an agent, or publishing. I wanted to find a community of writers and some resources to help me along the way, and WFWA has definitely helped. I've learned so much.

■ When and how did you first volunteer?

I'm a new volunteer. I was contacted by the volunteer coordinator, Hope Ashby, and she gave me some options on ways to help within WFWA. Being an editor seemed like a good fit.



■ When did you get involved with the *Inside WFWA*, and what is your favorite role you play in this?

I started as an editor for *Inside WFWA* in January. I've already learned so much from my fellow editors. They have such a keen eye when it comes to word choice and style. They know where all the commas are supposed to go! I look forward to learning more about editing from them as my time with the team continues.

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

I love watching the webinar replays. All the speakers are so knowledgeable. Since I'm looking for an agent, I've also enjoyed the Prepare Your Pitch and Pitch events in the past.

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

It's just like writing. I make time for it. It's important to be timely with *Inside WFWA*, and we have a schedule we stick to. When I'm working on an issue, I make it the priority.

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.

Writing is like driving
at night in the fog.
You can only see as
far as your headlights,
but you can make the
whole trip that way.

– E.L. DOCTOROW

