

**WINTER 2020**



The Quarterly Magazine of the Women's Fiction Writers Association

# **WRiTEON!**

## **GOALS & RECOMMITMENT**

**REDEFINING  
YOUR  
PERSONAL  
PATH TO  
SUCCESS**



**+ Q&A:  
AN AUTHOR'S  
JOURNEY**

**BIG LESSONS  
FROM LITTLE  
WOMEN**

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### AUTHORS REQUESTS

As part of our thirst for knowledge, we would like to continue the Q & A with authors on their writing journey and ask for volunteers from our readers to participate in this column for our next publication. If interested, email Kay Arthur, Managing Editor at [kdarthur@yahoo.com](mailto:kdarthur@yahoo.com).

### WRITE FOR WRITE ON!

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](mailto:kdarthur@yahoo.com).

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

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**A**s a child who read constantly, my head was filled with a lot of ideas. These included an understanding of how relationships and the world worked, based on what I'd read in those books. They became my map for navigating life.

Like most self-appointed heroines, I learned the hard way that, shall we say, I was not using the same map as everyone else. Even though I was behaving as I was "instructed" in the stories I'd read, my plans were not coming together like I thought they would.

In a similar way, publishing is a lot like life. Writers are pretty tenacious. This is not an easy job. It takes strength and determination to pour emotion onto the page day after day, to laugh with and cry over our characters and even kill them off when necessary. And asking others what's working and what isn't is no fun either, but we do it again and again.

A writer friend of mine has written four books. She has an agent, but is yet to be published. Her stories are beautiful, rich and lyrical. But traditional publishers aren't biting. *She's written four books*, but she still doesn't feel successful.

I have another friend who wanted to share her life experience with others. Because success to her meant helping people by telling her story, self-publishing was the perfect answer. She sells her book locally, gives talks and signings, and through word of mouth continues to reach more and more of the very readers she's sought from the first day she sat down to write. She achieved her goal. Did her book sell a million copies? No. Was her book reviewed extensively in the press or translated into other languages? Nope. Does that matter to her? Not one bit. The people who needed to read her story are reading it. Her book is helping those who've gone through what she did. She considers her book a success.

For many of us, attaining "success" (read: a multi-book deal, international acclaim, and millions of fans) is not only more difficult than we'd anticipated, it's consistently elusive.

So where does that leave us? Do we abandon the dream? Or do we instead re-examine what success means to us?

I started out writing both of my books because I loved the stories and the characters. Then I got an agent. But she couldn't sell my first book, and didn't like the second. Newly agentless again, I stopped writing. What was the point? Recently, a friend pointed out that I was happiest when I was writing my stories, not with the goal of being published, but because of my love for the characters and their journeys. I realized she was right.

Don't let someone else's definition of success become yours. Every writer's journey looks different. Only you can determine what success means for you. But no matter what, don't let your pursuit of it stop you from creating your art.

Write on!

*Christine Adler*

Christine Adler, WFWA President



**RECENTLY, A FRIEND POINTED OUT THAT I WAS HAPPIEST WHEN I WAS WRITING MY STORIES, NOT WITH THE GOAL OF BEING PUBLISHED, BUT BECAUSE OF MY LOVE FOR THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR JOURNEYS. I REALIZED SHE WAS RIGHT.**

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# ABOUT THE WFWA

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

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



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#womensfictionwritersn

Join the closed WFWA Facebook group by sending an email to:  
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## 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](mailto:writeon@womensfictionwriters.org). Submitted letters are considered for publication and may be edited for clarity or space.

# STAFF

## MANAGING EDITOR

**Kay Arthur** 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. Kay is a featured writer for *Sixty&Me*, an online publication and is currently querying her debut novel, *Beautifully Strange* while working on her second novel. Visit her at [www.kdathur.com](http://www.kdathur.com)



## COPY EDITOR

**Brooke Williams** 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. Her short story, "Another Time", was published in *The Orange Writer's Group Anthology*. She lives in Ohio with her husband and four children.



## CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

**Barbara Linn Probst** is a women's fiction writer living on an historic dirt road in New York's Hudson Valley. Her debut novel, *Queen of the Owls*, launching in April 2020, is the story of a woman's search for wholeness framed around the art and life of Georgia O'Keeffe. Her second novel is slated for publication in April 2021. To learn more, please see [www.barbaralinnprobst.com](http://www.barbaralinnprobst.com)



## CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

**Patricia Friedrich** is Professor of English at Arizona State University. She is the author/editor of six nonfiction books including *The Sociolinguistics of Digital Englishes* (Routledge, 2016), the award-winning *The Literary and Linguistic Construction of Obsessive-compulsive Disorder* (Palgrave, 2015), and several published short stories. She is currently working on revisions to her first novel-length manuscript, *Artful Women*.



## LAYOUT EDITOR

**Sheri Taylor-Emery** 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 a one-eyed dog and three cats at home. She lives with her husband outside of Atlanta. She's repped by Carly Watters of P.S. Literary. Visit her at [writeonsister.net](http://writeonsister.net)





## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT **WRITEON! EDITORIAL TEAM**



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.

The quarterly **Write ON! e-zine** has been a member benefit since WFWA was founded. The first issue was published way back in [2014](#), and it has continued to grow along with the association. That means the team behind it has had to grow too. The amount of planning, resources, writing, editing, and design involved with each release requires months of work, all behind the scenes. The end result is four annual issues of this beautiful publication, full of information, encouragement tips and wisdom. WFWA wouldn't exist without our fabulous volunteers, and this quarter we'd like to spotlight and thank the Write ON! team:

**Managing Editor:** Kay Arthur

**Copy Editor:** Brooke Williams

**Contributing Editors:**

Patricia Friedrich, Barbara Probst

**Layout Editor:** Sheri Taylor-Emery

Three cheers and a huge thank you for all for the wonderful work you do!



## MEMBER RELEASES

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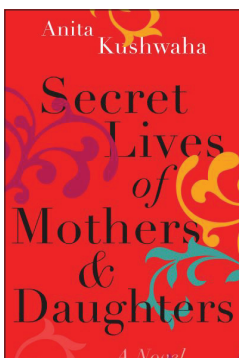


### ELENA MIKALSEN

#### *All the Silent Voices*

1/6/2020

Twenty-one years ago, Emma Shephard was sexually assaulted and forced to leave college. She has tried to forget the trauma, building a new life as a loving wife and parent with a successful marketing career. Then her world is rocked when her rapist buys the pharmaceutical company where she works. Now it's an impossible choice between keeping the safe life she's created and pursuing justice. With her marriage at risk and her child in danger, Emma finds herself at the center of ugly secrets and scandals.



### ANITA KUSHWAHA

#### *Secret Lives of Mothers & Daughters*

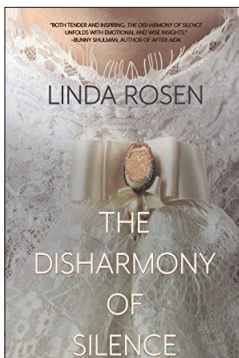
1/28/2020

Veena, Mala and Nandini are three very different women with something in common. Out of love, each bears a secret that will haunt her life—and that of her daughter—when the risk of telling the truth is too great. But secrets have consequences. Particularly to Asha, the young woman on the cusp of adulthood who links them together.

On the day after her eighteenth birthday, Asha is devastated to learn that she was adopted as a baby. What's more, her birth mother died of a mysterious illness shortly before then, leaving Asha with only a letter. Nandini, Asha's adoptive mother, has always feared the truth would come between them.

Veena, a recent widow, worries about her daughter Mala's future. The shock of her husband's sudden death leaves her shaken and convinces her that the only way to keep her daughter safe is to secure her future. Mala struggles to balance her dreams and ambition with her mother's expectations. She must bear a secret, the burden of which threatens her very life.

Three mothers, bound by love, deceit and a young woman who connects them all.



### LINDA ROSEN

#### *The Disharmony of Silence*

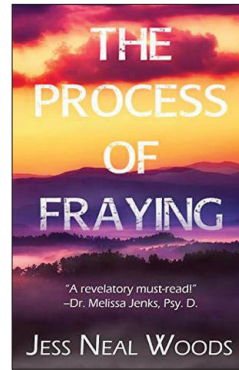
3/5/2020

In 1915, jealous, bitter Rebecca Roth cuts all ties with her life-long friends, the Pearls. Eight years later, Rebecca's son and young Lena Pearl begin keeping company in secret. Rebecca agrees to a truce when the couple marries. But the truce is fragile. Rebecca's resentments run deep.

In 2010, Carolyn Lee must come to grips with the fact that her mother's imminent death will leave her alone in the world. While preparing her childhood home for sale, she realizes that her mother's antique brooch is identical to the one pinned to the lady's dress in the painting hanging above the fireplace. Coincidence or connection? What she discovers has the potential to tear lives apart or to bring her the closeness and comfort she longs for.

# MORE

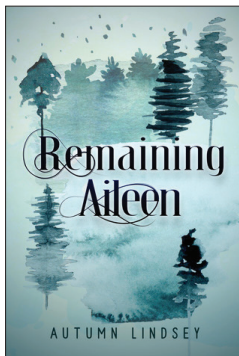
## MEMBER RELEASES



**JESS NEAL WOODS**  
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1/8/2019



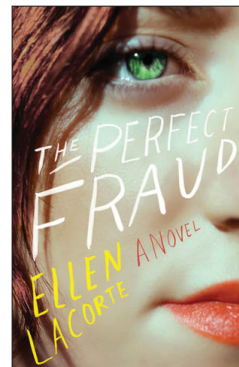
**LESLIE ROLLINS**  
Good-Time Girl  
2/1/2019



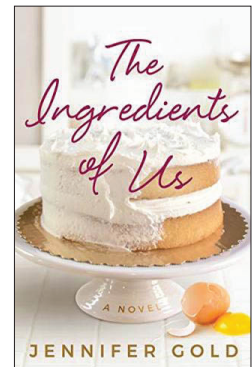
**AUTUMN LINDSEY**  
Remaining Aileen  
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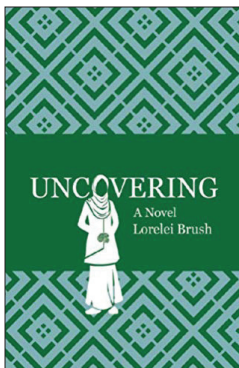
**JUDY KUNDERT**  
Sky Queen  
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**EILEEN LACORTE**  
The Perfect Fraud  
6/18/2019



**JENNIFER GOLD**  
The Ingredients of Us  
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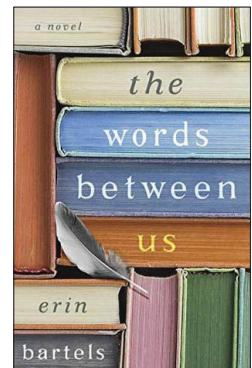
**LORELEI BRUSH**  
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7/2/2019



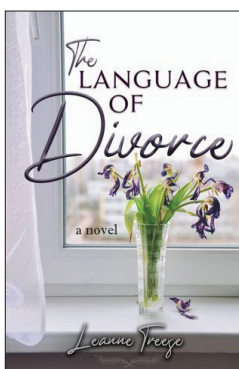
**SARAH JONES**  
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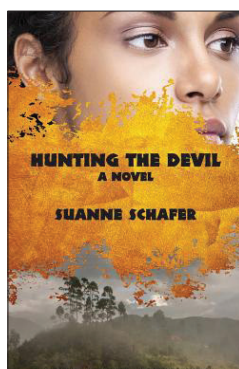
**PATRICIA V. DAVIS**  
Cooking for Ghosts  
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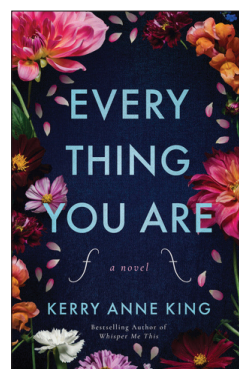
**ERIN BARTELS**  
The Words Between Us  
9/3/2019



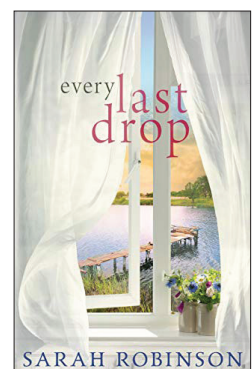
**LEANNE TREESE**  
The Language of Divorce  
9/10/2019



**SUANNE SCHAFER**  
Hunting the Devil  
9/15/2019



**KERRY ANNE KING**  
Everything You Are  
10/1/2019



**SARAH ROBINSON**  
Every Last Drop  
11/12/2019



## **ADOPT THESE FOUR AGREEMENTS TO SUCCEED IN 2020**



**R**emember when you first pressed pen to page and felt intoxicated by its power? A journey began, its twists and turns dictated by your curiosity, imagination, and love of language.

Then you started writing toward publication, and that seductive path started to feel a lot more like an expressway at rush hour as other drivers (Editor, Agent, Publicist, etc.) exerted their influence. Even your car now seemed to be driving you, fueled by a power that could make you skip past all the other cars or knock you right off the highway: “Market.”

In publishing, so much is beyond our control. This year, as you recommit to the success of your journey, why not start by recommitting to the one relationship you can control: the one you have with yourself. How do we negotiate this rocky, psychological terrain?

Many years ago, I found great answers within the Toltec wisdom that inspired Don Miguel Ruiz’s 1997 book, *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom*.

It’s a little book with a big message. Embracing its wisdom improved all aspects of my life. Let’s look at what its four tenets can offer us as writers.



## 1

**THE FIRST AGREEMENT:****BE IMPECCABLE WITH YOUR WORD.**

No doubt about it, the road to success is paved with honored commitments. Editors love authors who meet their deadlines, because doing so shows you are respectful and focused and humble enough to see that publishing is a business concern much larger than your story alone.

Today's writer must juggle many additional commitments as well. Conferences, book bloggers, interviewers, online forums, reading groups, and other writers will all want your time and attention. All of those engagements—and any future deadlines—are predicated on the notion that you are still a writer, leaving you crying out: when?

Only by acting with integrity toward self can you can be the person you want to be. If you want to be an author, that means showing up at your chosen job so you can pursue your writing goals.

Is this important? You're a creative after all—if you aren't in the mood to write today, can't you follow your niggling whim to binge *The Handmaid's Tale* instead?

Not if you told yourself you would write. Keeping your word with yourself is the only road to inner peace.

As someone who witnessed her husband's self-destruction, I know a little something about the stakes here. To ignore this agreement is to introduce the kind of dangerous psychic dissonance that is the result of believing one thing, and doing another.

*If you cannot hold yourself to your word and meet your writing goals, you are setting yourself up for a lifetime of inner failure.*

To succeed in writing you must either show up and do the work you've identified as your life's mission or renegotiate the terms of your commitment, and find a life that you can live with greater integrity. It's okay to say that you will journal and learn and doodle for another year or two while your kids are little. It's okay to say you're going to work for one hour each day while studying the work of other novelists. But it's not okay to be dishonest with yourself.

I know for a fact that this sounds a lot simpler than it is. Writing is hard. Finding time to do it is hard. But faking doesn't get you published. If you are ready to ramp up your career, you must also be ready to meet your obligations to self and others.

## 2

**THE SECOND AGREEMENT:****DON'T TAKE ANYTHING PERSONALLY.**

Accepting this agreement can save you needless suffering. What others say and do is a projection of their reality, not yours. Your work gave them a medium for expressing themselves, so pat yourself on the back, because that's a beautiful thing.

As a dance critic for nineteen years, this second agreement set me free. Unless I owned my words as informed personal opinion—as opposed to facts that could make or break careers—I could never have found the nerve to publish them. But this agreement can free novelists as well. Let's look at a few ways.

**■ FOLLOWING YOUR DREAM**

Cynics come disguised as family members, best friends, bosses—even writing partners might say you are wasting your time, considering the way the odds are against you. You will pour more money into this endeavor than you will ever make back. It takes years to hone that kind of craft and what if you never make it? You are a fool.

It's hard to hear such invalidating comments from the people you love. But listen again, through the filter of the second agreement. What are your loved ones saying about themselves? They are saying that they are afraid for you. That they fear the loss of your time and attention. That if you turn away from your dream, they can be released from their own striving.

By adopting the second agreement you can allow them to deal with their fears on their own.

**■ RECEIVING CRITIQUES**

I was once in a critique group with a man who said he was “correcting” my manuscript. Another man, in an esteemed and expensive workshop, wrote off my first manuscript as a “chick book” (yes, it was women's fiction). One reader said I should rewrite my story because they didn't like first person. These opinions were not helpful; it is not why I sought critique.

The second agreement suggests these advance readers were simply telling me things about them—that one thought of himself as a teacher, another as a manly man, another as a reader who prefers third person.

This agreement helps you translate usable critique.

**■ SEEKING AN AGENT**

I have rejected the word “rejection.” It is such a harsh, judgmental term—how does it help you to go through life, feeling multiply rejected?

I prefer “misalignment,” a choice empowered by the second agreement. When 112 agents said “no thanks” to my manuscript, they were not judging my work as unworthy; they were telling me that at this time they didn't know how to sell the project I sent them.

Now, I am not emotionless. The eight-year length of the search was at times discouraging, even though I continued to improve the manuscript. But why would I want to hire an agent to sell my work if they didn't know how to develop or champion it?

The second agreement will fortify you until you find the agent with whom you are perfectly aligned because their “no” was never intended to judge your worth.

**■ SURVIVING REVIEWS**

We humans love the arts because we get to know each other, and ourselves, through discussing them—whether that's on a date, during book club, or by writing reviews. This means that we writers will all receive both good and bad reviews of our work. We want this debate—it's so much worse if your work is roundly ignored. But take it from a former critic: if you are going to discount the bad reviews as personal opinion, you must discount the good reviews as the same. You haven't changed just because your work was reviewed—unless you let it change you.

By adopting the second agreement, you allow your readers to decide whether or not they connect with your work without disparaging you. If an attack sounds personal, it is because that reviewer is the type of person who can only gain personal power by trying to steal yours.

Let them try. They cannot hurt you, because you are untouchable.

## 3

### THE THIRD AGREEMENT: DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

“Communicate with others as clearly as you can,” says Ruiz—as writers, you’d think we’d have this one in the bag. We are all about communication! Yet as fiction writers we do so indirectly, while balancing character development, plot advancement, setting, word craft, metaphor, and more. And that’s just your novel, let alone the clarity of the emails you’re trying to answer and the tweets you’re trying to push out and blog posts that need tending and the gigs you’re trying to line up. Is it any wonder we sometimes fail to contextualize our comments, or express our needs, or ask all the right questions?

Yet a career is built on relationships that require clear communication. If we are the one failing to understand, we must seek answers. If a critique partner gives you the wrong kind of feedback, ask her to stop correcting your grammar and instead give you notes on how the story is adding up in her mind. If your career has stalled for eight months because you haven’t heard back from your agent, call her for an update. Don’t understand your contract? You won’t be the first—ask. If your book isn’t ready on time, tell your editor you want to give her the very best possible product and ask if your deadline includes any wiggle room. And if that means you’ll need more support at home, ask your spouse if s/he could cover dinners this week.

Pretty sure you see the thread here: don’t bungle these all-important exchanges on your end. JUST ASK. We can’t succeed by standing still; answers allow you to move on down your path.

## 4

### THE FOURTH AGREEMENT: ALWAYS DO YOUR BEST

Twenty-three years ago, I butted up against the toughest circumstances of my life when my first husband died by suicide after a daylong standoff at our idyllic little farm. Even though his alcoholism had plunged our family into financial jeopardy and I was bound to leave him, I still went to the wall again and again to get him the help he needed, making the standoff’s violent conclusion all the more shocking.

I learned a tough truth: there are dark forces in this world that are more powerful than any one high-achieving optimist’s means to combat them. But my actions absolved me of what could have been a horrific load of guilt and regret after his suicide. I knew I had done my best.

Almost two decades later, Sourcebooks gave me the opportunity to publish the novelization of those events in my sophomore novel, *The Far End of Happy*.

In *The Four Agreements*, Ruiz cautions us to do our best “under any circumstance.” Writing *The Far End of Happy* came with its own set of extreme circumstances, as I had all of ten months to wed emotionally-wrenching fact and fiction in a way that felt true, adapt it to a challenging structure, while still giving my all to the launch of my debut.

Once the book was delivered, I had to rest knowing I did my best given these circumstances.

Was it perfect? No. There was nothing perfect about that goddawful day anyway. It was very human, and the book and the way it’s written reflects that.

Was it simply “good enough”? Hell no. I have not, and will never, aspire to mediocrity. In a tough competitive industry, I do not believe this is how one stays published.

I am simply a writer, doing my best. I encourage you to do the same. Don Miguel Ruiz promises, “If you do your best always, transformation will happen as a matter of course.”

Be impeccable with your word. Don’t take anything personally. Don’t make assumptions. Always do your best. In 2020, commit to these agreements. These are things you can control. And if you are on your path because only writing affords you the transformation you seek in your life, you will succeed.



**Kathryn Craft**, the WFWA 2020 Guiding Scribe, is the author of novels *The Art of Falling* and *The Far End of Happy*, and chapters in *Author in Progress* and *The Complete Handbook of Novel Writing* from Writers Digest Books. Her 13 years as a freelance developmental editor inform monthly posts at Writer UnBoxed. [www.kathryncraft.com](http://www.kathryncraft.com)

## WORDS THAT DON'T EXIST (ACCORDING TO PRESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR), ARE OFTEN MISUSED, OR ARE UNNECESSARY (IN THEIR COMMON USAGE)

Some of these words will not be flagged by your word processor, but not always do they mean what you think. Can you spot which are actual words and which have a different meaning from those informally used?

**IRREGARDLESS** – the prefix is unnecessary. The suffix -less already indicates “without regard,” therefore “regardless” is all you need.

**EXPRESSO** – probably because English has the word “express,” many add the ‘x’ to the name of the beverage, which comes from Italian and is “espresso.”

**FIRSTLY** – when enumerating items, a person does not need to turn the numerals into adverbs. The numeral itself will be enough.

**HOPEFULLY** – this adverb exists, but its primary meaning is “in a hopeful manner.” For example, “he sighed hopefully” is correct. For the other uses it is best to indicate who hopes or to use the sentence “it is (to be) hoped.” For example, avoid “Hopefully, he will arrive on time” and use “I hope he arrives on time” instead.

**ALOT** – this is not a word. An easy way to remember the parts are separate is that you can insert a qualifier between them. For example, you can say “a whole lot.” The article and the noun are always separate in this case.

**SUPPOSABLY** – this one simply does not exist. It is also unnecessary because the term “supposedly” exists.

**FACTOID** – while many people use this to mean a trivial piece of information, it actually means a fake piece of information.



**CONTINUALLY** – this is certainly a word. However, many people use it to mean “continuously.” The word “continually” means “in regular intervals,” while continuously means “with no interval at all.” For example, If I continually check to see if he arrived, I check from time to time over a period. If the faucet is broken and water runs continuously, the water never stops.

**DISINTERESTED** – If you would like to signal a lack of interest in a specific topic, maybe you want to use “uninterested.” “Disinterested,” on the other hand, means without personal motivation, unbiased, and impartial. Some dictionaries already present both meanings as possibly pertaining to “disinterested,” but this seems a distinction worth keeping.

## Q&amp;A:

# An Author's Journey – One of Persistence and Dedication

By Kay Arthur

If you write, you're a writer. But being a writer raises another question—do you consider yourself an author before your book is published? Whether you do or not is an individual choice of how you consider your accomplishments. I have one shelved novel, a second in the querying process, and a third in progress. Each time I write the words “The End” I consider myself, in my own mind, an author of those precious pages that are the original creations of my own imagination. I am proud of those babies as I hold that binder of pages in my loving hands as a mother would her child, knowing I am their creator, after months and sometimes years of transporting those words from body and soul to ink on paper.

But, in the outside world, we want everyone to consider us authors. Sometimes we ask ourselves, why do we write? Most of us write because we love it; we like seeing our words on paper and feeling that utter sense of joy when we read them, and we know our work is good. We like using our imagination to come up with something original, and we like the way words create stories, describe feelings, and impact our emotions. But ultimately, we write so people can read our work. We want to see it published and in someone else's hands. And we want them to think it's good.

I love reading writers' success stories, and we thought you would too. I love knowing their journeys down the bumpy, mysterious, and sometimes uncharted road toward authorship. Success stories interest us, give us joy, and cheer us on. And as we focus on this new year of recommitment to our writing goals, perhaps their stories will motivate you and alter your own definition of success.

We enviously surveyed two authors who have successfully navigated that road and have held their published books in their hands. The following words are their own stories—to be read, devoured, and applauded. Both are interesting and different, but the same humble and proud threads are woven throughout their voices. You'll find yourself somewhere in those answers because we are all the same in one aspect—we are writers.



REBECCA HODGE



BARBARA JOSSELSOHN



## FEATURE

**REBECCA HODGE** is the author of *Wildland*, her debut novel, which will be released in February of 2020. Her website is [www.rebeccahodgefiction.com](http://www.rebeccahodgefiction.com).

■ **Did you always know you wanted to be a writer?**

*I've always been an avid reader but didn't envision myself as a writer until I was an adult. Even then, it took a while before I moved from playing around with short snippets to writing anything publishable. I wrote short stories for a time, published a half-dozen or so, but I like the challenges of novels better.*

■ **Is the first novel you had published the first one you wrote?**

*No. My debut novel, *Wildland* (released in February), is the fourth novel I've written. The first two will likely stay in a drawer, but the third one may resurrect itself. We'll see.*

■ **Where did you get the idea for your novel?**

*I was talking to my son who lives in Boulder, Colorado, and he casually mentioned that he was standing on his apartment balcony watching helicopters dump water on a nearby forest fire. The mom part of my brain was concerned, but the writer part of my brain was intrigued. What would it be like to write a story against the backdrop of a forest fire? That's what kicked things off for *'Wildland'*.*

■ **Who was your first reader? Did you have beta readers? How many?**

*I'm fortunate to be part of a five-person writing group that has been together for many years, and they are my first readers—chapter by chapter.*

■ **How many agents did you submit your query to before finding one to represent you? And how many requests did you have for a full manuscript before you got the call?**

*I submitted to about thirty agents via query letter and simultaneously entered the WFWA Rising Star contest. I received four requests for fulls from the queries, but when I became a finalist in the contest, I also got two requests for the full manuscript from agents who were judges. I ended up with two offers of representation—one from a query, and the one I accepted—from Nalini Akolekar, one of the Rising Star judges.*

■ **How long after being represented by an agent did you find a publisher?**

*Eighteen months: three months to revise per agent requests and fifteen months to find a publisher. During those fifteen months, I got a detailed Revise and Resubmit from an editor, liked the suggestions, and did a massive revision (changing my secondary POV character from one person to another, and working with an external editor to polish). The editor who requested the changes resigned her position a few weeks after we submitted the revisions, but the revised manuscript was then picked up elsewhere.*

■ **What words of advice do you have for aspiring authors?**

*Persistence is key. As you can tell, it's been a long journey. There are many (many) aspects of this business that are beyond your control, so focus on those aspects that you can control: (1) keep learning / keep improving; make your book the best it can be (2) connect to the writing community, and function professionally in that environment, and (3) enjoy the journey. The roller-coaster aspect of this business can be stressful, but do your best to hang on and find ways to embrace the twists.*

■ **What would you have done differently?**

*No regrets. I feel so fortunate to have met so many great writers and learned from so many great teachers. The fact that an actual book is coming out of this is an awesome icing on the cake.*



**THERE ARE MANY (MANY) ASPECTS OF THIS BUSINESS THAT ARE BEYOND YOUR CONTROL, SO FOCUS ON THOSE ASPECTS THAT YOU CAN CONTROL: (1) KEEP LEARNING / KEEP IMPROVING; MAKE YOUR BOOK THE BEST IT CAN BE (2) CONNECT TO THE WRITING COMMUNITY, AND FUNCTION PROFESSIONALLY IN THAT ENVIRONMENT, AND (3) ENJOY THE JOURNEY.**

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**READ AN EXCERPT FROM WILDLAND ON PAGE 15**

## FEATURE

**BARBARA JOSSELSOHN** is a New York-based novelist and freelance writer. Her first novel, *The Last Dreamer*, was published in 2015 by Lake Union, and her next two novels will be released in March and September 2020 by Bookouture. Her work can be found at [www.barbarasolomonjosselson.com](http://www.barbarasolomonjosselson.com).

### ■ Did you always know you wanted to be a writer?

*Yes! Like so many WFWA members, I grew up loving stories—both reading them and writing them. I loved imagining myself as the protagonist of any number of complex and emotional novels, struggling to work myself out of impossible situations and emerging wiser and stronger. I still do!*

### ■ How long did it take you to write your first novel?

*About fifteen years from idea to signed contract! I know that sounds like a crazy long time, and it is! But I was raising my children and working as a freelance magazine writer all that time, and I squeezed in the novel writing whenever I could. I never lost interest, and I never even considered giving up before it was done. Playing with my characters and seeing what they'd do was a reward I gave to myself at the end of a busy day!*

### ■ Is the first novel you had published the first one you wrote?

*Yes! The story was so close to my heart that I never wanted to put it away and start another.*

### ■ Where did you get the idea for your novel?

*I found my idea within my life—not the plot or the characters, but the theme. The idea came to me when I had young children. Could I devote myself to raising my family without losing myself? Once I knew that was the struggle I wanted to explore, the story unfolded from there.*

### ■ Who was your first reader? Did you have beta readers? How many?

*My first readers were a handful of close friends who gave me a lot of support and encouragement. But it wasn't until I enrolled in a novel-writing workshop at Sarah Lawrence College that I truly found a community that could teach me how to craft a book.*

### ■ How many times did you revise your WIP before submitting for representation?

*I would say I had three complete overhauls and dozens of mini revisions involving adding new characters, inserting new scenes, imagining new obstacles, etc.*

### ■ How many agents did you submit your query to before finding one to represent you? And how many requests did you have for a full manuscript before you got the call?

*I did three rounds of queries. In each of the first two rounds, I received a lot of requests for partials or fulls, but when I kept getting rejections, I stopped the querying to revise. I probably ended up submitting to a few dozen agents in total.*

### ■ What words of advice do you have for aspiring authors?

*Don't give up! I had an instructor who once said, "Persistence is more important than talent when it comes to getting published," and I would repeat that comment over and over. But equally important is to find a writing community—whether it's WFWA, a local writing circle, a university program, or all the above! Not only will these people help you get through the rough spots, they will also become some of your closest and most wonderful friends!*



**I HAD AN INSTRUCTOR WHO ONCE SAID, "PERSISTENCE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN TALENT WHEN IT COMES TO GETTING PUBLISHED," AND I WOULD REPEAT THAT COMMENT OVER AND OVER. BUT EQUALLY IMPORTANT IS TO FIND A WRITING COMMUNITY—WHETHER IT'S WFWA, A LOCAL WRITING CIRCLE, A UNIVERSITY PROGRAM, OR ALL THE ABOVE!**

**READ AN EXCERPT FROM  
THE LILAC HOUSE ON PAGE 15**

## EXCERPTS



### CHAPTER ONE MONDAY, 11:00 AM

Kat forced the last thumbtack through the yellow bedsheet and adjusted the fabric to make sure the bedroom mirror was covered. Facing her future was the goal of this trip to the southern Blue Ridge, but that didn't mean she had to face her reflection. Cowardly, perhaps, but no one would know. She lifted her empty suitcase off the bed and put it in the closet. A shame the rest of her life wouldn't tidy up so easily.

Lunch was next on her agenda, but the unexpected roar of a car struggling up the mountainous gravel road drew her to the front door, curious and a bit wary. This cottage sat by itself on a dead end. Someone must be lost.

She stepped onto the porch, ready to give directions, as a dust-covered 4Runner with dark-tinted windows came into view, dodging potholes and spitting pebbles in wide arcs. A robin and a pair of towhees took flight in a flurry.

Not someone lost—her daughter, Sara. They had made plans to meet for lunch in Franklin in two weeks to mark the halfway point of her stay, so Kat couldn't think of any reason Sara would drive an hour and a half to visit on her first day here.

A wide patch of gravel in front of the cottage ended at a stone bench that perched at the edge of a steep mountain drop-off. Sara parked, climbed out of the SUV, and waved. "Hi, Mom." She rooted around in the back seat and emerged with a bulging canvas bag and a bouquet of yellow daffodils and blue cornflowers. "I brought you some welcome-to-the-mountains gifts."

A nice gesture, but flowers didn't explain her daughter's arrival. Sara always had a master plan—something else was up. Regardless, it was nice to have her here. "Hi. You've come a long way. I've only been here a few hours."

## CHAPTER ONE

Anna mixed the pancake batter and thought about Greg's summer smell.

That's what she'd called it, his summer smell. It would return as if by magic every June, when the kids were finishing up school, and the azaleas under the front window were bursting out red. She remembered breathing it on him a year ago, when he'd come back so early from his run, wearing that old Binghamton University tee shirt he loved. He'd run out of steam, he'd explained—he hadn't slept well last night in anticipation of the five-hour drive to Lilac House. She'd poured him some ice water and followed him to the table, where she'd stretched her pajama-clad legs onto his bare knees. He'd kneaded her toes for a few luscious minutes, and then gone upstairs to take a shower and rouse the kids, shouting, "Last one to breakfast gets the pancake that fell on the floor!"

God, how she missed that smell. It was warm, kind of like sandalwood. A little citrusy. A little cinnamon. Less apparent in the morning when the scent of body wash prevailed. Stronger after he'd exercised, or in the evening, when the kids were asleep and she'd curl up by his side on the sofa, the two of them lit only by the glow of the TV...

"Mommy?"

Anna started. "What? *What?*?" she blurted out.

Evie stood in the kitchen doorway, her hands grasping the hem of her green "Lake Summers Day Camp" tee shirt. Her copper hair was neatly parted in the middle and pulled back into a low, sensible ponytail.

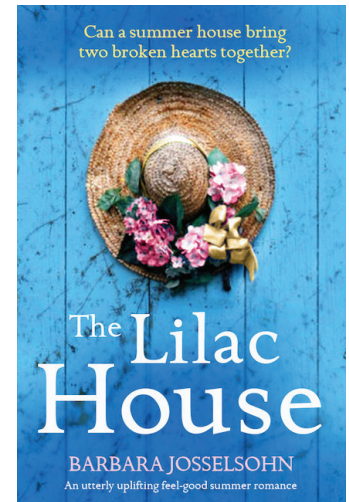
"I just wanted to show you I'm ready," she said, her ten-year-old voice apologetic. "You told us to come down when we were dressed."

"Yes, of course I did, and look at that—you found last year's camp shirt!" Anna forced herself back into the present. "You know, you'll get a new one this year. Blue, I think."

"Blue's good. But I like the green. But I like blue, too. I'll like them both, right, Mom?"

"Of course you will," Anna said, walking over to her daughter and stroking her cheek. "They're both great colors. You'll be very happy with the new shirt, I promise. Okay?" She smiled when Evie nodded. "Okay! Now, would you do me a favor, and see if your brother's dressed? Tell him it's time for breakfast. And make sure you've put everything you want in your duffel."

Evie went back upstairs, and Anna heated the griddle. She hadn't meant to be staring off into space like that. There was still a lot to be done. She and Greg had instinctively divided the final chores each June, with her packing up the last-minute items and him preparing the house to be empty all summer. They'd been such a great team, working in tandem without saying a word. Now he was gone, and it was all on her, and she felt ashamed for taking his role for granted.





# It's Great to Be a Writing Warrior

By Elizabeth (Beth) A. Havey

In the summer of 2013, I was adjusting to a major move from the Midwest to Southern California—decorating my new home, gardening and writing. Then one afternoon, the perfect community I might have dreamt up on my own, suddenly appeared on Facebook: **Join Women's Fiction Writers Association**, it suggested. We are new, we are here for you. Wow, exciting. I joined.

Being alone at the computer can be a joy. But in our now technology-driven world, writing in a vacuum is not the best choice. Charlotte Bronte discussed plotting with her sisters who also wrote novels. Editors like Maxwell Perkins and Robert Gottlieb worked closely with their clients: F. Scott Fitzgerald and Toni Morrison. Even Emily Dickenson shared her work with her sister-in-law, Susan Huntington Dickinson. Though we start alone with a keyboard or pen and paper, we often pause and wonder—where is this going? Will it get published? Will I ever have readers?

I've been fortunate to have mentors. My older brother, a professor of English literature, made helpful comments. The women in the Flossmoor Writers Group (Illinois) helped me improve my short stories, some of those stories I've published. When I lived in Iowa, the editors at Meredith Publishing were supportive of the proofreading and copyediting I did for their garden and decorating books.

But it has always been my novels that fuel my writing life. There is nothing better than spending hours reading through notes that go with me everywhere, then creating, weaving those notes into a scene, a story, even a novel. In my Iowa years, I wrote three novels, queried two of them, had encouragement, but no publishing contracts. But even so, I knew I was improving. In California, I would have more time, a more dedicated focus. And then suddenly—the added bonus—I had my membership in WFWA.

WFWA became the support group I needed. Their definition of women's fiction as *layered stories in which the plot is driven by the main character's emotional journey* was brilliant. It moved women's fiction from romance into broader areas. It celebrated the challenges, joys, and disappointments that people live with every day—either in their imaginations as writers or in real life moments that must make it to the page. My novels dealt with an abducted child, a wife with a cheating husband, and a woman's passion for a man she believes will never be hers. I was writing women's fiction.





## FEATURE

We all know that people who have common goals easily form friendships. Following the WFWA Facebook page helped me virtually meet members, learn what each was working on—and because I was also a blogger, expand my virtual presence. They were all eager to share ideas, offer suggestions, and listen.

Our WFWA membership grew. There were people working full time, part-time, raising children, who were writing fiction at the end of the day, on weekends, or waiting for a piano lesson or a baseball practice to end. The founders had seen a need to support women's fiction writers on the journey. And of course, the ultimate goals of the organization were to help members find an agent, get published, all the while supporting each other, applauding those who succeeded, and advising those still working toward individual goals. Amazing! And I also had all these new friends who shared my interests and dreams. We would help each other, benefit from each other's work while expanding WFWA and supporting each new program and workshop as it was added.

### BEYOND THE FACEBOOK FORUM

I began to take advantage of WFWA's programs. In 2015, Laura Drake's workshop, writing a query letter, helped begin my process of agent searching. Another workshop focused on writing the synopsis and log line. When Donald Maass presented his first class, he became a favorite of WFWA and of mine. His engaging ideas and amazing personal comments kept me and my fellow writers at the keyboard. I have an entire notebook dedicated to what I've learned during Donald's workshops.

I also believe WFWA membership fights writer's block. There is always a Podcast to listen to, or a workshop or webinar to participate in. Thinking of querying, need help with your pitch? Want to enter a contest? WFWA has it all. And if that isn't enough immersion, there is always the best way to forge

friendships, listen to established writers and teachers, and just have amazing time with fellow writers—the annual WFWA Retreat. And this year there are two, one in Albuquerque and one in Baltimore.

For my first retreat, I flew to Albuquerque, and within minutes, right there in the airport, were other writers, women I knew from being online—it was truly like meeting old friends. That evening, walking into a meeting room for the first time, again: Barbara, Laura and Orly; Peggy, Kathryn, and Christine. Nancy Johnson! Nancy and I discovered in three minutes that we had lived in the same suburb of Chicago.

Kathryn Craft (our 2020 Guiding Scribe) sat with me at dinner and provided encouraging advice. And Barbara Claypole White had a wild story about not feeling well, sending her husband to the drug store and then getting on the airplane no matter what. And though I am only naming a few of our amazing women, please know there are so many more. Get ready to read each other's name tags, then shout and hug, laugh and smile as the sharing of ideas immediately begins.

### LET'S GET PUBLISHED

Being a member of WFWA also meant I was approached by a major agent during one of the WFWA workshops. The agent provided some advice on the assignment, but also asked for the full version of my manuscript. As I continued to query, stating the manuscript was under consideration by this agent, more agents were interested. But I was not able to solidify a deal, this also being all part of the process. I did learn a lot, and over time have received encouragement from agents. Of course, I keep writing.

I often participate in WOW, the pitch sessions and the webinars. This past year I was part of the Mentoring Program as a Mentee, and I helped with our Diversity Program, reading and approving statements, under the guidance

**THERE WERE PEOPLE WORKING FULL TIME, PART-TIME, RAISING CHILDREN, WHO WERE WRITING FICTION AT THE END OF THE DAY, ON WEEKENDS, OR WAITING FOR A PIANO LESSON OR A BASEBALL PRACTICE TO END.**



of Stephanie Schlitz, who headed the Inclusion Team. A few years ago, I was delighted when Erin Bartels asked me to write a piece for Write On. I have also entered my novel in Rising Star and I read three novels to help with the Star Award.

I continue to write: my novels, short stories and my memoir. I have an exciting idea for that, which will blend of fiction and nonfiction. I'm also working on a story about a man who escaped from South Africa's apartheid in the sixties, came to the U.S., received his education and became a well-known Chicago neurosurgeon. When Nelson Mandela was released from prison, Isaac went back to South Africa to meet with him for a possible position in his cabinet. I believe in Isaac and his story and I know it will eventually appear somewhere.

Writing is my life. I write every day and I publish an essay every week on my blog: <http://boomerhighway.org>. WFWA provides me with excellent resources, programs and encouragement along with the wonderful friends that I have made through the organization.

Write On, everyone, it's the true life within each of us.



**Beth Havey**, a former teacher of English and labor and delivery nurse, attended the Iowa Summer Writing Workshops working with Elizabeth Strout and other amazing writers. She proofread nonfiction for Meredith Books and co-authored *Miami Ink: Marked for Greatness*. In 2015 Foreverland Press published her story collection, *A Mother's Time Capsule*. Other credits include Chicago Tribune, Better Homes & Gardens, Des Moines Register, The Nebraska Review, and literary and small magazines. Each week Beth publishes an essay on her blog: <http://boomerhighway.org>. Other online publications include: Writer Unboxed and Women Writers, Women's Books. Beth is proud to be an initial member of WFWA.

# BIG LESSONS From Little Women

By Barbara Linn Probst

Is there any women's fiction writer who hasn't seen Greta Gerwig's *Little Women*? If you haven't, stop reading this, and GO! But if you have, you've probably reflected on how times have changed—and not changed—for women who want to be writers.

For sure, there are aspects of the story, set one hundred sixty years ago, that seem to be timeless. We watch, and we know exactly how Jo is feeling. We echo her horror when she discovers the only copy of her manuscript is gone, destroyed. Her fervor is our own as a new story demands to be written, no matter how tired she is. And, of course, we see ourselves in the unforgettable final shots of her face as she holds her book in her hands. The book itself. Not someone's opinion of it on Kirkus or Goodreads or Amazon. Not a blurb or a sales report. Just the book. The real object, her creation.

Those final moments of the film really hit home for me. As someone preparing to launch my own debut novel, I sometimes worry that I'm so consumed with promotion and marketing that I've forgotten the *feeling* visible on Jo's face when she holds her creation. Part thrill, part quiet pride. *I did this*. That feeling is real and true, no matter how the reviews and sales figures turn out, and it will be there when the frenzy has abated. That glorious feeling of being a channel for the story is unlike any other. It provides a sense of connection and purpose.

That's the first—and most important—lesson from *Little Women*.

## LESSON #1. IT'S ABOUT THE BOOK.

On the other hand, we live in a very different era. In Jo's day, it was just her and her publisher—face-to-face as she pushed back to negotiate her worth and insisted on retaining copyright and control. Wouldn't it be nice to be able to stare down a publisher, to engage in a battle of wills?

While we may not be able to do that nowadays, we're still faced with the question Jo had to face: What will I fight for, as an artist? Is there something that would make me walk away from an offer, a line I wouldn't cross—title, cover, ending, audio rights? *Should* there be, if I'm an inexperienced newbie with no real leverage? Or should I be grateful for any opportunity to get my words and stories in print?

It's a question that each writer has to ask herself, and her answer may be different at different points in her career. It's the *asking oneself* that's important. Let's have the courage to ponder our values and decide what matters.



Sony Pictures



## LESSON #2. FIGURE OUT WHERE YOU STAND.

If you've seen the film, you'll remember there are moments when Jo does just the opposite, accepting the publisher's dictum instead of fighting back. The first time is when her publisher tells her that he'll print her story, but only in an abbreviated form. It's far too wordy, he tells her. Jo is hurt, but she agrees.

*Kill those darlings. Make it better.*

Professor Bhaer does the same thing when he tells Jo that he doesn't think much of the pages she's shown him. He's like the workshop leader or developmental editor—the one you've hired at no small cost—who delivers that wallop of tough love. Sometimes you have to set your bruised ego aside, pull up your big girl pants, and try again.

## LESSON #3. BE OPEN TO WHAT YOU DON'T WANT TO HEAR.

There's another moment in the film that's uncomfortable for writers; anyway, it was for me. It's when Jo agrees to change the ending of her book because the publisher tells her that no one will buy it if she doesn't.

The scene parallels what happened to Alcott herself. After the publication of the first volume of *Little Women*, covering the March sisters' childhood, Alcott voiced her frustration that so many of her fans wanted to see Jo get married. "Girls write to ask who the little women marry, as if that was the only end and aim of a woman's life," Alcott wrote in her journal. She wanted Jo to remain a spinster, devoted to her writing, "but so many enthusiastic young ladies wrote to me clamorously demanding that she should marry Laurie, or somebody, that I didn't dare refuse and out of perversity went and made a funny match for her."

She compromised, in other words, in order to continue working as a writer. Was she weak? Or practical? How much choice did she have?

## AND HERE'S LESSON #4. APPRECIATE THE GIFT OF CHOICE.

Unlike Jo, we have choices. We can find beta readers to tell us if our story might, in fact, be better with a different ending. We can enter pitch contests or hire professionals to assess the marketability of our work. If we disagree with their views, we can self-publish. No matter how daunting the world of publishing may seem, we have choices in 2020 that would have been unthinkable in 1860.

This issue of *Write ON!* is about redefining our goals. That could mean finding a fresh way to formulate our definition of "success," or it could mean renewing something that's gotten buried under all the activities that surround being a writer—the queries and pitches, tweets and posts, blogs and blurbs—but are not the writing itself.

*Which is it for you?*

*Which of these lessons from Little Women can help you find that new vision?*

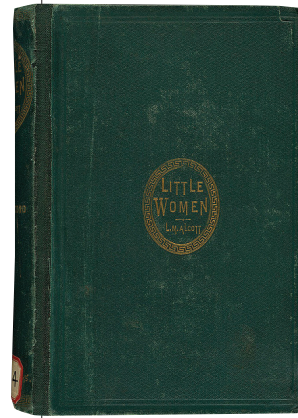


**Barbara Linn Probst** is a writer, blogger, former teacher, and therapist living on an historic dirt road in New York's Hudson Valley. Her debut novel, *Queen of the Owls* (launching in April 2020), is the story of a woman's search for wholeness framed around the art and life of Georgia O'Keeffe. It has been selected as one of the 20 most anticipated books of 2020 by *Working Mother* and will be the May 2020 selection for the Pulpwood Queens, a network of nearly 800 book clubs across the U.S. Her second novel is slated for publication in April 2021. To learn more, please visit [www.BarbaraLinnProbst.com](http://www.BarbaraLinnProbst.com).

## THE ENDURING POWER OF THE PRINTED WORD

The movie *Little Women* is based on the well-known book by Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888), who may be one of America's first-ever women's fiction writers.

Alcott didn't think of her book as "women's fiction," of course, since the term didn't exist back then. In fact, the story was written for girls, not women. Thomas Niles, Alcott's publisher, wanted her to write a book about girls that would have widespread appeal—in other words, make a



lot of money. Alcott resisted, reportedly confiding to a friend, "I could not write a girl's story, knowing little about any but my own sisters and always preferring boys."

Despite her lack of enthusiasm, Alcott set to work and within a short time had a dozen chapters. She sent them to Niles, who agreed that they were dreadfully dull. But Niles' niece read and liked them, so Alcott went on with the story, basing it loosely on her own family. The finished manuscript was shown to several girls, who declared it "splendid." As Alcott wrote, "they are the best critics, so I

should definitely be satisfied."

*Little Women* was an immediate success, surprising both author and publisher, as readers demanded to know "what happens next" and "who do the little women marry?" Alcott quickly completed a second volume, which was equally successful. The two volumes were combined into a single novel in 1880.

According to Alcott scholar Sarah Elbert, Alcott ended up creating an entirely new form of literature that combined elements from children's fiction with elements from popular sentimental novels—a coming-of-age chronicle about young women struggling with issues of loyalty and ambition, selfishness and generosity, as they emerge from childhood and seek their individual identities. Through the personalities of the four March sisters, the book explores intertwined themes of work, love, and family as its four protagonists explore differing versions of a specifically female journey.

*Little Women* was published 140 years ago, yet the appeal of the March sisters is timeless. The emotional journey that Alcott lays out in her book—four journeys, in fact—have provided lasting literary power that has endured across generations and sparked translation into countless versions for stage and screen.

Barbara will be contributing regularly in a new column entitled "Writing Matters"



# FINAL THOUGHT

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Totally stolen from Laura Drake

The scariest  
moment  
is always  
just  
before  
you start.

– STEPHEN KING, On Writing



**WRITEON!**