

WINTER2021



The Quarterly Magazine of the Women's Fiction Writers Association

WRITEON!

**ONLY
ONE RULE
+ CREATING
CHARACTER
THROUGH
COMMUNITY**



**WE'RE
ON THIS
JOURNEY
TOGETHER.**

**IN THEIR
WORDS:
LORELEI
BRUSH**

**+ NEW
FEATURE:
LET'S FIX
THIS!**

WINTER 2021

CONTENTS



FEATURES

9 Only One Rule
by Therese Gilardi
and Lita Harris

13 In Their Words:
Lorelei Brush
by Kay Arthur

COLUMNS

Guiding Scribe: Creating
Character Through Community
by Tiffany Yates Martin

7

Let's Fix This! by Leslie Lehr

11

DEPARTMENTS

President's Letter

4

Letter from the Editor

5

Member Releases

6

Contest Winner

6

Volunteer Spotlight: Janet Rundquist
and Sheri Taylor-Emery

15

Final Thought

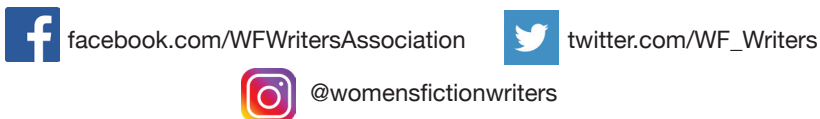
17

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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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.

STAFF

KAY ARTHUR Managing Editor

Kay is now retired after working 30 years in Healthcare Administration. She splits her time between Phoenix and a cabin in the mountains of Prescott, Arizona, where she loves to write, paint, and enjoy the great outdoors. Of course, spending time with her husband, two dogs, and family is the best part of her life. She is fully engrained in the writing community and has three novels in various stages of creation. Her website is www.kdarthur.com.



SHERI TAYLOR-EMERY Art Director

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



BROOKE WILLIAMS Copy Editor

Brooke is a novelist, childcare provider, fitness instructor, and Girl Scout leader. When she isn't writing or devouring stacks of good books, she's helping out at the local elementary school, working on her MFA, or haunting her favorite local taco joint. She lives in Ohio with her husband and four children.



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.



PRESIDENT'S LETTER

When you first realized you were a writer, did you wander from writing group to writing group looking for “your people”? I did. One group was writing essays and screenplays, and another was focused on literary fiction. We’d meet, read our work, and give each other critiques in person. This isn’t to say these groups didn’t have their merits. The members were all good writers. But I was just starting on my writer’s journey—I didn’t know what kind of writer I was yet—and I didn’t connect with their writing, or with them. So, I wandered on.

When I first joined WFWA in the month it was formed, I was immediately recruited to volunteer. Founding President Orly Konig was so encouraging that I was soon in personal contact with almost all of our 100 or so members to talk about workshops, while *also* talking about our writing and ourselves. Over the years, many have become my dearest friends.

Since then, WFWA has grown to over 1,400 members worldwide. I may never have the opportunity to know each one. But here’s the thing: we’re all standing shoulder to shoulder under this umbrella of the WFWA community. What does that mean? Belonging. WFWA is a network I turn to over and over. I can hop onto the [WFWA Facebook Community](#) page any time and find supportive conversations happening. The wealth of experience and information our members bring to the organization—and their generosity in sharing it—has been one of my favorite things about WFWA from day one.

■ Once the restrictions on gathering in person are lifted, I can reach out to [members in my region](#) and meet them for coffee or writing or both. Until then, we can meet from anywhere for [virtual writing dates](#).

■ If my story includes a character with special skills and I need to speak to someone who has that experience, I can search our [list of member experts](#) who’ll be happy to answer my questions about it.

■ When I needed feedback on my manuscript, I applied to become part of an ongoing [critique group](#). But if I need help with just a query letter or pitch, I can post to a [forum](#) of members who will quickly offer input. Or I can check out other members’ [pitches and queries that worked](#).

Of course, being on the “inside,” I know how much work goes on behind the scenes to make all of these resources possible: over 100 volunteers giving their time, expertise and care.

When I was first asked to volunteer, I feared I had nothing to offer. But we each bring unique skills to the table, and when we all chip in, it adds up to one thing: community. Every member is a thread, and when we weave our talents together, we all benefit.

Let 2021 be the year you [become part](#) of the WFWA fabric, enriching the community that welcomes us, and strengthens our writing and personal lives. We’d love to have you!

Write On!

Christine Adler



WHEN I WAS FIRST ASKED TO VOLUNTEER, I FEARED I HAD NOTHING TO OFFER. BUT WE EACH BRING UNIQUE SKILLS TO THE TABLE, AND WHEN WE ALL CHIP IN, IT ADDS UP TO ONE THING: COMMUNITY. EVERY MEMBER IS A THREAD, AND WHEN WE WEAVE OUR TALENTS TOGETHER, WE ALL BENEFIT.

“Find Your People. Love Them Hard.”



I saw this quote the other day from some unknown source, and it hit home for various reasons.

We writers are a lonely lot. Even in a room of people, our minds are continuously thinking, pondering, or plotting. We scour faces and look for ideas, sifting through the possibilities for stories to be penned.

We crave isolation so we can write. We crave time so we can think. We crave solitude because it spurs our imagination, and we learn to lean on ourselves and our intuitive nature so that words begin to flow. The pounding of keys becomes music to our ears.

But when our fingers pause and our mind is weary, we want our people. We wish for others like us who understand our moods, recognize our needs, and applaud our gathering of souls.

This is where WFWA comes in. We are a community of writers who understand what you need in this sometimes weird, often lonely, and mostly imaginative world we live in.

We need those who support, give wisdom, share experiences, and bounce ideas—those with understanding hearts who say, “Come join us, and we’ll help get you there.”

I’m one of those people who read the acknowledgements of the novel I’m reading before I finish the story. My fingers run to the back of the book and see who the author thanked. Those

people become real to me then, those writers whose journey has been just as difficult as mine. I see their community of people who’ve helped them along the way. It gives me hope. And it reminds me that we don’t have to do it alone.

This issue is dedicated to community, one of the founding values in WFWA’s mission statement. It is dedicated to the people in the back of the book who can help us navigate this exciting and seemingly impossible journey called writing.

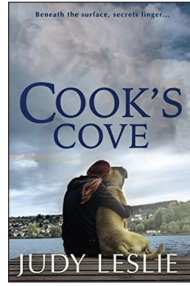
In this issue, we find much to offer our members including an article on community from our new Guiding Scribe, Tiffany Yates Martin, and a new regular feature entitled “Let’s Fix This!” Also in this issue, author, editor, and WFWA member Leslie Lehr will show us some great tips on the infamous query letter. This issue’s author interview is with Lorelei Brush, author of *Uncovering*, a 2020 finalist in the STAR Award.

We are your people. We are your community of writers who can help you along your journey. Let us be the group you run to when you finally pry your fingers from the keys and find yourself yearning for connection. Let us find ourselves in the back of your book.

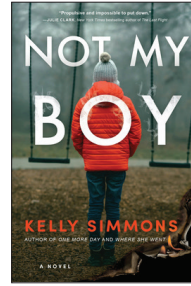
Your source, your partner, your cheerleader.

Your people. Love them hard.

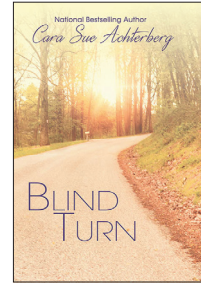
MEMBER RELEASES



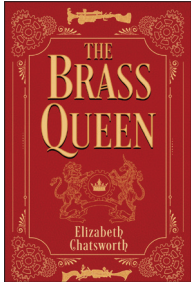
JUDY LESLIE
Cook's Cove
1/4/21



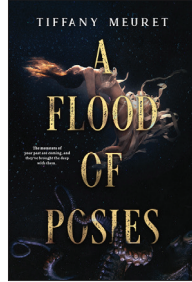
KELLY SIMMONS
Not My Boy
1/5/21



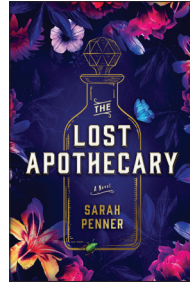
CARA ACHTERBERG
Blind Turn
1/7/21



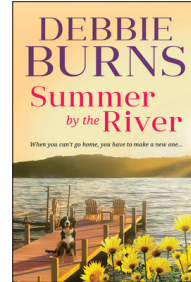
ELIZABETH CHATSWORTH
The Brass Queen
1/12/21



TIFFANY MEURET
A Flood of Posies
2/9/21



SARAH PENNER
The Lost Apothecary
3/2/21



DEBBIE BURNS
Summer by the River
3/2/21



LIBBY HUBSCHER
Meet Me in Paradise
3/23/21

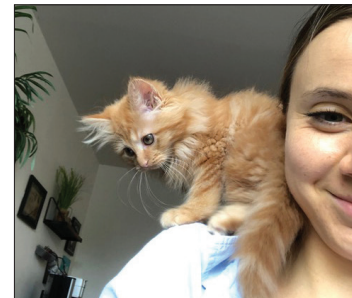
SHOOT AND SHARE CONTEST:

AND THE WINNER IS ...

Laura Ashwood and her furry friend, Gus. Laura will receive a \$25 gift certificate to her favorite Indie book store. Thanks to these members for sharing pics of their pets. Look for the next contest to be just as fun!



Laura Ashwood and Gus



Mallory Arnold & Ariana Grande



Leah DeCesare and Piper



Annie Gerlach & Jingles



Elizabeth Chatworth & Boo



Dee Buckingham's Rosie



CREATING CHARACTER THROUGH **COMMUNITY**

So much of who we are as individuals is shaped by our communities: our families, friends, romantic relationships, coworkers, neighbors, sometimes even casual encounters. The people who surround us impact our perspective, our ideologies, our biases and blind spots...what we know, what we want, and what we dare to dream. They can contribute to the wounds that form our vulnerabilities and frailties and can also help us heal them.

This holds true for the characters in our stories as well. No woman is an island; the people around your protagonists have an enormous impact on who they were, who they are, and who they become in the course of the story. If we want to create real, fully dimensional characters readers feel they know, we have to consider the communities that shape them and influence their arcs.

In Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half*, for example, identical twins Stella and Desiree run away together from their insular 1950s Louisiana town. In New Orleans, Stella decides to pass as white to apply for a well-paying job that wouldn't have been available to her as a black woman, marries her boss, and goes on to live a life of rarefied privilege. Desiree moves to DC to work with the FBI and finds herself in an abusive marriage she flees from with her daughter, reluctantly returning to her hometown.

Even in just this fragment of the story you can see how profoundly the protagonists' characters are impacted by the community around them. Their stifling small town where everyone knows the girls—and everybody else—is also where the girls witnessed their father being lynched by a mob outside their front door, and their mother subsequently pressed them into dead-end domestic jobs for a well-off white family, needing the extra money for the family to survive...which in turn is where Stella is abused. All these human interactions influence their trajectory by pushing the girls to flee.

GUIDING SCRIBE

Stella's and Desiree's lives begin to diverge as the communities they live in do—Stella is moving in a white world that Desiree is excluded from—and the choices each makes as a result profoundly impact her options, her path, and her goals.

The new communities around them as they move in separate circles continue to dictate their arcs: Stella is living a lie, deep in the fabric of her upscale white social circle and constantly in fear of being discovered. Desiree feels forced back to the small town she desperately wanted to escape, her choice to move in with her mother and grandmother closing her world in again even as it offers her a chance to open up her daughter's by offering her the safety of this insular community.

These aren't faceless situations the women exist in—they are made up of individuals who create the communities around them, and Bennett creates a memorable and distinct cast of characters who profoundly influence and direct her protagonists' journeys.

Think about your own story, your own main characters. Who are the people in their immediate orbit as the story begins? What influence do they have on your character's situation at her "point A"? Who does she love? confide in? work with? encounter in her daily routine? Who factors into the turning point that changes her trajectory? assists her on the path? stands in her way?

Think about where she came from—the factors that shaped her and brought her to that point A: What were her parents like? Did she have siblings? What relationship did they have? Was she popular in school, or a misfit—and how did that shape the person she became? Was there a particular friend or teacher who made her feel special or smart or interesting? What romantic relationships has she had, and how did they impact her?

That community around her when she was younger is often an intrinsic part of the fabric of who she is *now* in your story. For instance, perhaps she once dreamed of being a dancer because of a ballet her grandparents took her to as a young child.



THINK ABOUT YOUR OWN STORY, YOUR OWN MAIN CHARACTERS. WHO ARE THE PEOPLE IN THEIR IMMEDIATE ORBIT AS THE STORY BEGINS? WHAT INFLUENCE DO THEY HAVE ON YOUR CHARACTER'S SITUATION AT HER "POINT A"?

The ballerina and her grandparents are part of the community that shaped her path. So is the dance teacher who pushed her to excel, and the other student who got the scholarship our heroine needed to continue her training and destroyed her hopes for a dance career, making her feel that dreams are out of reach and resulting in the corporate career she resigned herself to—and hates.

The dog-eat-dog salespeople in her department who constantly make her feel she's treading water as fast as she can to keep up? They are part of her community now, impacting her. So is the boss who sidelines her, or praises her, or fires her. Maybe even the acquaintance who mechanically offers platitudes about one door closing and another opening—but perhaps it sparks a new drive in our heroine to revisit her childhood passion and is the first step that leads her to eventually open her own dance studio.

That's not to say that you need to (or should) show every single encounter in your characters' lives or spend swaths of ink creating all these relationships or her backstory—that would bog down the story. But consider these threads that form the tapestry of each main

character's life and her path in *this* story you're telling in *this* manuscript, and look for smooth, organic ways to weave in those influences to create a sense of the community that surrounds and influences them.

One way to learn how to do this—as with so much of writing craft—is to become an observer of your own life and reactions. Try spending a single day noting each time the people in your life affect you, whether those from the past who shaped you, those who impact your daily life in the present, or those who help motivate you toward your future: the parents who instilled your values, your spouse or kids whose daily moods impact your own, your coworkers who affect you, the friends who comfort or inspire you, even the people in the news who affect your outlook, or the grocery clerk whose smile gives you a lift after a long day.

None of us exists in a vacuum, and just as the people who make up our world—our community—impact nearly every element of our lives, the community peopling your protagonist's world is often as intrinsic to her arc as the protagonist herself.

Visit Tiffany at www.foxprinteditorial.com or www.phoebefoxauthor.com.

ONLY ONE RULE



By Therese Gilardi and Lita Harris

“THERE’S ONLY ONE HOUSE RULE.”

That’s the greeting Michele Montgomery offers everyone who joins the WFWA Writing Dates on Zoom. The unofficial program started as a temporary outlet for members as a distraction from the confines of COVID-19, and as a way for writers to connect and remain creative in a challenging time.

Writing in the best of times is a solitary profession. Toss in a pandemic, and suddenly the days of friends gathering around a kitchen table have evaporated. No longer are we able to share an in-person working lunch with our writing partners. No more brainstorming our next project together while gorging on homemade quiche and copious amounts of chocolate. Also gone is the enjoyment of sipping a cup of tea at the local Barnes & Noble while editing our latest manuscripts.

The Writing Dates were meant to help replace some of that lost connection for a couple of weeks with the opportunity for writers to check in and talk about their current works-in-progress for a few minutes followed by forty-five minutes of quiet writing time over Zoom. But what started as a temporary fix has turned into an official, solid offering from WFWA. Members at all stages of their careers, from the not-yet-published to the best-selling, log on from big cities, tiny towns, and even an island in the Pacific. Everyone is welcome and included. Which is very ... Michele.

It’s impossible to understand the alchemy of these writing dates without knowing a bit about the woman who had the brilliant idea to form them in the first place. You probably recognize Michele Montgomery’s name from the WFWA Board of Directors, where she serves as Secretary. Or maybe you’ve read Michele’s work in *The New York Times*. She represents what makes WFWA so special. Although it is a professional organization, it’s also a community full of writers generous with ideas, energy, and a strong desire to help each other succeed.

FEATURE

In this trying time full of unpredictability, Michele and the writing date crew are an anchor of stability. Every day, no matter what happens in the outside world, the Writing Dates occur. Although Michele is the only one who makes daily appearances, the majority of the group logs on most days of the week. It's a group bonded by our love of the written word, our desire to talk shop, and the magic that seems to take place when we're aware that the people on the other side of our screens are also struggling to move the cursor across the page while we're fiddling with our words.

The writing process is less solitary when you have a supportive group who understands the struggles of the writing life and cheers when you achieve even the smallest of goals. And we are there to lift each other when writing even one new word carries a weight you are too tired to bear. Attending these writing sessions and meeting these wonderful people offers a support group without leaving home, and the established writing schedule provides accountability.

Being able to throw out a question and get immediate answers is another wonderful benefit. The participants bring a wealth of knowledge to the group about the writing and publishing process. We are all teachers and students, and the Writing Dates have been instrumental in filling our creative wells. The lack of a competitive forum is comforting. You show up to write new words, outline a new book, craft a query, or build your timeline. Your focus is set by your own expectations. There is no pretense, just unconditional support and encouragement from fellow writers. There is no commitment to time and output, other than your own goal and the availability you establish for yourself.

For some, participation in these



If you are in search of accountability and supportive writers who want you to succeed, Member Writing Dates can be found under programs on the main page of the Women's Fiction Writers Association website along with many more tools for writers.

sessions has resulted in several rounds of edits, a new short story, revisions on dormant manuscripts that would have never been revisited, and most of all, a renewed interest in writing. But our writing sessions aren't about word counts or other arbitrary measures of progress unless we want them to be. Rather, they're a chance for us to work on self-directed goals, gently hold ourselves accountable, and encourage our fellow writers. It's such a joy to be part of this laid-back group, who will not judge but rather cheer each other on, even on writing days that are less than stellar.

Using Zoom means that we connect in a way that allows us to see each other's expressions, meet each other's pets, and sneak a peek at each other's working spaces. This face-to-face contact does much to rip away the terrible isolation that has shadowed us during this pandemic. The supportive community takes away some of the sting of not being

able to write in cozy libraries or scribble in favorite bookshops.

The consistency of the meetings also imposes order and a sense of discipline to a time when many of us have seen our normal schedules evaporate. Knowing the other writers will be at their screens, ready to connect, share information, exchange tips and cheer for one another at pre-designated times has helped some of us finish projects that were idling in a drawer for years. There is such comfort knowing these writers, who are now friends as well as well as colleagues, are waiting for you every day.

And that house rule? The sole requirement for joining the WFWA Write-Ins? "You must have fun with your writing." That doesn't mean it won't be challenging, or that the world beyond the keyboard won't break your heart. But don't worry. As Simone Biles said, "...if I can say I had fun, it was a good day."

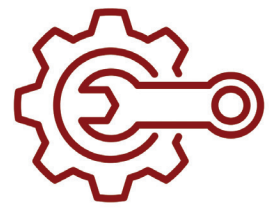
Now go get out that notebook.



Therese Gilardi's poetry, essays and short fiction have appeared in numerous anthologies and journals, including *Literary Mama*, *Onthebus*, *Punchnel's*, and *MomEgg Review*. There is the author of *Matching Wits with Venus* and *Narvla's Celtic New Year*. She is a member of Los Angeles Poets and Writers Collective, a PAN member of RWA, and the WFWA Mentorship Program Advisor.



Lita Harris currently splits her time between New Jersey and the Endless Mountains region of Pennsylvania. She also lived in Alaska for a short time just for fun. Her two rescue dogs are always close by and travel everywhere with her. An avid crafter, unused supplies clutter her basement, and attempts at making pottery, jewelry, and stained glass are scattered throughout her house. She also makes candles and homemade soap. With enough books to stock a small library, she may need to construct a building to store her literary obsession. She writes multiple genres: women's fiction, contemporary romance, paranormal, and cozy mysteries.



QUERY LETTER WORKSHOP

Attracting an agent is an act of seduction. That means your query letter is the equivalent of an online dating profile. First you clean yourself up, put on your best outfit, and introduce yourself. If someone is interested, they'll continue on to your story. Then they'll be curious to learn more about you, particularly anything that gives you credibility.

They'll want to know if you are popular and how much effort you'll put into the relationship. The goal is to have them wanting more. In the dating world, more means coffee, dinner, a proposal, and the contract for marriage. In the book world, more means a writing sample, full manuscript, a personal call, and the contract for representation.

Agents work on commission. They need to decide if your story is worth their time as quickly as possible. Or on to the next submission. That's why this one-page sales pitch is so critical.

Heather's query letter has a lot going for it. Clearly, she's passionate about her characters and her story. But the ideal query starts with a hook.

There are three ways to hook a reader. The best one is to start with the name of the person who referred you—a friend or client of the agent. The next best hook is to mention where you met the agent, or an interview that made you feel your book would be a good fit. If this is a cold query, then try a compelling question. These can work just as well.

Next, introduce the title, genre, word count, and premise line. If this is your debut novel, say so—agents love to discover new writers. Heather presents this information in a nicely organized paragraph, but the reader has to wade through the synopsis to find it. That forces the reader to hold all this information in her head before learning the subject. So we'll move it to the beginning instead.

Once we have a proper introduction in the first paragraph, it's time for the synopsis. Heather's synopsis takes the right approach in active present tense. But she begins by describing the main character with more passion than plot.

ORIGINAL QUERY LETTER

By Heather Marie Spitzberg

Fifteen years after Holly LaBrecque's best friend, Jenn Frietas, colluded to sell their tech start-up to the highest bidder, Holly has rebuilt a secure life in a historic home with a pensioned job and casual lover. However, her mother's recent death and office corruption and discrimination have left Holly questioning her choices.

At her sister's duplicitous urging, Holly hosts a campaign event that reignites her social justice passions. She embraces the grassroots election effort and a renewed spirit. To succeed, she learns the difference between a canvass and a phone bank and excels at keeping the disparate supporters on task. Others notice her leadership skills and urge her to run as a delegate. But when she realizes that Jenn, now a stockbroker, is also organizing, Holly can't help but start arguments at campaign events, which threatens her chance to be a delegate and her newly found hope.

When infighting destroys campaign morale, Jenn's collaboration could help. But reaching out re-quires that Holly learn to release bitterness and embody the beliefs she espouses. If she can't, she'll lose her chance to attend the convention and, ultimately, fail to forge a life of renewed relationships.

HOW TO WALK ON ICE, complete at 93,000 words, is upmarket women's fiction in which a GenX resister turned frustrated government IT specialist finds emotional freedom after she con-fronts her former friend and business partner when they both vie for delegate seats representing Bernie Sanders at the 2016 Democratic National Convention.

My writing has appeared in several journals and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. I'm a member of the Women's Fiction Writers Association. By day I am an environmental scientist and lawyer. By night I write and somehow wound up at the 2016 Convention as a Sanders delegate.

LET'S FIX THIS!

Make no mistake, boiling an entire book down to one paragraph is the biggest challenge of any query letter. No matter how compelling your characters are, or how important your theme may be, the story is what sells a book. And in fiction, the gold of the story is the protagonist's struggle to overcome obstacles created by her opponent in order to achieve a difficult goal. Heather's story is tricky due to a limited amount of opponent action preventing the hero's main goal, so I've heightened outside conflicts. Don't worry if the query synopsis is oversimplified or leaves out subplots. There's time for that later.

Heather's bio paragraph is placed perfectly and reveals some impressive details. But this is the place to shine, and she's far too humble. I spent thirty minutes googling her to learn the exciting details of her Pushcart Prize nomination and the professional background that makes her such a credible writer.

A fourth paragraph widens the scope to show the reader where this book and this author fit in the real world. A sentence that includes comparative titles can help prove there is an audience for this book. More importantly, agents need to know if you have a social media following. Editors at publishing houses must pitch new projects to the sales team, so potential readers are important. While googling Heather, I found that she has a beautiful, professional website. She has thousands of followers on Facebook as well as accounts on Twitter and Instagram. It's far better to say you are working on growing your following than to look like you don't care. Also, mention any large alumni or business associations that could support your book. Here, you must be your own publicist.

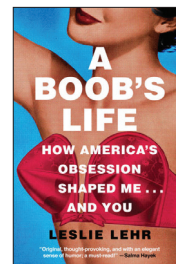
The last part of the query is a call to action. And don't forget your manners, because agents are people, too. Finally, make it easy for them to contact you.

Here's a revised version.

GOOD LUCK!



Leslie Lehr is a writing consultant and prize-winning novelist. Her new book, *A Boob's Life: How America's Obsession Shaped My Life... and Yours*, got a rave from *Publisher's Weekly*, has been optioned for TV, and was called a "must-read" by Salma Hayek, who is developing the project for HBOMax. www.leslielehr.com www.facebook.com/authorleslielehr IG @leslielehr1



REVISED QUERY LETTER

Heather Marie Spitzberg
Heather@HMSpitzberg www.hmspitzberg.com

March 1, 2021

Dear AGENT,

Has bad blood ever poisoned your dreams? *HOW TO WALK ON ICE*, my 93,000-word debut novel, is Upmarket Women's Fiction about a Gen X resister whose personal life threatens to derail her fight to make the world a better place.

When 39-year-old Holly La Breque's mother dies, she awakens from her cozy but boring life as a government IT worker and snaps back to her social justice roots. While campaigning for Bernie Sanders, she struggles with her job, her jealous boyfriend, and the troubling return of her unscrupulous ex-business partner, Jenn. Holly must battle old grudges and new suspicions as she runs alongside Jenn to be a delegate to the 2016 Democratic National Convention. Just as Holly discovers deep corruption at work that threatens both her and her boyfriend's livelihood, a political protest forces her to choose just how and where she can truly make a difference.

A 2019 Pushcart Prize nominee, my short stories and environmental essays have been published in journals including *Sinking City Literary Magazine* and *Trolley*, published by the New York Writers Institute. My political essays appear in the *New York Times* and *Daily Gazette* and I'm the author of *Cricket's Kids Books*, an online series. An environmental lawyer by trade, I am currently an Environmental Analyst for the State of New York. *HOW TO WALK ON ICE* is based on my own experience as a delegate for Bernie Sanders in the 2016 Democratic National Convention.

HOW TO WALK ON ICE proves the adage that "the personal is political" and fits on the bookstore shelf between XXXX and XXXX. With over 3,000 followers on Facebook, my platform as an author is growing every day. In addition to my website at www.hmspitzberg.com, you can find me on Twitter and Instagram. A member of the Women's Fiction Writers Association and the XX Alumni Association, I look forward to promoting this book with my colleagues at XX Environmental Group and the XX political club, among others.

Would you like to read a sample?

Thank you for your time.
Sincerely,

Heather Marie Spitzberg
Heather@xxxxx.com

IN THEIR WORDS: LORELEI BRUSH

By Kay Arthur

I had the distinct pleasure of interviewing Lorelei Brush, 2020 Star Award finalist in the debut novel category and author of *Uncovering*. As we Zoomed our interview and discussed her book, it became clear to me that this story is near and dear to her heart—a story that only she had the experience and passion to tell. As a debut novelist, writers often put themselves into their story, and Lorie’s voice speaks to this specifically as she was ingrained into the culture, strife, and values of the Pakistan people.



■ **How did the setting of your novel play such a strong role in your story?**

The setting is in northwest Pakistan, where I lived for two years, working in a rural area, employing over 200 staff. I was introduced to the culture by the women who worked for me, sometimes as the family’s only wage earner, and who lived in multi-generational households where their mothers-in-law ruled. What I learned prompted my passion to tell their story.

While it is fiction, my protagonist, Shahnaz, is a conglomeration of several of the women that I encountered as well as myself as I searched for the answer to the question, “could I adapt to the culture these women live in?”

■ **Your career as a writer, how did it get started?**

I have two doctoral degrees and last worked in international education. From 2006-2008, I managed a large USAID-funded program in the northwestern part of Pakistan, an area that was seriously affected by an earthquake in 2005. When I returned home, I retired from the business world and started writing. I’d written plenty of project reports and academic articles in my professional work. But after my time in Pakistan, I knew I had a story to tell. I had journaled notes during my trip and documented parts of my journey that would then show up in my book. The development of confidence over the years is what led me to know that I could write this story.

■ **The theme of this issue is Community. Do you have a community of writers?**

After my decision to write a work of fiction, I took a writing course, where I met several first-time novelists. Eight of us ended up forming a writing group. We met regularly, usually sending out a chapter a week prior to each meeting and then discussing the critiques. Of course, it was intimidating at first, but so helpful in improving my fiction.

■ **You published your book with Mascot publishers, a hybrid press. What led you to that decision to self-publish?**

I attempted the traditional route and, after receiving several glowing reviews with comments suggesting the market wasn’t right for my story, I thought I had to shelve it. But I knew it was a good story and wanted to share it. A hybrid publisher was the right choice, and I chose one that had standards for the stories they would accept. They were proud to put their name on the book, which validated its quality to me as well.

One of the benefits of using Mascot Books was that its staff was eager to help a good story make it into print and committed to making the book all I wanted it to be. For example, in working with me to design the cover, I suggested using a picture. The graphic artist proposed a drawing of a young woman, veiled, and faceless. When he showed me several versions of this, I realized he’d captured the essence of my protagonist, a woman living in a culture where she must work very hard to realize her dreams, to become known.

ONE WARNING TO AUTHORS: IF GOING THE INDIE ROUTE, KNOW YOU’LL HAVE TO DO MOST OF YOUR OWN PUBLICITY, CONTACTING BOOKSTORES, ARRANGING VIRTUAL MEETINGS, ETC. OF COURSE, AUTHORS END UP DOING THIS TRADITIONALLY AS WELL.

FEATURE

One warning to authors: If going the indie route, know you'll have to do most of your own publicity, contacting bookstores, arranging virtual meetings, etc. Of course, authors end up doing this when published traditionally as well.

■ What is your writing process like?

In a normal non-pandemic world, I spend several hours a day writing, preferably at a local coffee shop in front of a fire with other regulars. My goal is to finish a scene a day. I'm a pantsner not a plotter, seeing the arc of the story but not knowing exactly what the ending is. I wait to see where the heroine takes me. I let her have free will, allow her personality to develop throughout the story.

■ Do your books have any common themes?

Each of my books helps me to find more clarity by solving a puzzle in my life. *Uncovering* asked how could I adapt if I were born into a very different culture? My second book relates to my father and his life. And the third, you'll just have to wait and see where it goes.

■ As a finalist in the STAR Award Debut Novel Contest 2020, how did that help you with this book and the next?

I use this award recognition when promoting myself in reaching out to bookstores or potential reviewers with publicity requests. A big part of what I do now, when I'm not writing, is marketing for my second novel.

■ Why will readers want to read *Uncovering*?

Because it's a swashbuckling good story, filled with adventure, romance, and a coming-of-age heroine who must overcome obstacles and traditions and have the courage to find herself through it all. Isn't that what each of us wishes for ourselves?

Follow Lorelei at loreleibrush.com

EACH OF MY BOOKS HELPS ME TO FIND MORE CLARITY BY SOLVING A PUZZLE IN MY LIFE. UNCOVERING ASKED HOW COULD I ADAPT IF I WERE BORN INTO A VERY DIFFERENT CULTURE?

CHAPTER ONE

A river of eligible men flowed through the house that summer after the earthquake, weekend after weekend. Abu had opened the floodgates, and though Shahnaz argued it was too soon, there was no stemming this tide.

Tonight she peeked through a slit between the living room door and the hallway wall to see Naseer Khan and his family. The young man faced her, displaying springy black hair, deep-set eyes, a tidy beard, and a slender body comfortably balanced on the edge of the sofa. Not bad, at least on the surface. His thick moustache spread with enthusiasm across his top lip. The neatly trimmed hem of hairs showed that he had cut it that very day.

She sighed and leaned her head against the doorjamb. Why couldn't her father understand that her passion was making sure Kashmiri children were born healthy? There was none left for marriage. It was so unfair. He'd raised her like a son, encouraged her to ask questions, taught her to negotiate for privileges, and bragged to his friends when her grades topped the class. Until she was twelve and her brother Tahir was born. Then the world revolved around a different sun.

A hiss in her ear made her jump. "C'mon, Shahnaz, move out of the way. If you're not going to look, let me see him."

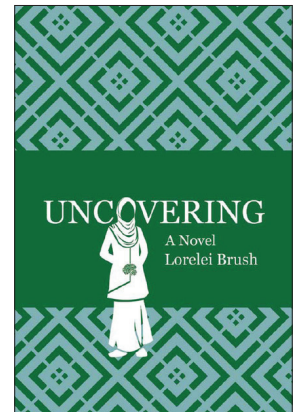
Shahnaz shook her head as she backed away from the door. That was Rabia for you, two years younger than Shahnaz's twenty-three years, and already wrapped up in the idea of marriage.

"Ooh," Rabia said from the side of her mouth. "Full lips, gentle eyes, long lashes. And Western clothes. You'll like that." She twisted her head this way and that to capture every possible detail.

Shahnaz watched her sister's ponytail bounce as she contorted her body. Kohl ringed Rabia's deep brown eyes; her lips and fingernails matched the red in her flowered tunic. So much energy packed into that lithe form, and all of it aimed at claiming a husband. Like there was gold in that living room, a nugget to be plucked from the couch and treasured—or used, who knew how. Why couldn't Naseer be for her?

Shahnaz paced the hallway, her face free of make-up and her nails of polish. Her life, her energy, was devoted to the people who lived in those mountains surrounding Muzaffarabad, the hardy Kashmiris who eked their existence from stark hills cut sharply by glaciers and oozing pebbled streams. That was where she belonged, clad in her favorite verdant greens, climbing steadily up the path to the house and clinic of one of her Lady Health Workers. Her mood blossomed with happiness every time she topped the rise and saw Bibi's children hopping from foot to foot and chanting her name. All except seven-year-old Kameela, whose foot had been crushed in the quake. She crouched and waved one of her crutches.

At least her Abu had chosen a potential husband from Muzaffarabad. The Khans lived on its eastern hills and, as she did, walked its rutted streets where little shops, hardly bigger than a bathroom, huddled side by side, facing lanes barely wide enough for a single car. A town working hard to rebuild after the earthquake.





JANET RUNDQUIST STAR AWARD CHAIR

We offer a gold star to Janet Rundquist who helps us shine a light on the best novels in the genre.



“I started volunteering for things I felt passionate about, because if you’re going to be giving up “spare” time, you’ll do a better job of it if you believe in it.”

1

How did you become a member of WFWA?

I joined up right in the beginning! I had started following Amy Sue Nathan’s blog, “Women’s Fiction Writers” and realized that women’s fiction was the kind of thing I was writing. I had been searching for a writing organization to join since I was early in my plans to pursue publication, and the newly formed WFWA seemed perfect.

2

When and why did you first volunteer?

I started volunteering for things I felt passionate about, because if you’re going to be giving up “spare” time, you’ll do a better job of it if you believe in it. One of my passions is equity and inclusivity and each of the various volunteer opportunities I’ve taken on has been with that aim in mind.

3

The STAR Award is such an important contest for our members. As the organizer of this program, what is your favorite part?

It’s fun to call the finalists (who doesn’t love sharing good news?), but I also love seeing so many amazing books get entered. The TBR list gets a little out of control when you run a contest like this!

4

What are your favorite resources you use in WFWA?

Probably far and away my most used resource is the Facebook group, but I have also attended webinars, pitch events, and workshops.

5

Among other work, family, hobbies, and writing, where do you squeeze in time for volunteering?

Depending on the nature of the work, I generally schedule it into my day. Otherwise, I do it like writing: whenever it works!

Continued on page 16



SHERI TAYLOR-EMERY **WRITEON! ART DIRECTOR**

Sheri is the 2017 Rising Star Award winner who every issue proves her eye for design is just as engaging as her prose.



“Since I have a degree in art, I’m really drawn to strong visuals. I try to design something that, married with the words, will draw a reader in. I don’t always succeed, but it’s a source of pride when I do.”

1

How did you become a member of WFWA?

I have Alison Hammer to thank for that! I met Alison online when we were in the same Women’s Fiction Critique Group and she reached out, saying she thought we had similar writing styles. I was complaining about RWA not being a good fit, but it was the only organization I knew of for women writers. Bless her for telling me about WFWA, because things really began to change for me after I joined.

2

When and how did you first volunteer?

After I won Rising Star in 2017, I wanted to give back, so I volunteered to be a first-round judge for the STAR award. About three years ago, the call went out for someone to lay out WriteOn! Since it was in my wheelhouse, I thought, why not?

3

You do such an amazing job as our Art Director. What is your particular source of pride in your publications?

You’re too kind. I’ve been doing this for more than 20 years, starting in the newspaper business. Since I have a degree in art, I’m really drawn to strong visuals. I try to design something that, married with the words, will draw a reader in. I don’t always succeed, but it’s a source of pride when I do.

4

What are your favorite resources that you use in WFWA?


The people! Whatever question you may have, whatever you may need, there is always someone in WFWA who can help you out. I also like the directory of members’ specialties, say in case you needed the input of someone with a background in medicine or law enforcement as you’re doing your research.

5

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

As much as I adore my kids to the moon and back, now that they are young adults, I have more time for myself, though I seem to have replaced them with kids of the four-legged variety. Critters and writing are my passions so it’s important to me to give back, whether it’s volunteering at a senior dog rescue, or giving time to WFWA. You just make it work.

FINAL THOUGHT



A candle
loses
nothing
by lighting
another
candle.

– JAMES HELLER