

WINTER 2022



The Quarterly Magazine of the Women's Fiction Writers Association

WRITEON!

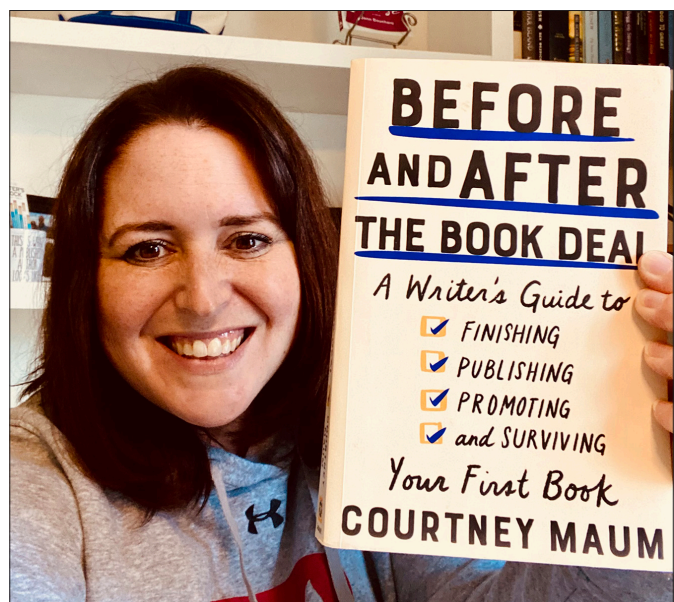
**BRINGING
EMOTION TO
THE PAGE**

**MEET THE NEW
VP OF DIVERSITY
& INCLUSION**

**SHOW US YOUR
FAVORITE
REFERENCE BOOK**

**+ LET'S FIX THIS!
SYNOPSIS**

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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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Join the closed WFWA Facebook group by sending an email to:
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WriteOn! is published quarterly by the
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IF YOU LIKE WHAT YOU'VE READ ...

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

STAFF

KAY ARTHUR Managing Editor

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



SHERI TAYLOR-EMERY Art Director

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



CASEY DEMBOWSKI Copy Editor

Casey is a contemporary romance and women's fiction author. Her debut novel *When We're Thirty* was released in April 2021 from Red Adept Publishing. Casey earned her MFA from Adelphi University and has over ten years of professional experience in corporate communications. She lives in New Jersey with her husband, daughter, and their two cats.



BROOKE WILLIAMS Staff Writer

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



KELLY HARMS Guiding Scribe

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



PRESIDENT'S LETTER

As your newly elected president, I'd like to thank you for your support. Chris Alder left some pretty big shoes for me to fill, so I've got to do her proud. I'm looking forward to serving this organization in every way I can with our steady growth. We have a wonderful group of volunteers, who continuously look for ways to enhance your membership in WFWA, and we're preparing lots of new things for the organization, so stay tuned.

Focus On What You Can Control

I started writing in the fourth grade, and, back then, I had no preconceived ideas about writing and the industry, and even if I did, it's changed over one hundred times since then. But when I started writing for publication, I had grand ideas about my journey and how it would play out. I imagined my readers climbing over each other to get their hands on my latest publication. And bookstores across the country would display my books on their entrance tables and beg me to sit in front and sign copies for the long line of waiting customers. I even imagined doing the morning talk show circuit to discuss my books and my source of creativity. And of course, in one of those daydreams, Oprah called.

I thought accomplishing those things would be the most challenging part of becoming a published author. Because I'd thought I'd sail smoothly into getting an agent and signing a healthy publishing contract. Many moons ago, there was a point when some of my yearly goals included signing with an agent. I even had a vision board that included making the *New York Times* bestseller list. How silly was I, thinking I could control the actions of others?

Well, I'm over ten years down this path, and even though small presses have published me, most of my wishful illusions still elude me. Now I look back at my naivete and can't suppress my laughter. I have an entire list of things I wish I knew before I started this venture, but the most important one is understanding the parts I control are limited. But there is still so much joy in this journey.

Once I accepted and fully understood what I could influence along this journey, I reset. When a writing idea comes to me, I let my creativity take a joy ride. The fun for me is writing the story and listening to the characters as they chat. I can't live in my creative process thinking about what agents are acquiring or what publishers are looking to publish next.

Thankfully, I learned quickly to stop obsessing about the industry. Now, I enjoy my writing process and let my imagination fly and play. After all, that's what drew me to writing. I still write as much as I always have, maybe more. However, I give myself the freedom to write what I want. I worry less about trends, who wants what, and why and when. What's hot today may not be desirable or trending tomorrow or next year. So I don't jump on a wave or chase a movement. Instead, I have a deep drawer that holds all those fun writing jigs that the world is not ready to see yet, and I'm a much happier writer.



THE FUN FOR ME IS WRITING THE STORY AND LISTENING TO THE CHARACTERS AS THEY CHAT. I CAN'T LIVE IN MY CREATIVE PROCESS THINKING ABOUT WHAT AGENTS ARE ACQUIRING OR WHAT PUBLISHERS ARE LOOKING TO PUBLISH NEXT.

Keep On Writing

Jacki

Jacki

YOUR BOARD WORKING FOR YOU

The weekend of February 5, the WFWA board met in Baltimore, Maryland, to develop a three-to-five-year strategic plan. The group arrived from various locations around the country, with some joining virtually, committed and dedicated to doing some hard work for the members of this wonderful and growing organization.



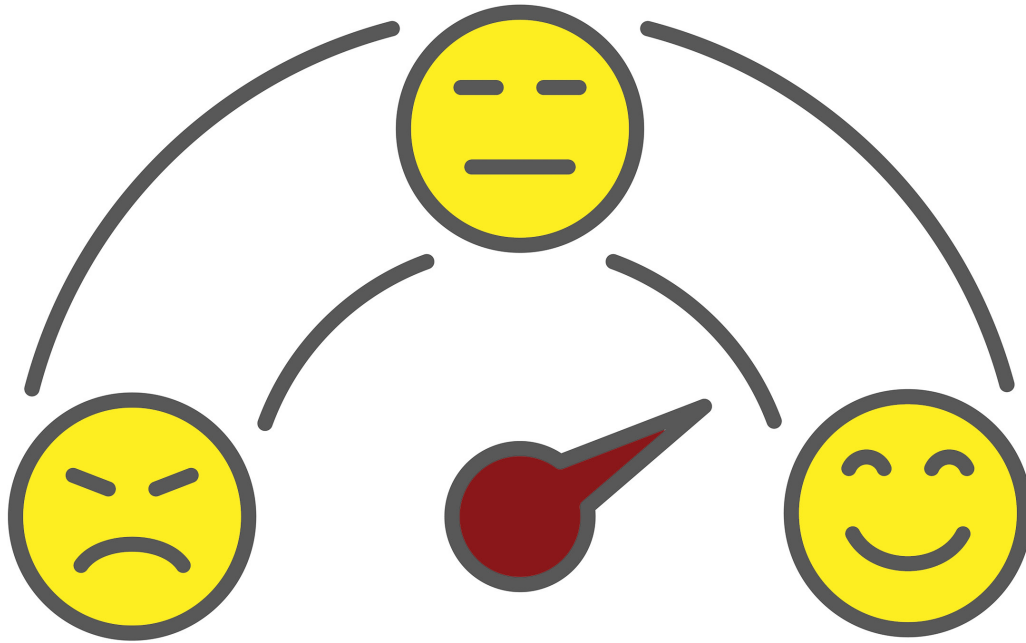
One of our key objectives was to keep the WFWA membership at the forefront of our decision-making process. And as our membership nears 1,800, we must scale our programs to provide enjoyment, value, and community to you.

It's been a few years since the board met in person to talk and map the organization's future and discuss the challenges some of our platforms are facing in our virtual environment.

We spent one and a half days addressing needs, visions, obstacles for each of our platforms—Programs, Communication, IT, Membership, Diversity and Inclusion, Social Media, and Finance. We walked away with a host of workable items. Many initiatives we will implement as early as June 2022. Other larger goals will require more time, investigation, and discussions.

Transparency is essential to the board, and we want to make our work available to all members. However, we're sure you don't want to see the thirty chart pad sheets we filled. So, we're preparing a formal document to share with you in the coming months. We'll also keep you abreast of the successes we're making on our strategic plan through Inside WFWA announcements, on our social media platform, and through special emails.

The work we accomplish as a 100% volunteer-powered organization is impressive. However, this workforce structure also means changes can't happen overnight. We will roll out these initiatives as we complete them. So, while we dig in and get busy implementing our plans, please stay tuned. We know you're going to love being part of our WFWA future.



A Range of Emotions

If you were to describe your journey as a writer, I'm certain the words would come easy: Insecure, hesitant, cautious, optimistic, hopeful, and exhilarated.

The range of emotions vary depending on where you are in your career, your current manuscript, or the most recent feedback. A rejection can plummet your mind into self-doubt, while one complimentary word of hope sits you back in your chair pecking away on your keyboard.

The path we take from one end of the emotional spectrum to the other is our "writer's journey." We can all relate to the steps on this path because we are traveling together.

"The driving force of women's fiction is the protagonist's journey toward a more fulfilled self."

This is also called the emotional journey.

However, the emotional journey of our stories is different for each of us and personal, too. Absolutely nothing is more crushing than an agent who says, "I couldn't connect with your character."

WHAT? How could that be? In *my* head, the connection is deep and moving. What happened? As the creators of our stories, we are the birth parents of our characters, so, yes, we take it personally. These people, on the page, are real to us, and we listen to their voices in our head and try to channel their thoughts into our story.

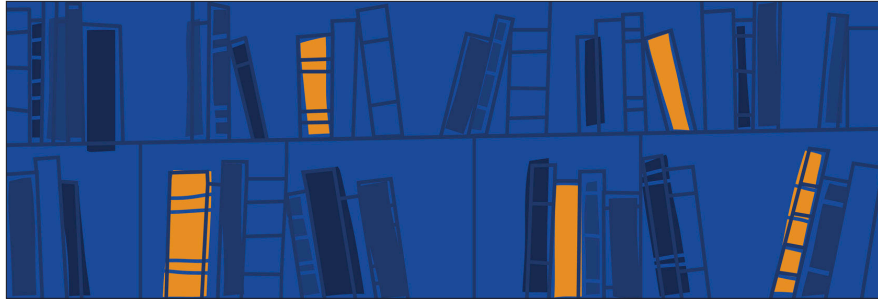
Our job as writers is to lay out the *emotional journey* of our protagonist for our readers to feel what our characters are feeling. Emotions are key to the *connection*, and they are the source to writing successful women's fiction.

Conveying the emotional journey is a challenge. We have to create an arc from page one until the end. And, in the course of that change, we must *show not tell*, using all of our writing skills. We must feel our protagonist shedding the skin of their old self to become the person they strive to be.

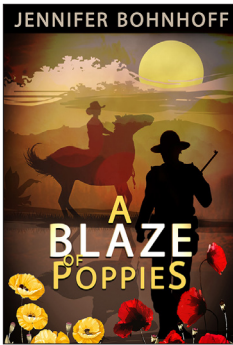
What a great challenge that is.

This issue of *WriteON!* is dedicated to the *emotional journey* and those skills needed to show it on the page. Psychologist and writer Maria Daversa will provide psychologist tools to write beneath the emotions. Writer and editor Leslie Lehr is back for another lesson, this time on the synopsis. We have reference materials to share, congratulations on new releases and to our 2021 STAR award winners Rebecca Taylor and Rebecca Hodge.

Your writing journey is important to us—we love providing you with tools to fulfill your writing dreams, so that your characters and you achieve that sweet sense of fulfillment.



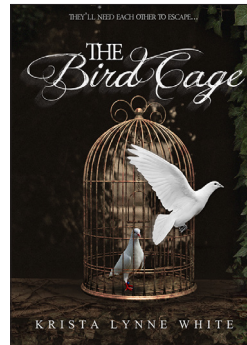
MEMBER RELEASES



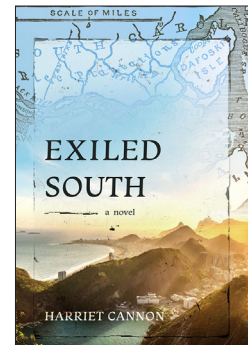
JENNIFER BOHNHOFF
A Blaze of Poppies
10/21/21



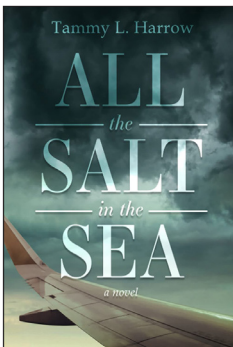
JENNIFER IRWIN
A Dress the Color of the Moon
10/30/21



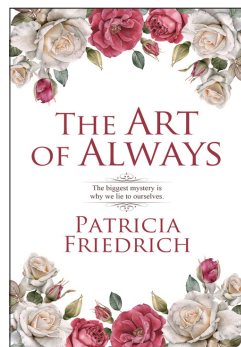
KRISTA WHITE
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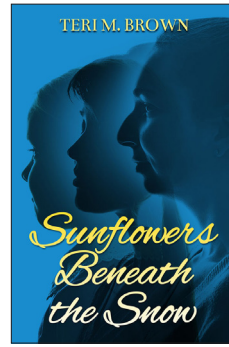
HARRIETT CANNON
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1/3/22



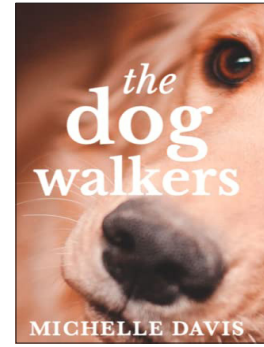
TAMMY HARROW
All the Salt in the Sea
1/11/22



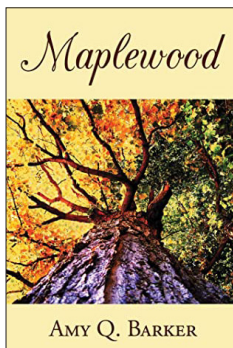
PATRICIA FRIEDRICH
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1/19/22



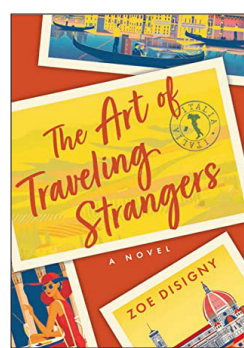
TERI M. BROWN
Sunflowers Beneath
the Snow
1/25/22



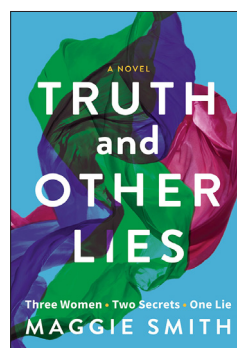
MICHELLE DAVIS
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2/1/2022



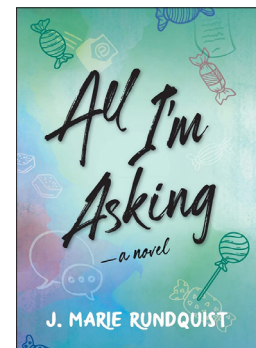
AMY Q. BARKER
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ZOE DISIGNY
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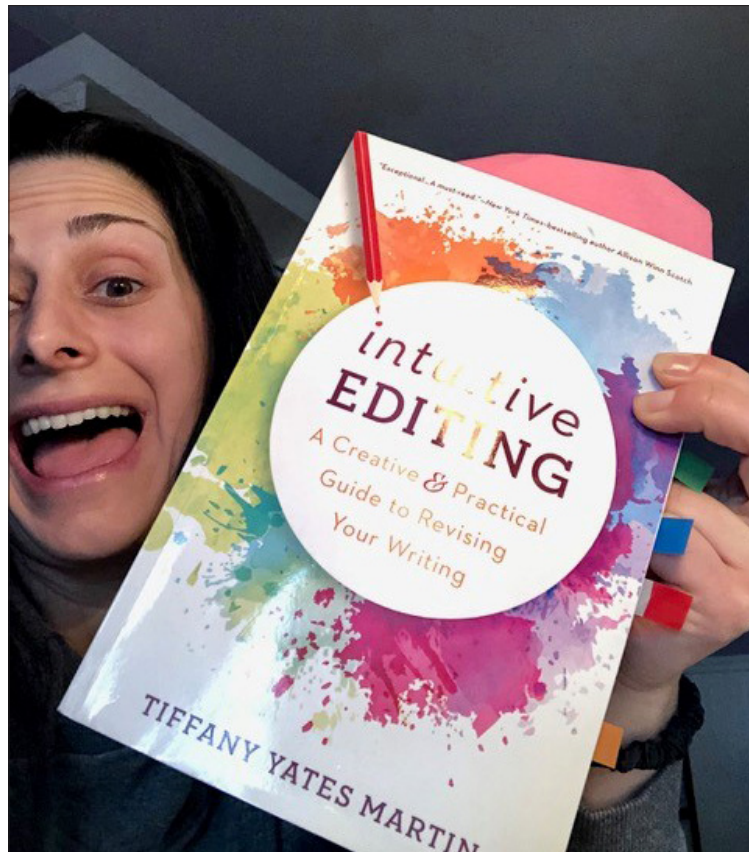
MAGGIE SMITH
Truth and Other Lies
3/8/22



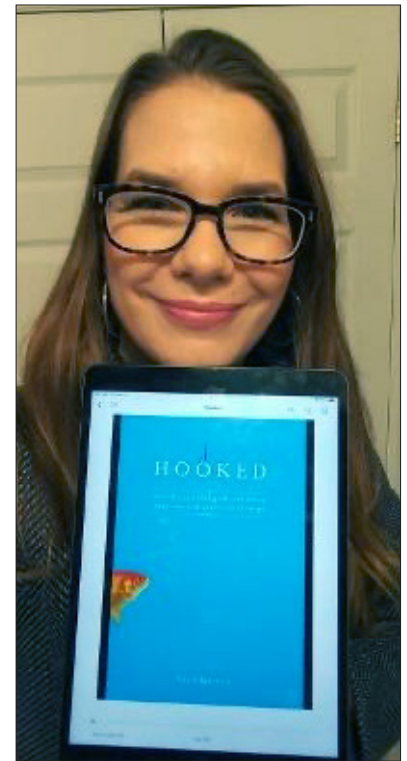
J. MARIE RUNDQUIST
All I'm Asking
3/15/22

SHOOT AND SHARE CONTEST: SHOW US YOUR FAVORITE REFERENCE BOOK

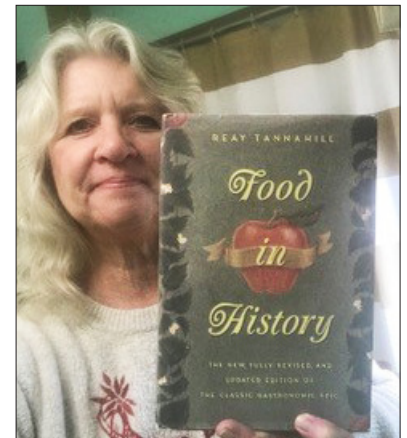
We received some great shots for this issue's Shoot and Share Selfie contest theme, Reference Books. The random winner of the \$25.00 gift card is Rachel Stone, with her favorite reference book that "literally changed my life". Congratulations and thanks to all who contributed. We love seeing you!



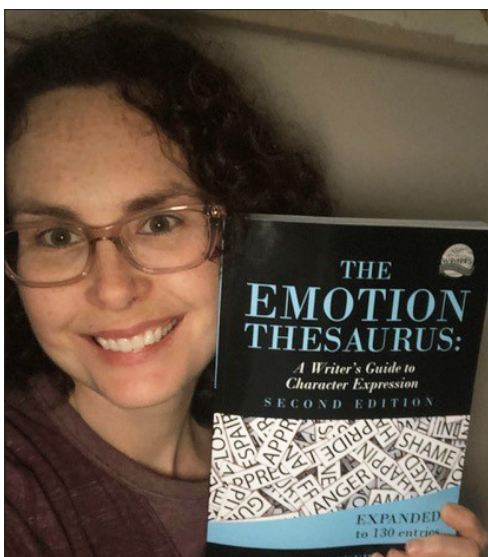
Rachel Stone



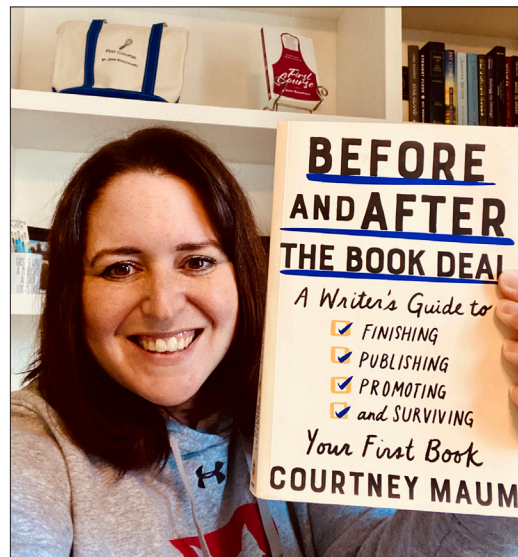
Krista White



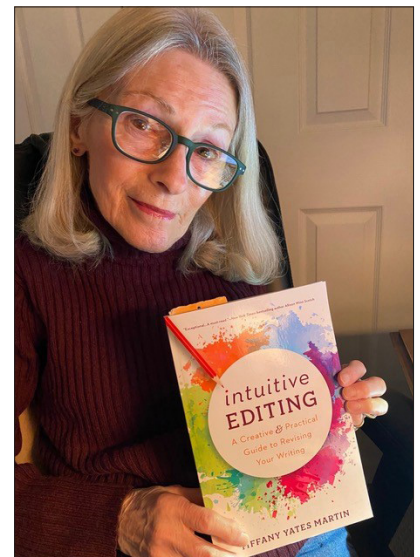
Kimberlee Esselstrom



Erica Haraldsen



Jenn Bouchard



Barbara Conrey

FEATURE

IT IS OUR PLEASURE TO INTRODUCE MICKI MORENCY AS OUR NEWLY ELECTED VICE PRESIDENT OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION.

FIVE QUESTIONS WITH MICKI

■ **When did you first become involved in WFWA?**

I became a member in 2016 at the invitation of a member who knew I was writing women's fiction.

■ **When did you begin writing women's fiction?**

It was not a deliberate choice to write women's fiction at the time. Honestly, I didn't know what women's fiction was. I only knew I wanted to tell the stories of four women who I've met on my life journey. I never really thought about what genre the book would fall into. And it turned out to be the ultimate women's fiction.

■ **You've just landed a book deal and your story is about a group of island women. How did you make their story universal while still honoring the specific culture? How can writers learn to do this in their own work, especially when they are writing about characters who are not from their ethnicity and/or background?**

I chose to place my characters of THE ISLAND SISTERS in Haiti, Guam, and St. Thomas. I was born in Haiti and had the privilege of living in Guam and St. Thomas. Even though the women's cultures informed who they are and why they made certain choices, the theme of abuse against women in the book is universal. I wanted to show the larger audience that we suffer the same through our common humanity. The consequences of abuse against women have ripple effects through society at large.

To write outside of your ethnic group, you need to be clear about why you want to do that. You have to tell their stories through your own lenses as an outsider not theirs. You need to research. There's no substitute to getting to know natives and organically learn their "ways." The only thing I share with my characters from Guam and St. Thomas is the island climate. So, I did tons of research and immersed myself in their daily lives to respectfully portray them in the context of the book.

■ **Growing up in Haiti, all the stories you read were by white authors. How did you read and internalize this different world from your own life experiences? Today, there are more books, both indie and traditional, that are telling stories about minorities and more. As writers and readers, a good story is universal, but what can we learn from these characters to inform our own work?**

In Haiti, I read books by French authors. My favorite was Victor Hugo with whom and whose characters I had absolutely nothing in common but the language. As a child, I thought Black people did not write books, therefore I didn't necessarily think I could, but the desire was there.

When I started reading books from POC authors, I saw the little girl I was from Toni Morrison, the teen I became from Terry McMillan, the struggles I survived to assimilate in America from Edwidge Danticat, a Haitian-American author. I've always read across many genres, nationalities, races, and cultures. I personally find that it helps me develop empathy and connection with others.

■ **WFWA is making a significant commitment to diversity and inclusivity. We've always believed the only criteria for membership is that an author write women's fiction. However, as our membership continues to grow and we expand outside of the US, we want to ensure that authors feel welcome and supported. What are your thoughts as the new D&I VP?**

As a minority in race, gender, culture, language, geography, religious beliefs, I tend to see myself as an outsider in many circumstances. From 2016, I stayed on the fringes of WFWA, making real friends when I attended the 2019 retreat in Albuquerque.



WHEN I STARTED READING BOOKS FROM POC AUTHORS, I SAW THE LITTLE GIRL I WAS FROM TONI MORRISON, THE TEEN I BECAME FROM TERRY MCMILLAN, THE STRUGGLES I SURVIVED TO ASSIMILATE IN AMERICA FROM EDWIDGE DANTICAT, A HAITIAN-AMERICAN AUTHOR.

I was excited and encouraged about the diversity and inclusion initiative to recruit, recognize, and support members who do not identify as belonging to the dominant group because of all the different characteristics that make them unique.

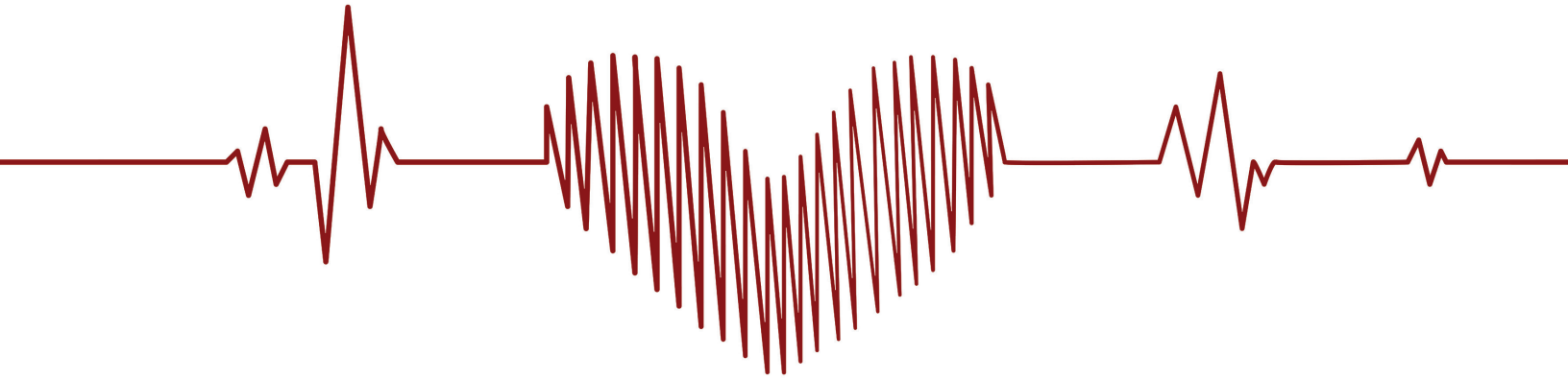
I see my role as a steward to lead us into meaningful conversations that will steer our organization to a more cohesive group. We are all members because we are all writers, but we share more than writing. We share humanity. I hope to see us learn from each other the differences that make us unique as individuals and groups. My vision is for our organization to be a place where we can be tolerant, engaged, and confident to write across barriers. What we learn from diversity and inclusion training can enrich our personal and professional lives.

We are a village. Let's learn together.

Micki is a Haitian American and a graduate of Northeastern University (Boston) and The Institute for Writers (Cincinnati). Her writings have appeared in The Tampa Bay Times, The Peoria Star Journal, The Weekly Challenger, print magazines and digital publications. Her debut novel, *The Island Sisters*, will be published in 2023. She lives in Florida with her husband and three daughters. More on Micki can be found at www.mickimorency.com

THE GREAT UN-QUIET:

HOW TO USE YOUR CHARACTER'S EMOTIONAL JOURNEY TO AMPLIFY PACING AND ENTICE READERS FROM PAGE ONE



Dear Hapless Women's Fiction Author,

Thank you for sending me your painstakingly written, revised, and polished novel, **THE BOOK ABOUT ONE PERSON'S MANY FEELINGS AND GRADUAL TRANSFORMATION INTO A BETTER VERSION OF HERSELF.**

Unfortunately, I must pass on this opportunity. While I enjoyed meeting your protagonist, Brunhilda, I found the story to be, in the end, a bit too quiet for commercial success.

Signed,
A Coldhearted Agent
of Doom

Since Time Immemorial, (or the early 90s, when the term “women’s fiction” took on more context in the book industry), women’s fiction writers of every stripe have received rejections like the one you read to the left. I know I’ve written my fair share of them, both to agents, when I was an editor, and to authors directly, when I was an agent. As a fairly junior editor at a major New York publishing house, I read dozens of manuscripts each month and had to pass on all but a tiny percentage of them.

“Too quiet” was not a favorite pass reason of mine. I found it to be largely useless. After all, I was reading works that explored the inner lives of women—women in love, women in transition, women struggling and suffering and succeeding in the most subtle and real of ways. What exactly would “loud enough” look like? No, I called a spade a spade, and when a book felt boring, (either because it was boring or because I made very little money and sometimes couldn’t afford enough coffee to stay awake late into the night as my job demanded) I wrote that it lacked drive or needed to be revised with pacing front of mind.

Then I became an agent and learned why quiet is such a frequently hurled epithet in this business. Quiet, in literature, means it’s a slow burn; it means no one gets stabbed; it means the issues that a book club might discuss are not controversial enough or the romantic subplot isn’t the kind that smokes off the page. Quiet means, often, that the book has a rich and well-developed emotional journey that rings true, delivers home truths, and guides the reader to become attached to the protagonist over hundreds of pages of narrative. Quiet meant nothing about the book’s quality—but it could mean everything about its sales potential.

If you’ve ever been told that a book is too quiet, then welcome to a very large and companionable club. Women’s fiction by its very nature leans quiet. If you take a random sampling of one hundred real midlife women, it is unlikely that more than, say, one of them is living a very loud life, by publishing standards. The rest of us are loving our families best we can, carving out room for ourselves in our areas of passion, and shoveling our sidewalks and sometimes our neighbor’s sidewalks, too. A beautiful, meaningful, and often privileged existence, but not necessarily riveting reading.

GUIDING SCRIBE

But in your capable hands it CAN be as riveting as you like. **Quiet, I believe, is an authorial choice. A legitimate one.** One that can, with the right team, find a readership through countless publishing paths. But if quiet is not your aim, you can juice your story into at least a mid-decibel level without giving up the integrity of the book you set out to write. The secret to “turning up the volume” lies within the biggest asset a quiet book has: the protagonist’s emotional journey.

WFWA members are a clever bunch. We know that the most commercial novels partner a dynamic emotional conflict with a well-paced external drive. In fact, I bet many of you could draw the “shape” of a novel’s emotional journey (or google it in a matter of seconds)—**it’s a rising mountain with a stutter step near the peak, where the character’s resolution to change falters just as she most needs it.**

But the shape of that journey, in the first act of the novel, is often quite flat. And that, my friends, is where we have an opportunity to crank the volume, not from littering the pages with corpses or sex or manufactured drama, but by playing with the already existing magic of story.

Here are some opportunities to turn up the volume on your character’s emotional journey in the early pages:

STRIP DOWN THE STAGE-SETTING. How much luxury do you grant yourself to set up the protagonist’s world? It might be too much. Your character may be an everyday woman. Does your book need to show her doing everyday things at length? No—in fact, that’s to be avoided!

Why do we write our characters in their starting place at such length? Because, my darlings, we the authors often need this writing to know who our main character is. This is side-writing done at the outset of the author’s discovery process, but alas, it is usually left in the front of a book where it is least appreciated by the reader. If your character eats, showers, puts her kids to bed, drives anywhere, or works at a desk, that is not the stuff of novels. If she does those things in some fascinating and magically unique way, it can stay. Otherwise, find the gem in those moments (hint: it might be little more than a sentence) and carve away the rest. This may feel contrary to the advice we hold dear, about setting the stage to show the reader where the character starts emotionally—but fear not! The place to show the reader where the character begins is in her reaction to the unusual in her life, not the normal.

INSERT MEANINGFUL TENSION THROUGH INSPIRATION. Later in your novel, you will find that you have drip-drip-dripped little bits of genius into your story in the form of symbolism. Yes, you, and yes, genius. You may find that you gave your main character something extraneous, a special shovel from her father, let’s say, or a penchant for black licorice, just because you did. One time I found that my novel had a leaky faucet mentioned for no reason. I created a pivotal faucet memory into her first pages, charged it with visceral emotion, and left the reader wondering

WHY DO WE WRITE OUR CHARACTERS IN THEIR STARTING PLACE AT SUCH LENGTH? BECAUSE, MY DARLINGS, WE THE AUTHORS OFTEN NEED THIS WRITING TO KNOW WHO OUR MAIN CHARACTER IS.

what it all meant until the second act. Another time, a battered suitcase arrived in my imagination midway through a novel. I pulled that suitcase forward into the early pages because there is nothing more curious than a character who has a suitcase sitting out, ready to go, even before her adventure begins.

Assemble those golden moments. Write them in bright colors on a large sheet of paper, find what aspects of the character’s internal life they represent, and then drag them forward into the story as emotional clues. Maybe a neighbor borrowed that special shovel months ago and now it shows she can’t ask for it back. Or perhaps an ex buys her a pouch of black licorice and though it is disgusting (black licorice eaters, don’t email me), she eats it to please him. Seed tiny mysteries that are already feathered into your story, just below your notice, into the front of the novel. They will become clever, delightful motifs that amplify the character’s journey without reducing the story to stunts or manufactured drama.

AND SPEAKING OF STUNTS, I AM NOT ABOVE THEM. A well-executed stunt, contrived though it might feel at first, can feel like good storytelling when the edges are sanded down. A few pacing cheats: Find the most dramatic part of your midpoint and flash a few beats of it forward. In one book that felt a bit too quiet for my readers, I pulled half of a tense scene from the character’s most pivotal decision point forward to entice the reader, and then flashed them back to where I wanted the action to truly begin. Did I get away with it? Reviews suggest I did. A juicy prologue from a third-party narrator feels schlocky when never called back later in the book, but when woven in deftly, it’s a drool-inciting amplifier for the reader. Even an envelope story or creation of source materials (articles, invitations, emails, journal entries, letters) can amplify pace, turn up the volume, and invest the reader enough to avoid that “quiet” badge. But these “stunts” only work when you believe in them wholeheartedly, and when you lace them with something so true to the character’s journey that, after they are written, you simply cannot imagine the book without them.

Your character’s emotional arc—or the sheer facts of women’s fiction—may make you believe your novel has to be quiet. It may help you understand that your book should be quiet. But if you are interested in upping the pace of your story while keeping the integrity of the emotional journey intact, consider these methods. Don’t use them all; don’t even use one until the idea of not using it feels ridiculous. Then, my writing friend, grab the volume dial and crank it—if not to eleven, then to a very honest level that will meet your character’s authentic journey and her reader’s attention level in the perfect middle ground.

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



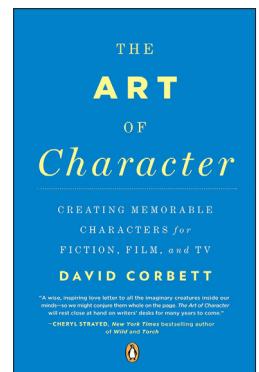
CHARACTER REFERENCES

by Brooke Williams

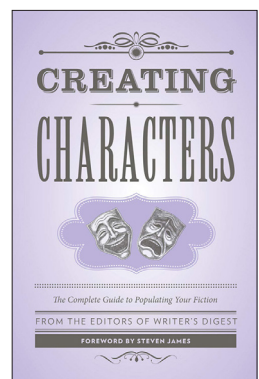
When writing a novel, there are so many elements to understand and keep track of, it can feel daunting to figure out where to start. But for those of us writing women's fiction, there's one element we can focus on, a foundation on which we can build all the other elements of our story: the character's emotional journey.

Here are nine writing guide recommendations to help you craft your way to success.

1 The Art of Character
by David Corbett
 Before you can send your protagonist on an emotional journey, you need to create a compelling character readers will want to journey with. Corbett shows how to conceive and develop characters and, also, how to bring them to life on the page.



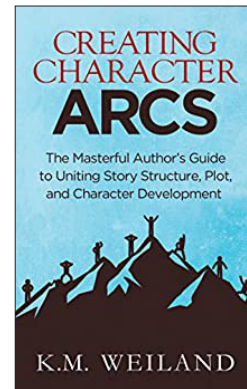
2 Creating Characters
by the editors of Writer's Digest
 It's full of essays on crafting characters from the varied perspectives of more than a dozen different writers, so there's no shortage of styles to learn from.



FEATURE

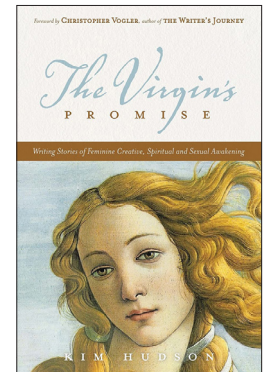
3 **Creating Character Arcs** by K.M. Weiland (and companion workbook)

Weiland shows you how to blend character development with story structure, so they work in tandem rather than as disjointed elements.



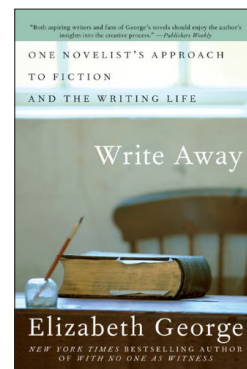
4 **The Virgin's Promise** by Kim Hudson

It explores the virgin archetype and the structural beats of the virgin's journey.



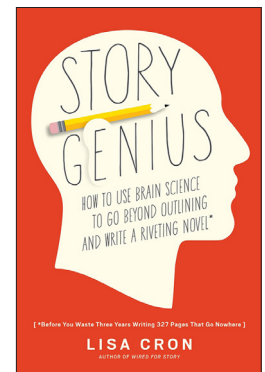
5 **Write Away** by Elizabeth George

George feels like your personal writing mentor. With each chapter, she invites you to sit with her while she guides you through her personal writing process. It's a joy to read and includes several helpful guides to use in your own writing.



6 **Story Genius** by Lisa Cron

Cron shows you how to build your story using cause-and-effect driven by the protagonist's inner struggle, what Cron calls the "third rail." It includes one novelist's evolving story as an example throughout, as well as a template for your own scene cards.



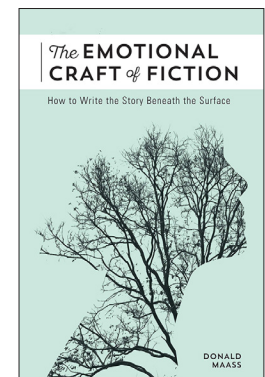
7 **Make a Scene** by Jordan Rosenfeld

Rosenfeld shows how to build a scene and breaks down the different types that could appear in your story. She also helps you understand each of the core elements of a scene, including character development and motivation as well as how to use plot to move your character along their emotional journey one scene at a time.



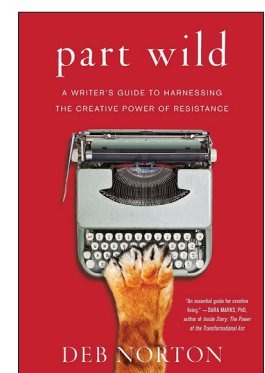
8 **The Emotional Craft of Fiction** by Donald Maass

This book dives deep into how to bring out those richer emotions and provides thirty-four writing exercises to help you master this particular art.



9 **Part Wild** by Deb Norton

Norton showcases how to embrace that resistance and make it work for you in a way that gives your creativity free reign.



And when you move beyond theory and need a thesaurus to find that one missing element reach for these powerful, insightful, thought-provoking, and intelligent resources: *The Emotion Thesaurus*, *The Emotional Wound Thesaurus*, and *The Conflict Thesaurus* by Angela Ackerman and Becca Pugliesi. These are perfect for fleshing out your character's emotional journey and showing their emotions on the page. All the resources mentioned can be immensely helpful in honing your craft, but they only work if you actually put them into practice.

So, sharpen your pencils or cozy up to your keyboard, and write!

BEHIND THE EMOTION



By Maria Daversa

Women's fiction features stories where main characters made decisions, good or bad, based on their emotions and reactions to those emotions. We call this the inner journey. The emotions involved in that journey include those experienced by the main character and by the reader. This requires creating our characters and developing their arcs authentically. It means capturing their strengths and imperfections, hopes and desires, and fears and secrets, and delivering the driving force behind their choices and decisions. To do this, we first need to understand how we experience and express our emotions.

THE BIG SIX

A brief overview shows there are six basic emotions. These are defined as reactions to external events and include



and we experience them daily—nearly every minute. Get cut off in traffic, and you get angry. An agent requests a partial, and you feel joy.

Yet, life is more complicated than this, and this is where our secondary emotions get involved. Secondary emotions are reactions to our primary emotions and are generated by our thoughts (Damasio, 1994), which are developed over time

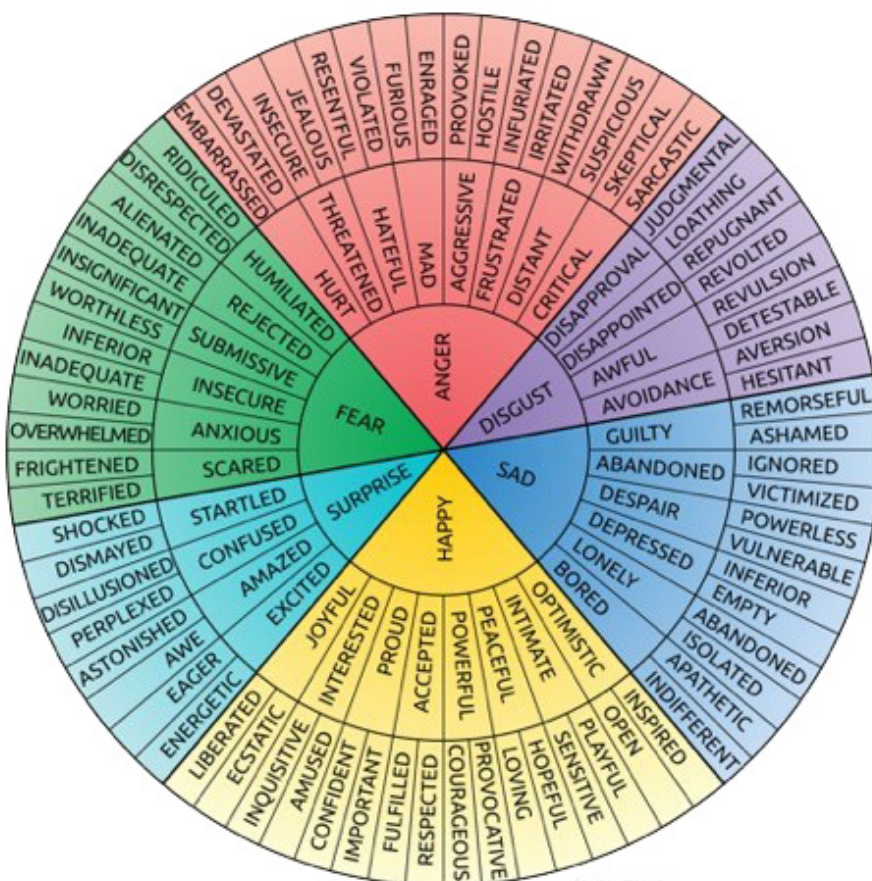
through our interactions with others (Picard, 1995). An example of a secondary emotion is feeling anxious (primary) about being asked to write an essay for an e-zine produced by and for a women’s writing association, then being embarrassed (secondary) about feeling anxious. For more, book coach and fellow WFWA member, Lidija Hilje, provides a wonderful review of secondary, or third-level

emotions, on her blog.

If all this sounds a bit complicated, it is! But here’s the bright spot. As a writer, this is exactly what we want when we place our characters in difficult situations. We want the problems and the obstacles and the setbacks because we want them to dig deeper. We want them to move beyond the basics—which means we need to dig deeper. It’s what Donald Maass (2016) proposes when he challenges us to go one better than what’s obvious, easy, or safe and asks us to identify the emotions under the surface, or what he calls lower-layer emotions (i.e., our secondary emotions). Give the reader the unexpected, and you give them a more complex character, one they can connect with on a more intimate level.

Our readers want to relate to our characters. They want to love, hate, cry; they want to connect. They want to embark on a journey of self-discovery, and we want to provide it for them. And it begins with exploring what’s behind the emotions.

Below is an Emotion Wheel to help you identify emotions beyond the basic.



Emotion Wheel published by The Samaritan Center on their blog <https://samaritan-center.org/forgiveness-part-four/>.

Damasio, A.R. (1994) *Descartes’ error: emotion, reason, and the human brain*. New York: Grosset/Putnam.

Ekman, P. (1992). An argument for basic emotions. *Cogn Emot.* 6, 169–200.

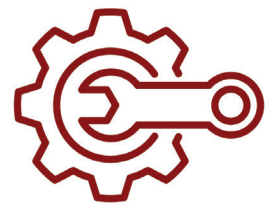
Hilje, L. (2022, January 22). Retrieved from <https://lidijahilje.com/blog/book-club-recap-the-dearly-beloved-by-cara-wall>

Maass, D. (2016). *The emotional craft of fiction*. Cincinnati: Writer’s Digest Books.

Picard, R.W. (1995). *Affective Computing*. M.I.T Media Laboratory Perceptual Computing Section Technical Report No. 321.



Maria Daversa, a clinical psychologist, writes upmarket women’s fiction and is presently completing her first novel. She lives in the US and shares her home with her husband and two rescues.



THE DREADED SYNOPSIS

Why do we dread the synopsis? Because it's hard! It's completely different from all the things we love about writing. Unfortunately, the synopsis is a critical tool for agents, editors, marketing, and publicity people who either don't have time to read your manuscript or aren't sure it's worth the time. The synopsis is essentially a cheat sheet. That's why it needs to be good.

Beyond describing what the story is about, or summarizing it in glowing terms, a synopsis needs to actually tell the story. Don't waste time explaining why you love it, why it's important, or withholding the ending as a surprise. The synopsis is one action-packed page that tells the main story as it happens.

ORIGINAL SYNOPSIS – HOW FAR WE'LL GO

Stay-at-home moms LORRIE and EDEN have long been the lifeblood of their neighborhood, and of each other. Their decades-long friendship is tested when Lorrie's oldest son and golden child, KNOX (18 years, high school senior), is accused of rape after an alcohol-fueled teenage party. In a nightmarish twist, the accuser is Eden's daughter, SUMMER (18 years).

Summer has been in love with Knox as long as she can remember. When he finally returns her affections their relationship quickly becomes serious, yet they struggle with different expectations of what "love" means. Summer's hinges on the fairy tale of being Knox's girlfriend at long last, while Knox's attempts at intimacy are tainted by a crippling, secret addiction to pornography.

Eden learns of her daughter's accusation when a neighbor discovers Summer after a night of drinking and brings her to the hospital. Frightened and angry, Eden confronts Lorrie.

Lorrie, who considers herself a feminist and believes she has raised a good son, is stunned by the accusation. With their friendship hanging in the balance, and Eden warns Lorrie that she will seek retribution.

Determined to protect Knox, Lorrie's husband, ED, hires a slick lawyer with a reputation for making sexual assault cases "disappear". Lorrie doesn't agree with this approach, and she and Ed fight — something they do more and more often. Without Eden to turn, to Lorrie feels isolated in a community where appearances are everything and rumors can be devastating.

Lorrie's younger son, ARCHIE (15 years), is torn between allegiance to his brother and to Summer, on whom he's harbored a secret crush for years. He also faces his own struggles with forging his identity in the shadow of his popular, all-star athlete older brother.

Knox is crushed when he suspects Archie's divided loyalty. Though outwardly popular and well-liked, he feels increasingly isolated as he struggles with his pornography addiction and bigger questions about

what it means to be a man.

Rumors fly once the news about Summer's accusation gets out at school. She is taunted by allies of Knox and a fight breaks out. Archie is suspended for entering the fray. While Lorrie knows she needs to address Archie's suspension and the increasing tension between her sons, she is waylaid by a shocking discovery of her own: that the lawyer her husband hired to protect Knox once defended Ed against his own case of sexual misconduct.

As Eden fights to protect her daughter and hold Knox accountable, her own history with sexual assault clouds her judgement. Tensions rise between her and her husband, who wants to seek justice through the courts, while Eden prefers to plot revenge.

Though a formal trial does not occur due to lack of evidence, judgement abounds as the community chooses sides. Summer's supporters, including Eden and the other mothers who have rallied around her, plan a public takedown of Knox at the Spring Salon, a high profile end-of-school-year event that's attended by the entire student body and their parents. Archie secretly plans to join them, unbeknownst to his parents and Knox.

The Spring Salon devolves into chaos as Team Summer storms the event in protest. In the aftermath the student newspaper publishes an article in support of Summer. It goes viral and results in Knox's college admission being rescinded.

A reckoning for all parties ensues. Knox struggles with the realization that his encounter with Summer was not consensual and considers what to do next now that college is off the table. Knox and Archie begin to mend their relationship, while Lorrie and Eden are unable to reconcile. Summer, who has found her voice, begins to heal and look toward the future. After the firestorm, Lorrie considers the ashes of the "perfect" life she'd so painstakingly architected, including her marriage, and realizes she must build something new that feels true to herself.

LET'S FIX THIS!

Caitlin Weaver's story, *How Far We'll Go*, has a clear and simple narrative that will attract many readers. She makes good use of active present tense. She understands the gold of the story, the unique perspective of a friendship between two mothers – one of whom has a son who rapes the other's daughter.

The original synopsis begins with the friendship, the existing situation. Yet in a synopsis, there is no time to set the scene. It must be woven into the action. The first significant action in this story is the rape. If this is the mothers' story, then the moment they hear about it is the place to begin.

Sometimes, this initial challenge is buried in the premise line. When I asked Caitlin for her premise line, she said: *Lorrie's comfortable life of PTA meetings and playground gossip is upended when her teenage son is accused of rape by her best friend's daughter.*

A more dynamic premise line would be: *When Lorrie, a devoted PTA mom, learns that her teenaged son raped her best friend's daughter, she struggles to save her friendship, her marriage, and do what's best for her son in a battle that rips the small town apart.*

Here are suggestions specific to this sample that will be useful for every synopsis:

■ **START WHERE THE ACTION BEGINS:**

This story begins with the rape. Or at least, the moment the main character hears about it.

■ **GROUND THE READER IMMEDIATELY WITH FOUR OF THE FIVE W'S OF JOURNALISM: WHO, WHAT, WHERE, AND WHEN:**

Like most writers, Caitlin is so familiar with her story that she has left out important facts. Where does this take place? How old are the mothers? What year is this? If it's present day, how does it address the #metoo movement?

■ **CHRONOLOGY:** The first paragraph here is perfect for a short promotional summary. But the actual synopsis begins in the second paragraph. And as we bounce from person to person, the order

SINCE SUMMER AND KNOX HAVE DIFFERENT EXPECTATIONS OF A RELATIONSHIP, THERE IS POTENTIAL TO ALSO ADDRESS CURRENT GENDER EXPECTATIONS, FEMINISM, CANCEL CULTURE, AND #METOO. REFERENCE TO THIS CAN RAISE UNIVERSAL QUESTIONS WORTHY OF MANY BOOK CLUB DISCUSSIONS.

gets muddy. I recommend making a list of events and important revelations before writing your synopsis.

Share the events as they happen in order. You can play with how you tell the story flashbacks in the actual manuscript. For the synopsis, use the natural chronology.

■ **FOCUS ON THE MAIN PLOT AND THE MAIN PROTAGONIST:**

This is a family drama, so everyone is affected. But focus only on the main characters unless you can weave in details that do not disrupt the main narrative line. In this story, we already have four important names, so I eliminated the husband's name.

■ **EXPAND STEREOTYPES INTO UNIVERSAL ISSUES BY DOING RESEARCH:**

The main character's son is described as having a "crippling secret porn addiction." Currently, this would be worthy of therapeutic treatment. In fact, there is a 12-step program called Sex & Love Addicts Anonymous (SLAA). Also, the widespread use of pornography has changed the expectations of sexuality. This "golden boy" is guilty, but the influence of the culture makes his journey more complex.

Since Summer and Knox have different expectations of a relationship, there is potential to also address current gender expectations, feminism, cancel culture, and #metoo. Reference to this can raise universal questions worthy of many book club discussions.

■ **AVOID SUMMARIZING CRITICAL EVENTS:**

This story is about a crime, but there is no trial. This needs to be

explained as a major turning point so it doesn't look like a plot hole. A few extra words can make a difference.

■ **CREDIBILITY:** Since there is no trial, the son is not formally charged. How does that eliminate his potential for higher education? Perhaps the fuss prevents him from getting a scholarship to his ideal college, but what about other colleges, later?

■ **BE SPECIFIC:** Avoid flowery language and vague descriptions. Details make your story unique. For example, why suggest a "a nightmarish twist" when the details are forthcoming? What is the "chaos" at the Spring Salon? What is the "reckoning" that "ensues"?

■ **POINT OF VIEW:** Caitlin's synopsis is structured in a way that suggests that she will be alternating points of view. Bravo for not telling us that outright. In such a short space, however, it can still help to be consistent with the opening character throughout. The reader needs to root for someone. Be sure to weave the other perspectives into the natural flow of the story.

■ **NARRATIVE DRIVE:** There must be a constant urgency in the story. Every event in the synopsis, like in the larger story, must have a cause and effect. Think of it like dominoes.

Also, Caitlin opens with the mothers, but the synopsis loses that focus. I added a sentence in the middle and also addressed it more at the end to keep that as the main narrative thread.

HERE IS ONE WAY TO REVISE THE SYNOPSIS:

EDEN, a stay at home mom in a close-knit Atlanta suburb, is called to the hospital after her daughter, SUMMER, has been raped at an alcohol-fueled high school party. Summer reveals that the rapist is her long-time crush, KNOX, the son of her mother's best friend, LORRIE. Eden contacts Lorrie and vows revenge.

Lorrie, a self-proclaimed feminist who prides herself on having the perfect life, is stunned by the accusation. Knox is her golden boy, a star athlete with a college scholarship in his pocket. She goes to her husband who hires a slick lawyer with a reputation for making sexual assault cases disappear. Lorrie wants to help her son but also hold him accountable, so she fights her husband over this strategy. She loses. Lorrie becomes a pariah in the community, and sorely misses her friend, Eden.

Lorrie's younger son, ARCHIE, struggles with loyalty to his popular brother due to a secret love for Summer. When Knox's friends at school taunt Summer over the rape accusation, his brother Archie comes to her rescue. Archie gets in a fight and is suspended.

Knox is crushed by his brother's betrayal. Now he must deal with his unhealthy appetite for porn as well as a larger insecurity about what it means to be a man in today's world.

As Lorrie grapples with her troubled sons, she learns that her husband was accused of a sexual

misconduct in the past. The same lawyer now representing Knox won a dismissal of her husband's charges. She reaches out to Eden....

Eden, clouded by her own memory of a sexual assault, is out for revenge. She battles with her husband over the lack of closure the legal system provides. And she's right—the charges against Knox are dropped due to lack of evidence.

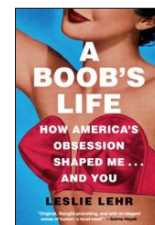
Eden enlists other mothers and students, including Knox's brother Archie, to Team Summer. The group expands into a popular cause that divides the close-knit community. Eden plans a protest at school's annual end of the year event, the Spring Salon.

When the Spring Salon is ruined by the Team Summer protest, a videotape of the chaos goes viral. Knox's college admission is canceled. He begins to address his serious problems and makes up with his brother while facing an uncertain future.

Eden mends her relationship with her husband as Summer begins to heal. However, she cannot remain friends with Lorrie. Alone, Lorrie must end her marriage and focus on what really matters. Lorrie picks herself up from the ashes, helps her children, and begins a new, truer life.



Leslie Lehr is the author of *A Boob's Life: How America's Obsession Shaped Me and You*, available in hardback, ebook, and audio. It's currently in development with Salma Hayek as a comedy series for HBOMax. Lehr is a prize-winning novelist and the Novel Consultant for Truby Writers Studio. Visit www.LeslieLehr.com Facebook | Twitter | Instagram



IN THEIR WORDS: REBECCA HODGE AND REBECCA TAYLOR

By Kay Arthur

WFWA celebrates our writers in every stage of their writing career by presenting two contests annually—the **Rising STAR Award for unpublished writers** and the **STAR Award for published writers**.

We are thrilled to feature Rebecca Hodge as the STAR Award winner of the Debut category with her novel *Wildland*, and

Rebecca Taylor as the winner in the General category with her novel, *Her Perfect Life*. We interviewed both Rebeccas to learn more about their careers and their novels and what it feels like to succeed as an author. They are grateful, humble, and spoke honestly about the challenges and joys of writing.

Rebecca Hodge lives in North Carolina and is a veterinarian and clinical research scientist. The nugget of *Wildland* was cast from a conversation she had with her son, who was in Colorado watching helicopters dump water on a nearby fire. Her writer brain took that nugget, and it became *Wildland*, which was published in February 2020.

Interestingly, she had entered the manuscript previously into the Rising STAR contest and was named as a finalist. It was through that entry that an agent judge, Nalini Akolekar, requested a full read, and she was offered representation.

Rebecca “pantsed” her way through *Wildland*, although she had a vague idea about the ending. With her new novel, *Over the Falls*, she began with a general outline and a stronger idea of the ending but allowed herself freedom to shift along the way.

Through WFWA, she loves the ability to connect with writers who are further along their writing career than she. She appreciates the information, friendship, and support that is also part of this writing community. Paying it forward to other writers is important to her, so she volunteers through the mentorship program.

Rebecca’s advice to writers:

- Persistence is key. Keep learning and making your book the best it can be.
- Remember there’s only one thing we can control—the quality of the work.
- Surround yourself with a strong writing community.
- Enjoy the ride.

Over the Falls, her latest novel, was released in September 2021. Visit Rebecca at www.rebeccahodgefiction.com



IN THEIR WORDS

Rebecca Taylor lives in Colorado with her husband and family. Born in Green Bay Wisconsin, and the child of a military family, she traveled from Canada to Okinawa, and all over the United States. She used reading to ground her through the many moves. Always with a book in her hands, she said, “Books help raised me.”

Her traveling continued in her 20s, working as an international flight attendant for years, while pursuing degrees in psychology and sociology. She hadn’t planned on being an author – “I didn’t yet know I could have dreams that big.” But when she was pregnant with her first child, she started writing as a hobby. Knowing nothing about the industry, she plunged into the waters, joined the writing community, attended conferences, and joined critique groups. She self-published several books, prior to landing an agent.

Her Perfect Life was born from her thirst to read and watch movies about writers. She took that thought and added sibling rivalry, posing the question of what it would be like to be the sister of a famous author. Having teenagers of her own, Rebecca knew all about sibling emotions and how intense they can be. She pitched the idea at a writing conference to an agent who liked the concept.

Interestingly, and fortuitous, Rebecca almost talked herself out of that initial pitch appointment with the agent. “I was afraid to get my hopes up.” Then, she asked herself, “Am I going to regret this when I’m 80, if I don’t go?” And she made the decision to go.

She pitched her idea and the agent asked to see her first chapters when they were completed. After reading them, her agent, Kevan Lyon, signed her without even reading the finished manuscript. It was published in June 2020.

Her scenario, although not the norm, proves the point to dream big, take the chance, and follow your dreams. Rebecca followed hers and now has seven published novels.

Rebecca’s style for plotting the novels is a marriage between creativity and structure. She outlines but doesn’t plot in detail; she too, allows for freedom of inspiration.



Rebecca’s advice to writers:

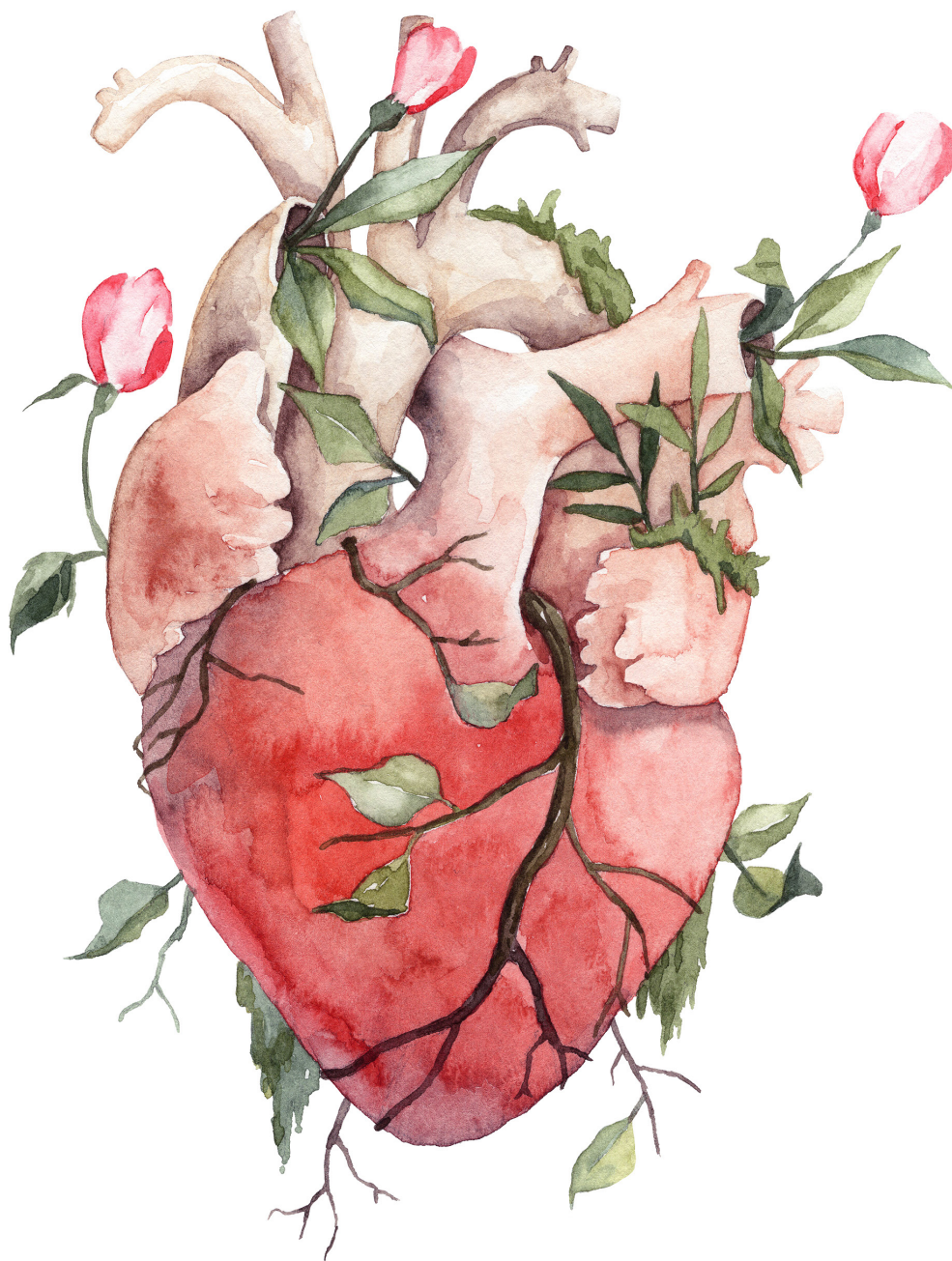
- Finish the book! The big lesson from her first book was that she could complete it—that “fulfillment” of knowing you can do it!
- Be realistic about your expectations. Publishing is a business, first and foremost.
- Keep in mind it’s a marathon, not a sprint.
- Always give yourself grace.
- It’s important to be part of a writing community—celebrate the successes of your peers.
- Support WFWA—it’s a lovely community. Give back and volunteer where you can.

The Secret Next Door, Rebecca’s latest novel, was released in November 2021. You can visit Rebecca at www.rebeccataylorbooks.com

Congratulations to these two STARS for all of their successes. We are so proud!

*Fill your paper with the
breathings of your heart.*

- WILLIAM WORDSWORTH



WRITEON!