



*Write* **ON!**

# THE ART OF **RESEARCH**

**RESEARCH TOOLS FOR WRITERS AT ALL STAGES**  
FROM DRAFT TO POST-PUB

**HOW TECH CAN HELP WITH RESEARCH**  
FOR WRITERS AT ALL STAGES

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE  
WOMEN'S FICTION WRITERS ASSOCIATION

*Summer 2016*



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# President's Note



Since I still have three school-age children, and live in the Northeast, my life is divided neatly into seasons, each one carrying its own personality.

Fall is fresh and new – shiny school supplies, colorful foliage, the earnest zeal of creatively packed lunches (that ends after the first week of school!) and pumpkin spice everything.

Winter holds busy holiday preparations punctuated by looming weather advisories of all sorts.

Spring is the wind down of the school year – the first flowering trees are almost missed in the frenzied rush of end of the year class parties, finals and field trips.

And then comes Summer.

Sigh.

Summer in our house is largely unscheduled, messy, and, for me at least - adorned by worn paperbacks smelling of sticky sunscreen and all the locales they hitchhiked along with me for the season. My best traveling partners – the books I read from June to August each year - form landmarks in my mind's eye of our family summers, the places we were, the people we were, the fights, the food, the memories, dropped ice cream cones, hassles and adventures.

The time I woke before everyone else in the house in Costa Rica in 2013 to finish Vanessa Diffenbaugh's *Language of Flowers* over strong local coffee before our nature hike. The summer I ignored everyone and even the sting rays for just a couple of hours to finish Katie Moretti's *Ties That Bind* in Discovery Cove in Orlando in 2015. That time at least 3 or 4 other people

were reading Maria Semple's *Where'd You Go Bernadette?* on my cruise to the Bahamas in 2012, and we all smiled at each other – strangers who shared something wonderful in common besides the trip we were on. That time I borrowed a copy of Sue Miller's *While I Was Gone* from the book stack in the vacation home we shared with several families - on the same day my daughter learned to surf in the Outer Banks in 2014. That week I curled up with Jessica Knoll's *The Luckiest Girl Alive* with my still new puppy nearby and a breathtaking view of the Chesapeake Bay where we were staying last summer.

I can remember every book I read every summer vacation for at least the last 5 years. And yet I can't remember why I just walked into the next room. Go figure.

Anyway - that's why I'm so excited about this year's WFWA Summer Reading Challenge. A chance to connect WFWA writers and readers, and create some landmarks of our own. Over 300 people – WFWA members and non-members - have signed up for the FB event (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/132780640460419/?fref=nf>) and are actively participating in daily and weekly discussions of WFWA titles. For someone who measures the success of her summer vacation in books read, this is a dream come true.

Of course, WFWA is certainly not in vacation mode. Programming continues in full force, including an upcoming Facebook launch party, a fabulous Summer workshop entitled "Killing Our Darlings," active Critique groups, and looking ahead .... planning is well underway for the annual retreat in Albuquerque and first ever regional conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania this fall.

Soon enough – at least where I am - it will be an icy cold mess with weather advisories and snow days. So for now, take a breather, curl up with a good book, and keep writing. We want yours to be the NEXT book we take along on summer vacation!

XO

# Editors

## FEATURES EDITOR

**Erin Bartels** writes copy for a living, but she writes novels for a life. She has worked in the publishing industry for fourteen years and has been a finalist in WFWA's Rising Star Contest and in the *Saturday Evening Post's* Great American Fiction Contest. You can find her in her home office in the middle of the Mitten State or at [www.erinbartels.com](http://www.erinbartels.com).

## LAYOUT EDITOR

**Sierra Godfrey** writes fiction with international settings and always a mention of football (soccer) or two. She is also a graphic designer with a soft spot for magazine layout, and a staff sports writer covering La Liga for *The Stoppage Time*. She lives in the foggy wastelands of the San Francisco Bay Area with her family and can be found at [www.sierragodfrey.com](http://www.sierragodfrey.com).

## MANAGING AND COLUMNS EDITOR

**Tasha Seegmiller** is married to the boy she met in elementary school, mom to three kids and coordinator of the project-based learning center (EDGE) at Southern Utah University. She writes contemporary women's fiction with a hint of magic, and thrives on Diet Coke, chocolate and cinnamon bears. She is a co-founder and the managing editor for the *Thinking Through Our Fingers* blog as well as the *Women's Fiction Writers Association* quarterly magazine, where she also serves as a board member. Tasha is represented by Annelise Robey of the Jane Rotrosen Agency.

## CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

**Patricia Friedrich** is an associate professor at Arizona State University. She is the author/editor of six nonfiction books including the upcoming *The Sociolinguistics of Digital Englishes* (Routledge 2016), and of several published short stories. She is currently working on revisions to her first novel-length manuscript, *Artful Women*.

*Write On!* is published quarterly by the WFWA.

**womensfictionwriters.org**

**f facebook.com/WFWritersAssociation**

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## ABOUT THE WFWA

We began this organization in 2013 with the idea to create a safe, nurturing place for male and female 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 prefer. 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.

**Write on!**



FACEBOOK

Join the closed WFWA Facebook group by sending an email to:

[membership@womensfictionwriters.org](mailto:membership@womensfictionwriters.org)

## READER LETTERS

Like what you've read in *Write On!*? Send us a letter! We'd love to hear your feedback and reactions on the stories and features. Email them to [writeon@womensfictionwriters.org](mailto:writeon@womensfictionwriters.org). Submitted letters are considered for publication and may be edited for clarity or space.

## 2016 WFWA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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# Member News

WE'RE EXCITED TO SHARE THESE NEW MEMBER RELEASES  
COMING OUT THIS QUARTER

## MEMBER BOOKS RELEASED THIS QUARTER:

**The Choices We Make**  
by Karma Brown

**Stranger on the Shore**  
by Marilyn Brant

**Rose Hill Cottage**  
by Kathy Nickerson

**Everything We Keep**  
by Kerry Lonsdale

**Sweet Carolina Morning**  
by Susan Schild

**The Ropes That Bind**  
by Tracy Stopler

**This Side of Perfect**  
by Crystal Klimavicz

**Root, Petal, Thorn**  
by Ella Joy Olsen

**Triple Love Score**  
by Brandi Granett

**Innocents Pray**  
by Lisa J. Lickel

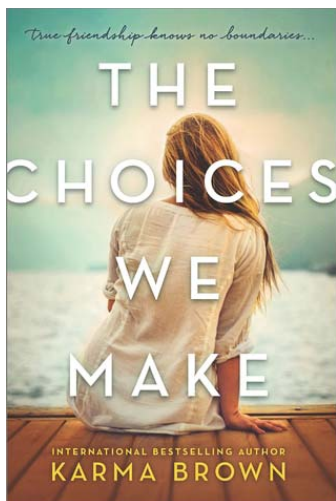
**The Secret Ingredient of Wishes**  
by Susan Bishop Crispell

**All the Good Parts**  
by Loretta Nyhan

**Echoes of Family**  
by Barbara Claypole White

**The Vanishing Year**  
by Katie Moretti

If you have a Women's Fiction novel being published in the next quarter (October-December), and would like Write On! to feature it, please [fill out the submission form here](#).

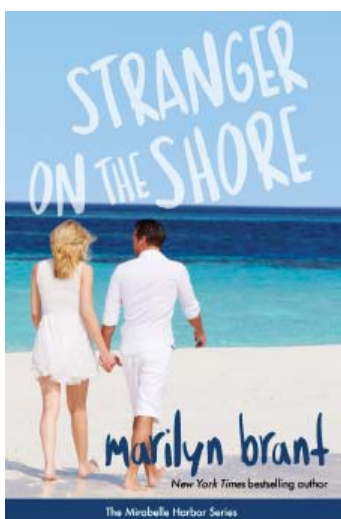


**THE CHOICES WE MAKE**  
**BY KARMA BROWN**  
**RELEASE DATE: JULY 12, 2016**

Hannah and Kate became friends in the fifth grade when Hannah hit a boy for looking up Kate's skirt with a mirror. While they've been close as sisters ever since, Hannah can't help but feel envious of the little family Kate and her husband, David, have created—complete with two perfect little girls.

Hannah and Ben have been trying for years to have a baby, so when they receive the news that she will likely never get pregnant, her heartbreak is overwhelming. But just as they begin to tentatively explore the other options, it's Kate's turn to do the rescuing. Not only does she offer to be Hannah's surrogate, but Kate is willing to use her own eggs to do so.

Full of renewed hope, excitement, and gratitude, these two families embark on an incredible journey toward parenthood . . . until a devastating tragedy puts everything these women have worked toward at risk of falling apart. Poignant and refreshingly honest, *The Choices We Make* is a powerful tale of two mothers, one incredible friendship, and the risks we take to make our dreams come true.

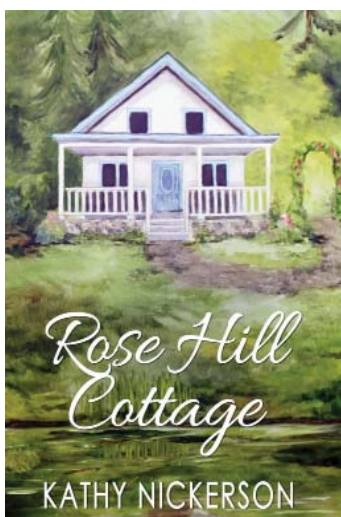


**STRANGER ON THE SHORE**  
**BY MARILYN BRANT**  
**RELEASE DATE: JULY 14, 2016**

On the verge of turning forty and having just lost her job, Marianna Gregory flees Mirabelle Harbor for the summer with little more than a suitcase, her beat-up car, and the blessings of her good friend Olivia. Her ex-husband is living a new life in California. Her college-aged daughter is spending her vacation with her boyfriend in Michigan. And the house Marianna once called her own finally sold, so she has nowhere to live in Illinois now anyway.

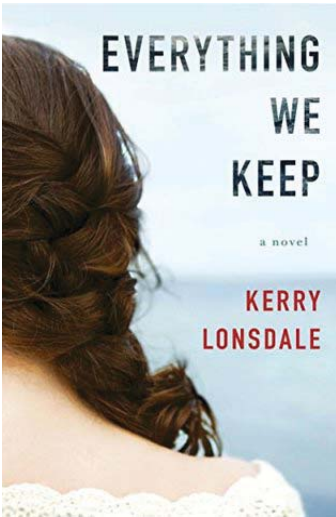
However, her wealthy sister, Ellen, owns an empty bungalow on the beach in Sarasota, Florida, so Marianna turns to the sea for a chance to go shelling, regroup, and figure out what to do with this new chapter in her life. She doesn't bargain on having to face down several family crises while she's away. Nor does she count on meeting a handsome beachcomber who bears a striking resemblance to Elvis. Just as surprising is the craft project she gets roped into volunteering for and the new group of friends who might just change the way she views the world and her future.

The most unexpected gifts can be found where the land meets the sea. *Stranger on the Shore*, a Mirabelle Harbor story.



**ROSE HILL COTTAGE**  
**BY KATHY NICKERSON**  
**RELEASE DATE: JULY 14, 2016**

After the death of her young husband, bestselling novelist Nora Kimble escapes New York for a summer cottage in the Ozarks. She hopes to leave behind her nagging mother, her ambitious literary agent, and her own pressing sorrow. But her private retreat is soon crowded by a strange visitor and a community that refuses to let her grieve alone.



**EVERYTHING WE KEEP**  
**BY KERRY LONSDALE**  
**RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 1, 2016**

Sous chef Aimee Tierney has the perfect recipe for the perfect life: marry her childhood sweetheart, raise a family, and buy out her parents' restaurant. But when her fiancé, James Donato, vanishes in a boating accident, her well-baked future is swept out to sea. Instead of walking down the aisle on their wedding day, Aimee is at James's funeral—an event that leaves her more unsettled than at peace.

As Aimee struggles to reconstruct her life, she delves deeper into James's disappearance. What she uncovers is an ocean of secrets that make her question everything about the life they built together. And just below the surface is a truth that may set Aimee free . . . or shatter her forever.

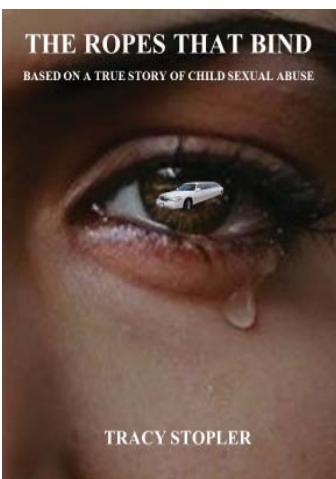
A luminous debut with unexpected twists, *Everything We Keep* explores the devastation of loss, the euphoria of finding love again, and the pulse-racing repercussions of discovering the truth about the ones we hold dear and the lengths they will go to protect us.



**SWEET CAROLINA MORNING**  
**BY SUSAN SCHILD**  
**RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 2, 2016**

Finally, just shy of forty years old, Linny Taylor is living the life of her dreams in her charming hometown of Willow Hill, North Carolina. The past few years have been anything but a fairy tale: Left broke by her con man late husband, Linny has struggled to rebuild her life from scratch. Then she met Jack Avery, the town's much-adored veterinarian. And she's marrying him.

Everything should be coming up roses for Linny. So why does she have such a serious case of pre-wedding jitters? It could be because Jack's prosperous family doesn't approve of her rough-and-tumble background. Or that his ex-wife is suddenly back on the scene. Or that Linny has yet to win over his son's heart. All these obstacles—not to mention what she should wear when she walks down the aisle—are taking the joy out of planning her wedding. Linny had better find a way to trust love again, or she might risk losing the one man she wants to be with—forever.



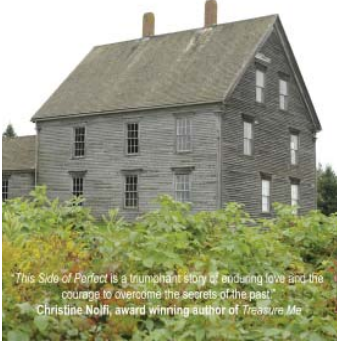
**THE ROPES THAT BIND**  
**BY TRACY STOPLER**  
**RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 12, 2016**

When nine-year-old Tali Stark from the Bronx stops to give directions to “The Man” in a white limousine, she unwittingly puts herself on a trajectory to emotional and spiritual turmoil that will take her decades to rise above.

Blaming herself for a heinous crime that happened because she didn't “go straight to school,” Tali is bound by invisible chains of secrecy, shame, and self-imposed isolation. Her harrowing and illuminating journey to recovery begins in her twenties with the support of her mentor, Dr. Daniel Benson, with whom she experiences deep love and heartbreak. Feeling lost, Tali travels to Israel where Kabbalah sparks her spiritualism, and then to Africa where an arduous climb up Mount Kilimanjaro ignites a newfound feeling of empowerment. Only when Tali goes back to the Bronx and learns that her unreported crime scene has become the site of a rehabilitation center, does she understand that there is one more road to travel prior to reaching freedom.

## THIS SIDE OF PERFECT

A NOVEL BY  
CRYSTAL KLIMAVICZ

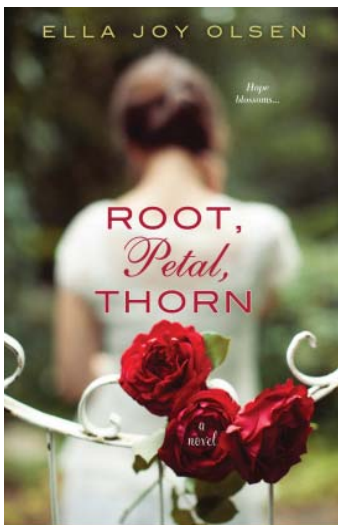


**THIS SIDE OF PERFECT**  
**BY CRYSTAL KLIMAVICZ**  
**RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 21, 2016**

Kate and her husband, Ethan, have moved into an old, sprawling farmhouse in the quaint coastal town of Parker Pointe, Maine. Reunited with both her family and her past, Kate should have found happiness. She has her son. She can smell the sweet, salty scents of the ocean. Life is good . . . or so she thought.

Kate soon realizes that having “everything” doesn’t always equate to happiness. As events slowly begin to unravel and mysterious events in their neighborhood occur, Ethan’s unsettling behavior and a crazy neighbor cause Kate to question everything. Over the course of the summer, a strange station wagon is repeatedly seen driving by. Then Kate discovers a note in her mailbox that says it’s from a brother she didn’t know she had.

When outside forces become too strong to ignore, Kate’s instincts finally kick in. However, it’s not until that which she loves most is lost that her world comes crashing down. In the end, Kate’s life endures a twist of fate that will surprise everyone.

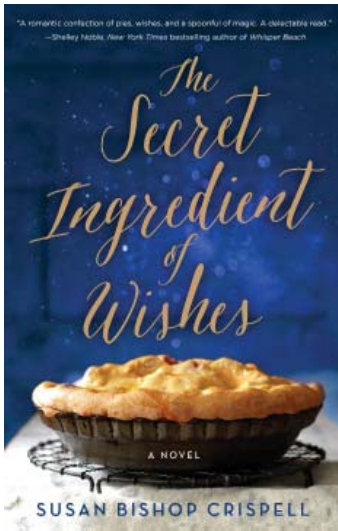


**ROOT, PETAL, THORN**  
**BY ELLA JOY OLSEN**  
**RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 30, 2016**

Ivy Baygren has two great loves in her life: her husband, Adam, and the bungalow they buy together in one of the oldest neighborhoods in Salt Lake City, Utah. From the moment she and Adam lay eyes on the home, Ivy is captivated by its quaint details—the old porch swing, ornate tiles, and especially an heirloom rose bush bursting with snowy white blossoms. Called the Emmeline Rose for the home’s original owner, it seems yet another sign that this place will be Ivy’s happily-ever-after . . . until her dreams are shattered by Adam’s unexpected death.

Striving to be strong for her two children, Ivy decides to tackle the home-improvement projects she and Adam once planned. Day by day, as she attempts to rebuild her house and her resolve, she uncovers clues about previous inhabitants, from a half-embroidered sampler to buried wine bottles. And as Ivy learns about the women who came before her—the young Mormon torn between her heart and anti-polygamist beliefs, the Greek immigrant during World War II, a troubled single mother in the 1960s—she begins to uncover the lessons of her own journey. For every story has its sadness, but there is also the possibility of blooming again, even stronger and more resilient than before.





**THE SECRET INGREDIENT OF WISHES**  
**BY SUSAN BISHOP CRISPELL**  
**RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 6, 2016**

Twenty-six-year-old Rachel Monroe has spent her whole life trying to keep a very unusual secret: she can make wishes come true. And sometimes the consequences are disastrous. So when Rachel accidentally grants an outlandish wish for the first time in years, she decides it's time to leave her hometown—and her past—behind for good.

Rachel isn't on the road long before she runs out of gas in a town that's not on her map: Nowhere, North Carolina—also known as the town of “Lost and Found.” In Nowhere, Rachel is taken in by a spitfire old woman, Catch, who possesses a strange gift of her own: she can bind secrets by baking them into pies. Rachel also meets Catch's neighbor, Ashe, a Southern gentleman with a complicated past, who makes her want to believe in happily-ever-after for the first time in her life.

As she settles into the small town, Rachel hopes her own secrets will stay hidden, but wishes start piling up everywhere Rachel goes. When the consequences threaten to ruin everything she's begun to build in Nowhere, Rachel must come to terms with who she is and what she can do, or risk losing the people she's starting to love—and her chance at happiness—all over again.



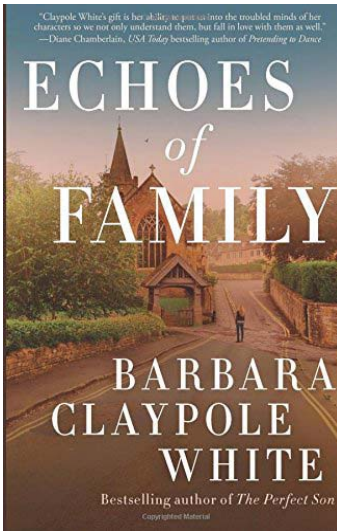
**ALL THE GOOD PARTS**  
**BY LORETTA NYHAN**  
**RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 20, 2016**

At thirty-nine, Leona Accorsi is broke, single, back in school, and living in her sister Carly's basement. She's perfectly content being quirky Auntie Lee to Carly's four children. That is, until Leona's doctor tells her that if she wants to have a child, she'd better do it now.

Leona does want a baby. She always has, but the circumstances have never been right. Now she has a huge decision to make: face motherhood on her own or risk missing out on its rewards.

Unfortunately, she's let her romantic life go stagnant. She barely even knows any single men. She has just a few prospects: a Vietnam vet and partial amputee, his intimidating son, the sweet but troubled man who tutors her niece, and a fellow nursing student she's never actually met.

As Leona discovers more about each one, she realizes any of them could be the right man for the job. The more important question is, has she become the right woman?

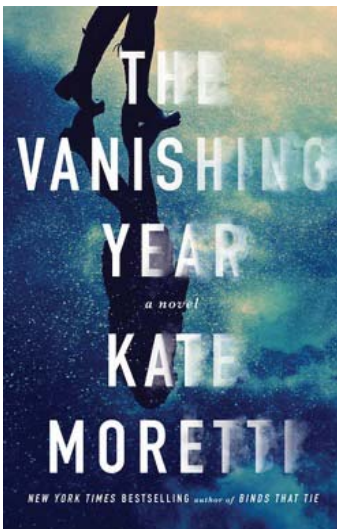


**ECHOES OF FAMILY**  
**BY BARBARA CLAYPOLE WHITE**  
**SEPTEMBER 27, 2016**

Sometimes the only way through darkness is to return to where it began.

Marianne Stokes fled England at seventeen, spiraling into the manic depression that would become her shadow. She left behind secrets, memories, and tragedy: one teen dead, and her first love, Gabriel, badly injured. Three decades later she's finally found peace in the North Carolina recording studio she runs with her husband, Darius, and her almost-daughter, Jade . . . until another fatality propels her back across the ocean to confront the long-buried past.

In her picturesque childhood village, the first person she meets is the last person she wants to see again: Gabriel. Now the village vicar, he takes her in without question, and ripples of what if reverberate through both their hearts. As Marianne's mind unravels, Jade and Darius track her down. Tempers clash when everyone tries to help, but only by finding the courage to face her illness can Marianne heal herself and her offbeat family.



**THE VANISHING YEAR**  
**BY KATIE MORETTI**  
**RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 27, 2016**

Zoe Whittaker is living a charmed life. She is the beautiful young wife to handsome, charming Wall Street tycoon Henry Whittaker. She is a member of Manhattan's social elite. She is on the board of one of the city's most prestigious philanthropic organizations. She has a perfect Tribeca penthouse in the city and a gorgeous lake house in the country. The finest wine, the most up-to-date fashion, and the most luxurious vacations are all at her fingertips.

What no one knows is that five years ago, Zoe's life was in danger. Back then, Zoe wasn't Zoe at all. Now her secrets are coming back to haunt her. As the past and present collide, Zoe must decide who she can trust before she—whatever she is—vanishes completely.

*The Vanishing Year* combines the classic sophistication of Ruth Rendell and A.S.A. Harrison with the thoroughly modern flair of Jessica Knoll. Told from the point-of-view of a heroine who is as relatable as she is enigmatic, *The Vanishing Year* is an unforgettable new novel by a rising star of the genre.



# The Research that Comes *After* You Write

by ERIN BARTELS

**Y**ou're a responsible writer. You do your research. You comb newspapers, pin web pages, and gather visuals. You interview professionals and watch scads of YouTube videos. You prepare yourself to write the best book possible. And when you run into something you don't know enough about, you research *that* too.

All that great research will fuel your writing. It will help you create settings that feel startlingly real. It will help you breathe life into your three-dimensional characters. It can even drive your plot. Done right, research will help readers live inside your book for a while and come out the other side knowing more than they did before, yet not having noticed they learned it from you!

But what if you researched your tail off, wrote your draft, and revised it several times only to find yourself wondering, "Did I get that right?" Sometimes a quick look at your research again can confirm that yes, you put that building on the right street or no, you need to change some of that character's symptoms.

But sometimes, looking again or even looking for more information is not going to give you the confidence that you have "gotten it right." I'm talking about the times when you've stepped out

on a limb and your inexperience is causing that limb to shake. Maybe you have taken to heart the call to write more diverse characters—people who are coming from a different racial, socioeconomic, sexual, or religious place than what you're used to. It's one thing to read about what it feels like to be a minority or someone who has experienced extreme poverty or sexual abuse. It is another thing altogether to experience it.

And what if, despite your best efforts, you got it wrong?

One of the best ways I have found to quell those nagging doubts that you've done your due diligence is to seek out beta readers who have more experience with some of your plot elements than you do.

I currently have a manuscript on submission called *The Bone Garden* that covers three generations of a white family and its interactions with the Underground Railroad, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, including the Detroit Riots of 1967, and current racially motivated violence. My characters were split black/white and male/female about fifty-fifty. I was keen on avoiding stereotypes on either side of the racial divide and presenting characters that held a multitude of nuanced viewpoints on race, justice, and family.

I'd done my research. Oh, I had *done* my research. I read nonstop for a year before I put even one word of my first draft to paper. I read hundreds and hundreds of pages. And I felt pretty good about what I finally produced after many drafts.

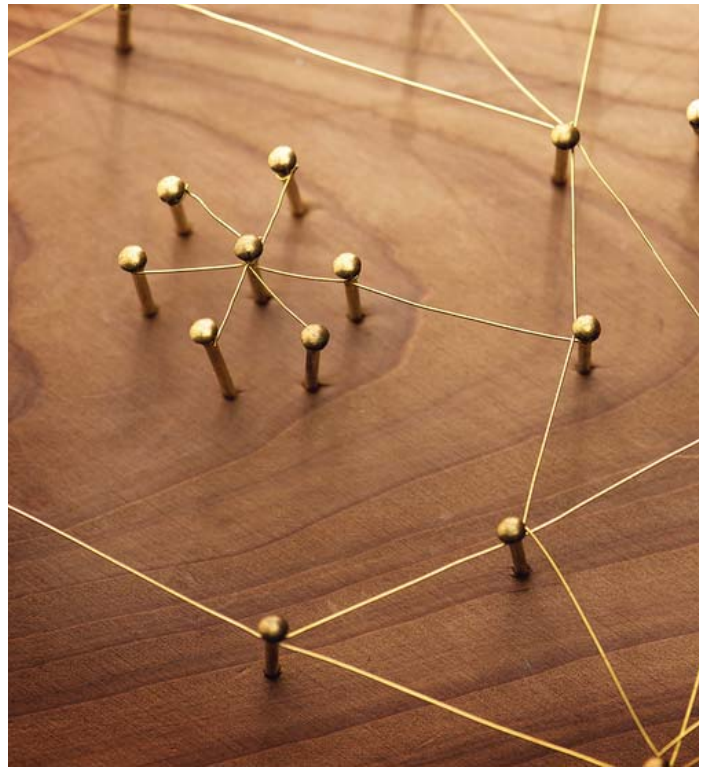
Yet, I worried.

I worried that I had unintentionally written something that someone would take the wrong way. I worried that I didn't have the right to write characters who used African American English Vernacular. I worried that I may have used an architectural feature or a turn of phrase that was anachronistic. I worried that I might have had a male character say something that only a woman would say. I worried that I might have made a blunder from which there might be no coming back.

So when I started looking for beta readers, I specifically looked for people who could speak to the things I was concerned about. My readers included three black friends, three men, and a number of women; a historic preservationist and a sociology professor who specialized in race relations; several casual readers and a few writers; one black reader whose father was a cop during the riots; and two white people (who happened to be my parents) who lived in my setting of Detroit in the 1960s and remembered the riots from both within the city of Detroit (mom) and from safe in the wealthy suburbs (dad).

Depending on their areas of expertise and experience, I asked my readers to look for specific issues—Did the language ring true? Are the politics right? Would that wood trim have been stained or painted? What was it really like on those hot July nights when your city was coming down around you?

Several of these people had been resources during the initial research, especially my parents. Where would white kids and black kids have gone to the movies? If you saw an interracial couple walking down the street, what might be some people's reactions to that? What is the process of developing black and white film in a dark room? If this guy works for GM, what suburb would he likely live in? (Hint, it's not



Dearborn.)

But having all those many people read the manuscript after the fact gave me peace of mind that I had done my story and my characters (and my eventual readers) justice. It also helped as I spoke with my potential agent, who wanted to know how I had vetted the manuscript. I was able to tell her confidently that the historical facts were impeccable, the various characters rang true, and that the story was in all ways believable and respectful.

Now, you don't want to leave your research for after the fact—that's disrespectful to your story and your readers.

The story I'm currently writing includes a character who is a German translator working on a translation of my main character's book. I do have a couple family friends (my old pastor and, funnily enough, my old AP English teacher) who are German who could read things over for me later and help me to translate some lines and words that I want to appear in untranslated German. (I have yet to find my sources for the little bit of Korean I'll also be leaving untranslated.) But a big part of the plot hinges on this German translator character and his translation issues. Did I really want to leave it until the end and

perhaps have gotten something so wrong that fixing it could affect the very fabric of the plot?

Enter Jessica Topper, fellow WFWAer and someone who just had her book translated into German. Through the magic of Facebook and Gmail, I have been able to connect with her translator over in Germany and this lovely woman is generously reading scenes and translating lines of German (and already some of the things I wanted to do don't actually make sense). This early input will help me shape a believable plot and character (not only is my new friend German, she is a German translator *for a living!*). And when the whole manuscript is finished, she's offered to read it for me—after the fact.

So I'm not worried.

I know that with helpful beta readers, I can double and triple check my research so that I can confidently say to my agent, yes, this rings true, this is correct, this is ready for the world.

How do you find the right people? Network. Get on the FB group and put out a call for the expert you need. Someone knows someone who knows someone who can help you.

Remember that game from the Nineties called Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon? Where you name any actor and the other person has to get to Kevin Bacon within six movies? For example, Mila Kunis was in *Extract* with Justin Bateman who was in *Identity Thief* with Melissa McCarthy who was in *The Heat* with Michael Rappaport who was in *True Romance* with Christian Slater who was in *Murder in the First* with . . . Kevin Bacon. Well guess what, it works for everyone in the world, not just washed up Eighties celebrities.

In fact, you're only six degrees away from Kevin Bacon. So if you need him to read your manuscript that features a young man doing angry workout dancing in an old warehouse, just start putting those feelers out on Facebook. •



**Erin Bartels** is the author of *This Elegant Ruin: and other stories*. Her debut novel is on submission—which means she's trying really hard to stay inspired enough to work on her current WIP to avoid checking her inbox for news. She blogs at [www.erinbartels.com](http://www.erinbartels.com) and would love to connect with you on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/ErinBartelsAuthor](http://www.facebook.com/ErinBartelsAuthor).



# Tales from the Other Side. . .

## *Finding an Agent*

by PATRICIA FRIEDRICH

**S**uccess leaves a trail, people say. It is principled rather than random, so you can increase your chances of success by planning and turning your plans into action. Even if we don't have a standard recipe for success, it never hurts to talk to those who have found winning strategies in order to see if there is a common denominator to their methods. In that spirit, I talked to four successful women's fiction writers, asking them if they had used particular strategies for securing an agent and whether or not they felt that they were getting closer when they applied those strategies to their search. It turned out all of them did.

**Amy Impellizzeri**, WFWA president and author of *Lemongrass Hope*, looked for agents who were engaging in activities such as pitch sessions and conferences. She explained it in these terms: "It occurred to me that agents who were spending time on professional activities other than reading manuscripts were looking for something new—maybe even from an emerging author." The hunch paid off.

**Aimie K. Runyan**, author of *Promised to the Crown* and the upcoming *Duty to the Crown*, told me the following: "I think the key is finding agents who are looking for the book you are writing." She added that worrying about the

"celebrity" agent of your dreams might not be the best way to find successful representation. Ultimately, she found her agent and her path to publication through a Twitter contest. In her own words, she suggested that writers "query smarter, not harder."



**Leah Ferguson**, author of *All the Difference*, narrated her strategy to me: "I searched out relatively new, very ambitious agents within

[reputable] agencies, agents who had a bit of experience behind them, whose interests matched the characteristics of my manuscript (in my case it was modern women's fiction with a 'hook'), and who were anxious to build their client lists." She continued by suggesting that querying writers not dismiss agents simply because they don't have big lists yet. In fact, this can actually work to the writer's advantage. If the agent is new but works for a well-thought-of agency, they have already been approved by "people in the know." In addition, they will have support staff and likely a mentor or two who have been in the business for a long time. "I sought out a team, rather than a mere 'name,' and I think that is what helped me find representation."

Many emerging writers might think that if the querying process is long, they are wasting their time. **Kerry Hall Lonsdale**, author of *Everything We Keep* doesn't think that way. She explained to me that it was the act of querying itself that helped her develop common sense and a good strategy. "The manuscript that landed me an agent wasn't my first MS. It also wasn't the first version, more like the sixth or seventh. The more you query, the better understanding you glean as to who you are as a writer, what you write, and what you want in an agent." She too decided to put aside "the ideal of a dream agent." Instead, she aimed for a business partner. She wanted a team with experience. "Once I accepted that this whole author/agent business is a business, I got smarter when it came to filtering criticism and feedback." In the process, she learned to listen to her gut, and, most importantly, to not give up on a story that she believed in. "It never crossed my mind that I wouldn't acquire an agent, and it never crossed my mind I wouldn't land a publishing contract. To me, those just weren't options." •



**Patricia Friedrich** is an associate professor at Arizona State University. She is the author/editor of six nonfiction books including the upcoming *The Sociolinguistics of Digital Englishes* (Routledge 2016), and of several published short stories. She is currently working on revisions to her first novel-length manuscript, *Artful Women*.

# People are your best *Resource*

by BARBARA CLAYPOLE WHITE

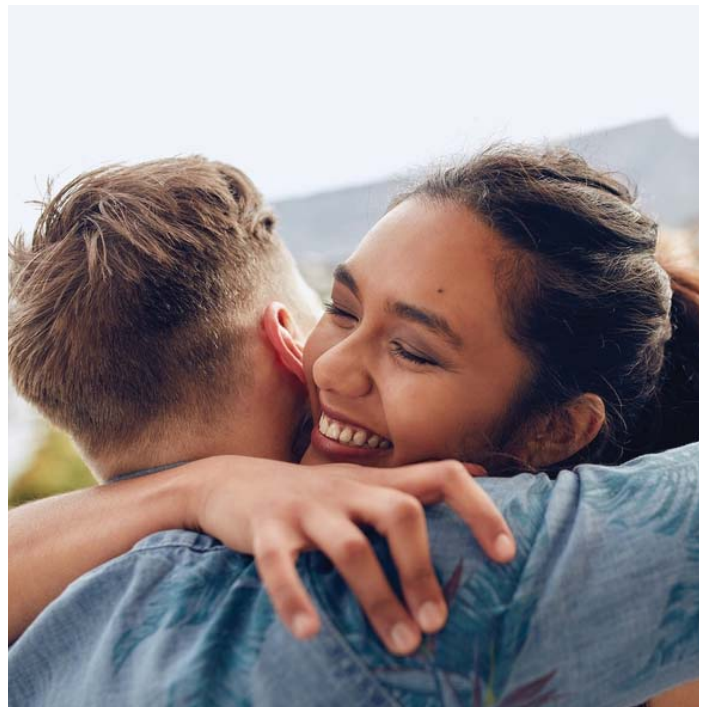
**A**t a recent family gathering, a relative declared his admiration for authors of historical fiction who, unlike writers such as myself, have to work with facts. (I may have provoked this comment by mouthing off about making up stuff for a living.) When I told him I was a research-heavy novelist, he frowned and said, “But what do *you* have to research?”

“Everything,” I said, miffed to realize he was too far down the table to be a target for a projectile napkin. Since he’s a sports nut, I gave him this analogy: “Imagine you’re reading a story about a baseball coach, and the novelist has no idea what his job is, how he does it, or how it influences his life. You’d give up on the book pretty damn quick, right?”

Much nodding followed. Finally, I was talking his language.

“Well,” I said, “that’s true for every character, every scene, every plot point that I create.” And then I told him how I write: I talk to people.

My passion is to craft characters who chip away at the stereotypes of invisible disabilities. A huge part of telling their stories comes from panning for gold in one-on-one interviews. I want to connect with people who have lived or are living the same experiences as my characters.



When I’m researching a mental or neurological disorder, I start with medical websites, blogs, memoirs, etc., but there are no textbook versions of what I’m writing about. And to quote Indiana Jones, “You need to get out of the library.”

If you contact a stranger and say, “Can I interview you for my novel?” he or she won’t care whether or not you’re published. Trust me. I found Tilly, the heroine of my debut, *The Unfinished Garden*, after a summer of interviewing young widows through an online support group.

I had nothing to offer and no guarantees that I wasn't an emotional vampire. I told the group's administrator the truth: I was researching a story about the specific challenges a young widow has to face. I'll never forget one woman's story: she was seven months pregnant when her husband killed himself. She joined a support group for widows, but was the only member under seventy. One day another woman turned on her and said, "You're lucky—you're young enough to meet someone else. I was married for fifty years. My life is over." The young widow said to me, "My life was over too, plus I had a young child who needed me and no friends who could understand what I was going through." When we first meet Tilly, she's retreated from everyone except her son. Her sense of isolation—inspired by that young widow's comment—sets up the connection with my hero, who has never told anyone he battles OCD.

My preference is to meet with interviewees and record them. But I also interview via phone, email, Facebook, carrier pigeon . . . whatever makes someone comfortable. In a face-to-face interview, I watch body language and listen for cadence. I have questions tucked away, but I've discovered a simple, "Tell me your story," leads most people to share the bad stuff they've overcome. And I need that level of research to find characters who are courageous survivors, not victims. (I'm big on the courage it takes to negotiate life while struggling with mental illness.)

One of my favorite interviews—actually we did two—was with John Blackfeather Jefferies, the retired chief of the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation. My sole motivation in meeting with him had been to figure out the backstory for Jacob, the Occaneechi grandfather in *The In-Between Hour*. Jacob is slipping into dementia when the story starts; unbeknownst to me, so was John's wife. As we sat in John's shed, with the smell of a sage smudge, rain tinkling on the tin roof, and the creak of his rocking chair, he talked openly about his wife, his family, and his childhood spent running wild on Occoneechee Mountain. When I came home and transcribed that interview, I knew I had found Jacob's voice and his real memories. And rain on a tin roof and the smell of a sage smudge feature in Ja-

cob's first scene.

The art is to listen. John Blackfeather taught me that. People's stories are living, breathing oral history, says the former history major. Treat them as such.

Another remarkable person, a young woman, agreed to an interview when I was struggling to understand Marianne, my manic-depressive heroine in *Echoes of Family*. (Marianne is a three-time suicide survivor.) We were both in tears as this young woman described waking up in the ER to the realization that she had to explain her suicide attempt to her family. Another young woman relived a hallucination so I could better understand my 18-year-old character with schizoaffective disorder (also in *Echoes of Family*); and the mother of a teenager with Tourette's took me through a terrifying rage attack her son had when he was younger, a version of which ended up in *The Perfect Son*. Listen with empathy; you'll be surprised how much you learn.

If I need to know anything, I go to an expert. I spent most of this morning running dialogue with a 911 dispatcher. We literally created an imaginary call, which is now in my WIP. Do I know any 911 dispatchers? Did I break multiple laws with a bogus emergency call? Nope. I put up a Facebook post asking for help.

I always keep my character radar switched on, even when I'm not searching for potential interviewees. Later this week, for example, I'm hoping to chat with a standardized patient—someone trained to act as a sick person. We met because he attended a workshop I gave at a local library. As I was packing up to leave, he came over to thank me and mentioned what he did for a living. I was curious, asked questions, and he explained that it was perfect for him because he used to do improv. Guess what? I have a failed actor in my WIP who was in desperate need of a day job. Bingo!

Everything around you is research. When I found myself with a free afternoon between events in Raleigh, North Carolina, I decided to scout for settings and went to the contemporary art museum. I started talking to a woman and discovered that she ran a docent program at

the museum—for middle graders. As fate would have it, my new plot hangs on a chance meeting between 10-year-old girl Maisie MacDonald and a metal artist called Katie Mack. Yup, the docent program is now in the manuscript.

Writing is not a solitary endeavor for me; I can't do it without a village. I don't write historical fiction, but I need my fiction to be authentic; I don't write sci-fi, but creating characters is worldbuilding.

At its core, women's fiction is about the human condition. How do we flesh out the messy emotional lives of characters who jump off the page? By talking to people—by exploring their experiences, glimpsing their thought processes, and mining their memories. It's all research, baby. •



A Brit living in North Carolina, Barbara Claypole White writes hopeful family drama with a healthy dose of mental illness. *The Unfinished Garden* won the 2013 Golden Quill Contest for Best First Book; *The In-Between Hour* was chosen by the Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance as a Winter 2014 Okra Pick; and *The Perfect Son* was a nominee in the Goodreads Choice Awards for Best Fiction 2015. Her forth novel, *Echoes of Family*, has a publication date of September 27, 2016. For more information, or to connect with Barbara, visit [barbaraclaypolewhite.com](http://barbaraclaypolewhite.com).

# Rising Star Contest Finalists!

The RISING STAR CONTEST committee is pleased to announce the end of round one:

**THE SUBSTITUTE PRINCESS** by Kathleen Sander Basi

**THE KINDEST LIE** by Nancy Johnson

**BY ACCIDENT** by Laura Levin

**SHELTER ME** by Gabrielle Luthy

**FOUR WOMEN TALKING** by Micki Berthelot Morency

Pat O'Dea Rosen, entries coordinator will be returning scoresheets to contestants this week. Finalists will receive theirs today. Revised finalist entries are due back to Pat O'Dea Rosen ([patodea153@aol.com](mailto:patodea153@aol.com)) on August 1.

# Tech Tips

## Research to Aid Writers at *All Stages*

by TASHA SEEGMILLER

**R**esearch is a fundamental part of being a writer. Of course, many of us think about that when we are trying to nail a setting or establish nuances within our characters, but there are many other kinds of research depending on where you are in the writing process. This edition of tech tips is meant to give you a few more things to consider that will hopefully make the research you need to do go a little more smoothly.

### FOR THE DRAFTING WRITER

#### **Google Drive or Dropbox:**

Both of these cloud based services will allow you to upload pictures, files, documents, or what have you and will sync across devices for later retrieval. Google Drive has more space available on their free plan while Dropbox lets you “earn” more space by inviting friends. This is also highly recommended as a backup, because there are few things worse than losing a manuscript and precious words because of a computer issue.

#### **Scrivener:**

If you are a Scrivener user, you can load all

of your research right into the file where you are writing your book. No need for a million bookmarks or dozens of tabs open. In fact, you don't even have to move from the page where you are being productive.

Better yet? You can format Scrivener to show up split screen, put the research in one side and draft in the other. This is an incredible organizational tool and perfect if you are the kind of person who can be easily distracted re-researching something.

#### **Pinterest:**

I know, I know. You thought that the point of Pinterest was to find all kinds of things to



distract you from your writing. It is, however, an invaluable tool for a drafting writer. From recipes to locations to styles of clothing, Pinterest already has an abundance of information waiting for discovery.

But did you also know that it is the perfect tool for brainstorming? Sometimes, when the very beginnings of a new idea creep in, it can feel like something very fragile, something that, if we share it with others, might get destroyed. This is where the secret board function within Pinterest is helpful. Create a new board and just start dropping things in there that might make up an incredible story someday—characterization, setting ideas, plot twists, etc. It's safe from scrutiny and expectation, and if/when you decide to write that book, the research you started is ready and waiting.

### **Evernote:**

With its incredible mobile apps and the ability to “clip” from web pages, Evernote has quickly moved up as my go-to tool for nearly everything. If you discover articles, ideas, reminders, or writing hints while on the go, either Evernote or Pinterest are the tools for you. I love the way I can create however many notebooks I want, and can arrange them into stacks. Digital organization for the win. Have something you think you might use in more than one place? Simply add a tag for both to a single note. The free version gives you lots of space, the paid version even more, with perks like annotations and note taking on pics and PDFs.

## FOR THE QUERYING WRITER

### **Spreadsheets:**

Even the best mind can quickly lose track of which agents are at what agency, when they were queried, what was sent, etc. If you don't like combing through your sent box in your email, keeping a spreadsheet is the easiest way to maintain order (and some semblance of sanity) dur-

ing the querying process. There are several agencies that say a “no” from one is “no” from all, while others say you can query multiple agents within an agency. By creating columns that contain agent name, agency affiliation, requirements for query, date queried, and response, you can let your mental energy go toward other things. I like using sheets within Google Drive because then I can access them on my devices or different computers.

### **Twitter:**

Entering the querying world can be a daunting, overwhelming, frustrating process. Twitter can absolutely give you an in-depth education about the whole process if you know where to look. Of course, I'd recommend following agents who not only represent what you write, but also those with a good reputation who are active on this social media platform.

In addition to looking at agents themselves on Twitter, the hashtags #tenqueries & #mswl\*\*\* provide an abundance of information. #tenqueries is what several agents use to provide brief insights into whether they decided to request or reject based on ten random queries in their slushpile. #mswl stands for manuscript wish list and is an event wherein agents and editors are invited to tweet the kinds of books they'd like to see, and many agents use this hashtag outside of the events. If you want to look at a collection of everything in one place, check out The Official Manuscript Wish List & #MSWL Website designed by our own Sierra Godfrey.

*\*\*\* Please note, neither of these hashtags should be used to pitch, just to gather information.*

### **QueryTracker:**

QueryTracker is a website that you can use for free to find agents who represent what you write and what their current status is on queries (sometimes they close to queries for periods of time). You can track your interactions with them, gain insight into their response time from others with accounts who report, and even track the versions of your queries and the responses to each. While some of these features require

the upgrade to the premium version, there is an abundance of information and insight available through this website.

### **Publisher's Marketplace:**

This is the site that reports which authors and agents have sold which books. While there is a decent amount of information available through the free version, signing up for the \$25 monthly subscription will allow you to search deals reported by agents, who is with which agency, what kinds of books they have had success selling, etc.

A bit of advice, should you choose to use this website: searching in the romance/women's fiction genre will bring you more romance than women's fiction. As Publisher's Marketplace has not yet separated the two genres, it is a good idea to peruse both debut and general fiction for women's fiction titles with their accompanying agents, and to cross check what agents are selling with what they say they are interested in via agency websites.

**FOR THE  
REPRESENTED,  
ON SUBMISSION, OR  
CONTRACTED WRITER**

### **Gain familiarity with similar authors and book bloggers:**

Connections are everything for authors. Reviews move more books and people are more likely to give of their time to read and give those reviews to people who have been eager to help, promote, and share in the first place. This does not mean you need to start a book blog. What it does mean is that promotion, interaction, and shout-outs to other authors who wrote something you liked is very good form. It will also give you insights into how they have marketed, the techniques they used to gain early reviews, and how they built a group of people who were eager to share news about their book (sometimes

referred to a street team).

### **Interact in reading groups via social media:**

A good place to start is WFWA's own Summer Reading Challenge on Facebook. This is actually a win/win because you get the opportunity to see what people say about books, craft, plot, character development, and cover design, as well as watch which books generate interest. Plus you get the opportunity to engage and interact with writers and readers alike. Once again, connections are everything and you want to make sure that you are making many, that they are real, and that you are giving more often than you are receiving. People who volunteer to help you in return are much more valuable than those who sign up hoping for some freebies.

### **Pinterest:**

Yes, again, but different. When readers really love a book, when they want to know more about the author, their favorite characters, that recipe or flower arrangement that sounds amazing, they will often go to Pinterest, especially women's fiction readers. This is your chance to give additional insight into who you are as a writer, where the ideas for your book came from, and side interests that inspire or motivate you. If you have blog posts, linking them with a quality image to Pinterest can generate more traffic to your site, get your name out to more people, and translate to more sales when the time comes.

Pinterest can also allow you to see how published authors are promoting their books. Giveaways, paired readings, statements like, "If you liked \_\_\_\_\_ (well known movie, book, TV show), then you should try \_\_\_\_\_ (several books including your own)."

Remember that reviews and word of mouth are the fastest ways to spread news about an agent, agency, valuable resource, and, ultimately, a book. Engage, share, and stay organized, and you'll plant yourself on the path to success. •

| RESOURCES                     |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Pinterest                     | <a href="http://www.pinterest.com">www.pinterest.com</a>   |
| Scrivener                     | <a href="http://www.literatureandlatte.com/scrivener.php">www.literatureandlatte.com/scrivener.php</a> |
| Google Drive                  | <a href="http://drive.google.com">drive.google.com</a>   |
| Dropbox                       | <a href="http://www.dropbox.com">www.dropbox.com</a>   |
| Evernote                      | <a href="http://www.evernote.com">www.evernote.com</a>   |
| Twitter                       | <a href="http://www.twitter.com">www.twitter.com</a>   |
| Manuscript Wish List          | <a href="http://www.manuscriptwishlist.com">www.manuscriptwishlist.com</a>                             |
| QueryTracker                  | <a href="http://www.querytracker.net">www.querytracker.net</a>   |
| Publisher's Marketplace       | <a href="http://www.publishersmarketplace.com">www.publishersmarketplace.com</a>                       |
| WFWA Summer Reading Challenge | <a href="http://www.facebook.com/groups/132780640460419/">www.facebook.com/groups/132780640460419/</a> |



**Tasha Seegmiller** is married to the boy she met in elementary school, mom to three kids and coordinator of the project-based learning center (EDGE) at Southern Utah University. She writes contemporary women's fiction with a hint of magic, and thrives on Diet Coke, chocolate and cinnamon bears. She is a co-founder and the managing editor for the Thinking Through Our Fingers blog as well as the Women's Fiction Writers Association quarterly magazine, where she also serves as a board member. Tasha is represented by Annelise Robey of the Jane Rotrosen Agency.

# Vague Pronouns

by PATRICIA FRIEDRICH

**V**ague pronouns are exactly what they sound like they would be: pronouns that, not having a clear referent expressed in the sentence or its adjacent clauses, acquire vague meaning.

Consider:

**In John Smith’s book, he uses beautiful imagery.**

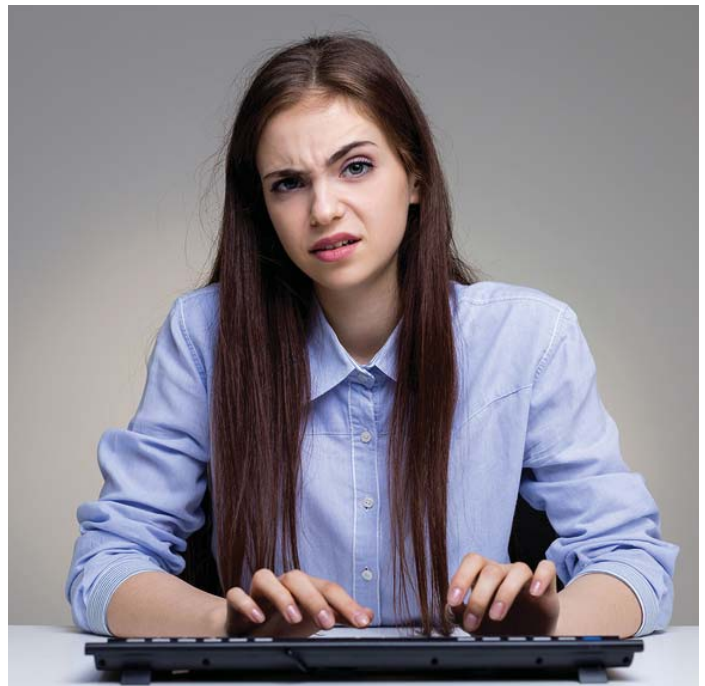
Grammatically speaking, “he” does not refer to any antecedent in the prepositional phrase “In John Smith’s book.” You might be tempted to assume that “he” refers to “John Smith’s,” but because the headword of that noun phrase is “book,” grammatically speaking, “he” has no referent. Your grammatical alternatives could be the following:

**In his book, John Smith uses beautiful imagery.**

**In John Smith’s book, the author uses beautiful imagery.**

Other kinds of structures can contain vague pronouns too. For example,

**It rained yesterday, and it made the roads flood.**



The first “it” is grammatical because English requires a noun/pronoun as (the headword of) a subject.\* Natural phenomena usually don’t have a clear one, hence the use of “it” as an alternative. As for the second “it,” the general understanding is that in some vague way it refers to the noun “rain.” However, the noun “rain” never appears in the sentence, and therefore the pronoun is vague. To fix it, consider the following:

**The rain yesterday caused the roads to flood.**

Here is one more:

**The baby cried. This woke up his brother.**

Again here, because the reference is an elusive noise not expressed in the sentence, “this” is a vague pronoun.

Rewrite in one of the following ways:

**The baby’s crying woke up his brother.**

**The baby cried, and the noise woke up his brother.**

With a little attention, you can avoid vague pronouns and, in the process, make your sentences more precise.

\* Some languages allow that verbs be conjugated without a subject. For example, the Portuguese form for “it rained” is simply “choveu,” or literally “rained.” •



**Patricia Friedrich** is an associate professor at Arizona State University. She is the author/editor of six nonfiction books including the upcoming *The Sociolinguistics of Digital Englishes* (Routledge 2016), and of several published short stories. She is currently working on revisions to her first novel-length manuscript, *Artful Women*.

