



Write ON!

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE
WOMEN'S FICTION WRITERS ASSOCIATION

Winter 2016

INSPIRATION, CREATIVITY, INVENTION

INSPIRATION IN STRESS?

HOW TO TURN STRESS INTO CREATIVITY

AGENT SPOTLIGHT

KATIE SHEA BOUTILLIER OF THE DONALD MAASS AGENCY

GET OUT THERE!

INSPIRATION IS ALL AROUND YOU

GRAMMAR HELP

SURPRISINGLY TRICKY WORDS





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President's Note



In June 2009, nearly 7 years ago, I applied for a one-year sabbatical from my 13-year corporate law career. It wasn't that I hated the hard work. Hard work and I get along just fine. And it wasn't that I wanted to leave to be a writer. I was already a writer. A professional writer, no less. But I wrote only in my clients' voices. There was nothing of me in anything I had written in over 13 years. My old journals and stories and essays were locked away in Rubbermaid bins and shoe boxes, relegated to closet shelves in every dorm room, apartment, and home I'd lived in since the college days in which I had first decided that creative writing was for people who were not going to law school. People, who were not, you know, me.

The real reason I applied for the sabbatical was because in the middle of the chaos, I felt just the faintest wind of freedom. Maybe, just maybe, I thought, I could spend the year finding my voice. The head of my department—a world class renowned female litigator—took one look at my sabbatical application, and laughed. "But you're so busy! Why would you want to leave?" I convinced her. "Only a year," I said.

Over the next year, I worked hard, doing pro bono work, freelance writing, and volunteering for an advocacy group for working families. I joined the executive team of a company whose mission was empowering women entrepreneurs. By the end of that year, I had about 20,000 words

written of a story that would become my debut novel, and I made the bittersweet decision not to return to corporate law. It would be another three years before I'd finish that novel. Another year before I'd find the right publisher for that novel. Another year or so before I'd get the attention of literary agents for a second manuscript. But it all started in 2009, during a one-year sabbatical. I'd opened up those Rubbermaid bins and shoeboxes. I unlocked some long closed door, and found my voice.

Only a year.

Along the winding road of my journey from lawyer to full-time writer, I discovered—like all of you—that a tribe of like-minded working writers had sprung to life under the motivated inspiration of a founding board including Orly Konig-Lopez, Kerry Lonsdale, Laura Drake, Maggie Marr, and others. When the out-going Board made a call for new candidates to continue their work into 2016, I responded enthusiastically. When the election results came in, I was excited, albeit nervous. So much to do. Complete the web migration, and continue creating a robust brand for WFWA in the industry. Grow membership and develop programming worthy of such a motivated group of working writers. Engage the community with inspiration while still encouraging the practical work necessary to the craft of writing women's fiction. So much to do. So little time.

After all—It's only a year.

But listen, you can bet—that I for one, know just how important a period of time that can be.

Thank you for your confidence and support. Looking forward to an amazing year!

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'Amy'.

Amy Impellizzeri
WFWA President

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.

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. Her design work can be found at www.sierrafong.com.

MANAGING AND COLUMNS EDITOR

Tasha Seegmiller is a mom to three kids and high school English teacher in Southern Utah. She writes contemporary women's fiction with a dash of magic. Her loves include Diet Coke, owls, chocolate and cinnamon bears. She is a founder of and contributor to Thinking Through Our Fingers, and can be found at tashaseegmiller.com.

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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

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twitter.com/WF_Writers

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 woman's emotional journey.

Write on!



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

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. Submitted letters are considered for publication and may be edited for clarity or space.

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Member News



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

MEMBER BOOKS RELEASED THIS QUARTER:

Linny's Sweet Dream List
by Susan Schild

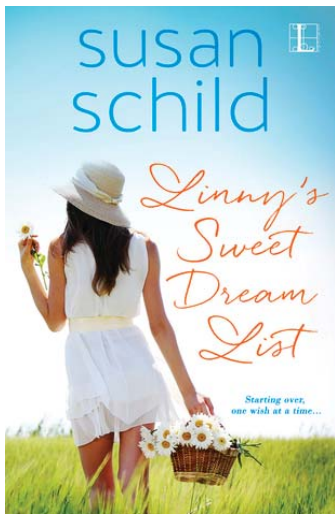
Days Made of Glass
by Laura Drake

In Another Life
by Julie Christine Johnson

Platinum Doll
by Anne Girard

This Side of Perfect
by Crystal Klimavicz

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



Linny's Sweet Dream List
by Susan Schild
Release Date: January 6, 2016

At thirty-eight, Linny Taylor is suddenly living a life she thought only happened to other, more careless people. Widowed for the second time and broke—thanks to her cheating late husband—Linny has no house, no job, and no options except to go back home. There, in a trailer as run down as her self-esteem, Linny makes a list of things that might bring her happiness. A porch swing. A job that nourishes her heart as well as her bank balance. Maybe even a date or two.

At first, every goal seems beyond reach. But it's hard for Linny to stay in the doldrums when a stray puppy is coercing her out of her shell—and leading her right into the path of the town's kind, compassionate vet. The quirky town is filled with friends and family, including Linny's mother, Dottie, who knows more about heartache than her daughters ever guessed. And as Linny contemplates each item on her list, she begins to realize that the dreams most worth holding on to can only be measured in the sweetness of a life lived to the fullest.



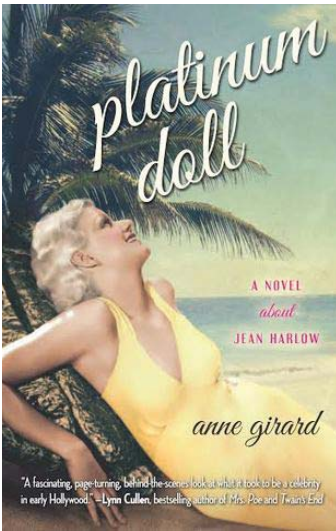
Days Made of Glass
by Laura Drake
Release Date: January 11, 2016

Harlie Cooper raised her sister, Angel, even before their mother died. When their guardian is killed in a fire, rather than be separated by Social Services, they run. Life off the grid in L.A. isn't easy, but worse, there's something wrong with Angel.

Harlie walks in to find their apartment scattered with shattered glass and Angel, a bloody rag doll in a corner. The doctor orders institutionalization in a state facility. Harlie's not leaving her sister in that human warehouse. But something better takes money. Lots of it.

When a rep from the Pro Bull Riding Circuit suggests she train as a bullfighter, rescuing downed cowboys from their rampaging charges, she can't let the fact that she'd be the first woman to attempt this stop her. Angel is depending on her.

It's not just the danger and taking on a man's career that challenges Harlie. She must learn to trust her partner—and herself—and learn to let go of what's not hers to save.

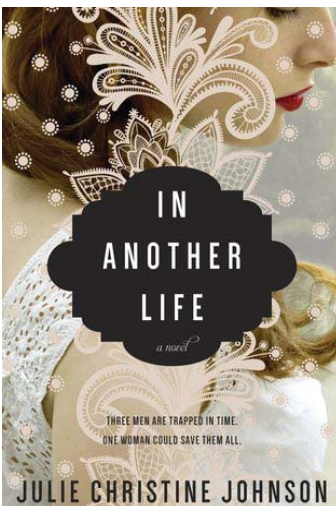


Platinum Doll
by Anne Girard
Release Date: January 26, 2016

It's the Roaring Twenties and seventeen-year-old Harlean Carpenter McGrew has run off to Beverly Hills. She's chasing a dream—to escape her small, Midwestern life and see her name in lights.

In California, Harlean has everything a girl could want—a rich husband, glamorous parties, socialite friends—except an outlet for her talent. But everything changes when a dare pushes her to embrace her true ambition—to be an actress on the silver screen. With her timeless beauty and striking shade of platinum-blond hair, Harlean becomes Jean Harlow. And as she's thrust into the limelight, Jean learns that this new world of opportunity comes with its own set of burdens. Torn between her family and her passion to perform, Jean is forced to confront the difficult truth—that fame comes at a price, if only she's willing to pay it.

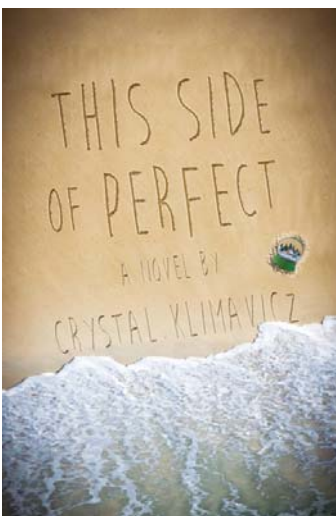
Amid a glittering cast of ingénues and Hollywood titans—Clara Bow, Clark Gable, Laurel and Hardy, Howard Hughes—Platinum Doll introduces us to the star who would shine brighter than them all.



In Another Life
by Julie Christine Johnson
Release Date: February 2, 2016

Historian Lia Carrer has finally returned to southern France, determined to rebuild her life after the death of her husband. But instead of finding solace in the region's quiet hills and medieval ruins, she falls in love with Raoul, a man whose very existence challenges everything she knows about life—and about her husband's death. As Raoul reveals the story of his past to Lia, she becomes entangled in the echoes of an ancient murder, resulting in a haunting and suspenseful journey that reminds Lia that the dead may not be as far from us as we think.

Steeped in the rich history and romantic landscape of the Languedoc region, In Another Life is a story of love that conquers time and the lost loves that haunt us all.



This Side of Perfect
by Crystal Klimavicz
Release Date: March 15, 2016

Reunited with both her family and her past, Kate thinks she should have found happiness. However, it all begins to unravel as her husband, Ethan, becomes less than satisfied with their new lives and their once complacent marriage turns as unpredictable as the Maine weather.

Over the course of the summer, her next door neighbors remind Kate of life's uncertainty, and she soon realizes that having 'everything' doesn't always equate to happiness. Then Kate finds a note with a picture in her mailbox—from a brother she didn't know she had. It's not until that which Kate loves most is taken away that her world comes crashing down. This next chapter of her life ends with a twist that surprises everyone.



Chasing Inspiration

by ERIN BARTELS

The impulse to write emerges from a desire to say something, to share with others what you have noticed, discovered, or experienced. We've all felt the heady, intoxicating feeling of being inspired and then writing out the torrent of our thoughts and emotions. Later we may read over the product of those moments of overwhelming inspiration and recognize that it needs some work, but deep down we feel it in our bones that what we've written is true, even if it is not ready to be seen by anyone else just yet.

Those gorgeous moments are why we wanted to write in the first place, right? So why does it seem that the longer we're at this game, the more we may find ourselves struggling to recapture those moments? Why do our wells sometimes run dry—and what can we do about it?

I like to think of this phenomenon in terms of a musician's sophomore album. There's a beautiful song by musical artist Mat Kearney called "In the Middle," which includes the following lyrics:

*Twenty-five, here I am with freshman LPs
One life to write one, two years to repeat*

Isn't that how it often is? We put so much of ourselves and our experiences and our struggles into the first things we write, our first album, if you will. Then—and this increases exponentially if you are under deadline—you feel pressured, by yourself or your agent or your editor or your readers, to keep producing, to write the next book and the next and the next. So you hunker down in front of the computer and tap away at the keys, but find you are drawing water from an empty well.

We all hit a wall sometimes. But it's not the end of the story. There are so many ways to get your writing mojo back, to fill up your well so that your "sophomore LP" has just as much life in it as the one that took you a lifetime to write. Here are just a few I've thought of. If you have more ideas, let's share them with each other on the WFWA Community Facebook Page.

PEOPLE

Lots of writers, it seems, are born people watchers and eavesdroppers. Sometimes all it takes is getting out of your house and getting into a public place where you can spy on your embryonic characters. Airports, universities, grocery stores, dog parks, beaches, fairgrounds, city council meetings—anywhere there are

people, there are characters waiting.

PLACES

I'm deeply inspired by settings. I especially love to get out into silent places and listen for the sounds you can't hear in the city—the whistle of wind through bare branches, the song of a distant bird, the *ploink* of a frog disappearing underwater. I visited the Rocky Mountains for the first time last year and was enthralled by the variety of rock, vegetation, and weather. My husband routinely goes downtown to write amid the rushing legislators and ranting protestors at the State Capitol. (Obviously we're inspired by different settings.) The point is, one of the least inspiring places to be is the room you are always in. Get out there and find something else to look at! One fantastic place to look for inspiration is antique and thrift stores. Every object has a story—every forgotten family photo, every piece of costume jewelry, every bullet-riddled street sign—so tell it!

FORGOTTEN PLACES

Related to the above but, I think, of a different variety are forgotten places. Empty warehouses, abandoned theatres, boarded up homes, overgrown fields, lonely cemeteries. Anywhere you might expect to find a ghost, you can expect to find inspiration.



GREAT BOOKS

Nothing makes me want to write more and better than rereading my favorite books, which I have already liberally underlined to highlight the especially wonderful turns of phrase. Was there a book you read in the past that made you want to be a writer? Reread it. Did *The Telltale Heart* scare the daylights out of you? Reread it. Did *Anne of Green Gables* make you want to move to Prince Edward Island? Did *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* have you knocking on the backs of all your closets? Reread it. Was there a book you checked out so many times from the library that they finally just gave it to you? Reread it. Everything that captured your imagination was a great book, whether the rest of the world knew it or not. And that is the kind of hold you want to have on your reader's heart. Great writing inspires great writing.

POETRY

I know, I know. Poetry isn't for everyone. If you hate poetry, skip this. But if you remember liking a particular poem way back in your high school American Lit class, look it up and re-discover why it touched you. Nothing can set a mood and show you the possibilities of language like a good poem. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," "Dulce et Decorum Est"—they all put you vividly into particular moments and moods. If the heartbeat of your muse is flat-lining, I can almost guarantee a good poem can get it pumping again.

MUSIC

Even if you really can't stomach poetry, I'm willing to bet you could name half a dozen songs or more that transport you. Whether it's Moby or Mozart, the Beatles or Bach, Billie Holiday or Billy Idol, something in your iTunes library or your record collection makes you feel amazing. Dig out the stuff you used to listen to in college. Find the stuff your parents always played on long car trips. I have my dad's old mix tapes from the late 1970s and early 1980s that were always in our cars growing up and listening to those old songs transports me. It can get too

quiet in the writer's studio. Maybe it's time you livened things up a bit.

ART

Now I know that not every city has an art museum. But most of us probably live within driving distance of a few great ones. Me? I could go down the road to the Broad Art Museum for modern art. I could drive 90 minutes to the Detroit Institute of Art. Three and a half hours the other direction puts me at the Art Institute of Chicago. Whether the subject or style of a painting, or the story of the artist's life, or simply being in a new space with new people, inspiration awaits.

GREAT MOVIES & TV

There is no shortage of films and TV shows to inspire your writing. Watch *Breaking Bad* from start to finish, then re-watch it to discover all the things you missed the first time. That's some layered storytelling right there. Watch the films of Paul T. Anderson or the Coen brothers or Nora Ephron or Alfred Hitchcock or Tim Burton or Christopher Nolan or Robert Altman. Watch every movie your favorite actress has ever been in. What about your guilty pleasure movies? The ones you won't admit to liking. How can they inspire characters, plots, pacing, or tone? Try out some fan fiction (no one has to know) and see if it takes you anywhere interesting.

HISTORY

Most of my recreational reading is nonfiction, usually centered on history in some way. Great biographers and historians bring the world and the people of the past alive in entertaining ways. I once read a history of the United States told entirely in our relationship to our forests and it was fascinating (no, really, it was) and sparked a dozen ideas for writing. Reading history is not just for those interested in writing historical fiction. Studying the self-destructive habits of Hemingway could inspire a completely different, modern character. Reading about the Civil War could inspire a futuristic Sci-Fi saga. Stories about actresses in Old Hollywood can inspire a story about a modern starlet.

ODDBALL NEWS ITEMS

I remember reading about that apartment found in Paris that had been locked up since WWII and thinking, "That would make a great story." And it did. *A Paris Apartment* came out last summer and is a *New York Times* bestseller. Author Michelle Gable took a fun news item and built a story around it. People do this all the time, with both current news and old newspapers you can still find at most libraries. Even a few lines of filler news can spark a killer story.

BOOKS DESIGNED TO AWAKEN YOUR MUSE

When real life cannot seem to wake up your sluggish muse, turn to books. *The Pocket Muse*, *642 Things to Write About*, and *Writing without the Muse* are on my bookshelf, and undoubtedly there are many more out there. Most are simply books of prompts, jumping off points. You can also find these online. Just Google "writing prompts" and watch your day slip away...

MINDLESS, ROUTINE DRUDGERY

Most of my ideas come to me in three places: in the shower, while driving down the highway, or while messing up or cleaning up the kitchen. When I was running regularly, I also got ideas then. There's science to back up the idea that doing routine tasks frees up your thoughts to wander into interesting little nooks and crannies in your brain. Stuck on a scene? Hand wash your dishes or get on the treadmill.

YOUR MOST POIGNANT MEMORIES

This, to me, is some of the most fertile ground of all. After a particularly rough winter and spring last year, which included losing out on a promotion at work and plenty of rejection on the writing front, I was really, really down. My husband immediately suggested I should get out of town and go see my childhood best friend, Tina, in Denver. The arrangements were made and the tickets bought before the week was out.

I hadn't seen Tina since her wedding five years before. Prior to that, we had seen each other sporadically in the years since she left our

high school after our freshman year to go to boarding school. The day I heard she was leaving was one of the saddest of my young life.

The trip was phenomenal. The Rocky Mountains were a salve to my soul (see Places above). Our conversation picked up wherever we had left off years ago. I felt renewed.

Not long after I came home, my husband and I found out our best friends for the past seven years were moving to Tennessee. And that old feeling of being left behind came rushing back. I was that teenager again, standing on the porch, watching taillights fade away.

And that feeling, that terrible feeling, inspired me. And I started to imagine a story that would explore those aching moments when friendship is interrupted, when a young heart is crushed, when life barrels on and you are powerless to stop it. I combined that feeling of losing my best friend with fond memories of summer excursions to her cottage on Lake Huron. Then I dredged up memories of being inappropriately touched by a different friend's much older brother, and the knowledge that that girl later suffered from substance abuse and may have died from it. There's a story there. And I began to intertwine those stories at the 2015 WFWA Retreat—getting about 7,000 words down in just a few days. To the writer, even pain—maybe especially pain—inspires.

Where do you go to be inspired? Which of your friends bolsters your creativity? What have you never tried before that you're dying to try? What have you been afraid to confront? What are the things you wish you had said to that person? What do you wish with all your heart you could take back? What was your worst day? What was your best day?

What transports you? Chase that. And the writing will follow. •



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 and would love to connect with you on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ErinBartelsAuthor.



A Second Wave of Inspiration

by PATRICIA FRIEDRICH

Stephen King has famously written in *On Writing*, “Amateurs sit and wait for inspiration . . . the rest of us just get up and go to work.” Many others, just like King, believe that it is in the habitual process of writing that one finds the muse, and when deadlines and contracts are at stake, it is often not possible to wait around for inspiration to show up.

Inspiration and motivation for writing have also been equated with getting to know one’s own thoughts. This further highlights the importance of sitting down and writing. Joan Didion, for example, has reflected on that facet of craft in the following terms:

Had I been blessed with even limited access to my own mind there would have been no reason to write. I write entirely to find out what I’m thinking, what I’m looking at, what I see and what it means (from “Why I Write.” Originally published in the *New York Times Book Review* in December of 1976).

But what is different, what challenges writers, when it comes to finding inspiration and putting words on the page once again for a second book (and more) after all the work and emotional charge of writing a debut novel? We asked this question of a few WFWA members,

hoping to help inspire our members who are at that particular intersection in their careers.

Susan Schild, author of *Linny’s Sweet Dream List* (Jan. 2016) told us she has finished writing the two sequels in the Willow Hill series and learned something about her craft in the process: “In book one, I came to know and love my characters, at least most of them,” and “feedback from my reading group and pre-readers helped me make the story stronger.” The good thing about books two and three, she explains, is that, when it came time to write them, she had a deeper understanding of the characters. “I knew how they wanted to grow, and what kind of scrapes, conflicts, and fun they’d get into next.” And the more she knew those women and men, the more confident she got about showing their quirks and their vulnerabilities.

She also focused on the feel of the environment, something that can be carried over to later books: “Sunny, small town Southern stories are a good fit for me, so I’ll stick with the genre. In my next series, my heroines will still be aged thirty to seventy-ish, go on adventures, wrangle with their men, enjoy dogs, and look for their happily ever afters.”

Barbara Solomon Josselson, whose debut novel *The Last Dreamer* came out in Decem-

ber, recognizes “it’s daunting to begin work on a second novel.” She says that, like all writers, she poured herself into her first novel: “I cried over it, I agonized over it, I dreamed about it all the time, and I gave it everything I had. What more could there possibly be left to give?”

But when she’s feeling intimidated or overwhelmed at the task ahead, she reminds herself that she is a different person from the one she was when she started her first book. “I’m older, I’ve seen more, and I’ve experienced more. I’ve had more ups and downs in my life, more thrills and more moments of sadness and disillusionment. And all of these experiences and emotions have shaped me into someone new.” Because of all that, she truly believes that the writer she was back when she started her first novel could never have written the novel she is now capable of writing. She concludes that this perspective gives her hope and a degree of confidence, as she starts to fall in love with a new set of characters, and starts to explore the unfamiliar world that they inhabit.

Finally, **Barbara Claypole White** (*The Perfect Son*, *The Unfinished Garden*, *The In-Between Hour*), who has just turned in her fourth book, tells us that what moves her work forward is instinct, not choice. “I’ve always loved to write, and my childhood dream was to be an author. But I didn’t start my first novel until I was a temporary resident alien, newly married, and unemployed. I was working in the London fashion industry, getting my writing fix through churning out press releases, when I fell in love with an American professor.” Once she scratched that itch for fiction writing, she couldn’t quit. When she finally got her first publication deal, she had one novel in the drawer, one completed, one in first draft. “I guess that meant I was pretty serious about this gig.” She adds, “Every book is hard, and the reality of writing to contract means my dream often feels like a nightmare.” But, she says, writing is also her passion—stories about the impact of mental illness on families. “It’s my little corner of the world, and I want to stay in it as long as I can.”

Whether driven by instinct or a curiosity to discover what will happen to their characters

next, these authors seem to agree that, however hard, the quest for new words and new worlds is well worth the effort. •



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*.

Finding Inspiration *In Stress*

by BARBARA CLAYPOLE WHITE

Many artists seek a stress-free environment to unearth their creativity; I'm not one of them. To me this isn't so much choice as acceptance: If I couldn't find ways to make stress productive, I won't be much good at my job—writing to contract.

As a stay-at-home mom I used to tell people I wrote in the cracks of life. The child psychologist's waiting room was my favorite writing space, followed by a downtown parking lot during my son's Tuesday evening guitar lesson. But now that I'm writing full time, and the former Beloved Teenage Delinquent has taken his anxiety disorder off to college, nothing has changed. The pressure merely builds differently. I'm still juggling my writing with all things family, but I've added the negative ions of the author life: crappy reviews, returns, failed promotions, events with no audience, endless self-doubt feeding gnawing fears. On it goes. And because none of us writes in isolation, real life continues to spin. Drop in a dollop of family drama and something has to snap. Usually you, right?

To quote Nathan Lane's character in *The Bird Cage*, when he's told that sneaking a famous politician out of a drag club incognito is impossible: "Not necessarily."



Well, you might snap, but that doesn't have to kill your creativity.

I spent the fall of 2015 closing in on my December 1 deadline while dealing with an ongoing family crisis in England. What really pushed me to the edge was the time difference. My most productive writing period is between six and eight o'clock in the morning—when the house is sleeping, the phone is silent, and email is relatively quiet. That, however, doesn't hold true when your family crisis is five hours ahead. Instead of waking up each day to uninterrupted thoughts of my story, I found myself slamming

into messages that demanded immediate attention and shattered my focus. And when your airfare home costs \$1,500 and your 85-year-old widowed mother falls frequently, you have to think carefully about whether or not this is a time to drop everything—plus a huge chunk of change.

In the end I booked a non-refundable ticket to fly two days after my due date. My theory was simple: If I was going to be there for my mother 24/7, the manuscript had to stay behind. But that also upped my ante, because an extension would have been meaningless. After losing most of October and November to 15-hour workdays, I turned in novel four as per my contract. And I didn't totally hate the manuscript. Actually I quite liked it, which surprised the heck out of me.

What was my takeaway from all this stress?

1) DENYING EMOTIONS DOESN'T MAKE THEM DISAPPEAR. EXAMINING THEM, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS A USEFUL EXERCISE IN CHARACTER MOTIVATION.

For example, I was angry at my mother for falling, which is totally illogical. I was also resentful for the intrusion into my writing life (selfish as all hell, Barbara). But there was another emotion at work. Remember what Donald Maass told us about finding that third level emotion in a scene? Yes, I was angry (first level emotion) and I was frustrated (second level emotion) but together those led to my third level emotion: guilt over the way I was feeling.

2) NEGATIVE EMOTIONS CAN FUEL GOOD WRITING.

As women's fiction writers, nothing matters more than the emotional journey of our characters, right? And what is family life if not a pressure cooker of emotional journeys? Next time you're mad enough to spontaneously combust, take that emotion and explore it on paper. Turn it inside out, upside down, and then find unique ways of working through it in your character's voice.

3) LET WRITING BE YOUR GUILTY PLEASURE.

Nothing about writing is easy and yet it has always been my escape and my therapy. In 2015 I also positioned it squarely as me time. Raising a child who battles mental illness taught me that a fried caregiver is a useless caregiver. To help my mother and burned-out sister through a difficult time, I needed to be a voice of reason and calm. Not the angry, resentful person. And to do that, I had to give myself permission to walk away. (One of my characters uses a similar line in the manuscript.)

4) RADICAL ACCEPTANCE FLOATS MY WRITING BOAT.

I'd bought a workbook on dialectical behavior therapy to help figure out my manic-depressive heroine, but I hadn't read it. One day when I was beginning to rip apart at the seams, I decided to crack the book open and see if I could find calming techniques that might help me. Which is how I discovered radical acceptance. Next time you're having a hissy fit, try and put it into the following perspective: this moment is exactly what it should be given the long chain of events that began in the past. Then apply that theory to a character's backstory.

5) USE SYMPTOMS OF STRESS FOR RESEARCH.

Slow down the moment to analyze how your body is reacting to stress. How does it feel as your fight-or-flight response kicks in? Use those physical reactions to unpack and describe your POV character's emotions.

6) LET PERSONAL EXPERIENCE ADD ANOTHER DIMENSION YOUR STORY.

Rather than treat my life and my fiction as separate entities, I folded my aging parent situations—yes, we have more than one—into my story. Right before the episode with my mother hit boiling point, we had a big hiccup with my 99-year-old father-in-law and had to go visit him in his retirement home. There went another four

days of my deadline. But after eavesdropping in the lobby where my father-in-law loves to sit, I flew home with tons of vignettes about old women behaving badly. The next day my hero got an aging mother with issues, which added a new layer of stress to his situation and gave me an imaginary roommate in hell.

Writing is stressful, and once you get your pub deal, that stress amplifies. You can't escape or deny stress. But you can turn it into an opportunity to spark your creativity. •



A Brit living in North Carolina, Barbara Claypole White writes hopeful family drama with a healthy dose of mental illness. Her debut novel, *The Unfinished Garden*, won the 2013 Golden Quill Contest for Best First Book, and *The In-Between Hour* was chosen by SIBA (the Southern Independent Booksellers) as a Winter 2014 Okra Pick. Her third novel, *The Perfect Son*, was a semifinalist in the Goodreads Choice Awards Best Fiction 2015. Her fourth novel, currently untitled, has a publication date of October 2106.

For more information, or to connect with Barbara, please visit barbaraclaypolewhite.com.

DONALD MAASS WORKSHOP

Some manuscripts sparkle and gleam. What not only catches the eyes of agents and editors but holds them in thrall all the way through? What signals “commercial” to industry types? How can you give your project that radiance without compromising its integrity?

This is a hands-on workshop with five writing assignments spread over two weeks. Presented by New York literary agent and teacher Donald Maass, author of *Writing the Breakout Novel*, *Writing the Breakout Novel Workbook*, *The Fire in Fiction* and *Writing 21st Century Fiction*.

Topics will include:

- High concept elements that don't feel cheap.
- Why readers really fall in love with protagonists.
- Story worlds we don't want to leave.
- Entertaining versus illuminating.
- Voices we hear versus voices we ignore.

Registration is open from February 15 through March 10. Cost is \$45 dollars.

Register through the WFWA website.

How to Interact with WFWA

by TASHA SEEGMILLER

One of the first things I loved about the Women's Fiction Writers Association, before it was even an association, was the kindness of those affiliated with the group and the willingness they showed to assist, answer questions, direct toward resources, and generally cheer each other on.

The main, and I think only, downside about the WFWA organization (and any other like it) is that we can't get together at lunch and chat about these things. A live chat itself can be complicated due to varied sleep patterns combined with a multitude of time zones. While the medium may have changed from the original Yahoo Group to a website to a better website, the camaraderie, friendship, and expertise have not only continued, but the breadth and depth of information available has grown incredibly. While there are many reasons that people join an organization like WFWA, one of them surely must be to gain knowledge in a safe, welcoming environment.

As it is the newest medium, I wanted to point out a few things about the new website. First of all, there is the member directory, which contains the listing of everyone who is a member—779 at the time of writing this article! Looking through the directory, you can put a name with a face and find email info (this is your friendly reminder to make sure that you've

updated your member directory listing on the website with picture, social media links, and bio). Though searching based on location isn't an option, glancing through to find others close to you might make the opportunity of a physical meet up and lunch possible.

In the member directory, there is also the ability to search by subcategories. One of the options that I love is searching for our published authors. I think we all know that reading and talking about books are the best ways to help a friend, and this search option in the directory is



a great starting point. Another cool search feature is the member groups. This will allow you to know whom to contact if you want to know specifics about any number of programs, contests, and events.

One of my favorite features that transferred over from the old website are the toolboxes. Maybe you are locked in on the drafting process. Maybe you have written “The End” and are working through the editing, querying, submitting process. Maybe you have a book deal and are wrestling with how to market, how much marketing is too much marketing, or the right way to engage in a conversation with a book group. Wherever you are in your writing journey, the WFWA website has a toolbox with you in mind. And if you have had a great epiphany, a grand “ah-ha!” that you wish you had known before for any of these stages, there is a Content Submission Form where members are invited to share their information.

If you like the quicker snippets of information, WFWA has an active Twitter account. Make sure you are following @wf_writers for a resource of great information, and feel free to give a public shout-out to the association over there. You can also use the hashtag #wfw.

Quite possibly the most active platform right now is the WFWA Community page on Facebook. This is serving both the social media purpose you’d associate with Facebook, as well as the forum platform. It is the place for formatting, style, and craft questions, the place to ask for advice when a book title will no longer work, for when the words that were necessary for a deadline paid no regard to the writer’s wishes, for when rejections are piling up quickly and overwhelmingly. If you are not yet a member of the Facebook page, please send an email to membership@womensfictionwriters.org and we will get you added.

We all joined the association for a reason, we have all benefitted from others’ knowledge, and we all have something to contribute to help each other, no matter how far we may be on our writing journey. •



Tasha Seegmiller is a mom to three kids and high school English teacher in Southern Utah. She writes contemporary women’s fiction with a dash of magic. Her loves include Diet Coke, owls, chocolate, and cinnamon bears. She is a founder of and contributor to *Thinking Through Our Fingers*, and can be found at tashaseegmiller.com.

Katie Shea Boutillier
Donald Maass Literary Agency



This month, we're launching a new column that focuses on an agent who represents women's fiction. We're thrilled to welcome Katie Shea Boutillier as our first Agent Spotlight!



BIO

All about Katie

Katie Shea Boutillier is the Rights Director of the Donald Maass Literary Agency. For her own list, she is looking for women's fiction, realistic YA, big sweeping love stories, and quirky narrative nonfiction. She loves novels with big voices, imperfect characters, and storylines that relate to modern issues.



WANTS

What are you hoping lands in your inbox right now?

Projects with authentic voices and premises that will relate to current times.



LOOKS FOR

What do you look for in a debut?

Energy. Open to direction, feedback and guidance.



STANDING OUT

What makes a women's fiction project stand out in today's marketplace?

Relates to a large group of women, yet introduces a new perspective.



TIPS

What's your best tip for writers seeking literary representation? (Tips on query writing, pitching, surviving rejection, etc.)

Listen. Watch. Learn. And understand that publishing is a huge test of your patience and stability.



FAVORITES

Who are your favorite authors, living or dead?

Joan Didion. Liane Moriarty. Ann M. Martin (Baby-Sitters Club series). Alice Walker.



BOOKS

What book changed your life?

In the Shadow of the Banyan by Vaddey Ratner. It came to me as a query when I was just starting as agent. I knew it was something special, but she ended up signing with Emma Sweeney.



TIDBIT

What do most people not know about you?

I'm in this for the long run.

Does That Word Really Mean What You Think It Means?

by PATRICIA FRIEDRICH

To launch this column on common grammar and usage slips, I decided to address the simple but tricky “wrong word” question. Below are some of the most commonly and most easily confused pairs (and one trio) of words, and some of them even go undetected at later stages of manuscript production.

Before – has as the reference point a time in the past

Ago – has as the reference point the present moment

(direct speech) “Oh, you just missed John. He left a few minutes ago.”

(reported speech) She told me I had just missed John. He had left a few minutes before.

Etymological curiosity – Ago comes from Old English Agone meaning “departed” and therefore is from the same origin as the verb to go and its participle gone.

Continuous – indicates uninterrupted action

Continual – indicates action occurring at regular intervals or in a repeated manner

The rain didn’t stop for many hours, and the continuous sound of the downpour was very soothing.

From time to time, Jane took formal lessons, so that her learning could be continual.

Affect – most often used as a verb, it means “to have an effect on” something/someone

Effect – most often used as a noun, it means “the result of” something

Those stories affected her whole outlook.

Those stories had a very positive effect on her outlook.

Note: affect can also be a noun, but it is occurs much more rarely (in psychology jargon), and effect can be a verb, often meaning “to cause” particularly if used with the noun “change” as in “The group is trying to effect positive social change.”

Phonetic curiosity – Most people who confuse “affect” and “effect” do so because they rely on the sound of these words to make a choice, and in many dialects of English the sound is the same. The cognates in romance languages (e.g., Portuguese afeto/afetar and efeito) have very different vowel sounds, so no one confuses them.

Less – indicates comparative amount with uncountable nouns

Fewer – indicates comparative number with countable nouns

She had less money in her wallet than she expected.

She had fewer dollars than she would have liked.

Number – indicates quantity with countable nouns

Amount – indicates quantity with uncountable nouns

He was surprised at the number of people who showed up.

He was surprised at the amount of work he had to do.

Who – used as a subject pronoun

Whom – used as an object pronoun

This is the woman who lives next door. (This is the woman. The woman lives next door).

This is the woman whom I told you about. (This is the woman. I told you about the woman).

Note: While prescriptive grammarians like to postulate that one should not end a sentence with a preposition, most descriptive grammarians think the maneuvers necessary to avoid such use are more truncated and less desirable than the original.

Principal – main, most important (also head of a school)

Principle – theory, belief, ethical value

She was the principal dancer, and she gave interviews often.

He was not going to betray his principles.

And here's the most confusing one of all (though let's hope less so after you see it broken down).

Lie (lied, lied) – intransitive (regular) meaning to say something that isn't true

She was afraid he had lied to her.

Lie (lay, lain) – intransitive verb (irregular), meaning "to be or assume a horizontal position" (most of the confusion comes from the fact that the past of "lie" is "lay," the same form as the infinitive of the next verb)

Last night, she lay down on the bed, and she thought about the events of the day.

She likes to lie down on her bed every night and think about the events of her day.

Lay (laid, laid) – transitive verb (irregular), meaning "to put or set something down"

Last night, she laid her purse on the bed and looked for the telephone. •



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*.

