

SETTING GOALS AS YOU MAKE YOUR WAY UP THE MOUNTAIN

- COPING WITH FAILURE
- PLOTTERS AND PANTSERS
- USING YOUR AUTHOR PLATFORM
- WRITING TOOLS (MEMBER RECOMMENDED)

**AUTHOR
PROFILE:
SHARON
RITCHEY**

**GUIDING SCRIBE:
A CAUTIONARY TALE**

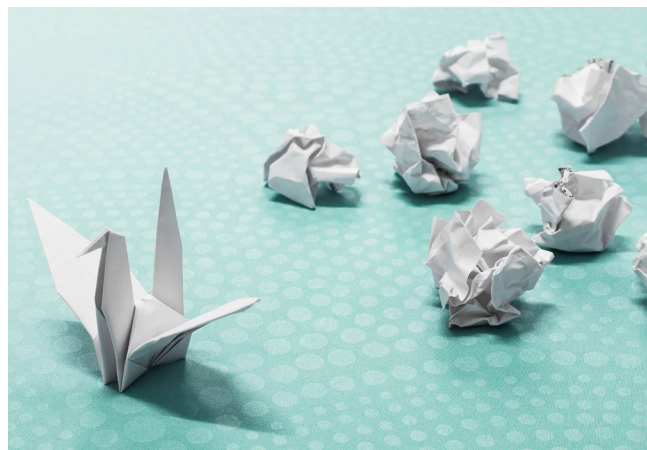
+ MEET YOUR BOARD CANDIDATES



WINTER 2024 CONTENTS

FEATURES

- 14** Setting SMART Goals and Coping with Failure
By Brittany Clair
- 16** Plotters and Pantsers
By Brittany Clair
- 18** Using Your Author Platform to Showcase Your Unique Voice
By Katie Tammen
- 20** Writing Made Eas(ier)
By Katie Tammen
- 22** Congratulations to the Rising STAR and STAR Award Winners
By Sharon Ritchey



MEET YOUR BOARD CANDIDATES / PAGE 11

COLUMNS

- President's Message **4**
- Letter from the Editor **5**
- Spotlight on Diversity and Inclusion **6**
- Guiding Scribe: Denny S. Bryce **9**
- Author Profile: Sharon Ritchey **23**
- Volunteer Spotlight: Leanne Treese **25**

DEPARTMENTS

- Member Releases **7**
- Snap and Share Albuquerque Retreat **8**
- Final Thought **26**



Check out our calendar of events, workshops, and webinar information on our website.

ABOUT THE WFWA

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

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



facebook.com/WFWritersAssociation



twitter.com/WF_Writers



instagram.com/womensfictionwriters/

Join the closed WFWA Facebook group by sending an email to:
membership@womensfictionwriters.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Kristi Leonard
President

Stephanie Claypool
Vice President, Finance/Treasurer

Catherine Matthews
Vice President, Technology

Tara Baisden
Vice President, Programs

Maggie Marr
Legal Counsel

Janet Rundquist
Secretary

Marie Watts
Vice President, Diversity and Inclusion

Kori Kobzina
Vice President, Communications

Leah DeCesare
Vice President, Events

Wendy Rossi
Vice President, Membership

Denny S. Bryce
Guiding Scribe

THE WFWA FOUNDING TEAM

Orly Konig
www.orlykonig.com

Kerry Lonsdale
www.kerrylonsdale.com

Laura Drake
www.lauradrakebooks.com

Linda Avellar
www.lindaavellar.com

Marilyn Brant
www.marilynbrant.com

Maggie Marr
www.maggiemarr.com



Write ON! is published quarterly by the
Women's Fiction Writers Association
www.womensfictionwriters.org

EDITORIAL STAFF

Sharon Ritchey
Executive Editor

Brittany Clair
Managing Editor

Katie Tammen
Articles Editor

Sheri Taylor-Emery
Art Director

Jen Craven
Copy Editor

Kathi Jenkins
Proofreader

Lorraine Norwood
Proofreader

Beth Dotson Brown
Proofreader

Diane Riley
Proofreader

IF YOU LIKE WHAT YOU'VE READ ...

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

Bold Goals for WFWA

As we find ourselves cozied up with blankets and warm drinks, reflecting on the year behind us (and possibly procrastinating on our next chapter), it's the perfect time to talk about goals. Whether you're a dedicated plotter with color-coded spreadsheets or a pantser who flies by the seat of your imagination, we can all agree that goals help keep us moving forward—at least until Netflix calls our name.

In the spirit of setting goals, I want to talk about what lies ahead for WFWA in 2025. I know, I know—goal setting can feel like that moment when your character realizes they're in the middle of Act Two with no idea how to get to Act Three. It can be intimidating, but it's also exciting. The board spent much of 2024 building a strategic framework to guide us over the next few years, and now we're ready to turn the page and put that plan into action.

Here's the thing: Much like finishing a novel, our organization's goals are bold—and we know they'll take time. But much like writing that perfect sentence (or deleting it the next day), it's all about the process. One of the biggest goals for WFWA in 2025 is to take the strategic plan we developed in 2024 and make it real. We're talking about implementing tangible changes that will strengthen our community and make our resources more sustainable. Think of it as revising a messy first draft—exciting, challenging, and full of potential.

At the heart of this plan is our shared mission: to create community among writers, deepen our connections, and strengthen our craft. Sound familiar? Whether it's in your writing group, in a WFWA workshop, or in the middle of a critique session, you've likely felt that sense of connection—the one that reminds you that you're not alone in this writing journey, no matter how many rejections land in your inbox. We've all been there.

One of our top priorities is to ensure financial health. It's not the most glamorous topic, I know. But just like keeping your manuscript's word count under control, it's crucial. We want to make sure WFWA can continue to offer the programs, scholarships, and opportunities that benefit you, our members. So, we'll be looking for ways to increase revenue and choose smart investments that align with our mission.

Another goal for 2025? Strengthening our volunteer systems. Writers are busy people, and our volunteers are absolute superheroes. We want to make sure they're getting the support, resources, and recognition they deserve, because without them, WFWA doesn't exist. If you've ever thought about stepping up to help, this might be the perfect year to raise your hand. We promise, it's more fun than staring at a blank page!

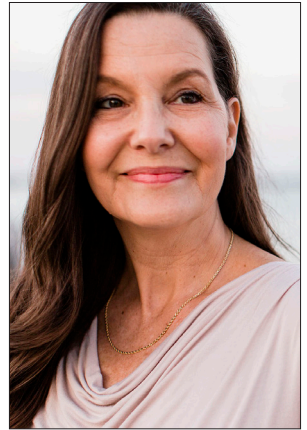
And of course, we can't forget technology. It's like Scrivener or Google Docs—it either works for you, or it makes you want to throw your laptop out the window. We're working on ensuring WFWA's online presence is solid, so you can connect, participate, and learn without tech headaches (because we all know life gives us enough of those).

At the end of the day, WFWA's goals aren't just about keeping the organization running smoothly—they're about creating a space where each of you can thrive. We're here to support your writing dreams, whether that means helping you find your next critique partner, giving you the tools to level up your craft, or simply cheering you on through your writing journey.

So, as you sit down to set your writing goals for the year ahead, remember that you're part of a community that's here to support you every step of the way.

Here's to making 2025 a year of writing victories, big and small, and to achieving our goals—both on the page and off.

Wishing you a year full of creativity, community, and maybe even a few completed manuscripts!



MUCH LIKE FINISHING A NOVEL, OUR ORGANIZATION'S GOALS ARE BOLD—AND WE KNOW THEY'LL TAKE TIME. BUT MUCH LIKE WRITING THAT PERFECT SENTENCE (OR DELETING IT THE NEXT DAY), IT'S ALL ABOUT THE PROCESS.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristi Leonard". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Kristi Leonard

WRITING AN ENDING. PLOTTING A SEQUEL.



This issue of *Write ON!* will be my last as executive editor. And I'm not gonna lie, a wave of anxiety is tensing my muscles as I write this.

I've had many volunteer positions with WFWA, but my favorite has always been leading *Write ON!*. I'm a magazine gal. Magazines are where my writing career began in 1993.

It's difficult to step away from the one project that has allowed me to meet and work with so many incredible members. However, one of the first lessons I learned in editing school was to recognize when a project was finished—or finished enough. The second lesson was that I'll never be a gifted proofreader.

In 2018, I wrote my first piece for *Write ON!* on research techniques for character development. [It's still in the archives](#), and I still teach this material. Soon after, I joined the board as the Vice President of Communications, where I served for four years.

I came to that job with a deep well of professional communications experience. I left with so much more. And when my term on the board ended, I continued to lead the magazine.

My one overarching goal has been to include as many different voices and faces as we could in every issue. I've always wanted this to be a publication for the membership, *all* the members.

I had other goals related to excellence, content variety, tone, and messaging. The magazine has achieved much over these many years. With Sheri Taylor-Emery as Art Director, *Write ON!* has a branded look, feel, and layout to rival any publication in the

market, and yes, I will die on that hill!

I'm thrilled to announce that Brittany Clair will take over as Executive Editor. She and I have been working hand in hand for the past year. When I found Brittany, I knew she was perfect for the role. Together, we have expanded the editorial staff, streamlined processes, and laughed at some epic mistakes. I set out to mentor her for a year, but honestly, she has taught me just as much. Her new ideas and skills reminded me why it was time to pass the pen. The magazine needs new energy to keep it vibrant and ensure it remains an important membership benefit. Brittany has the secret sauce that this most precious project needs.

I'm not disappearing completely. I'm moving down and to the side of the masthead as Editorial Advisor. I'll be available to answer questions, talk through ideas, and to be a cheerleader.

Thank you to everyone who has happily said yes when they received a call or email from me to contribute. Thank you to the amazing authors I've had the pleasure of meeting and interviewing. Thank you to the dedicated, all-volunteer editorial staff, and everyone who has come through the masthead over the years—for copy edits, for proofing, for fact-checking, and for your incredible ideas and dedication. I am leaving with so much more than what I started with. And it'll have to be finished enough for me.

WELCOME TO “SPOTLIGHT ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION”

THE D&I COMMITTEE INVITES OUR GENERAL MEMBERSHIP TO SHARE STORIES THAT IMPACT THEM IN THE AREA OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION. WE WANT TO HEAR ALL VOICES. PLEASE SEND YOUR SUBMISSION TO DI@WOMENFICTIONWRITERS.ORG.

A Scarcity Mindset Inhibits Writing Goals

By Marie W. Watts

Achieving our writing goals takes work, but sometimes we unknowingly sabotage ourselves. If you find yourself ruminating on any of the following, you may be stifling your true potential:

■ “I won’t get an agent because I’m too old/a person of color/not a person of color/not a native English writer/a native English writer/or ... [insert your thoughts here].”

■ “If I don’t have an agent, I can’t get published.”

■ “I can’t finish my book because I don’t have time to write.”

■ “I don’t have the skills and abilities to write; I’m an imposter.”

■ “That writer got an agent/award/contract, and I didn’t. The green-eyed monster interferes with my sleep.”

■ “In writing, there are winners and losers; we’re fighting for limited resources.”

If so, you are most likely approaching the craft with a scarcity mindset—a way of thinking that hones in on what we do not have and stresses that we will never have what we want. If you’re suffering from a scarcity mindset, interacting with others in the writing community is probably not on your radar. Why? Because people who have a scarcity mindset think about achievement like a zero-sum game. They may believe others might steal their ideas, beat them out for awards or contests, use their own newly discovered craft book to write a better manuscript, or unfairly criticize their work.

This type of thinking keeps us from focusing on what we can gain by interacting with others, which, in turn, can take a toll on our mental health. In this



scenario, problem-solving, making good decisions, and retaining more information become difficult.

An abundance mindset, on the contrary, inspires us to see our lives as full of possibilities. When we act with a sense of security and trust, and we stress collaboration over competition, we can pursue our goals and embrace new opportunities without fear. We’re also likely to find ourselves happier, as well as more creative and successful.

Try these steps to develop and maintain an abundance mindset:

■ Replace negative thoughts. Change your line of thinking from “I will never have enough” to “I can create new opportunities.”

■ Practice appreciation. Be thankful for what you do have. Start by acknowledging at least one thing you are grateful for daily.

■ Surround yourself with positive people, and limit your exposure to negativity.

■ Become involved with like-minded communities and organizations that can help you further your professional and personal development.

■ Adopt the attitude espoused by Virginia McCullough, writer extraordinaire and member of the D&I committee: Think of an opportunity as a train. They come and go. “I may have missed that train, but another is coming.”

I invite you to join any of the numerous activities WFWA offers—and wear your abundance hat to the party! Participating in a community like WFWA can:

■ Increase the odds we all finish our novels.

■ Grow your writing craft. Learning from other writers is invaluable.

■ Provide a venue to obtain critique partners and beta readers.

■ Connect you with friends who understand the writing life and can offer support and encouragement.

■ Build a strong network that offers a wealth of information on anything from self-publishing to finding editors and agents.

But remember: to get, you must give. And if we give liberally, the rewards will be infinite.

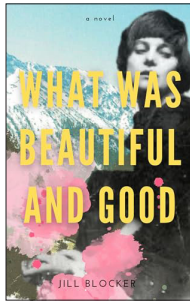
The WFWA D&I Committee is dedicated to ensuring that everyone has a seat at the table so that, as a community, we can grow to be the best writers we can be. Please reach out to us and visit us in the online community where we have information on this topic under Resources: Frank Table Talk and more.



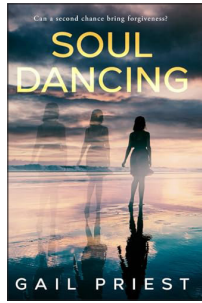
Marie W. Watts is a former employment discrimination investigator, human resource manager, and human resource consultant. Coauthor of *Human Relations*, 4th ed., Marie also penned the award-winning fiction trilogy *Warriors for Equal Rights* as well as the novel *Tough Trail Home*. Marie and her husband live on a ranch in central Texas.

MEMBER RELEASES

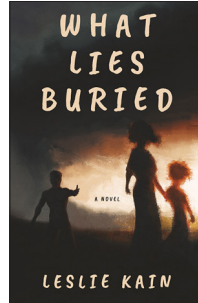
As WFWA continues to grow, so have our members' accomplishments. To be fair to everyone, all new women's fiction releases featured in the magazine must have been published within the past one year. If you are a new member with an older title(s), please still submit your books to be included on the WFWA Goodreads shelf and continue to take advantage of other opportunities to share your work with the membership, including the weekly newsletter and *Read ON!*.



JILL BLOCKER
What Was Beautiful and Good
2/1/24



GAIL PRIEST
Soul Dancing
5/7/24



LESLIE KAIN
What Lies Buried
5/14/24



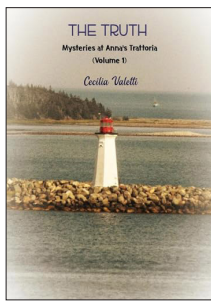
CLAIRE YEZBAK FADDEN
Wishes, Lies, & Fireflies
6/19/24



LIZ FLAHERTY
Pieces of Blue
7/1/24



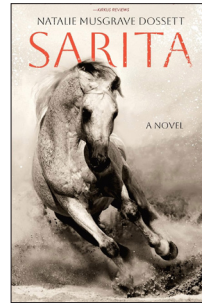
DEBRA BORCHERT
Her Own War
7/14/24



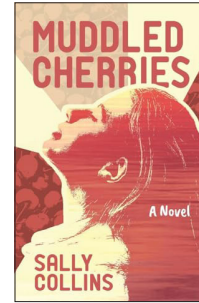
CECILIA VALETTI
The Truth: Mysteries of Anna's Trattoria (Volume 1)
7/22/24



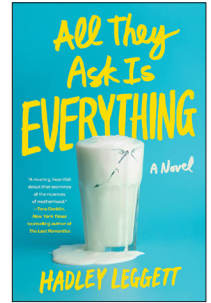
CHRISTINE GUNDERSON
Friends With Secrets
8/1/24



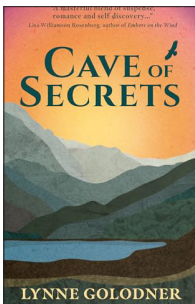
NATALIE MUSGRAVE DOSSETT
Sarita
8/10/24



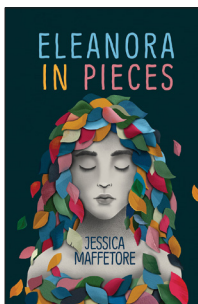
SALLY COLLINS
Muddled Cherries
8/13/24



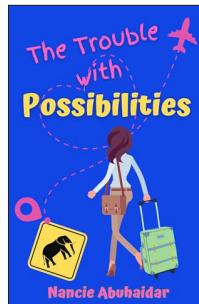
HADLEY LEGGETT
All They Ask Is Everything
8/27/24



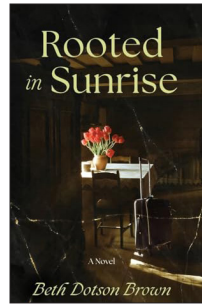
LYNNE GOLODNER
Cave of Secrets
8/27/24



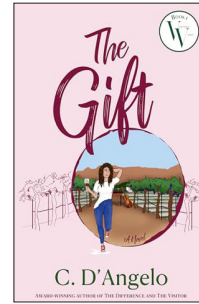
JESSICA MAFFETORE
Eleanora in Pieces
9/5/24



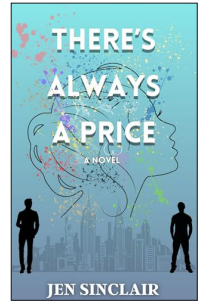
NANCIE ABUHAIDER
The Trouble With Possibilities
9/10/24



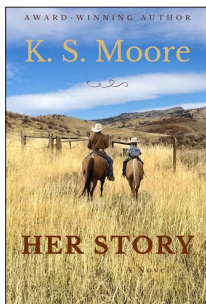
BETH DOTSON BROWN
Rooted in Sunrise
9/17/24



C. D'ANGELO
The Gift
9/19/24



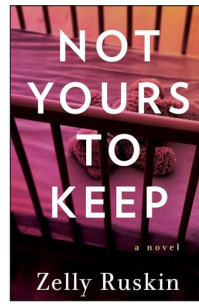
JEN SINCLAIR
There's Always a Price
9/24/24



KATHRYN MOORE
Her Story
10/1/24



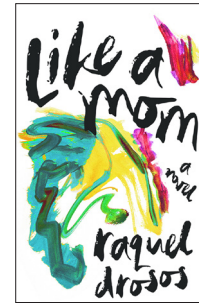
KRISTIN OWENS
Elizabeth Sails
10/8/24



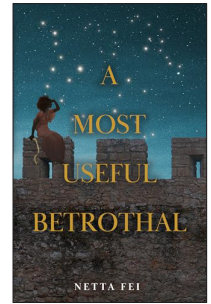
ZELLY RUSKIN
Not Yours To Keep
10/8/24



ERIN QUINN-KONG
Hate Follow
10/8/24



RAQUEL DROSOS
Like a Mom
10/22/24



NETTA FEI
A Most Useful Betrothal
10/24/24

SNAP AND SHARE

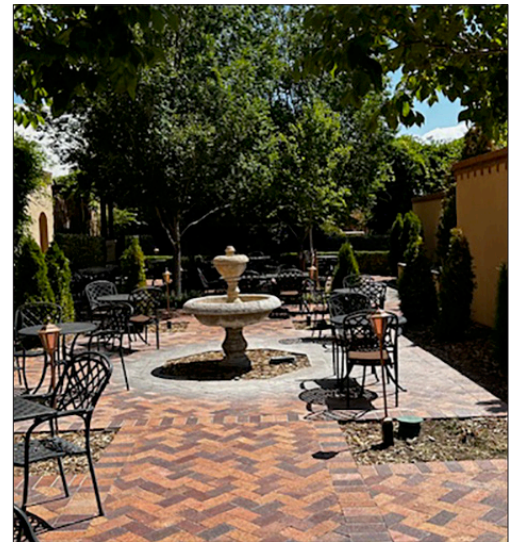
This issue we asked to see your photos from the Albuquerque Retreat. Thank you to everyone who participated!



Group shot, smiles in Albuquerque



Catherine Matthews



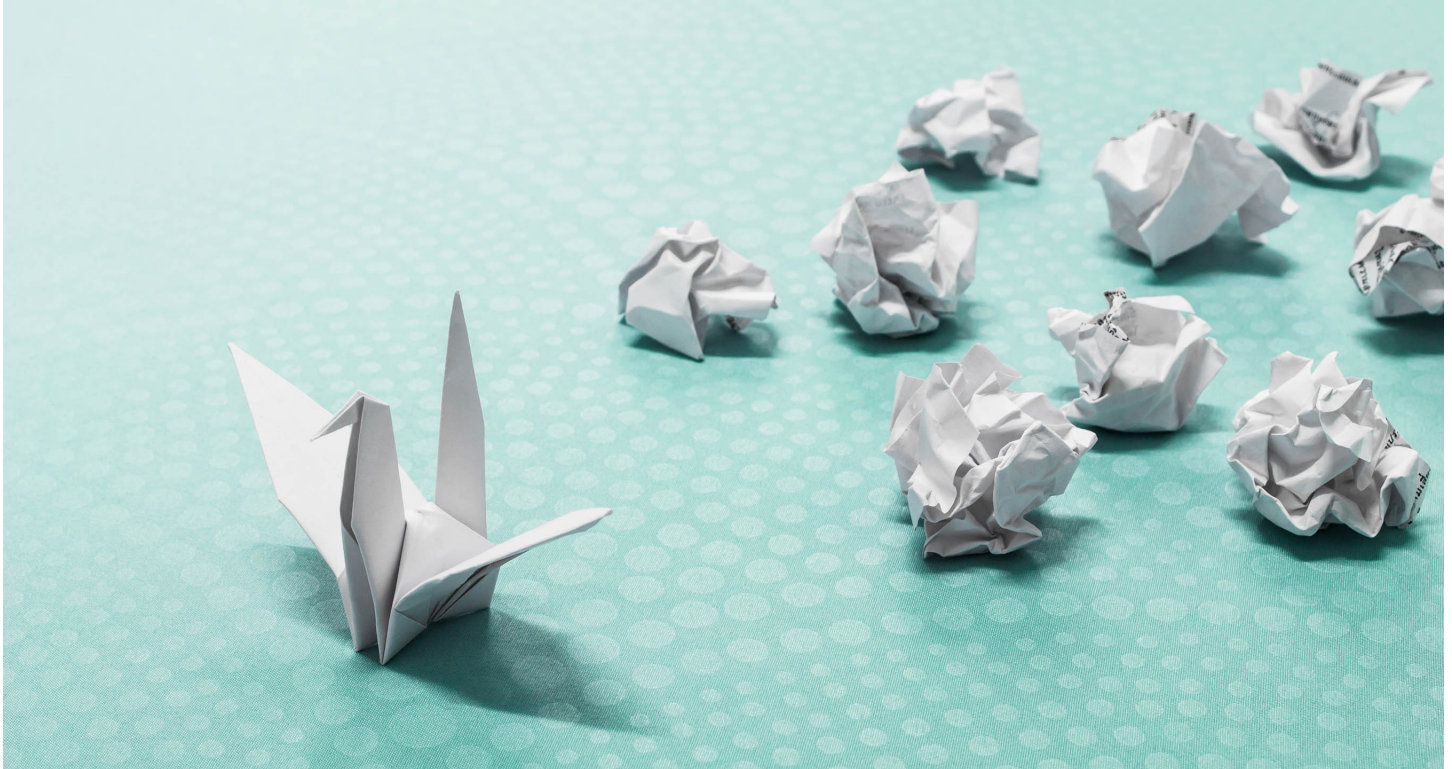
Outside, submitted by Laura Drake



Albuquerque hotel lobby, submitted by Joelle Cullen



L to R, Kym Summers, Beth Morris



GOAL SETTING: A CAUTIONARY TALE

This is a cautionary tale that doubles as a candid reflection on my writing process, a journey filled with challenges and self-discovery. I share this not to expose myself but in the hope that it might resonate with some authors who, like me, have felt trapped in the chaos of creating a book.

When we writers think about goals, we ask questions. How many words will I write today? What research must be completed before I write the first draft? How many books will I finish writing in the next 12 to 18 months? How many will I publish? Will I have an agent in six months? Do I need an agent? Will I upload my debut novel to Amazon Kindle? Will I squash my creativity with plotting? Will I ever finish a book pantsing? (No, because I'm a plotter.)

I often find myself second-guessing my process to the point where it feels like self-bullying. All these internal struggles came to a head during my ongoing work on a new novel, which will be my fifth in four years. To kick off the process, I set clear goals and outlined everything I needed to help me finish the book on time. I delved into character development, defining their goals, motivations, and conflicts. Next, I referred to some of my favorite how-to writing books to solidify my story structure. Here are some I've been using lately, in no particular order:

- Larry Brooks: *Story Engineering*
- James Scott Bell: *Write Your Novel from the Middle*
- Debra Dixon: *GMC: Goal, Motivation, and Conflict: The Building Blocks of Good Fiction*
- Michael Hauge (with Christopher Vogler): *The Hero's Two Journeys*

GUIDING SCRIBE

I don't read these books from front to back each time I start a new novel. Instead, I pick what resonates with me about character development and plotting. During this phase, I also outline my A and B storylines, the major subplot, the villain (or the main obstacle to my character's success), and how to distinguish my main character(s) from the supporting cast. The books above help me develop a customized framework for writing a solid rough draft of my novel.

But things don't always work out the way I expect. I forgot to mention that I spent days trying to figure out the theme or themes of my novel (which can also be discovered by writing the first draft). I kept missing my goals. Repeatedly. I was stuck in a cycle—not finishing the rough draft, rewriting the opening chapters multiple times, changing my mind about tense and point of view characters, adding major plot elements that complicated the story, and focusing on the plot with little character development. I was trapped in a bed of self-doubt, perfectionism, and confusion.

How did I resolve this problem?

Guess what? I didn't. Not right away. I wrote a rough draft that should've been tossed, creating characters that didn't serve the overall plot (or provide enough conflict to the main character's journey or the plot). I also have this thing about throwing away words (it's so damn painful!).

In retrospect, I spent months preparing to write the book instead of *writing the book!*

Nonetheless, I walked away from those months of freefall and finally reached a point—at about 50,000 words—where the story, plot, and characters began to mesh.

By this point, let's just say I've realized something about setting goals and letting go of them.

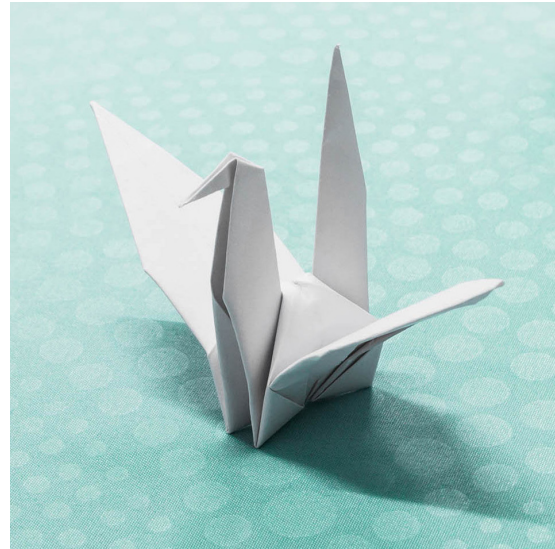
My WIP taught me that spending too much time planning is a form of procrastination that comes from my fear of starting something new. That's right—FEAR!

I believe it's natural—or I've decided it's natural—that every new project is freaking scary.

And it's not only me. Several authors I've asked about this phenomenon have given me the same answer: No matter how many books they've written, beginning a new book feels like hanging over a precipice by a fingernail.

I take this as good news. Writers go through the mill with each book.

Now, I have learned a few things about my process (and myself) during this journey.



IT'S OKAY TO TAKE ADVICE AND LEARN FROM EXPERTS, BUT, ULTIMATELY, HOW YOU WRITE YOUR STORY AND PRODUCE A QUALITY FINISHED PRODUCT IS UP TO YOU.

First, find what you enjoy about your process and embrace it—begin there. Next, avoid comparisons, second-guessing, and imposter syndrome. I know—nothing here is easy, but if it interferes with your process and achieving your goals, give it a go at putting it aside.

Sometimes so much information is available about how to start a book that writers like me forget the fun part. It's okay to take advice and learn from experts, but, ultimately, how you write your story and produce a quality finished product is up to you. Your process is unique and valuable.

And if none of this speaks to you—that's okay. It's all right to be *that* perfect writer, too. We can still be friends! :)

Editor's note: The WIP Denny S. Bryce refers to here is her novel *The Trial of Mrs. Rhineland*, which was selected as an Editor's Choice read by the Historical Novel Society and listed in She Reads' Most Anticipated Historical Fiction of 2024.



Denny S. Bryce is the bestselling, award-winning author of five novels: *The Other Princess: A Novel of Queen Victoria's Goddaughter*, *In the Face of the Sun*, *Can't We Be Friends* (co-written with Eliza Knight), *Wild Women and the Blues*, and *The Trial of Mrs. Rhineland*. She is also an NPR book critic, an adjunct professor at Drexel University, and a freelance writer who has written for *Harper's Bazaar* and *USA Today*. She is a member of the Historical Novel Society, Women's Fiction Writers Association, and Tall Poppy Writers. You can learn more about her work at www.dennysbryce.com.

MEET YOUR WFWA BOARD CANDIDATES

VOTE! 2024 BOARD ELECTIONS

Our Board elections will be held December 2–8, and we need your vote! You will be voting for five positions, and the elected candidates will serve two-year terms (2025–2027). Next year, the remaining Board positions will be up for reelection, thus ensuring there are always members on the Board to provide continuity. We have a great slate of candidates this year—all wonderful members prepared to keep this organization thriving and growing. Please read their bios and answers to one of the candidate questions below, then visit the WFWA website to read the full interviews and learn more about them.

How have your past experiences, both professionally and personally, uniquely prepared you for this specific Board position? What skills or perspectives do you bring that would directly benefit WFWA in this role?



2024 Board of Directors Candidates:

VP of Events:
Debbie Abbott

VP of Membership:
Krista White

VP of Communications:
Christine Wilcox

VP of Finance/Treasurer:
Stephanie Claypool

Secretary:
David (D.L.) Williams

VP OF EVENTS: DEBBIE ABBOTT

So many interwoven experiences in my life reflect my desire to plan events. As a child, I was the kind of kid who bought backyard carnival sets advertised during cartoon commercials C.O.D. (for anyone under the age of 50, that's "cash on delivery"). As an adult, I worked as public relations coordinator at a five-star resort in Scottsdale, AZ, flying in award-winning and celebrity chefs from around the world for a 1,000-person, \$10,000-per-table charity dinner and auction. In that role, I worked with group sales managers from both sides of the planning process on contract negotiations and hospitality/hotel requirements, as well as the wants and needs of conference planners, VIPs, and attendees.

My first job at that upscale property as a liaison between the in-house groups and all the resort departments involved coordinating conferences and events. I parlayed that experience into my dream job as a managing editor and media manager for a successful food and lifestyle print magazine. In addition to my duties as editor, I was the sole planner for customer appreciation events with over 500 attendees.

As the WFWA Events VP, I will bring a massive toolbox of experience in conference planning and hospitality along with a solid foundation of public relations and marketing in those fields.

Brain tumor-survivor and angel believer, Debbie Abbott understands the importance of recognizing and pursuing dreams. Along her journey to become a novelist, writing has been a constant beacon guiding Debbie's life, centered at the heart of her career in public relations and marketing, and the soul of her dream job as managing editor of a Scottsdale, AZ print magazine and companion TV show. Since early childhood, Debbie has found poetic inspiration in the swells and curls of life (Once upon a time, longing to be a songwriter).

She has penned more than 100 articles for local and regional publications and worked as a freelance editor and writer for the same national publishing company for 15 years. Recently, her first published poem was included in an all-women's anthology (July 2024).



MEET YOUR WFWA BOARD CANDIDATES

VP OF MEMBERSHIP: KRISTA WHITE

Among the experience I'll bring to the VP, Membership role, I count most important my two years spent as WFWA's Manager of Volunteer Recruitment. I've worked together with all hiring Board members, and in doing so have gained an understanding of their team objectives, and how they come together to serve WFWA's mission.

Professionally, I'm a certified figure skating coach, and in my twenties, I transitioned into sales. I joined a direct sales organization where I recruited, trained, and coached members of my sales team. From there, I became an executive recruiter and co-owner of a small recruitment firm. I offered consultation to senior executives in multiple industries encountering hiring difficulties, helping them make their positions attractive to potential applicants and recruiting to find a successful candidate. The VP of Membership must track member data, analyze its significance, communicate with members to keep in step with the pulse of our organization, and offer potential solutions to the Board. Each of these activities utilizes the communication, analytical, and customer service skills I've honed throughout my professional career.

Krista began volunteering with WFWA only months after joining the organization in early 2022. She first served as Volunteer Coordinator, was promoted to Manager of Volunteer Recruitment, and now serves as Membership Director, Volunteers. Her career choices have centered around effective communication, first as a figure skating coach, then direct sales professional, sales manager, executive recruiter, and co-owner of a small recruitment firm. Krista began writing six years ago, and her first book, a novella, was published in 2021. She loves writing romantic tension, and funnily enough, miscommunication tropes. She lives in an idyllic Southern Ontario hamlet with her steadfast hubby, enigmatic sons, and her vegetable garden.



VP OF COMMUNICATIONS: CHRISTINE WILCOX

I have 30 years of corporate communications experience, ten of which were specifically in leadership at the large-then-small-then-large-again grocery company I worked for. I managed internal and external communications and oversaw our divisions' community support and donation efforts for many of those years. I understand both the importance of telling the big story to own the narrative and fostering individual relationships. It was great to get the headlines, but I'm equally proud of the way we used communications to build relationships with our teams, community organizations, and customers.

The skills I bring to this role are varied. I'm profoundly versed in crisis communications from too much experience. I understand how to leverage PR for good and know how to develop the TV-dinner-type stories that time-starved reporters crave to make their jobs easier. I'm a creative brainstormer who likes to help different business functions find ways to engage their teams and members. I love using improv rules to build trust and create strong teams that have each other's back, help others shine, and are present with one another.

Christine Wilcox racked up nearly 30 years as a writer and editor while she worked in communications and education for a grocery retail company. In 2021 she decided the term "plot twist" applied to her career and made the switch to full-time author, editor, and freelancer.

Chris's short story "Speculatively Sarah" was published in the December 2023 anthology Meet Me at Midnight, and her story "Violet, Crushed" will be published in November 2024.

Chris has also published numerous nonfiction essays, including "Trying Perfection," "Gratitude," "Pencils," and "No Damn Funeral."



MEET YOUR WFWA BOARD CANDIDATES

VP OF FINANCE/TREASURER: STEPHANIE CLAYPOOL

For the past two years, I have filled the VP of Finance position. I also host a couple of the writing dates, and I am a member of the Scholarship Committee. Prior to that I chaired the Mentorship Program. Volunteering for WFWA is the best way I have to give back to this organization that has given me so much.

Stephanie Claypool serves WFWA as VP of Finance/Treasurer on the 2024 Board of Directors. She is responsible for managing all funds for the organization and assisting and advising others.

A native New Yorker, Stephanie graduated from the University at Albany with a BS in accounting. After many years as a CPA working for a large accounting firm in New York, she moved to London and began working in the corporate world. Her career led her to San Diego, where she spent many years and eventually ended her accounting career.

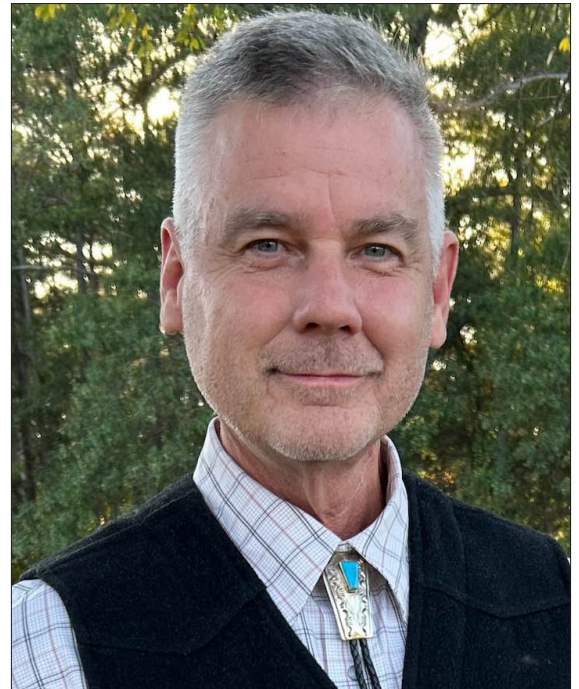
Stephanie now lives in Pittsburgh with her husband and a menagerie of pets. She devotes her time to writing and other pursuits. Her debut novel, A Thousand Tiny Stitches, launches November 12, 2024.



SECRETARY: DAVID (D.L.) WILLIAMS

I've been on various boards related to child health and welfare organizations and suicide prevention programs. I currently sit on the board of the Arkansas Coalition Against Sexual Assault. I have the ability to listen, collaborate, and champion ideas I think are important.

David "D.L." Williams is a retired 30-year public safety officer with assignments having included Advanced Life Support ambulances, tactical medic, helicopter rescue, police patrol, mental health liaison, and violent crime investigations as a detective. Williams is the bestselling author of Fighting for Her Life: What to Do When Someone You Know Is Being Abused and Textbooks, Not Targets: How to Prevent School Shootings in Your Community, and he now teaches criminology at the University of Arkansas. He and his family have settled in the Arkansas River Valley, where they offer a haven for rescued horses and donkeys.



SETTING SMART GOALS AND COPING WITH FAILURE:



INSIGHTS FROM A THERAPIST AND A PROJECT MANAGER/BOOK COACH

By Brittany Clair

In his book *On Writing and Failure*, Stephen Marche writes, “Failure is the body of a writer’s life.” If it sounds bleak, he means it to be so—Marche’s introductory essay is not exactly inspiring. And yet when I read it, I take a certain comfort in this shared reality among the writing community: failing is part of the job. (*It’s not just me.*) It’s like pressing a bruise.

We don’t need psychology to tell us that chronically failing to achieve our goals can lead to a suite of negative outcomes, but it does. Self-critical thinking. Negative self-fulfilling prophecies. Decreased self-esteem. Humiliation. Anxiety. Rumination.

Sound familiar? I’ve resumed my childhood nail-biting habit just thinking about all of this.

There’s no way out—but there is a way through. “The first job of a writer is to write,” Marche says. “The second job is to persevere.”

We spoke with WFWA members Christine Dasso (Licensed Mental Health Counselor and National Certified Counselor) and project manager/book coach Kerry Savage about how to set goals that get us writing and how to persevere when we fail.

STEP BACK TO STEP FORWARD: DEVELOP SMART GOALS

When it comes to coping with failure, half the battle is stepping back and setting the right goals—and experts have a specific checklist for what makes a “good” goal. It’s easy to remember because the framework is called SMART. Let’s walk through the acronym:

SPECIFIC

Be as clear and precise in spelling out goals as you can. We’re better able to measure success when we work toward specific targets, and studies show that people who develop more specific goals often display higher levels of persistence and motivation. If you are working toward more general or abstract goals (“write a book,” say), consider ways to particularize them.

Example: “Write more” is a very vague goal. Possible adjustments include: “Write 1000 words daily,” or “write a short story every month,” or “work on a writing prompt from a workbook every Monday between 5 and 7 p.m.” (You could even break these down

further . . .) Similarly, aiming to “improve your writing” is too general. Consider what you might actually do to improve your writing, such as enroll in a craft class, join a critique group, or read a new craft book.

MEASURABLE

Set goals you can gauge. This ties back to specificity, but make sure to set goals with criteria you can track. You need to be able to reflect and assess whether you met the goal.

Example: Instead of “come up with a new project idea,” try “I will commit to brainstorming new project ideas for one hour every day this week and writing down my thoughts.”

ACHIEVABLE

Christine and Kerry both stress how crucial it is to be realistic when you set goals—consider your own life and commitments, and be honest with yourself about what you can accomplish. Here are two tips to help set attainable goals.

1. BREAK THINGS DOWN

This comes back to specificity: Split larger or long-term goals into bite-sized chunks. Instead of setting out to “write a book,” break it into constituent steps that align with your own writing process. Whatever your goal is, identify every task you need to complete to get there, and set goals to meet those.

2. FOCUS ON YOU

Set goals for what YOU can accomplish, rather than aiming for objectives that are out of your control. This is paramount because, in the publishing world, there is so much we can’t control.

As Christine explains, “Goals that focus on outcomes you can’t control, like getting published by a certain date or hitting a specific number of followers, can be risky. These kinds of goals can lead to frustration if things don’t go as planned.”

FEATURE

Examples: Instead of aiming to “get an agent,” make a plan for querying. Instead of aiming to “get a short story published,” make a plan to write a short story and identify where and when you will submit it to publications.

RELEVANT

“Your goal needs to matter to you and align with other objectives,” Christine emphasizes. “Start by aligning your goals with your bigger ‘why.’ Why do you write? What do you hope to achieve? Goals grounded in purpose are more likely to motivate you in the long run.” Christine suggests asking yourself the following questions: Is this goal worthwhile? Does it contribute to my long-term writing aspirations?

Remember that adjacent goals can also serve you. “If your goal is to publish a book,” Christine says, “smaller goals like completing a manuscript or learning the publishing process would be relevant.”

TIME-BOUND

Yes, this is essentially a deadline, but setting parameters for when you want to achieve a goal can help keep you on track.

Try this at home: Take one of your goals and turn it into a SMART goal. This will force you to get into details that make it more “real,” accounting for your particular circumstances, ambitions, and time constraints. Plus, since SMART goals yield measurable outcomes, you will see your progress, build confidence, and stay more focused.

COPING WITH FAILURE

SMART goals may mitigate the likelihood of failing, but failure is inevitable in this business. Learning how to work through it can carry you far. Here are suggestions to help you persevere, heal, and grow.

1. CHANGE YOUR OUTLOOK

Psychologists recommend thinking about failure as a lack of progress rather than a lack of commitment, and remembering that time spent working toward a goal—even if you fail to meet it—isn’t lost (more on this below).

Acknowledge where you are with a sense of self-compassion. Member Joani Elliott manages failure by thinking of it as a more time-limited setback. When she feels defeatist thoughts creeping in, she thinks about her progress like a train track, with stops along the way, reminding herself, *Right now, you are here. But you will get there.*

2. DON'T INTERNALIZE IT

We all know accountability (however you implement it) is crucial to writing, but it's equally critical to recognize that any given failure does not mean *you* are a failure. This kind of distancing can help you protect yourself. We've probably all experienced some version of the negativity death spiral that can follow in the footsteps of a failure. I love how Kerry explained this: “A goal is a set of parameters created around some data points . . . it's not a reflection on anything other than that. . . . It's not a value judgment on your competency as a writer or a human.”



Brittany Clair has a PhD in history and left academics to pursue writing (mostly) full-time. She is the author of *Carrying On* (a book about the history and science of prenatal health care) and *Rest Uneasy* (a history of SIDS), and previously wrote for the parenting website *Lucie's List* and other online outlets. She lives in Maine with her family.

3. BE FLEXIBLE

Being willing and able to adapt in the face of changing circumstances is so important. I heard this from every corner while conducting research and interviews for this piece. Making changes based on reality isn't a sin. It's *fine*. And it happens all the time, to all of us. Kerry said that in her work as a project manager, she expects change, almost as a rule. “The best thing you can do is to acknowledge and adjust.”

4. LEARN FROM IT

I admit there's something off-putting (trite, perhaps) about the advice to “learn from failure.”

But after experiencing failure in my own writing, I've come to understand how revelatory it can be. (For me, at least, this comes after a necessary period of mourning.)

The first step is simply to reflect. Christine suggests thinking about the following:

- What worked well for you? Where *did* you succeed?
- What didn't serve you?
- What did you take away from the process?
- What connections did you make?
- How can you change things to meet success next time?

5. SEEK COMMUNITY

Last, weathering failure with a supportive community at your back is far easier than on your own (still SO HARD). WFWA offers opportunities to connect with other members and share in the successes and failures of the writing life. From workshops and webinars to podcasts, book clubs, writing dates, and critique matching, there's something for everyone. Consider trying something new with the organization—it's a great goal for all of us.

Special thank you to the following:

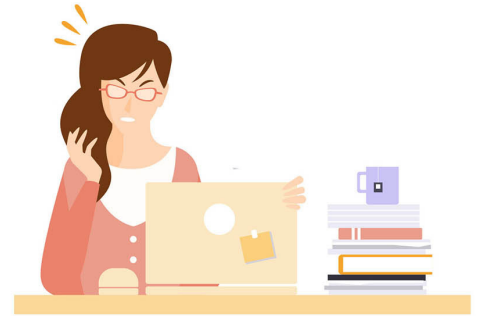
- Christine Darrow (LMHC, NCC) has been a therapist for 23 years. She writes as [C. D'Angelo](#), and is the award-winning author of *The Visitor*, *The Difference*, and *The Gift*.
- [Kerry Savage](#) has been a project manager for more than 16 years. She is also an Author Accelerator Certified Book Coach and Coach Mentor, and she's currently revising the umpteenth draft of a historical novel about a badass female pirate.

Additional Sources:

- Carlson, Ryan W., and Ayelet Fishbach. “Learning from Failure.” *Motivation Science* 10, no. 3 (September 2024): 160–70.
- Höpfner, Jessica, and Nina Keith. “Goal Missed, Self Hit: Goal-Setting, Goal-Failure, and Their Affective, Motivational, and Behavioral Consequences.” *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (September 21, 2021): 704–90.
- Jones, Neil P., Alison A. Papadakis, Caroline A. Orr, and Timothy J. Strauman. “Cognitive Processes in Response to Goal Failure: A Study of Ruminative Thought and Its Affective Consequences.” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 32, no. 5 (May 1, 2013): 10.1521/jscp.2013.32.5.482.
- Marche, Stephen. *On Writing and Failure: Or, On the Peculiar Perseverance Required to Endure the Life of a Writer*. Biblioasis, 2023.
- Yang, Haiyang, Antonios Stamatogiannakis, Amitava Chattopadhyay and Dipankar Chakravarti. “Why We Set Unattainable Goals.” *Harvard Business Review*. January 4, 2021.



PLOTTERS AND PANTSERS DISH ON HOW THEY SET WRITING GOALS



By Brittany Clair

We know many WFWA members identify as either “plotters” or “pantsers” (and some as in-betweeners, “plantsers”). We’ve been eager to learn how they set, work toward, and celebrate achieving their writing goals. When we asked, we received answers from a diverse group of writers, ranging from Joani Elliott, a dedicated plotter who spends weeks crafting and revising a 40- to 50-page story synopsis before drafting a new project, to Rigel Ailur, who told me, “In the true spirit of winging it, what works for me is that I just sit down and write.”

And you know what? While there are a few subtle differences, it turns out even the most steadfast plotters and pantsers have more in common than we may think when it comes to goals.

Regardless of our actual writing processes, we all make plans to write. “I may never be a plotter,” Leslie Hall explains, “but now I am a planner.” And surprise, surprise: There’s no one right way to approach your goals.

Still skeptical? That’s okay! We’re about to break it down for you.

We’re all familiar with a suite of different

criteria to set writing goals. Hours, word counts, page counts. Scenes and schedules. Deadlines and due dates. *You can use anything that works for you.* Some writers love daily word targets, but the same strategy may feel arbitrary to someone else. Likewise, deadlines are beloved by many, yet they make others cringe. “Rushing doesn’t work,” Patty Warren reflects.

Some members’ only rule is to write every day—some variation of “butt in the chair.” But for others, a daily writing practice isn’t feasible. “I don’t hold myself to a word count or a page count per writing session,” Teri M. Brown explains. “My goal is to write what is in my head until it isn’t there anymore and then wait until I have more to say.”

Some members make sure to do something that advances their main WIP daily, but it need not be writing per se. Brainstorming counts. So does looking something up, reading a comp title, or revising a single sentence. “I have a ‘punch list’ of things I need to do on a manuscript,” Samantha Bryant says, “and I’ll pick from that list depending on how I feel.” I love how Lauren Beltz puts this same sentiment: “I show up to my craft every day.”

FEATURE

No matter what approach they take to setting writing goals, everyone agrees it's important to 1) keep writing goals attainable and realistic; 2) practice flexibility; and 3) acknowledge progress, no matter how small.

MEMBERS SHARE THEIR TOP TIPS ON SETTING WRITING GOALS

■ Don't be overambitious—it can lead to burnout, disappointment, and frustration.

■ When in doubt, write forward.

■ Set a long-term goal and carve it up into weekly or daily objectives so you have a manageable list of tasks you can achieve.

“Lately, I'm learning that I work best when I break down large creative projects into much smaller pieces.”

~ *Barbara Bellesi Zito*

■ Recognize when you need to adjust your goals and targets, whether it's because of something in your personal life or your career, or a snag in your project.

“One of the most important things I learned was not to be hard on myself when I'm having an off night or week. Beating yourself up doesn't get you closer.”

~ *Ginger Haggerty*

■ When you schedule writing time, treat it as sacred. Don't let other activities interfere with that commitment.

“Tell your family about your writing routines, and don't be available when you sit down to write. Your family takes its cues from you.”

~ *Joani Elliott*

“You wouldn't skip a doctor's appointment or work meeting because you didn't feel like it. As much as possible, treat your writing time both as precious and as real of a commitment as anything else in your life.”

~ *Kerry Savage*

■ Consider also setting goals to *avoid* your work sometimes, giving yourself space from a project—especially before revising. Sometimes stepping away is just as important as showing up.

■ Set author goals that reflect YOUR reasons for writing.

■ Establish marketing goals.

■ Consider aligning your deadlines and work goals with external events such as festivals, conferences, or fairs.

“I look ahead for opportunities and potential book events when planning my book releases, then back up what it takes to reach the launch date for that book.”

~ *Kimberly Nixon*

■ Celebrate every accomplishment—even sitting down to write.

■ Create a ritual when you sit at your desk to write, and keep your writing space as free from distractions as possible (leave your phone somewhere else, for example).

■ Consider adopting a tracking mechanism to see your progress over time.

■ Rely on critique groups or a writing partner for accountability.

One final point of emphasis: **Be flexible for different projects and different types of writing.**

“What works for one project might not be the best fit for the next.” Lauren Beltz explains. “Don't be afraid to iterate your process to see what works best for you in this season of life.”

Joani Elliott likens switching gears to a new manuscript to having a second child: “Just because you had a first, it doesn't mean it's the same, or any less painful to have another.”

When I started researching and speaking with members for this piece, I presumed plotters and pantsers would have a totally different take on setting and working toward their goals. But that didn't entirely hold up. Regardless of their writing strategies, plotters and pantsers see value and utility in setting goals. The most important pieces are to set reasonable, attainable goals that align with your own ambitions and schedule; be open to change; and to acknowledge (and celebrate) every baby step along the way.

Thank you to the following members who offered input for this article: Joani Elliott, Annette G. Anders, Rigel Ailur, Kathi Beck, Diane Barnes, Patty Warren, Teri Brown, Samantha Bryant, Kimberly Nixon, Ginger Haggerty, Lynne Golodner, Lauren Beltz, Leslie Hall, Kerry Savage, and Barbara Bellesi Zito.



CREATE A RITUAL WHEN YOU SIT AT YOUR DESK TO WRITE, AND KEEP YOUR WRITING SPACE AS FREE FROM DISTRACTIONS AS POSSIBLE (LEAVE YOUR PHONE SOMEWHERE ELSE, FOR EXAMPLE).

USING YOUR AUTHOR PLATFORM TO SHOWCASE YOUR UNIQUE VOICE



By Katie Tammen

By now, you’ve probably figured out that typing the words “The End” is really only the beginning of your publishing journey. In addition to editing and revising, writers today are expected to have a well-developed author platform.

And no, before you pull out that paper bag and start hyperventilating at the idea of another publishing task, an author platform is NOT equivalent to “social media presence” (or standing up on a stage to give a speech). Cultivating an author platform is—for fiction writers, especially—about creating a collective body of work while connecting with the people who are and will become your readers and superfans.

“The whole thing is about building your network and your audience,” says author Alison Hammer, who is also the creative director for an advertising agency. “It’s joining the community before you’re trying to sell to them.”

That’s a lesson that WFWA member Bralade Koroye-Emenanjo learned the hard way after she released a short story collection without finding her audience first. An engineer by trade, Bralade wasn’t connected to readers or other writers, so getting the word out about her work was tough. “We write these books, and then we don’t really engage them,” she says.

After a period filled with empty if not inaccurate internet searches and book club appearances near her home in Texas, Bralade found WFWA. She’s happy to report she no longer seeks advice from websites paying to appear at the top of search engines. Instead, she hops onto Facebook and searches within WFWA’s page, and almost always finds an expert.

“I know where to get the information now,” she says with a laugh.

PLANS, NOT PANIC

Creative writing instructor and author Mary Dezember has a wealth of knowledge she’s happy to share. And even better? She’s created a plan that breaks down author platforms into three bite-size pieces, so the entire process is less intimidating.

“I do a lot of stuff in three steps because I think it’s really easy for us to think of things as one, two, three,” Mary says.

FEATURE

STEP ONE: IDENTIFY YOUR "AUTHOR FINGERPRINT"

For most writers, this means nailing down not just your tagline, which she recommends thinking of the same way as a logline for a book, but the things that make you unique as a writer.

"How do you want to present yourself and your writing to the world?" Mary asks.

Both Mary and Alison caution not to pigeon-hole yourself too tightly at this stage. Wider is better when you're growing your audience. Mary, for example, doesn't just say she writes historical fiction in her tagline because she also publishes poetry. Instead, she identified universal elements in her writing and chose to emphasize the optimism infused in it. Her personal tagline says she offers "portals to possibilities" with her words.

Alison also had to get creative with how to present herself to readers, especially after she started cowriting books in a different genre than her published works. She looked for common themes and discovered everything she wrote was, at its base form, about love. She created a Substack she described as "fan mail" for people and things she loves.

STEP TWO: BUILD YOUR AUTHOR STUDIO AND GALLERY

Once you establish your author identity, you'll need to create a landing place for people interested in your writing. Mary recommends doing this with a personal website that showcases your personality and writing style. Not only can you include your biography and social media links on your site, but Mary is a big fan of offering sneak peeks into your stories, a blog, and a calendar of upcoming events. The best part? You don't need a published book to have an author website.



ONCE YOU ESTABLISH YOUR AUTHOR IDENTITY, YOU'LL NEED TO CREATE A LANDING PLACE FOR PEOPLE INTERESTED IN YOUR WRITING. MARY RECOMMENDS DOING THIS WITH A PERSONAL WEBSITE THAT SHOWCASES YOUR PERSONALITY AND WRITING STYLE.

STEP THREE: START REACHING OUT

This is where social media, a newsletter, a Substack, and personal interactions come into play.

In addition to meeting other writers through groups like WFWA, outreach means immersing yourself in the literary world and supporting other authors. On Facebook, you could join groups like Friends & Fiction, Great Thoughts Great Readers, and Readers Coffeehouse. You can also post positive reviews about books you enjoyed (or that are similar to what you intend to publish) on Bookstagram or Goodreads.

It's not all online, though. Building your audience means showing up for book signings and readings for authors in your area, or visiting local bookstores.

Mary, who spent her career working as an English professor, never imagined she'd use social media, so she ended up building her online presence in small increments. During COVID-19 lockdowns, she started a newsletter for family and close friends about her life with updates on how she was doing and bits of encouraging poems or sayings. It eventually expanded after she discovered

people from her hometown were invested in learning more about her life and writing, too.

A WORD OF CAUTION

"I am a big advocate of do it before [your work is] out there," Mary says, "but only if you're very serious about [publishing]."

There's no point in putting yourself out there, and building an audience, if you don't follow through, she says.

Alison agrees with Mary, but also notes that your approach can, and will, evolve as you learn more and settle into your writing career. The key factor to home in on from the beginning is authenticity, she says.

Most people agree it's best not to join writing and reading communities to just benefit yourself or to plop in a plug for your newest book. It works much better in the long run if your participation derives from a shared love for reading and writing; people respond positively to that kind of selflessness.

"I think it comes down to being a good literary citizen," Alison says. "It's not just selling; it's a community."



Katie Tammen is a recovering news junkie who began her writing career at daily newspapers. These days she avoids all stories related to super obedient police dogs, but never misses an opportunity to highlight the unspoken realities of womanhood.

WRITING MADE EAS(IER): MEMBERS SHARE HOW THEY PERFECT THEIR CRAFT

By Katie Tammen

With the holidays (and their sales) approaching, now is as good a time as ever to talk about writing tools. You know, the technology that provides forward momentum on the days you want to launch your computer out the window or delete an entire manuscript because you can't get the opening right. We asked WFWA members on Facebook and the Online Community to share their top picks. This list isn't comprehensive, but each tool has been tested—and loved—by our members.

EDITING TOOLS

PROWRITINGAID

■ **What it is:** ProWritingAid provides a deep dive into overused, repeated, or echoed words and phrases in your document. It also considers sentence structure, the percentage of dialogue, pacing, and too many other items to list. You can use it through its website or with plug-ins inside Word, Scrivener, and several other programs. It's fairly intuitive software, and many users say once they try it, they can't imagine editing without it. (It's my personal favorite, and I've tried all the ones listed here.)

■ **Cost:** Offers a limited free version, and monthly, yearly, or lifetime subscriptions.

AUTOCRIT

■ **What it is:** AutoCrit is similar to ProWritingAid, but has a couple unique features in its paid version. In addition to AI-generated chapter and book summaries, AutoCrit includes a read-aloud function. It won't read an entire manuscript at once, but the voices are easy to listen to and less robotic than many out there. (This function is great for catching not just typos, but also awkward-sounding phrasing.)

■ **Members say:** "You still need human eyes on it, but it sure saves your editor a lot of time (and \$)." – Kim Rebecca Gottlieb-Walker

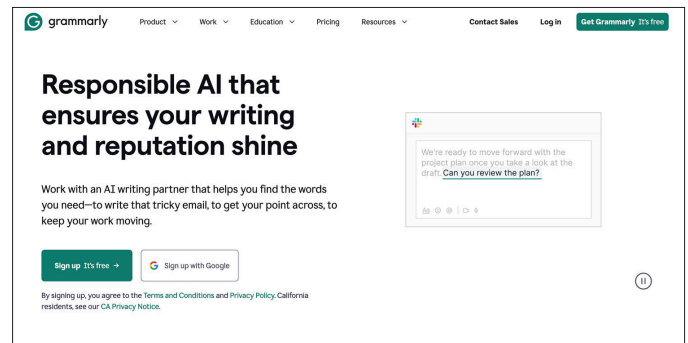
■ **Cost:** Offers some features for free, but much more with a monthly, annual, or lifetime subscription.

GRAMMARLY

■ **What it is:** This is another program in the vein of ProWritingAid and AutoCrit. Grammarly is especially good at noting repeat sentence starts, but does tend to lean toward business writing rather than creative, so you might end up ignoring many of its suggestions.

■ **Members say:** "Saves me all day, every day, but has too many pop-ups and sometimes it's difficult to do my own editing because of those." – Cherie Dawn Haas

■ **Cost:** Offers most features for free, but has more advanced tools with its subscription plans. You can go monthly or yearly (no lifetime option).



HEMINGWAY EDITOR

■ **What it is:** This online option will note the complexity of your sentence structure and flag the use of passive voice, adverbs, and unnecessarily complex words. (It's great for shorter bits of writing like a pitch or query letter. I used to pop my articles into it back in the day before turning them into my editor.)

■ **Cost:** Free

DRAFTING TOOLS

GOOGLE DOCS

■ **What it is:** This online program is one of the best for collaboration, and requires only a (free) Gmail account to use. Multiple people can work in the document simultaneously and view edits in real time. You can also assign access levels for each user that span from read-only to editing capabilities. (It's a favorite for the staff at *Write ON!* when we're prepping our articles.)

■ **Members say:** "I use Google Docs for everything! It's easy to share amongst writing and critique partners and allows me to have my work at my fingertips on various devices. It also translates nicely to more traditional formats like Word." – Deonna Fulfer Osborn

■ **Cost:** Free

Continued on page 21

FEATURE

SCRIVENER

■ **What it is:** This is a tool that writers tend to love or hate. This writing program is capable of taking you through every step of your writing journey, from conception to page layout, but be warned, you'll need to take time to learn it to make the most of it.

■ **Members say:** *"When I discovered Scrivener, I realized I could never again write without it. The app is a giant trapper keeper of all my research, drafts, manuscripts and style sheets, bookmarks, links, maps, you name it."* – Jann Alexander

■ **Cost:** One-time purchase, with updates included.

PLOTTTR

■ **What it is:** This novel outlining program provides outline templates and fill-in-the-blank character profiles. You can also freestyle your outlines to suit your needs.

■ **Members say:** *"I can choose a template or 'beat sheet' to guide me through laying out my acts/chapters/scenes. Scenes can be dragged and dropped anywhere, I can track subplots, and all my series' characters can be added to each book with a click of a button."* – Jessica Halleran Benzing

■ **Cost:** Offers a 60-day free trial and then monthly, yearly, or lifetime subscriptions.

EXPERT ADVICE

WRITERS HELPING WRITERS

■ **What it is:** Here's another website with tons of tools and advice to take your writing to the next level. It's run by three women, including recent Albuquerque retreat speaker Angela Ackerman, and offers tools, articles, and other resources.

■ **Members say:** *"Another great resource that I swear by and will never stop recommending is Writers Helping Writers and the tools included on their One Stop For Writers website—especially the character builder. I find it incredibly valuable."* – Rebecca Campbell

■ **Cost:** Offers a two-week free trial to decide if it works for you, then can be purchased for a month, six months, or a year.

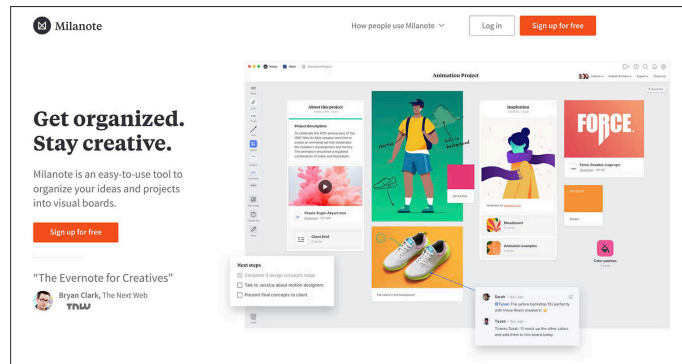
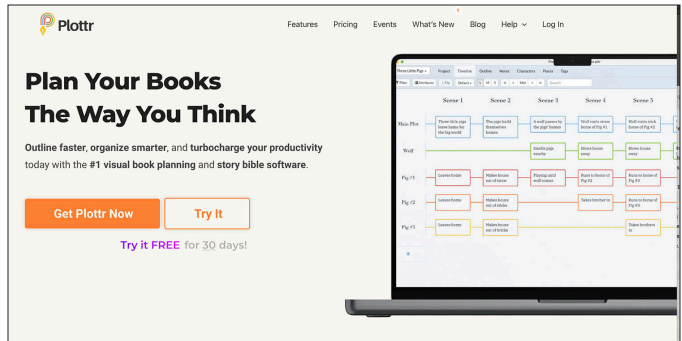
ORGANIZATION TOOLS

MILANOTE

■ **What it is:** This provides an opportunity to compile your random notes all in one place and arrange them in an order that's effective for you. You can also make "index cards" of your story structure and easily rearrange them.

■ **Members say:** *"I have just started inputting all of my handwritten notes into Milanote and using this side-by-side with Scrivener. I have notes in Google Docs, Sheets, on paper, images in folders and it's a beast trying to find everything and create a coherent timeline. That's why I'm trying Milanote."* – Stephanie Caballero Hale

■ **Cost:** Offers a free limited-feature program and monthly or annual subscriptions.



PACEMAKER PLANNER

■ **What it is:** This online tool lets you set writing goals and keeps you on track.

■ **Members say:** *"Pacemaker Planner (online) is great for tracking word count goals. Helps me stay motivated by watching word count and the percentage of my goal I've completed. The free version lets you make a plan for up to 60 days."* – Kate Traub Underwood

■ **Cost:** Offers a free plan plus monthly or yearly subscriptions with additional features.

As always, the best writing tool we have is this community, and we'd like to thank everyone who took the time to answer our questions for this piece. Even if your response didn't make it in this time, keep an eye out for more posts on Facebook and in the Online Community from our staff. We'll be reaching out again for the next issue!

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2024 RISING STAR AND STAR AWARD WINNERS



RISING STAR **JACQUELINE COLEMAN** **PLAYING IN THE SHADOW** **OF THE WIND**

This novel explores unfamiliar perspectives of a black woman, balancing living during the unfolding civil rights movement and being married to a man who adopts a religion that preaches that Armageddon will come by 1975.

Should she abandon the dreams that her children reap the benefits of the changing world, or embrace the religion her husband loves?

This story uncovers what is learned as a family struggles to find truth and meaning in the world.



STAR AWARD – **DEBUT** **LAUREN PARVIZI** **LA VIE, ACCORDING** **TO ROSE**

Thirty-something Rose Zadeh aims to please everyone—except herself. High-maintenance mother? Check. Insufferable boss? Double check. When a work hiatus lands Rose in Paris, she has three weeks to reinvent herself. But first, she'll need to learn how to say no and when to say yes, a thousand times yes.

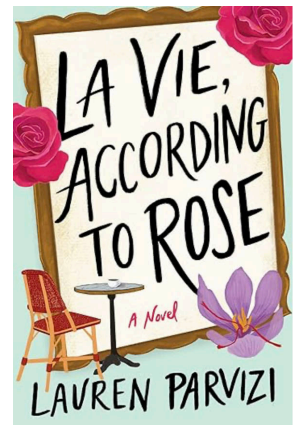


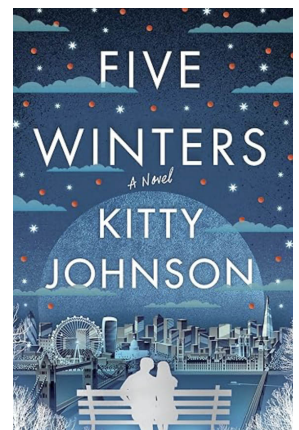
Photo by Nazaneen Gangi



STAR AWARD – **GENERAL** **KITTY JOHNSON** **FIVE WINTERS**

Ever since Beth Bailey was young, she's been in love with her best friend's older brother, Mark. But now he's married, and she needs to move on.

Over the course of five years, Beth comes to startling realizations about family, friendship, the meaning of love, and most importantly, herself on the winding path to happiness.



AUTHOR PROFILE:

SHARON RITCHEY

PUBLISHING AS SHARON J. WISHNOW

By Brittany Clair

For this issue we spoke with WFWA member, author, and volunteer extraordinaire Sharon Ritchey. She's our Executive Editor, so it was an especially fun conversation. Sharon's a nonfiction editor turned fiction writer. Besides her sharp sense of humor, keen editorial eye, and propensity to research the hell out of esoteric topics as far-reaching as cocktail recipes and french fries, to the history of wearing gloves in the archives and raccoon infestations, she has a wealth of experience across the publishing industry. Her debut, *The Pelican Tide*, was released this past June, and we're thrilled to hear about her book, get a little advice, and learn her personal take on achieving goals.

WO: Your professional background is in the world of nonfiction. When did you start writing fiction and what prompted that shift for you? What's the transition been like?

Sharon: I've written fiction off and on for 30 years but with limited success. I've published a handful of short stories but was never wild about the format until I discovered flash fiction. One thousand to 1,200 words is my sweet spot. These are contained worlds and scenes. About ten years ago, I decided that if I ever wanted to write a novel, I better get to it. (It was the same thought as when I decided after being married for seven years to finally start a family.)

The transition was hard. I have an MFA in creative nonfiction writing and assumed (incorrectly) that I could easily transition to fiction. Not so—I had a lot to learn. That's when I found WFWA and my membership has made all the difference.

WO: Tell us about *The Pelican Tide* and what inspired you to write it.

Sharon: *The Pelican Tide* tells the story of Chef Josie Babineaux, a Cajun chef and restaurant owner living in Grand Isle, Louisiana. She's putting the pieces of her life and her family back together after her husband, Brian, an oil rig worker, gambled away their savings. When the Deepwater Horizon oil platform explodes, Grand Isle becomes ground zero for the spill, threatening Josie's business, her community, and her family, including a brown pelican named Gumbo they rescued two years earlier. He isn't a pet in the traditional sense, but one who has chosen the Babineaux family as his people.



The story came to me in 2019 after I watched a webinar on the spill from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute (WHOI). The webinar was about the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and how the Gulf of Mexico had recovered ten years later. I was stunned that ten years had passed, as I vividly remembered the spill. However, the webinar didn't talk about the people. What happened to the people? Surely you didn't live through an oil spill and—*poof*—ten years later there are no lingering effects. From there, my story began.

WO: Your debut was released in June—what's surprised you most about publishing?

Sharon: How much control I had over the story editing and how little control I had over anything else.

Continued on page 24

FEATURE

WO: You've served in numerous positions with WFWA. What made you want to become involved with the organization as a volunteer, and how has your experience with WFWA influenced your career?

Sharon: I believe with any organization or relationship, you get out what you put in. I saw value in being part of WFWA, and dipped a toe in the volunteer water by helping to run the Work Our WIPs February sprint (this program has since been replaced by the now-regular writing dates). Through that month-long gig, I met dozens of members and worked with WFWA leadership. I was hooked.

WFWA is the first thank you in my book acknowledgments. I wouldn't be published today were it not for the education and the people. The friends I've made and the community I've built sustain and nourish me.

WO: What's a piece of advice you received you would pass on to others?

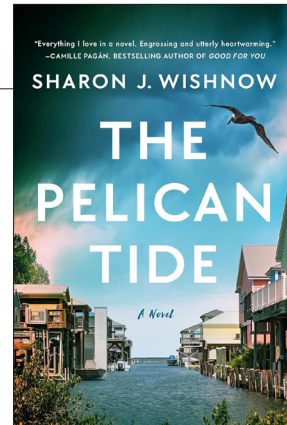
Sharon: Oh, wow, so much advice. Recognize that nothing you write is wasted. I used to feel that I wasted so many years only writing and working in the nonfiction space until I was reminded by a mentor (hello, Camille Pagán!) that the millions of nonfiction words I've written, the interviews I've conducted, and the research skills I've developed have landed me here. That work counts. The other important advice I've been given is to learn to say no and protect my time.

WO: We're taking a close look at setting goals in this issue. What's your approach to setting writing goals? How do you balance your nonfiction and fiction work?

Sharon: Unless I'm under a deadline, I switch off my fiction and nonfiction days. I work on my drafts and editing one day, and marketing, newsletters, and client work on another. I also aim to move the needle every single day—seven days a week—on my projects. Some days that may mean reading a bit of research for fifteen minutes, or editing a page of work. It may be small, but it counts.

WO: What do you hope to be working on in 2025?

Sharon: I have a variety of projects currently moving. I finished one manuscript that I like but don't feel is baked enough to follow my debut. I'm shelving it to age in the back of my hard drive. I'm writing another story that is shaping up to be one I'm excited about. I'm also working on my newsletter, *Research for Writers and Other Curious People*.



Chapter 1

Grand Isle, Louisiana

Sunday, April 18, 2010

2:00 p.m.

Chef Josie Babineaux shook a bowl of flour over hot oil in her grandmother's cast-iron roux pot. The flour sizzled as it made contact, and tiny bubbles danced around the edges, releasing its nutty toasted-bread essence. With a practiced hand, she mixed the flour with her roux paddle like she was on a mission, and she was.

In two hours, a food critic and a photographer from *Vacation Ventures* were interviewing her, the spice queen of the bayou, for the magazine's cover story. At least that's what the editor had crowned her last month, when she told Josie they'd selected Odeal's as the 2010 Island Restaurant of the Year. This wasn't the first accolade that her family's restaurant had earned over the past decade. Josie proudly displayed the small write-ups in *Zagat*, *Southern Living*, and *Gourmet* as if she had won a Michelin Star.

Vacation Ventures' glossy pages, prestige, and dedicated readers were the miracle Josie needed. The international publicity, combined with the full calendar of fishing rodeos and events planned for Grand Isle, would fill the restaurant, making this tourist season the turning point to pull her out of the financial death spiral her husband, Brian, had plunged the family into. But she had no time today to worry about Brian. He was six months in her rear-view mirror.

AUCTION COORDINATOR LEANNE TREESE STRIVES TO IMPROVE OFFERINGS EVERY YEAR



Lawyer-turned-author **Leanne Treese** has overseen WFWA's scholarship auction since it began in 2020. The mother of three lives in New Jersey with her husband and their dogs.

Creating an online auction to raise money for WFWA scholarships might not have been Leanne Treese's idea, but she's quietly shaped it into a program that raises north of \$10,000 every year.

Leanne discovered WFWA at a writer's conference in 2018, but it took two years before she found her volunteer niche, and now she's completed her fourth year as WFWA's auction coordinator.

"I just wanted to help WFWA in a contained [way]," Leanne says.

Prior to 2020, WFWA raised money for its scholarships through gift baskets that were raffled during the annual writing retreat. Leadership, though, wanted to help more writers achieve their dreams, so the online auction was born.

Leanne's role started as many do, with a simple offer to figure out the new platform. But as the auction continued to grow, Leanne realized she didn't need to do it alone. This year, Kathy Dodson, Sandy Young, Kay Smith-Blum, Marie Watts, and Rachel Michelson have all stepped up, freeing Leanne to focus on bigger-picture issues.

In its first year, the October auction had 64 items up for bid, and last year they topped out at 107. Since starting, the committee has raised anywhere from \$10,595 to a whopping \$16,809 with each auction. Leanne anticipates more of the same this year, especially since she has a larger team helping her.

"I think it's not only a great program to have these scholarships, but I think it's fun for our members to have this opportunity to bid on these things," Leanne says.

Thanks to the new volunteers, Leanne was able to procure a wider variety of items in this year's event than in the past. In addition to critiques and publishing insights from agents and writing professionals, this year also had smaller items available, such as a journaling kit, a candy jar, and coffee cups with clever writing-related sayings.

"This year has been really great!" Leanne says.

When the retired lawyer isn't working on the auction, she's writing women's fiction and romantic comedies, or playing with her dogs at her New Jersey home.



“This manuscript of yours that has just come back from another editor is a precious package. Don’t consider it rejected. Consider that you’ve addressed it ‘to the editor who can appreciate my work’ and it has simply come back stamped ‘Not at this address.’ Just keep looking for the right address.”

BARBARA KINGSOLVER