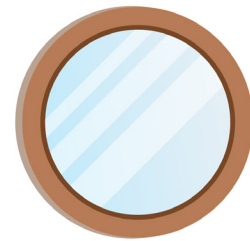
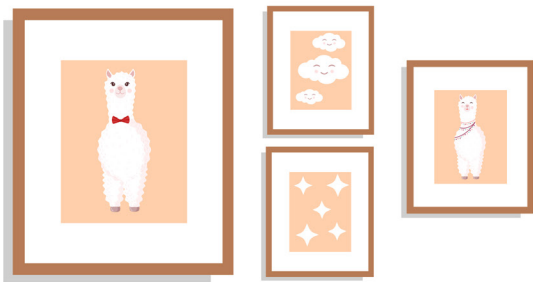


The Florida Writer

April 2022 | Volume 16, Number 2



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How to Find and Work with Beta Readers


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EDITOR
Mary Ann de Stefano

PRODUCTION EDITOR
Tanya Grae

QUERIES & SUBMISSIONS
mdestefano@floridawriters.org

ADVERTISING
mdestefano@floridawriters.org

PUBLISHER
Florida Writers Association
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floridawriters.org

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The Florida Writer

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS

Celebrations

We publish announcements for members who have good news to share.

- Submit a one-paragraph announcement written in third person.
- Maximum word count 100
- You may include one headshot or a photo of the front cover of your book to accompany your announcement, but it is not required.
- One entry per issue, per person
- Type “Celebrations” and month of the issue you’re submitting to in the subject line of your submission email.
- Follow all “Additional Requirements” listed below.

Paragraphs

We publish selected creative writing by members who respond to the issue’s prompt.

- Prose, poetry, and excerpts from longer works that can stand alone are welcome.
- Maximum word count for prose, 700; maximum line count for poetry, 50. Title is included in word count.
- You may include a headshot to accompany your entry, but it is not required.
- One entry per issue, per person
- Type “Paragraphs” and month of the issue you’re submitting to in the subject line of your submission email.
- Include a one-line bio, no more than fifteen words including your name within your submission document.
- Follow all “Additional Requirements” listed below.

Additional Requirements

1. To be eligible for publication, you must be a member of the Florida Writers Association
2. Send your entire text submission as an attached Word doc. Do not embed any of the text that is part of your submission in the email.
3. Include your name and contact information within the attachment.
4. Photo image files must be high resolution, 300 ppi, jpg or png format, and sent as an attachment, not embedded in a document.
5. Email your submission to mdestefano@floridawriters.org

Prompts & Deadlines

June 2022 Issue – Deadline May 1, 2022

No prompt. Send us your best stuff, and be sure to follow the submission requirements.

August 2022 Issue – Deadline July 1, 2022

Write about a sound.





Why I Volunteer and You Should Too

Mary Ann de Stefano
Editor

Without question, volunteering has given me some of the most enriching and memorable experiences of my life. Here's some of what volunteering has given me. You can have this (and more) too.

A Sense of Purpose

Years ago, when I had stepped out of corporate life—a huge change for me—an acquaintance invited me to a board meeting for a local adult literacy organization. There I found a deep connection to the cause that was grounded in my own love for writing and reading, and it lifted my spirit in ways I hadn't known needed lifting. Since then, I have always found value in being a part of something greater than myself, and that has surely continued into my work with the Florida Writers Association (FWA).

Community and Networking

Through the literacy group, I met people “like me.” Later, I connected with like-minded people through a shared love for the craft and business of writing when I joined and volunteered for FWA. Bonus: I've met people with diverse experiences and backgrounds. Along the path, I've found mentors. (Some didn't know they were mentoring me, but I learned—am still learning—from their examples.) I've made some deep friendships out of our volunteer experiences. Volunteering helped to expand both my professional and social networks (and it's fun).

Skill-Building

You can use volunteer work to learn or practice skills that can increase your employability or just enjoy for the sake of learning. When the literacy group came to a financial crisis, I had the incentive to learn how to write grants and successfully secured funding. At the time I hadn't done much business or other nonfiction writing but having to write grants made me develop that voice, and I learned a lot about what it takes to effectively communicate an organization's story. I was able to translate my volunteer practice into paid work for other groups as a part-time

freelance grant writer—perfect for me during my son's pre-school years.

Being an Agent for Change

When I first joined FWA in 2005, I craved more communication from the organization. By that time, I had found my calling in a full-time freelance business offering editorial services, and I was experimenting with an email marketing newsletter, something that wasn't nearly as common as it is today. FWA communicated with members primarily through a print magazine, published only four times a year, so I suggested a monthly e-newsletter—and volunteered to produce it. It's funny now to think that it took some convincing.

Do you see the need for change? Having an idea is the easy part. The best way to make change happen is to make a good case for your idea, and then actively participate in doing the work to make that change happen. (The bonus in my example was that I got to build my e-newsletter skills at the same time.)

You may be an extrovert craving more social interaction or an introvert who prefers to stay behind the scenes. You may have skills you can share or skills you'd like to learn and develop. Perhaps you'd like to make new friends or increase your visibility in the writing community. Volunteering for the Florida Writers Association can have myriad social, career, and personal benefits for all kinds of people.

FWA runs on volunteer power, and we need you. Check out the volunteer opportunities listed in the Member Center or write to contactus@floridawriters.org. The FWA is an organization I believe in. My FWA volunteer work has rewarded me with all that I tell about here and more. I wish the same for you. ✨

Mary Ann de Stefano serves as editor of *The Florida Writer* and FWA's vice president of administration & membership and publishes *MAD's Monday Muse*. An independent editor with 30+ years' experience, she works one-to-one with writers who are developing books. Visit madaboutwords.com





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News in Brief

Welcome 75 New Members in January/February

Shawn Amos, Ashleigh Anderson, Jane Anderson, Charline Barger, Austin Bell, Tonya Bervaldi-Camaratta, Jennifer Bjork, Jeff Braun, Deborah Burghardt, Jace Burke, Vee Byram, Larry Chizak, Norman Clark, Are Connelly, Kathleen Contrino, Teresa Davis-Mills, Susan Dwyer,

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Lauren Papa, Paisley Papa, Joyce Plair-Jordan, Jude Platt, Suzanne Purvis, S.E. Reed, Sharon Rhyce, Ian Rowan, Cathy-Ann Sauer, Ravi Sharma, Gene Siudut, Violet Speichert, Athena Spiska, Natalie Symons, Bonnie Thompson, Lucy Tobias, Holly Vagley, Elaine Viets, Dick Walsh, John York, Nealy Young, Ava Yurdusev, Jeannie Zokan

Don't Delay! Enter Now!

The submission period for Florida Writers Association Collection, Volume 14: Thrills and Chills ends April 30. The Royal Palm Literary Awards submission period ends April 30—or when 550 entries have been received. Submission requirements and entry forms can be found in the Member Center. Remember, your membership must be active through October 31 in order to qualify.

Member Success of the Month

Share a recent writing success with the Florida Writers Association community! A writing success can be anything that makes you feel proud, accomplished, or just plain excited. Examples include (but are not limited to!) the following:

- You finished outlining your second book
- Your poem was recently published in an anthology
- You got your first paid writing gig
- You broke through a tough scene in your story

You get the idea. Submissions will be randomly selected and featured in the FWA email news. Submit your entry using the form on the Member Center's landing page. Let us hear from you.

Royal Palm Literary Awards



A prestigious writing competition that recognizes extraordinary writing in 28 genre categories for adults.

Submissions open February 1st
www.floridawriters.org/writing-contests

Collections #14

The theme is
Thrills & Chills

Submission Window:
February 1, 2022, through
April 30, 2022, at midnight.

Visit www.floridawriters.org
for more information.



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WAR STORY
A TRUE TO LIFE ACCOUNT OF WWII

REVIEW

“This is one of those rare books you won’t be able to put down. The thorough and realistic descriptions of various situations made me feel like I was a part of the action. When missions were being flown, I felt like I knew the characters and found myself hoping they make a certain decision or cheering them on. It gave me a much better appreciation for what the airmen, as well as the ground crews, went through during WWII, including the emotional attachments that developed not only between people, but with the aircraft.” **D. SAMUEL**

You can almost hear the roar of B-17 Flying Fortress Engines

You’ll get caught up in this exciting, action-packed, true to life, World War II adventure that puts YOU in a front row seat.

SYNOPSIS

It is the spring of 1942 and as Steve Carmichael celebrates graduating from the University of Florida, it is clear to every young man in America that a war is on. Six months have passed since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and ordinary citizens stand united, ready to fight against the tyranny of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.

Steve grew up on a cattle ranch in Kissimmee, Florida. His two passions: baseball and flying. At the age of 11, his father, Ray, purchased an old mail-route biplane, and within a year, Steve was soaring with the birds. It was an easy decision for Steve to join the Army Air Corps and pursue his desire to pilot the B-17 Flying Fortress. In flight school, he meets his future copilot and best friend, Howie Van Dyke. Stationed overseas in Chelveston, England, with the Eighth Air Force, they form the tight-knit crew—Pappy’s Pack in the 305th Bomb Group. Action-packed air battles ensue as they fight deadly flak and German Luftwaffe in the skies of occupied Europe. Though they must complete a total of 30 missions before earning a trip back to the States, a young British nurse named Maggie captures the attention of Steve, and he finds himself torn by both the uncertainty of love and the business of war.

**A story of hope, dreams, and love in a war-torn world.
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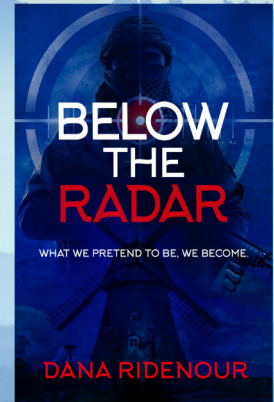
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Undercover Thriller

"Below the Radar is a
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creator, Dana Ridenour, is a
writer you'll want to add to
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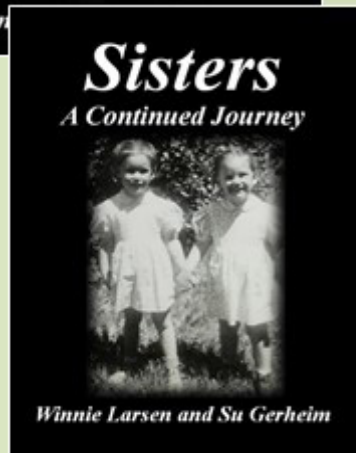
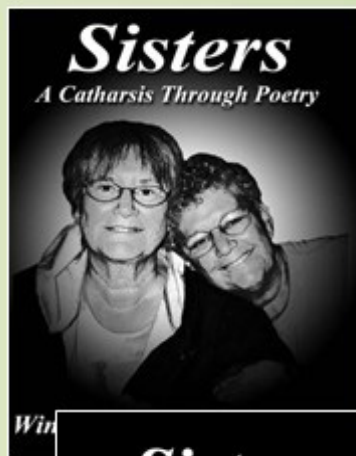
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and deftly paced; highly
recommended."

-Kirkus Reviews



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Save the date for this exciting conference! Learn from industry experts, network with local writers, and supercharge your craft.

#FloridaWritersCon2022



See You at Florida WritersCon 2022

by Alison Nissen

We're back! The Florida Writers Association is excited to meet you in person this year! Our annual conference, scheduled for October 28-30 at the Hilton Orlando/Altamonte Springs, will be our 20th. The Youth Writers Summit will take place October 29.

After two years apart, we've been inspired to refresh our conference. Rebranded as Florida WritersCon 2022, we are proud to welcome writers to learn, focus, and reconnect. We're offering new programs and are prepared for a huge impact—with lots of fun mixed in.

Florida WritersCon 2022 begins on Friday afternoon with a workshop presented by Sherri Winston, author of books for young readers and YA fiction. Then, attend our evening Meet and Great Mixer—a great way to reconnect with friends, make new contacts, and share stories. Beginning at 5:30 PM, attendees will be treated to two free cocktails or mocktails and hors d'oeuvres and can relax in preparation for a jam-packed weekend.

Saturday, enjoy a light breakfast and choose from among morning workshops including:

- **Adapting Books to Film** with TV and film author Jaimie Engle
- **Crafting Poetry** with Pushcart Prize poet Gail Ghai
- **Sensitivity Proofreading** with personal publishing concierge L.E. Perez
- **Freelance Writing** with freelance journalist Nafari Vanaski
- **Write-Tight** with journalist & author Eliot Kleinberg
- **Writing Realistic Dialogue** with educator & author Julie Murphy

Concurrently, our youth members will enjoy a special program designed for just for them at the Florida Writers Youth Summit:

- **We Are Authors: An Interactive Discussion on Writing**
- **The Art of Storytelling: Where Art and Mystery Stylishly Collide**
- **Your Published Future: Plan Your Publishing Path**

At lunch, we'll celebrate our Youth Royal Palm Literary Awards Winners and members selected to be in our 2022 Collections anthology with a ceremony and book signing.

Then we'll all spend the afternoon learning from Sarah Penner, author of *The Lost Apothecary*. Her book was an instant *New York Times* bestseller which debuted at #7 on the hardcover fiction list and is now in the works as a drama series at Fox. A book signing with Sarah will follow.

Saturday evening will conclude with our Royal Palm Literary Awards hosted by Bill Opperman, the new RPLA chair. The evening offers us the opportunity to celebrate our fellow writers.

Sunday morning, Florida WritersCon will conclude with a Publishing Panel featuring Marilyn Allen, Allen O'Shea Literary Agency; Assistant Agent at the Tobias Agency, Sarah Fisk; Orange Blossom Publishing owner, Arielle Haughee; Editor and Founder of *Ghost Parachute Literary Magazine*, Brett Pribble; and New York & Naples, Florida Agent Marlene Stringer of Stringer Literary Agency. Conference Chair and host of the *Florida Writer Podcast* Alison Nissen will moderate the discussion.

If you want to be immersed in the craft of writing, Florida WritersCon 2022 is your opportunity to gain focus, stay inspired, and learn valuable tips to help move the needle on your writing. As I mentioned before, we've missed you!

The FWA will continue to take the suitable steps to ensure all our speakers, attendees, and exhibitors are as safe as possible.

We can't wait to see you! 🐾

Alison Nissen, is the co-founder of Revel Coach, a platform that mentors leaders as they build a framework for the Next Steps in their career, volunteerism, or public service. She is also a professor at Southeastern University, author of the 2016 RPLA Unpublished Memoir of the Year *Resolve, Courage, Hope*, and host of FWA's *The Florida Podcast*. Follow her *Tales from the Laundry Room* at alisonnissen.com.



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by Anne Dalton, Esquire

Many writers are confounded by royalties charged by copyright holders for use of maps, designs, documents, photographs and other visual elements considered necessary to properly convey concepts set forth in fictional or non-fictional works. If it's possible to find public domain materials at all, often they are of poor quality and inappropriate for inclusion in modern works.

This may help.

The New York Public Library Digital Collection of Public Domain Materials exceeds 912,024 digitized items as of February 2022. These items are free to use. As the website explains, "no permission required. No restrictions on use." And the Library allows download in "the highest resolution available, directly from the Digital Collections website!"

A casual examination of its well-composed website reveals free items as diverse as "an unassuming black notebook containing the earliest draft of Oscar Wilde's 1895 play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*," and iconic images that evoke famous literary works, such as John Steinbeck's Dust Bowl America or *Oliver Twist*'s London or *Dracula*'s Transylvania or the Old Witch House in Salem, Massachusetts, "where victims of witchcraft were condemned in 1692" (the setting for Arthur Miller's play, *The Crucible*); or a 1901 drawing of dirigibles, used in Jules Verne's *Around the World in 80 Days*.

Are you a dance fan? Over 2,000 free public domain prints are now available through the Library's Jerome Robbins Dance Division, including a poster from the Folies-Bergère of Loie Fuller's dancing; a woodcut depicting Nijinsky in a leafy costume; and lots more.

An architectural fan? How about complete mansion floor plans from early 20th Century New York City?

How about American history? Now you can download and use authentic and high-quality copies of original papers from James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington and others.

Important documents from the International Gay Information Center Collection (252 items) are also available for free.

Looking for something more eclectic? How about ladies' dress shoes of the nineteenth century (24 items); 700 years of scientific and medical illustrations (299 items); classic illustrated zoologies and related works from 1550 to 1900 (7,956 items); collections of book jackets (2,505 items); moths and butterflies of the United States, east of the Rocky Mountains (163 items); Posters of the Russian Civil War, 1918-1922 (213 items); maps of Asia (84 items) and Africa (2 items); Charts of America; Maps from the Lawrence H. Slaughter Collection (3,411 items); or children's book illustrations (1,987 items).

Better yet, spend some time sorting through the public domain section of the library's website yourself at digitalcollections.nypl.org. Warning, though: this website is addictive! ☞

Comments contained in this article are informational only and do not constitute legal advice. Please seek the advice of an attorney of your choice regarding specific factual issues.

Anne Dalton, Esquire, has provided business and personal legal services to writers and other creatives in all phases of their creative development for 45 years. She proudly serves as General Counsel and Executive Vice President of the Florida Writers Association and is an FWA Lifetime Member. Anne is licensed in Florida, New York and Pennsylvania, and her credentials can be viewed at www.daltonlegal.com. Contact her at adalton@daltonlegal.com.



How to Get More Book Publicity as a Self-Published Author

by Penny Sansevieri

We all love getting more attention for our book, and book publicity is a big “get” for most authors. However, media often seems like an elusive butterfly for most authors—always attractive, but often out of reach. But it’s not impossible. It just takes a different kind of effort.

First let’s dig into the differences between book marketing and book publicity.

Book marketing vs. book publicity, what’s the difference?

If you ask five publicists their views on the differences between marketing and book publicity, you could very well get five different answers. The lines are sometimes blurry.

But a good way to look at the difference is this: Getting your book out there is a conversation. Book marketing is a conversation you start, whereas book publicity is a conversation others have on your behalf.

For example, Amazon ads are book marketing. But an interview with *Good Morning America* is publicity—because it’s a conversation GMA is having (yes, with you) but also on your behalf.

The other big difference is that book publicity can be limited to the book’s shelf life (which we’ll discuss in a moment), but book marketing is fairly ageless. You can probably push the marketing of your book longer than you can push the publicity for it.

Other things that fall under book marketing could be:

- A Goodreads giveaway
- Amazon optimization
- E-book promotion
- Contests and giveaways with your readers

Book publicity on the other hand, can be:

- Local media outreach
- National media outreach
- Trade media outreach
- Podcast pitching

You get the idea!

Does every book need book marketing and book publicity?

The short answer is yes. The longer answer is it really depends on what the book’s genre is; what stories the book could anchor to; and how much time you want to invest in media pitching. Because it does take time to do this!

What’s your overall goal?

Media always sounds alluring to most authors. If you ask ten authors if they want to be on national television, nearly all of them will give an enthusiastic YES! But before you jump headlong into media, it’s probably a good idea to decide if your book really belongs there.

Why spend time on media if the media won’t care?

I know that sounds harsh, but doing a great book promotion campaign is more than just throwing stuff out there and seeing what sticks. (Also called: spray and pray.)

One helpful thing is looking at similar books in your market to see where they pop up. Fiction authors, for example, don’t see a lot of play with big, national media—unless the author is a household name. The same is true for memoirs and, frankly, for many first-time authors.

Not to be discouraging, but there’s an element of “build” that needs to be considered as well. Meaning: Build your platform and reach before you can jump headlong into media pitching. Especially if this is your first book. We’ll talk about the media build in a minute.

Let’s say you have a business or you’re a speaker. Maybe you’ve been quoted a time or two in media, and you’re ready for the big time. Great, we’ll look at that, too.

Starting with your overall goal is important to help set the stage for what you’ll do next. For example, if you’re just starting, your media outreach will look a bit different from someone who has done lots of media previously.



Understanding Types of Media

Before you start pitching—and even if you’ve been out there for a while—it’s good to know the tiers of media because when you’re out there pitching it’ll make a difference.

The first tier is national media, and this is the one almost everyone wants. National media are the big morning shows (*Today*, *GMA*, *Fox and Friends*) and big magazines like *Good Housekeeping*, *Entrepreneur Magazine*, and *Oprah*.

The second tier—and often overlooked—is local media. Though it seems less sexy than that top-tier media, don’t count your local media out. Local media can be a terrific avenue to grow your audience, readership, and platform. The best part? Local media loves local authors.

The third tier—and I can honestly say the most overlooked—is trade media. Trade media is specific to a trade or industry. So, quilting magazines, fishing magazines, *The Writer*, etc. I especially love this tier of media because it’s ripe with possibilities and also many of these publications are super eager for content.

Creating a Foundation to Win More Media

If getting more media is on your book marketing bucket list but you aren’t sure where to start, I highly encourage you to start looking at the second and third tiers of media. Media loves media and sometimes the more you do, the more you’ll get. So start by blanketing your local media with pitches.

Consider your local freebie publications—those “throw-away” publications you see in grocery stores because, surprisingly, many people read them.

Trade media is another consideration. Pitching trade publications (either print or online) can be great to add to your media repertoire, and the pitching options are endless. Trade media is less date-sensitive, so if your book is older but the topic is relevant, it’s an easy consideration for them.

Pitches, Hooks, and Other Ways to Get More Book Publicity

I have talked a lot about pitching and creating book hooks, but know this: pitching big media is an art form and they get thousands of pitches a week—sometimes daily.

No one cares that you wrote a book. And this is where I have a disconnect with most press releases. Authors will

often issue press releases to announce they have a book, which is not a good use of this service, and it’s not a good use of a pitch either. Pitching your book for a story will rarely get you a story—but pitching the topic, something that’s relevant to what’s in the news or in pop culture or an event that’s coming up just might. Each month we publish our monthly observances on our blog, and a great use for those is for your pitching!

Position your book on a current event or something that’s coming up in the news. Finding a unique way to say something that’s already being said a thousand times isn’t easy, but it’s not impossible—and, frankly, this is something I love to do. Over the years, I’ve created thousands of pitches for authors and had tons of fun doing so. For example, we worked with an author who wrote about the importance of humor for children and the holiday pitch was: “Give Your Kids the Gift of Laughter this Holiday Season.” Everyone loved it.

We took an existing concept: the importance of laughter—and tethered it to the season. It was a topic that has been done a bunch, but we reframed to make it more enticing.

Does book publicity sell books?

No one thing sells books, though you’ll see a bump if you get a big media hit or a bunch of appearances on local channels. The idea, really, is that as you’re planning your campaign, layering on some local media, trade media—or if you’re ready, some national media—could really help boost your exposure. And, as I mentioned before, media draws media, so the more you do—the more you’ll get.

The goal is repeat exposure to your readers. In the end, that’s what good book publicity is about. 🐾

Penny C. Sansevieri, Founder and CEO of Author Marketing Experts, Inc., is a bestselling author and internationally recognized book marketing and media relations expert. She is the author of 18 books, including *How to Sell Your Books by the Truckload on Amazon*, *Revise and Re-Release Your Book*, *5-Minute Book Marketing for Authors*, and the newly-released *From Book to Bestseller*. Her company has developed some of the most innovative Amazon optimization programs and social media/internet book marketing campaigns. To learn more, visit amarketingexpert.com.



How to Find and Work with Beta Readers to Improve Your Book

by Kristen Kieffer

No creative act is a solo endeavor. Editors, designers, marketers—it takes a team of professionals to help authors bring their novels to life. But lurking behind the contracts and cut checks is a valuable set of hands many authors fail to exploit: beta readers.

Just as film directors benefit from the insight of test audiences, authors can learn much about the state of their novel's appeal by working with readers willing to critique their story before it hits the market. With these readers often offering their time and feedback free of charge, what's not to love?

Working with beta readers can provide authors with invaluable insight, helping them see their work through that pesky objective lens. With the feedback digested, authors can use what they've learned to better tailor their novel for marketable appeal, increasing their chances of releasing a commercial and critical success.

But not all beta reader experiences are created equal. As with any interaction involving an honest critique, working with beta readers can quickly grow into a regrettable experience if it isn't designed for the benefit of both parties.

Let's avoid any mess the first time around. If you're ready to screen your novel with a test audience for honest and invaluable insight, here are eight steps to follow for an ideal beta-reader experience.

1. Identify Your Ideal Reader

There's no use in sending your manuscript to an uninterested reader. By taking time to discover your novel's ideal reader before sending out beta copies, you'll be able to cultivate a list of betas who most accurately represent your future readers, saving you—and those unenthusiastic partners—a wealth of time and trouble.

How can you identify your ideal reader?

Think about the type of person most interested in your novel, then create a quick profile. Here are a few questions you might answer in your sketch:

- What is their age and gender?
- Do they read to be entertained or emotionally engaged?
- What are their favorite books, television shows, and movies?
- What makes them happy, sad, or angry?
- What do they fear or regret?
- Why do they enjoy reading?

If you're struggling to form a strong image of your novel's ideal reader, run a Google search of books related to your own. Begin reading through the reviews for each listing to identify the type of person who most enjoyed the work. Use what you learn to strengthen your answers to the questions above.

2. Cultivate Relationships with Beta Readers

If you're starting from scratch, you'll need to identify a group of potential beta readers to whom you'd like to pitch your manuscript. Though the easy route would be to email the first interesting person you find on the internet, I highly encourage you to take a step back.

The work of beta readers should not be taken lightly. To read a novel may be a simple task, but to analyze each element with a critical eye in search of weak areas, errors, and inconsistencies is anything but.

Before contacting strangers to ask for their help, take time to cultivate strong relationships. You can do this by first identifying the group of prospective beta readers you'd like to work with.



If you haven't yet made any connections, begin by creating an account on the social media site where your ideal readers hang out. Young and new adult crowds are often found on Twitter or Instagram, while more mature readers usually congregate on Facebook.

Once you've chosen a platform, it's time to establish your presence. Begin by adding a headshot for your profile picture and a succinct profile bio. Then, like or follow the feeds of other authors and notable creative figures. This will help potential beta readers gain a quick understanding of you and your interests as you begin to interact.

Speaking of interacting, your next step is to find and follow potential beta readers. Not everyone you eventually contact will accept your proposal, so I suggest following at least thirty potential betas. If you reach out to all and only a quarter accept, you'll still have a fantastic group of beta readers to critique your novel.

To find potential beta readers, follow popular writing tags like #amwriting and #writercommunity. Make sure to use these tags when you publish your own posts. You can also find prospective betas in online writing groups, such as Writers Helping Writers or Fiction Writers.

Once you've found a few potential beta readers, begin interacting with them by liking and commenting on their posts and statuses. Offer friendly conversation, sharing in their daily joys and challenges. After a few weeks of genuine interaction, it's time to move on to step three.

3. Don't Ask for Beta Readers— Offer to Be One

Unless you've built incredible friendships overnight, your potential beta readers probably won't be too inclined to read and critique your novel without receiving something in return. As we discussed above, beta-reading is difficult and time-consuming work. Your potential beta readers are entitled to more than just a thank you for their effort.

This is why I recommend sourcing your beta readers from the writing community. When you finally get in touch, you won't have to beg or plead for their help; you'll be able to bring your own offer to the table.

That's right! When you ask your new acquaintances for help, you should offer to beta read their latest manuscript in return. Not only will this make the experience beneficial for both parties, but you'll gain more practice in reading with a critical eye. This will help immensely as you continue to edit your own works.

When reaching out to potential beta readers, make sure to be personal and professional. Let them know their

services are highly valued by contacting them directly (and individually) through email rather than on a public feed or in a private social media message.

4. Simplify the Process

Once you've compiled a group of committed beta readers, it's time to ship them a copy of your manuscript. Though some authors may choose to send a paperback copy to their beta readers, a digital PDF or EPUB file is the most common option, and both are perfectly acceptable. Ask your beta readers which format they'd prefer.

Simplify the critiquing process for your beta readers by including a list of questions you'd like answered. You can inquire about characterization, plot and character arcs, pacing, the quality of your prose, and any errors or inconsistencies your betas may have noticed.

When you contact your beta readers, clarify that these critique questions are an optional guideline for the feedback you'd like to receive. Allow each beta to pick and choose how they present their feedback, and never demand they work according to a specific process.

To read a novel may be a simple task, but to analyze each element with a critical eye in search of weak areas, errors, and inconsistencies is anything but.

It's also helpful to include a preferred time frame for the critique in your initial pitch. If you need feedback before a certain date, ensure your betas know that before they agree to read your book.

Be upfront and honest about the type of critique you're looking for, but never believe you're entitled to receive it simply because you've offered to beta in return. Writers lead busy lives, and sometimes they simply don't have the time or desire to meet your needs.

5. Learn to Love Criticism

No matter your age or experience, learning to swallow your pride and accept an honest critique is a difficult endeavor. It's also necessary. Learning to love criticism will only make you a stronger writer.

That's why it is important to recognize critiques as advice rather than admonishments. The manuscript you send to your beta readers is not perfect. No story is, not even the most critically acclaimed works.



Rather than viewing your beta readers' critiques as flaws or nitpicks, recognize them for what they are: the potential for improvement.

If your beta readers have sent you truly constructive criticism—feedback that encourages as much as it critiques—you can trust it to be an inside look at what future readers would think if your novel were published as is.

This means their criticism comes from an honest desire to see your work improve, rather than the chance to tear you down. Seize this opportunity. Recognize your chance to take these critiques and use them to your benefit. Better your novel and you'll better its chances of success.

With that said, don't make every change your beta readers suggest. They're only people. They may not see or understand your vision for the book or have the same desires as the rest of your beta readers.

If you don't agree with a critique a beta reader has pointed out, take a step back and put that critique in context. A good rule of thumb is to only make a change to your manuscript if it's something you wholeheartedly agree with or if more than 50 percent of your beta readers made the same critique.

6. Show Your Gratitude to Beta Readers

When you receive feedback from beta readers, make sure to show your gratitude for the time and energy they've spent critiquing your novel.

If you previously offered to return the favor, make sure to follow up. Ask your beta readers if they would like you to critique their next project. If they agree, pencil the time to complete the review into your schedule.

If a beta reader doesn't need you to critique one of their upcoming projects, offer to promote or review a project they have already published. Show them you care by taking time to inquire how you can return the kindness they've done you.

And finally, if your beta reader isn't a writer, offer to send them a few copies of your novel once it is published. Make sure to sign each copy. You may also want to include a personalized note of thanks to show your appreciation.

7. Take an Honest Approach When You Serve as a Beta Reader

If you return the favor by completing a few critiques for your beta readers, these final two steps are for you.

First things first, you want to be honest in your communication. If you simply can't make the time to

critique a beta reader's manuscript, let them know. Don't let their hard work go unappreciated, but be honest in what you can and cannot make the time to do. The only thing worse than not reviewing their book is sending a poorly constructed critique because you couldn't spare the time to do it right.

If your beta reader appreciates your critique as much as you did theirs, let them know you'd like to maintain the relationship. Rather than finding a brand new set of beta readers for your next work, you'll have a group you know will put in the time and effort to do the job right.

On the other hand, if you don't want to maintain a relationship with a beta reader, be honest but kind. Let them know you appreciated their work and was happy to return the favor, but be clear about ending the relationship.

8. Give the Value You Desire to Other Writers

If you reached out to beta readers, it was likely with the expectation they would offer you valuable insight you could use to better tailor your novel for success. You should give this same kind of value in return.

Constructive criticism is a flinch-inducing phrase for many writers. They view it as a series of negative remarks rather than as commentary on both the strengths and weaknesses of their manuscripts.

For every element you critique when completing your review—be it characters, plot, setting, etc.—include at least one comment that's encouraging. Every writer should know what they're doing right; we build upon our strengths. So where did they excel? ✨

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Kristen Kieffer is an author, podcaster, and writing coach based outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She teaches writers how to confidently and consistently craft stories that connect through her work at Well-Storied, which is frequently voted among top sites for writers. When not putting pen to paper, she can be found with her nose in a book, her feet on a trail, or her hands full of treats for her rescue dog Aggie. well-storied.com



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KRISTEN KIEFFER

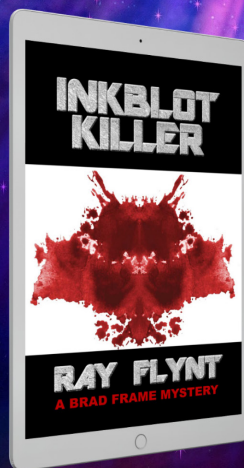
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Why Your Essay Got Rejected

by Allison K Williamson

Last month I responded to 113 essays and book beginnings. A fraction of what a literary magazine might see in submissions; a lot for me to comment on. Nobody got a form rejection, because the pages were for a webinar—*What’s Wrong with this Work: Turning Rejections into Publications*—and the learning was the point. The authors listed their previous rejections from literary magazines, mass media, websites, and agents, as many as 35 rejections for a single essay.

I hadn’t expected so many submissions. About 50 had arrived, and I’d been on a roll, picking pieces to edit live while screen-sharing during the webinar, and thought “Sure, I can do one comment on everyone!” Then the coordinator sent a reminder email. I wasn’t publicly committed to 113 responses—officially, I needed 2-5 volunteers—but I’m glad I plowed through them all, because I needed to know this and so do you:

It’s probably not your writing.

By “your writing” I mean sentence-level prose. The ability to frame a paragraph, write a rounded character, show setting, and imply backstory. Almost every essay was well-written, from competently to marvelously. I only told two writers: “Consider working with a writing group or taking a class to improve your craft—your story is bigger than your ability to tell it right now.”

So why were they getting rejected? For that matter, why are you? And what can you do about it?

Topic

Many well-written pieces made a good point but didn’t say anything new. Writing about the pandemic, cancer, addiction, aging parents, or cultural racism? Your angle must be something we haven’t heard many times before—and/or your writing must be incredibly moving or incredibly funny. The world doesn’t want another “sorry about being a white lady” piece. Sorry.

For memoirs, most opening pages lacked cultural relevance. How does your story intersect with the larger world now? What makes your book more than a family album?

Fix this: Read widely in the publication you want to be in and in your genre. What’s already being talked about? How can you add to the conversation? Make your fresh angle or new insights clear from the first page.

Story/Stakes/Change

Many essays with strong concepts lacked a dramatic arc. The stakes weren’t clear. A series of observations showed another person’s character, or the narrator retold past events without a clear choice in the present. “Slice of life” pieces portrayed a particular family or group, but read as charming collections of characters rather than a personal journey for anyone.

Fix this: Ask of your essay, “What’s my state at the beginning? What’s my state at the end? What made me change and where in the essay does that moment of realization happen?” If you can’t put your finger on a sentence showing change, you don’t have a story.

Style of Writing/Where It Was Submitted

Literary essays had been rejected by mass media. Essays with the style and tone of mass media had been rejected from literary magazines. I could see why the authors were confused—they had strong writing and great stories! But they were trying to wear a ballgown to change the oil. Great dress, wrong place.

Fix this: Pick three recent pieces from your chosen publication. Analyze paragraph by paragraph. Where is the premise established? What’s an active scene and what’s imagery or reflection? Does the writer give advice, tell personal anecdotes, reference needed cultural change? That’s mass media. Crying at the end but you’re not sure why? Literary all the way. Now analyze your own work: do you see similar components to the published pieces?

Confusing Openings

When too many names, places or events show up in the first few paragraphs, the reader gets confused before they get oriented. They’re trying to track who or what will be important, and they don’t yet have the background to care about anyone.



Fix this: Count the nouns. Seriously. People, places, things. How many concrete things are in your opening? If there are more than three proper nouns, three objects or one location, make sure you have a specific reason to put them there ... and that it's working.

Opening with Death

I've seen many memoirs open with a loved one's death, then flash back to fill in the story. But we don't know why the person you're mourning matters! You're asking the reader to attend a stranger's funeral and fully empathize with the chief mourner.

Fix this: The death was a big event ... but this is still your story. Where does your journey begin? Start there.

Length

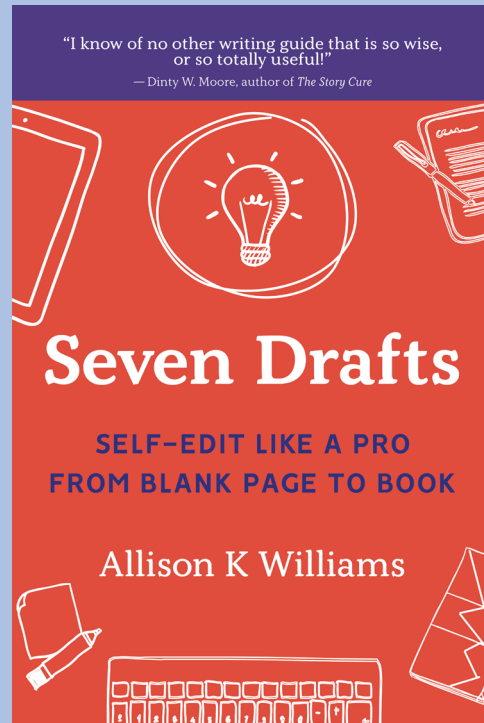
Not many magazines take essays over 5000 words, and not many readers want to soldier through one. Most mass media essays are 900-2000 words, with the sweet spot around 1500. Most literary magazines take work up to about 25 double-spaced pages. Over 5000 words is long for personal essay that's not deeply researched or culturally situated, and you'll probably need previous publication credits in big-name, similar journals, or even a shorter piece in the same magazine.

Fix this: If your story's big, make a choice: either tell sections of it in a couple of shorter essays; or write the whole book.

Rejection is often not "bad writing." Often, the submission is a mismatch with the venue, the opening is muddy, or the overall point isn't clear, or someone's narrating their family album. You can fix this. Why not pick your favorite piece without a home, and fix it now? ✍️

This article originally appeared on Brevity's Nonfiction Blog and is reprinted here with permission.

Allison K Williams has edited and coached writers to deals with Penguin Random House, Knopf, Mantle, Spencer Hill, St. Martin's, and independent presses. She's guided essayists to publication in the *New Yorker*, *Time*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *McSweeney's* and TED Talks. Find her on social media @guerillamemoir, or discover her virtual and travel retreats at rebirthyourbook.com.



Allison K Williams

"Allison is one of the most gifted writing teachers I know. She's like a friend privately taking you aside, delivering the honest truth you need, in a way that makes you enthusiastic to keep on going, even when the work gets very hard."

—Jane Friedman,
publishing expert and author of
The Business of Being a Writer



The Secret to a Tight, Propulsive Plot: The Want, The Action, The Shift

by Tiffany Yates Martin

Creating a *story* without at least some idea of your plot is like planning a trip without a route: You're likely to wind up meandering, stuck, or lost.

But strong plot is more than just a series of interesting events. It's a foundational element of what creates story—the road along which your character travels and is changed en route to a strongly held desire.

This basic definition of story means that plot is intrinsically tied to character. As a story element it doesn't exist in a vacuum but is both driven by and drives the protagonist: what she wants, the steps she takes to get it, and how she's affected by each step on that journey.

You can adapt how much you decide to plot in advance of drafting based on whether you're a die-hard plotter, a pantsner, or something in between (“plantser”), but framing the overarching story as well as each scene within it through the lens of your characters and these three key elements—the **want**, the **action**, and the **shift**—will help guide you through creating a consistently cohesive and propulsive plot.

Think of your protagonist(s) as Tarzan.

If you want him to fly through the air with the greatest of ease, your job as the author is to make sure there's a vine within reach when he needs it, that it swings him smoothly through the jungle canopy, and that there's another vine ready for his grasp when he reaches the end of that arc. He can travel the whole jungle that way, all the way home to Jane.

That's the sense readers should have of your character's journey—that they're effortlessly borne along with your protagonist on an unbroken series of arcs toward the final destination. The **want** is the vine awaiting the character's grasp; the **action** is the swing; and the **shift** is the transfer from one vine to the next awaiting vine.

If any of these three stages fail, that smooth momentum is broken and you risk sending your protagonist—and your reader—plummeting to the forest floor, or stranded in the treetops or on a motionless vine.

This formula applies not just to each individual scene, but to the story as a whole. Before you even begin drafting,

see if you can define your story through the lens of the want, the action, and the shift:

Hypercautious Marlon is desperate to keep his sole remaining child close to the safety of home and his protection after the rest of their family is killed, but when his son is swept out to sea, Marlon must face the dangers of the open ocean in trying to find him—and learns that life must be lived fully, despite the risks.

Did you recognize the key plot points in *Finding Nemo*?

- The **want** is clownfish Marlon's desire to keep Nemo safe in their little anemone and corner of the sea.
- The resultant **action** is his journey to track Nemo down and bring him safely home, and all the challenges, obstacles, setbacks, and advances along the path to that goal.
- The **shift** is Marlon's realization that he can't shelter Nemo from every danger, and that a meaningful life can't be lived in fear.

Even if this is all you establish before starting to write, it will still create a map to keep you on track as you travel the road of your story. And as a bonus, it can also double as a clear, concise log line to use when you're ready to query and pitch.

How scenes work with *want, action, and shift*

The want, the action, and the shift should also form the foundation of each scene within the story, either as you outline or as you're drafting. In stories with the strongest momentum, every single scene in the plot comprises a necessary step along the protagonist(s)' path toward their ultimate goal—each scene is a “mini-story” of its own, with its own want, action, and shift, each in service to the über want-action-shift we defined above.

The Want

One of the most important skills an actor learns is never to walk onstage without knowing what their character wants in that scene. The same goes for fiction: Before you begin writing a scene, know what “want” your character enters



with. That's how you put that vine in Tarzan's hand as he reaches for it.

- A character's want in a scene might be a strong, tangible, urgent goal: to rescue the princess, to escape the bad guy, to win a promotion or a love interest or a battle.
- It might be a less concrete, internal one: to attain a parent's approval, to assuage a spouse's anger, to help a friend.
- The immediate want could also be a subtractive goal: Your characters might want to *not* feel a certain way, or to avoid a particular outcome.

You don't have to have a major story—or character-defining goal in every scene—as long as whatever that “want” is directly or indirectly serves the character's overarching want in the story: i.e., attaining this immediate goal will (theoretically) move the character closer to her end-goal.

The Action

As a direct result of her desire for that goal, your character should take some definitive action to attain it—this is the swing of the vine that moves us through the story.

If, for instance, your protagonist's “want” in a scene is to avoid yet another fight with her partner, what does she do to pursue that goal? Does she come into the house with a big smile and a bouquet of flowers? Slink in the garage door as quietly as possible so as not to draw her partner's attention or ire? Not go home at all, but instead delay her arrival with an extended happy hour with friends?

This scene, then, will be about her attempting to achieve her want by taking those specific actions—and whatever results from what she chooses to do (or not do) will create further action within the scene:

- Maybe she succeeds in disarming her partner with the flowers, and the

two wind up having an unexpectedly pleasant evening together over wine and a nice dinner.

- Perhaps she tries sneaking silently inside, but her partner intercepts her with a hurt expression, asking why she's avoiding them, and the evening ends in wounded feelings and tears the protagonist can't assuage.
- Maybe she gets home late from her unannounced happy hour, only to find her partner waiting up for her, loaded for bear, and a spectacular fight ensues.

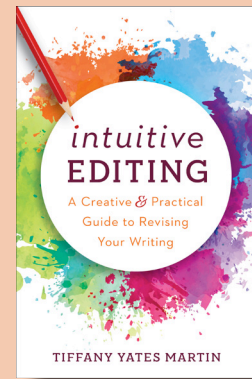
The Shift

The character's action in the scene will either move her closer to her end goal or cause a setback from it. In either case, readers need to see how she is affected by the results of her actions, and how they change her behavior, thoughts, and actions going forward—the “shift” that directs readers toward that next vine, a.k.a. the new want that results from the character's shift.

If our hypothetical protagonist enjoys an unexpectedly nice evening with her partner, for example, maybe it changes her attitude toward them, and the next day she finds herself eager to get home, planning to surprise her partner with dinner from their favorite restaurant.

That original shift led to a new want, which will lead to new action. Is her partner not home and our protagonist tries to figure out where she went? Or have they reverted to their resentment of her and start another fight? Or do the two sit down over dinner and decide to work on their relationship and save it? Which will lead to a new shift...a new want...new action...and so on.

This pattern of want-action-shift creates powerful momentum, vine to swing to new vine, over and over, and creates a plot that keeps readers carried effortlessly, seamlessly along throughout your story.



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Tiffany Yates Martin has spent nearly thirty years as an editor in the publishing industry, working with major publishers and *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today* bestselling and award-winning authors as well as indie and newer writers, and is the founder of FoxPrint Editorial and author of the bestseller *Intuitive Editing: A Creative and Practical Guide to Revising Your Writing*. Under the pen name Phoebe Fox, she's the author of six novels, including the recently released *The Way We Weren't* (Berkley). Visit her at foxprinteditorial.com or phoebefoxauthor.com.

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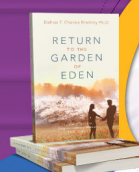
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In Bruges

by Bob Ellis

I’ve had them all; sage-y British bangers, spicy Mexican chorizo, andouille from down the bayou. I am something of a sausage aficionado, but definitely not a connoisseur. If its shape is tubular, I’m ordering it for lunch, dinner, or a snack. On a great day, I can manage to have three or four meals of sausage.

Business completed in Frankfurt, an appropriate name for my appetite if ever there was one, I had a four-day weekend to kill before my flight back to New York City. That night saw me in a rathskeller, a brick-lined, arched basement on the Buchgasse, in the old section of the city. I sampled four different kinds of beer, each with a sausage from the region. I tried the Bregenwurst, the Leberkase, the Teewurst, and the Gelbwurst, each with its suggested brewed accompaniment. I was sated, but somehow unfulfilled; the sausages tasted rather pedestrian.

The Belgians at the next table were catching the train home to Bruges the next morning. I had never seen the Venice of northern Europe, and the two couples sang the praises of the city, ever more vociferously, as they consumed stein after stein of Einbecker bock.

The next morning, I was on the Eurostar, arriving in Bruges around two in the afternoon. After arrival and dropping my suitcase at the hotel, I wandered between the brick buildings and along the canals on the Boinvest in the Magdalena Quarter. Come four o’clock, I was ready for my first beer. I had an Avril, a low-alcohol amber ale, with a Saucisson d’Ardenne, a fermented dry sausage smoked over beechwood.

After my snack, I strolled some more, entering the Sint-Anna Quarter. There, on Rolweg, I found my nirvana, my Eden, my sausage heaven.

The modest tavern, located in an old brick building from the 1500s, featured “Over 100 Types of Sausage” per the multi-lingual sign out front. The list of the day’s available sausages was posted inside on a chalkboard as tall and broad as LeBron James, with items crossed out as the stock was consumed by the diners. There were four

columns describing the sausages, in Flemish, French, German, and English.

Of course, I wanted to try everything: the boudin varieties of “blanc, noir, et Liege,” the cervelat, and the bloedworst, available in several variations, depending on the animals slaughtered for their blood and meat. These thick, red-black sausages were sliced and then arranged in an overlapping circle on the plate. I dove in.

My favorite proved to be one of the bloedworsts, one with a bright crimson color and only a few islands of fat in the slice. Extremely mild in flavor, I found I needed to add just a touch of salt, but the flavor was sublime. The sausage almost melted on my tongue. I had three helpings, each with a different Belgian wheat beer.

I called my waiter over and pointed to the last remaining piece on my plate. “What is this?” I queried. I tried first in English, then in halting French and German, but I spoke no Flemish. He looked quizzically at me, then summoned another waiter to my table. His English was barely passable, but eventually he got the gist of my question: “What animal had I been eating?”

He went off on a tangent, telling me that abattoirs in Bruges are only allowed to operate from midnight to five in the morning, lest the animals going in and subsequently failing to re-emerge upset school-age children or their intellectual equivalents, the tourists.

“But the animal?” I asked again.

“Horse, monsieur. It is female horse. That is how we make the best bloedworst in *tout le monde*.”

The waiter levered me by the arm into a standing position and headed away from the table. I tottered after, feeling my copious consumption of beers and ales. He led me back to the mile-high chalkboard and pointed, then tapped his index finger next to the blood sausages. And there it was, in English.

“Worst, Night Mare.” 🐾

Bob Ellis, retired exec, has lived on three continents and swum in all the oceans!

The Sweetest Nightmare

by Alicia Griffin

As a 17-year-old teenager and a senior in high school, I should've felt as if the world were in my hands. The plethora of upcoming events should've been on the horizon—college applications, prom, graduation, and the like. It's a year full of promise and joy. Instead, what was ahead of me, was an unclear path that paved the road. It was full of uncertainties.

Seventeen and pregnant. That was my new reality, and very soon it was going to become my new normal. I had no idea what motherhood entailed. I was in for a huge awakening—all while I was walking into what I believed to be my worst nightmare. I was literally standing on a precipice with no safety net.

I remember staring intently at the self-test applicator in my hand. My eyes fixed on the double horizontal lines that appeared in a bright shade of pink, a shade of pink that can definitely represent the gender; if it was a girl of course. What was I going to do? How was I going to finish my senior year and graduate? Worst of all, how was I going to tell mom? I was overwhelmed in fear. This should be a time when a woman, preferably over the legal age limit, would be screaming with joy and excitement. Instead, there I sat on the toilet seat, pondering all the thoughts of uncertainties that lay ahead.

The months that followed only proved to be testaments of what was to come. Since the termination of my pregnancy wasn't an option, releasing the news to my family that I was expecting wasn't as hard as having to face my friends and the faculty at my high school. All eyes were on me as I walked the halls—sheer expression of disappointment on their faces. I felt out of place. The school administration recommended that I attend night school, since I wasn't the ideal example they wanted to portray for the other students. I was no longer welcomed. Though their reasons may have seemed valid, I had no intentions to finish the school year under those circumstances, especially when I was so close to crossing the finish line. My goal was to graduate with my class. Therefore, I fought extremely hard, and I got approval to continue with my scheduled classes.

To say that some teachers were ruthless would be an understatement. Even though they were to maintain a level of equality and professionalism, their judgment was evident. They disapproved of my attendance at the school. However, the few teachers that were always willing to help me achieve my goals to graduate, regardless how they truly felt about my pregnancy, were never left unnoticed. They were never judgmental, at least not to my face. They helped make my experience a little more tolerable. I will forever be grateful for their compassion and guidance.

As time began to draw closer to my due date, I was becoming extremely anxious. My inability to be independent drew concerns on how I was going to provide the financial stability that came along with the responsibility of being a parent. Would I even be a good mother?

When the day arrived, however, the uncertainties were washed away the minute I looked into the eyes of the sweetest little bundle of joy that was wrapped so tight in her warm blanket and placed in my arms. In that very moment, the unconditional love I felt was inexplicable. My heart expanded immediately. I didn't have all the answers, but I knew from that moment on, we would get through anything—together. ✨

Alicia Griffin lives in the Sunshine State where life experiences drive her writing ambition.



Worst Enemy by Mike Mulvey

The recurring dream always begins the same. He sees his bare feet, knees, arms, and hands, but none of his limbs will move. Gripping a ladder and trying to climb down, he feels frozen in time. The side of a house, which closely resembles his childhood home, stares back at him. The weathered wood siding needs another coat of white paint to conceal the discoloring and wear of too many harsh winters, rainy springs, and humid summers. It must be a flashback, but the sound of loud, approaching footsteps remind him that he is no longer a teenager tasked with helping dad paint the house.

"Why did you hate this so much? Why did you argue with him about everything?" Whoever or whatever emits that raspy voice remains out of view behind him, but the ladder shakes from the thunderous steps of its approach. A heavy, forceful breath tousles the hair on the back of his head.

Still unable to move, he must wait in silent panic for the words. Sometime the voice fluctuates between genders, sometimes it sounds cruel, sometimes the tone is soft, sometimes the voice approaches seductive, but the words never change:

He transports like a sci-fi trope, either beamed up or beamed down without warning. Now, on an incline of rocks, the water splashes somewhere behind him. He again finds himself in a familiar place.

This time, the shore near the bluffs, a place that created so many pleasing memories, so many years ago. Tiny barnacles on the rocks prick his feet as the

flowing water soothes them. The sensation familiar, even welcoming. A tiny cave rests above him, only a few steps away. With fingers floating in front of the mossy, rock staircase that leads to his sanctuary, tension grips him and he freezes. Tiny splashes of chilled water pelt his back, announcing the mysterious creature's return.

"She trusted you, and you betrayed her. Was that one night worth it?"

Even though he cannot move, his inside quivers in fear: heart accelerating, groin burning, and temples pounding as if to eject his eyes from his skull.

"What will it sound like this time?"

A gasp for breath wakes him, and he see the pills still on the nightstand, next to a half-empty glass of water.

"They will ease your mind. They will help you sleep."

But he refuses, choosing instead to seek the owner of the voice in his dreams. He hears his father's anger, his mother's disappointment, his ex-lover's rejection, and his boss' harsh tone and exact words when he was fired. The voice is the summation of mistakes, reincarnated as a nightmarish demon, delivered in one direct, painful vocal burst. Reality creates the worst nightmares. He hopes that, if he can defeat them when asleep, then he can live with them while awake.

Until then, "there is no cure for what ails you." ✨

Mike Mulvey is an aspiring writer from Jacksonville, Florida.

The Sky Was Missing a Star

by Mary Rogers-Grantham

“New beginnings are often disguised as painful endings.”
— Lao Tzu

When you left, you didn't pack anything.
You weren't sure where you were going.

So, I watched you leave. It was one
of those sacred acts we both took part in,
but only one of us witnessed. I signed onto
the watch for the love of loving.

You weathered menacing temperatures
symbolizing a devoted and tireless,
confident and proud Sergeant Major.

I wanted to change everything.
I wanted to return to ROTC summer camp.
I wanted to relive that week of gazes and answers.
I wanted to color our rainbows all over again.
I wanted to walk with you on snow covered trails.
I wanted to hear the ice crunch beneath our feet.

When you left, you didn't pack anything.
I stood in the doorway between panic and love
and released you to the soldiers in the sky,
You disappeared and so did I,
into my worst nightmare,
a world without you.

Mary Rogers-Grantham is award-winning poet and professor currently based in Florida.



Revenge of the Soul Thief (Letter to an Abuser)

by Nina Ward

You murdered my son,
Abuser.
Though his breath still trickles out closed lips,
he does not live
within his living flesh.

The twelve years since his disappearance
drag by like a sea anchor pulled from deep waters.
I wonder how he's aged,
if the rage in him, settled.

His polluted mind
and body
cannot withstand humanity
so, he hides
within his tortured self.

He abandons family, discards people,
because you trashed his childhood, his manhood.
His shame blankets his eyes.
His blame covers the universe.

You cut deep in my heart,
Self-Seeker.
Nights of uneasy sleep awaken me
To a parent's
worst nightmare come true.

I forgive you solely because you took your life by suicide
so, I hide
behind the joy,
pleasured by the gratification,
Relieved, another child will not be harmed.

You robbed the world,
you ignorant fool—
of a gifted, caring human.
A tragic loss.

Inescapable.
The Universe
forgives you only because you must answer.
This frees me
from punishing you.

Nina Ward's writing credits include adult and children nonfiction
and fiction in magazines and newspapers.



On the Eve of a Nightmare

by P.C. Zick

A beautiful cloudless day began with hope that the harsh north Florida summer might soon be gone. September 10, 2001—a normal day of writing my column for the local newspaper. I hummed as I made a dinner of fresh vegetables, rice, and fish. My husband and I sat watching the sunset over our pond as bats dove for mosquitoes and frogs began their nightly cacophonous symphony. We spoke of simple things as we vowed to live a healthier lifestyle with more exercise and less stress.

The evening halted when the ringing phone blasted through our resolutions.

“I have to tell you something,” my oldest brother shouted when I answered. “Traci killed the girls!” He spoke with urgency, and I was certain he’d lost his mind.

Traci—the woman who had divorced our nephew, Tom. The girls—my great-nieces, Candice, 10, and Kimberly, 5. Nothing computed. Traci—the woman who had been close to our mother until her death a few years earlier. The girls—the great-granddaughters who had stolen our mother’s heart. Killed the girls?

“You’re kidding,” came my lame response. I didn’t know what else to say or do. How would I? How would anyone?

“I would never kid about anything like this,” my brother yelled. “Tom just called and told me Traci murdered the girls.”

“It must be a divorce revenge thing gone bad.” Traci, although I had never trusted her, would never murder her daughters.

“Do you think that’s possible?” My brother’s voice held hope that maybe that was the case.

“Does Bob know?” Bob was another brother who lived in Atlanta.

“Can you call him?” Marvin suddenly sounded tired.

Before calling Bob, I called my brother Bill, the grandfather of the girls and father of Tom. They lived in the same town. His line was busy. And Tom wasn’t answering his phone. I called Bob.

When his wife answered, I told her she needed to tell my brother, who wasn’t in the best of health, the news. She screamed the announcement to him, and he grabbed the phone.

“But it might just be a revenge thing gone bad.” I repeated what I wanted to believe. “Let me call my friend

Susan who lives near them and find out if anything is on the news.”

“It can’t be true.” Bob’s voice caught. “No way can it be true.”

“I don’t think it is, but I’ll call Susan and find out.”

Susan turned on the TV. “There isn’t anything, but the local news isn’t on for fifteen minutes. I’ll call you as soon as I know anything.”

I called my brothers again and spread my message of hope. If there wasn’t anything on the news, then it couldn’t be true. My phone rang at one minute after ten.

“Does she live in Zeeland in a white two-story house?” Susan asked.

Bomb dropped on my last strings of hope. The worst had happened.

Until the next morning. I watched the national news until 8:30 AM. Reporters were already camped out on my brother’s lawn in Holland, Michigan, but no reports yet on national TV. I turned off the television and began to pack for my flight to Michigan. I stared at the clothes in my closet. A funeral. I had to pack for a funeral for two angels.

The phone rang. Susan wanted to know what I was doing. “I’m getting ready to leave for the airport.”

“You’re not flying anywhere today. They’ve just shut down all the airports in the country.”

Now I was angry. How dare my good friend play games with me at a time like this when I couldn’t even pack my suitcase?

“Not now, Susan. I’m not in the mood for one of your jokes.”

“You don’t know.” Her voice was flat and emotionless. “Go turn on your TV.”

And then the second bomb dropped on me as the nightmare worsened and blew up my life for the next decade. Nothing much of my previous life survived—hope, innocence, and my marriage all casualties of murderers. ❧

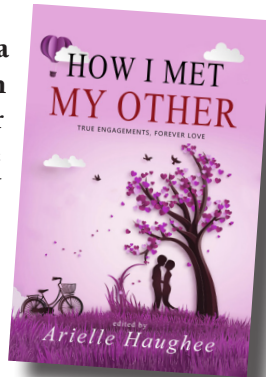
P.C. Zick writes contemporary fiction and creative nonfiction and lives in Tallahassee.



Celebrations!

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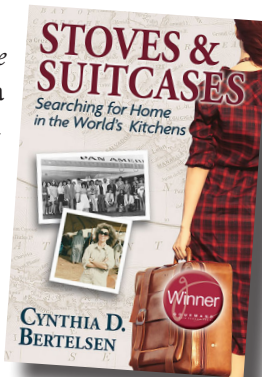
Congratulations to members **Rita Angelini**, **Paul Iasevoli**, **Eileen Hector**, and **Sharon Rhyce** for the publication of their creative nonfiction in the anthology *How I Met My Other: True Engagements, Forever Love*. In this collection of true stories, authors share their one-of-a-kind engagement stories, filled with humor, surprises, and most of all, happiness. Inside are stories of unexpected beginnings, second chances at love, tales of just-right timing, and experiencing the magic in every day. This is the third volume in the *How I Met My Other* series from Orange Blossom Publishing owned by member **Arielle Haughee**. Visit orangeblossombooks.com to learn more.



Becky Bohan announces the release of her lesbian suspense/romance blend, *The Santorini Setup*. Britt Evans' holiday takes a perilous turn when a photographer plunges from Santorini's steep cliffs. The death is ruled accidental, but authorities in Athens suspect otherwise. They enlist Britt to discover the truth, but is it a set up that will take her life? Britt must use wit and courage to save herself and the enchanting windsurfer who has captured her heart. "A sublime cast propels this tale of romance, misdeeds, and intrigue...all the way to the tense final act." —*Kirkus Reviews*. Paperback and Kindle. nanbec.com.

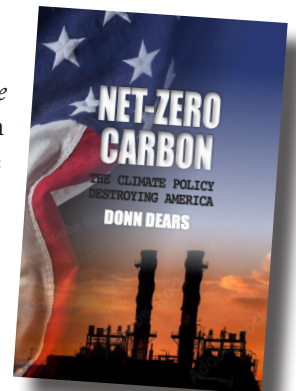


Stoves & Suitcases: Searching for Home in the World's Kitchens, **Cynthia D. Bertelsen's** rollicking and reflective memoir, has won Best in Food Writing in the USA for 2022 from the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards. Now in line for consideration for Gourmand's Best in the World award for Food Writing—to be announced in Paris, France in June 2022—*Stoves & Suitcases* is Bertelsen's sixth book. Book critic Diane Donovan of *Midwest Book Review* says, "It's hard to compare *Stoves & Suitcases* to other books of its ilk. Perhaps Anthony Bourdain's *A Cook's Tour* comes closest." cynthiadbertelsen.com



Nancy Christie's short story, "The Snow Globe," was recently published in *The Saturday Evening Post* online edition. The story is part of Christie's forthcoming collection, *Mistletoe Magic and Other Holiday Tales*, scheduled for publication December 2023 by Unsolicited Press. For more information, visit her website: nancychristie.com.

In *Net-zero Carbon, The Climate Policy Destroying America*, **Donn Dears** explains why climate policies sacrifice America's energy independence and force the United States to become dependent on foreign countries for the mining and processing of materials required for wind and solar power and for battery-powered vehicles. These policies put Americans at risk while increasing the cost of energy, food, and everyday living. *Net-zero Carbon* explains the history of climate policies, their link to Marxist ideology, and the role of the United Nations. *Net-zero Carbon* is an eye opener.



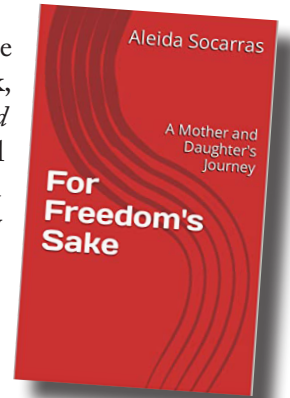
Celebrations!

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Living in Florida agrees with **Dan Fuchs**, new transplant from Austin, Texas. Since moving to Orlando in November, Dan has had two short stories, “Dr. Muller’s Next Move” and “The Man with the Dog” published. The latter will appear in an online pub, *The Manifest-Station*, and the former is included in an anthology called *Historic Tales*, put out by Free Spirit Publishers. Dan studied with Tobias Wolff at Syracuse University, and is currently working on revising four novels and finishing a memoir about his time living in Madrid, Spain in the late 1980’s.



Aleida Socarras announces the publication of her second book, *For Freedom’s Sake: A Mother and Daughter’s Journey*. This historical fiction is the story of a five-year old sent to the United States in the early 1960s through Operation Peter Pan, a semi-clandestine operation to get children out of Cuba and save them from communism. The story is told from the dual perspective of the biological mother’s struggle to be reunited with her daughter and the daughter’s journey to find her identity. Are they ready to confront the past and start a new life?



Romantic suspense writer, **Judith Luke**, recently released *Secrets of the Heart*. After the death of her abusive husband, Brooke Montgomery returns to her father’s Wyoming ranch in search of serenity. Adam Tower, neighboring rancher and life-long friend, is training their horses and living in their house. More disturbing are her father’s evasive answers. Soon Brooke is the victim of physical attacks and written warnings. Adam has loved Brooke her entire life and vows to protect her. A trail of secrets leads them to a final showdown where they will have to lay their lives on the line for each other.



Sandra Madden announces the April 2022 Wild Rose Press release of her historical romantic comedy *The Lady and the Laird*. The action begins when Lady Lilith Munro returns to the rugged Scottish Highlands to arrange a marriage to Laird Edan Cameron. What could be better than an arranged marriage between old friends? she asks. Anything, according to Edan, the Laird of Glen Carin! He’s shocked when confronted with the shameless lass who ceaselessly tormented him when they were children. Visit sandramadden.com for more of *The Lady and the Laird*.



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Here's a quick guide to what you can find there and how to access it.

How to log into the Member Center

- Go to <https://www.floridawriters.org/>
- Click on the "Member Center" button.
- Your "Username" is your email address
- If you haven't created a password yet, click the "Reset Password" link to begin the process for creating one.
- Keep your login credentials on file for future use!

Login takes you to the Member Center landing page.

From the landing page, you can access all members-only content.

Right up top, you'll see your **member number** and **expiration date**. No more having to record that information or ask for it.

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- Learn about member discounts.
- Purchase Florida Writers merchandise
- Access your member profile
- And more.

Your profile gives you more control over your member information.

To access your member information, click the "Update Your Profile" link. You'll arrive on your profile page. Your member number and expiration date are here, too, and on this page you can update your email or mailing address, add a link to your website and books page, and more.

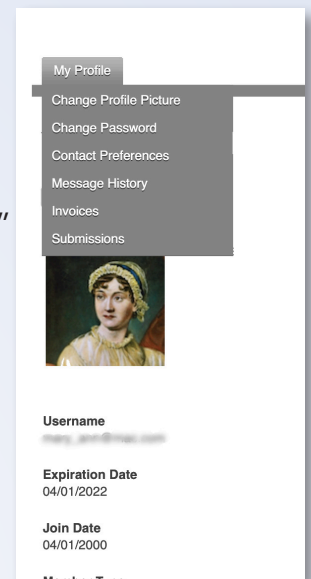
Run your cursor over "My Profile" above the avatar and you can access the dropdown menu you see in in the photo.

Change Profile Picture. Members notice that it takes some time for the profile photo to upload. You need only upload it once, then step away and come back later and it will appear.

Message History. A link to every official message FWA sends you will appear here, including newsletters, renewal notices, and special offers.

Invoices. A record of every financial transaction you undertake with FWA is stored here including payments for dues, events, and contests. Convenient for tax records. Unpaid invoices are also available, and you can click them to pay online or print and mail them to us with a check.

There's much more to be found. Explore the website, especially the Member Center, and see all that it holds for you. Click around. You can't break anything!



Questions? Email contactus@floridawriters.org



The Florida Writer

The Official Magazine of the Florida Writers Association

Editorial Calendar

Ad Reservation Due Date	Ad & Payment Due Date	Publication Date
December 15	January 1	February 1
February 15	March 1	April 1
April 15	May 1	June 1
June 15	July 1	August 1
August 15	September 1	October 1
October 15	November 1	December 1

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Quarter Page	3.75" x 4.75"	\$60.	\$90.
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