


The Florida Writer

OCTOBER 2025 • VOLUME 19, NUMBER 5

**A Few Of My Favorite
(Conference) Things**

**How to Reconnect
with a Draft You No
Longer Want to Write**

**Strategies to Build an
Engaged Email List for
Authors**



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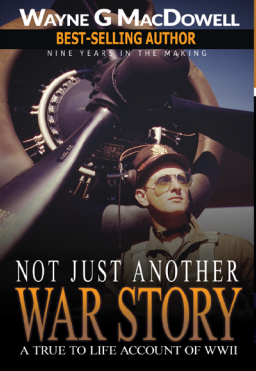


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REVIEW

“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

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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 35th 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.

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Cover photo: artifirsov @ Adobe Stock
Swamp cypresses on lake with fog and sunshine.
Taxodium distichum with orange needles in Florida.



The Florida Writer

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS • REQUIREMENTS

Celebrations

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

1. Submit a one-paragraph announcement written in third person.
2. Maximum word count 100
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4. One entry per issue, per person
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We publish selected creative writing by members who respond to the issue’s prompt.

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2. Maximum word count for prose, 700; maximum line count for poetry, 50. Title is included in word count.
3. You may include a headshot to accompany your entry, but it is not required.
4. One entry per issue, per person
5. Type “Paragraphs” and month of the issue you’re submitting to in the subject line of your submission email.
6. Include a one-line bio, no more than fifteen words including your name, within your attached submission document.
7. 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. Acknowledge in your submission that you have read and agree to *The Florida Writer Magazine Contributor Agreement*. floridawriters.org/tfw-contributor-agreement
6. Email your submission to mdestefano@floridawriters.org

Prompts & Deadlines

- **December 2025 Issue** – Deadline: November 1, 2025
Prompt: A message written by one person, answered years later by the recipient
- **February 2026 Issue** – Deadline: January 1, 2026
Prompt: No prompt. Submit your best work and be sure to follow the submission requirements.





Whose Book Is It, Anyway?

Mary Ann de Stefano
Editor

In an online forum for editors, an editor new to the business wondered what others do when their feedback is rejected by the author. The question provoked much discussion, and it occurred to me that it might be interesting for you writers to be privy to something editors talk about when you're not around.

Whether or not the writer incorporates suggested revisions is a big concern among the in-house editors. In-house editors are employed by publishing companies, magazines, and journals as staff or freelancers. The job of those editors is to communicate house style and ensure the work meets house standards. Although there may be discussion and negotiation, if a writer turns the revision process into a fight with an in-house editor, their work may not be published after all.

While the dynamics can be tricky for in-house editors, things are quite different for freelance editors working directly with writers readying work before seeking publication.

Independent editors in the forum told about writers (no names were used!) who rejected their suggestions and produced books riddled with errors or who rushed to self-publish books that were clearly not ready for readers. Every editor, it seemed, had stories like that.

Experienced editors know their job is to offer thoughtful advice, supported by standard guides like *The Chicago Manual of Style*. They also explain how certain craft choices (POV, plot, characterization, etc.) may affect the reader. But ultimately, what to do with editorial feedback is the author's decision. One editor in the forum wrote, "Editing is a diplomatic awareness-raising exercise, not a battle of wills."

I enjoy working with a writer who will engage in conversation and push back on my suggestions. It keeps me on my toes when I have to explain my advice, and I know a back and forth between editor and writer can help the writer clarify their vision, even when we don't agree.

More often than not, when it comes to writing, there is no one right answer. Want an example of what some may think is a radical decision by an author? Cormac McCarthy omitted quotation marks, semicolons, and

commas in his novels. He aimed for maximum clarity with minimal punctuation—and succeeded. His example reminds editors that creativity sometimes defies convention—and that our role is to serve the writer's intent, not enforce rules for their own sake.

The job of an editor is to offer suggestions and other information that enable the writer to make good choices more confidently. Editors want to help, not hinder, the writer. Still, it's hard for an editor not to cringe when our name appears in the acknowledgments and reviewers criticize the editing—especially when we know the issues could have been avoided.

But we can also cheer when an author has gone in a different direction—and done so successfully. Esteemed editor Maxwell Perkins said, "I believe the writer . . . should always be the final judge. I have always held to that position and have sometimes seen books hurt thereby, but at least as often helped. The book belongs to the author."

We editors can offer the best of our experience and knowledge. We can explain the reasoning behind our feedback. We can hope writers will truly listen, carefully consider our advice, and give their work all the time and effort it deserves. But then we have to let the work go because it does not belong to us.

When I'm tempted to be the self-important, all-knowing editor, I think about an old *New Yorker* cartoon depicting an editor sitting at his desk. "I wish you would make up your mind, Mr. Dickens," the editor says to the man sitting across from him. "Was it the best of times or was it the worst of times? It could scarcely have been both."

Indeed, the book belongs to the author. 🐼

Mary Ann de Stefano is President of the Florida Writers Association and editor of *The Florida Writer*. An independent editor with 30+ years' experience, she works one-to-one with writers who are developing books. Mary Ann is mad about nurturing creative and community spirit. madaboutwords.com





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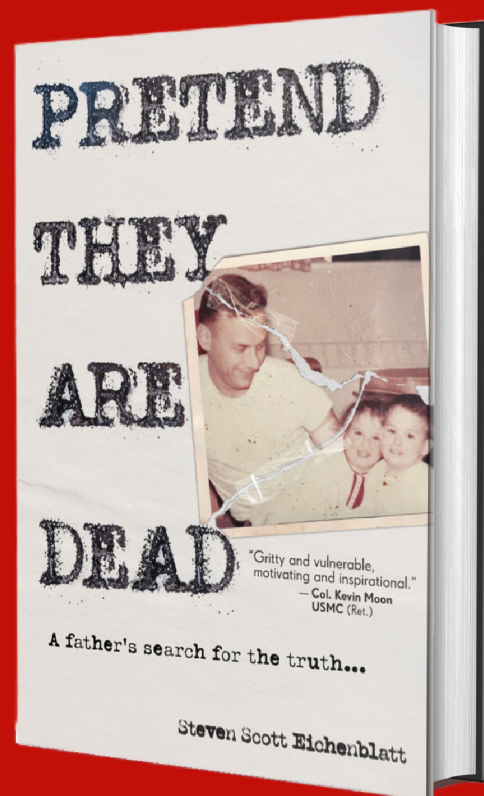
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Directly Speaking

A Few Of My Favorite (Conference) Things

Ginnye Lynn Cubel
Executive Director

If I had to pick one word to describe this year's Florida WritersCon, it would be *thoughtful*. The Conference Committee—composed of Paul Iasevoli (Conference Chair), Mary Ann de Stefano (President), Michael Farrell (Youth Chair), and me—showed up asking, “How do we produce a conference that is educational, celebratory, and meaningful for our members?”

It's easy to have ideas. It's hard to balance those ideas with logistical realities, budget, and delivering an exceptional experience. I'm incredibly grateful and proud of this year's committee for keeping our members at the heart of every decision that shaped Florida WritersCon 2025.

Even the smallest details—such as organizing our lineup of workshops into curated tracks to make it easier to identify sessions based on topic or a Champagne pour at the RPLA mixer—were crafted with the idea that this is not just an event. It's a chance to break out of our ordinary, feel inspired and celebrated, and connect with other writers.

Here's a few things I'm looking forward to at this year's conference.

Writers Connect

Join us on Friday October 17 for 2 hours of thoughtful networking. Instead of milling about a large room and handing out business cards, attendees will participate in guided activities designed to encourage authentic connection and inspire a sense of fun.

My favorite part is what we're calling “connection stickers”. These stickers will say one of four things: Conference Buddy, Critique Partner, Accountability Advocate, or Collaboration Seeker. Participants will select one of these four stickers and wear it like a name tag to communicate what types of opportunities they're open to so that other participants may feel comfortable starting up a conversation.

Balanced Lineup of Workshops

Here's a little inside baseball: did you know that each of our workshops was selected based on whether it fit into the categories of Craft, Publishing, or the Business of writing? And that the selection committee also evaluated whether we had a balance of all three categories?

We were incredibly fortunate to have so many amazing speakers and proposals for workshops submitted this year. It allowed us to curate a well-balanced lineup of sessions from some truly accomplished professionals.

So whether you're in a season of sharpening your craft, finding the right publishing path for your work, or discovering ways to power up your writing business, we have an incredible lineup of sessions. Check them out here: floridawriters.org/faculty-workshops

Hands-On AI Workshop

Hosted on the morning of Sunday October 19, this immersive experience led by faculty member Noel Zamot, will guide AI-curious authors in using technology as a tool and assistant—not a replacement—to elevate your writing without compromising your voice. As you'll learn in the session, this isn't about using AI as a ghostwriter, it's about learning to interact with this technology as a collaborative assistant.

Bring your laptop and your creativity as we explore ethical, practical ways to collaborate with AI throughout the writing process. This is a unique opportunity to get hands-on experience working with AI tools.

At the time of this writing, I haven't seen or heard of any other writing conference offering hands-on demonstrations for writers on how to use these tools. I'm incredibly proud to help bring this to our members and give you access to education that goes beyond a presentation deck. Plus, it's a lot more fun to roll up our sleeves and try it out for ourselves!

If you're planning to join us at Florida WritersCon 2025, I can't wait to see you there. Come find me (the coffee station or registration desk is a good place to check!) and let's connect. Because if I had to pick one thing that I like best about Florida WritersCon, it's the chance to meet so many amazing and talented writers. ✨

Ginnye Lynn Cubel is a writer and Certified Digital Marketing Professional (CDMP) through the Digital Marketing Institute. She holds a BA in Creative Writing from Butler University and has over a decade of experience in marketing and business operations. As Executive Director of Florida Writers Association, she empowers writers through strategic leadership, community building, and creative programming. Fueled by coffee and a love of writing, she turns bold ideas into action.





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Notes from a Word Nerd

by Paul Iasevoli

The Proofreader: The Ship Steward's Final Prep

In this, our metaphorical book's penultimate voyage, I may be sailing the ship and its crew to the brink, but now that the manuscript has made it to its final port of call—the publisher's desk—and is ready for printing, one more crew member must see to it that everything on board meets the expected standards. On a ship, that task falls to the steward; in publishing, it's the responsibility of the proofreader.

The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS), (18 ed., 2.105) states: "Proofreading ... applies to the manuscript *after* it has been converted to a format for publication but *before* it is published." The "format" mentioned in the above may be an electronic and/or a printed version of the book. At this point in the editing process, the book is referred to as a first *proof*, and the manuscript is referred to as the *copy*.

Although a manuscript has gone through a copyedit, it still needs the keen eye of a proofreader before it's released to the public. The author themselves may take on the task of proofreading the copy against the edited manuscript or they may choose to hire a professional proofreader. Larger publishers will usually assign an in-house proofreader to a book. This stage of the editing process is the last chance to perfect a book. Just as it's the steward's job to see to it that the cabins are neat, tidy, and pleasing to the eye of the expected passengers, so it's the proofreader's task to ensure that the overall appearance of the book will satisfy its readers. This includes *all* aspects of the book: front and back matter, front and back covers, the spine, page numbers, and the copy itself.

On a macro level the proofreader will verify:

- The font is consistent throughout the copy, unless specialized for a reason.
- Page numbers are accurate and align with the table of contents, if there is one
- Chapter titles are numbered in sequence, formatted correctly, and free of typographical errors.
- Footnotes, if any, align with the index.

On a micro level the proofreader checks:

- Spelling—niggly words like *compliment* v. *complement* ... one of my pet peeves.
- Hyphenation—*e-mail* v. *email* which became a closed noun some years ago.
- Word breaks—words that have to be broken at the end of lines are hyphenated at the correct syllable.

These are just a few of the things that a proofreader will scrutinize and correct. For a more extensive list, see CMOS, 2.115–2.123.

In general, it's not the proofreader's job to deal with recasting sentences, word choice, or anything else for which the author would have to be queried; these are tasks that should have been taken care of in the copyedit. However, if the proofreader comes across an error that seems to effect meaning or comprehension of a sentence: a word missing, or a misspelled word—*breath* v. *breathe*, for example—they will have to query the author or publisher to alert them to the error.

As implied earlier in this article, this is only the first proof. This proof will be checked again for accuracy resulting in a revised proof which will be checked against the *first* proof (now considered *foul* or *dead*) and the original manuscript. Hopefully none of these proofs will change the pagination of the book which could delay its expected publication date. The upshot of all of this is that a book may go through several proofs before it's printed and released to the public.

So, the next time you pick up one of this year's bestselling reads, consider the journey that book has taken; not only the literal one from a printing house somewhere across the country, but the figurative one from the glint of an idea in the author's mind to a spot on *The New York Times* Best Sellers list with number one next to its title. 🌟

Paul Iasevoli is a writer, editor, and member of FWA's Board of Directors.
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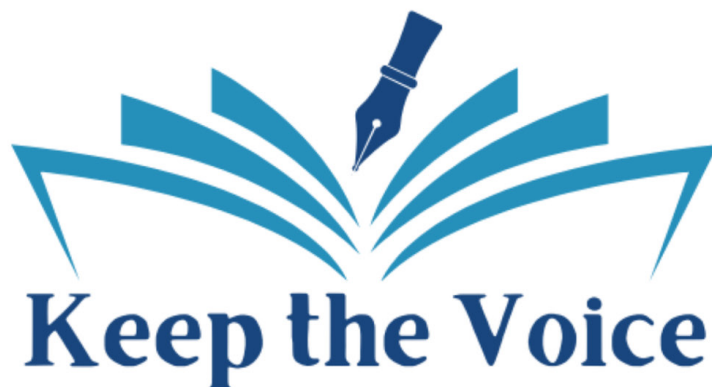
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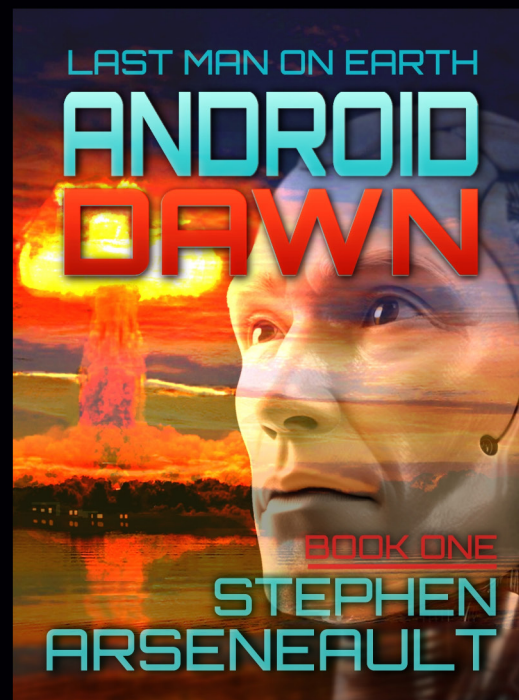
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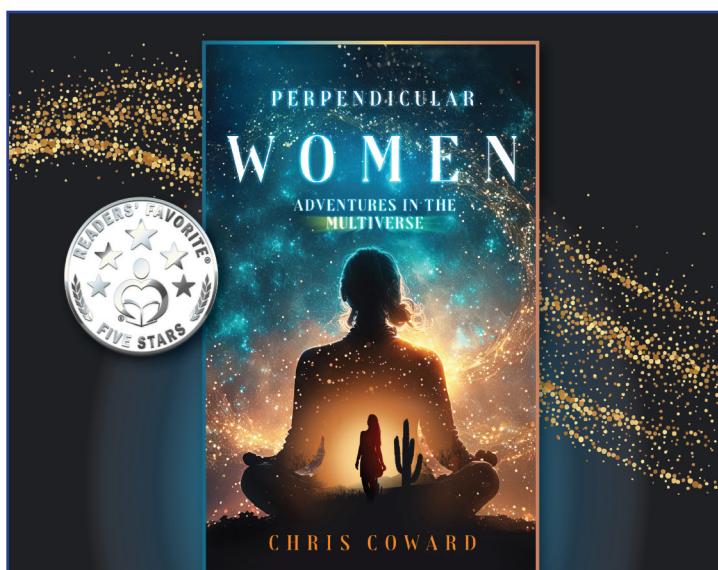
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—AJ Lewis, author of *The Amalfi Mysteries*

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Proven Strategies to Build an Engaged Email List for Authors

by NY Book Editors

In the modern age, you can't publish a book and expect people to know about it. Gone are the days of advertising in newspapers and magazines (remember those?). The effectiveness of in-store events has diminished with the rise of online shopping and digital media consumption. Plus, fewer physical bookstores and fewer people visiting them means authors must step outside traditional means of reaching their audience. And television or radio advertising? Forget about it. With media fragmentation and the rise of streaming services, these channels don't guarantee the broad reach they once did.

You, and any author who wishes to eke out a measure of success, must embrace the modern age. It's time to go digital with your marketing, even if your book is traditionally published. And that starts by building an email list.

You may still need to learn what an email list is, why you need it to market your books, or how to build one. That's where this guide comes in. It's a comprehensive but beginner-friendly guide to building an engaged email list from scratch, and it's tailored specifically for authors looking to connect with their readers in the most direct and personal way possible. Let's get started.

What Is an Email List?

An email list is a collection of email addresses you gather from people interested in your content, products, or services. When people sign up to be on your email list, they permit you to send them updates, newsletters, promotional materials, or other emails directly to their inbox.

Here's a quick breakdown:

You collect email addresses through your website, social media, in-person events, or online platforms. People enter their email addresses and agree to receive emails from you.

You use this list to communicate with your audience. You can send information about your new book release, blog posts, exclusive offers, or any news you think they would be interested in.

It's really that simple.

An email list is like having a direct line to your readers or customers, making your email list a powerful tool for building relationships and growing your platform or business.

Why Do You Need to Build an Email List?

Your email list helps you build a personal connection with your audience. Unlike social media, where your posts might get lost in a sea of content, emails land directly in a person's inbox, making it more likely they will see and engage with your message.

Here are some compelling reasons why every author should prioritize building an email list:

Direct and Personal Communication. Your email list allows for direct communication with your readers. Unlike social media algorithms that decide who sees your content, emails ensure your message reaches your subscribers' inboxes.

Control and Independence. You own your email list. You're at the mercy of changing policies and algorithms in other platforms. However, your email list is entirely under your control.

Increased Book Sales. When you launch a new book, your email list serves as a ready-made audience who are more likely to purchase your book. This vetted list can lead to higher initial sales and better rankings.

Audience Insights. Email interactions can provide valuable insights into your audience's preferences. You can use this insight to tailor your content, marketing strategies, and writing to meet their needs and interests.

Cost-Effective Marketing. Email marketing is one of the most cost-effective marketing strategies. It offers a high return on investment as you can reach several people at a relatively low cost.

Long-Term Relationships. Regular email communication helps in building long-term relationships with your readers. It keeps your audience engaged and invested in your journey as an author.

Boost Event Attendance. Whether hosting a Q&A, book reading, or a signing event, your email list is a great



tool to boost attendance. Your subscribers are your most loyal fans and are more likely to participate in your events.

Drive Traffic to Your Blog or Website. Regular newsletters can drive subscribers back to your latest blog posts or website content, increasing your site's traffic and improving your search engine rankings.

Build Anticipation and Buzz. Use your email list to build anticipation for your upcoming book releases. Teasers, exclusive excerpts, or pre-order bonuses can create buzz and ensure a successful launch.

Crisis Management. In case of unforeseen issues, such as a canceled event or a publication delay, your email list is the fastest way to update your readers and manage the situation effectively.

Your email list is not just a marketing tool. It represents a community of individuals who have chosen to embark on your literary journey with you. It's an asset that grows over time, ensuring your target audience still hears your voice in the increasingly crowded digital space.

What If You Don't Have Any Visitors on Your Website?

Building an email list is a fantastic goal for authors, even if your website still needs to garner your audience's attention. It's like planting seeds for your future garden. As your website traffic grows, so will your list.

And things can change quickly. If one of your books or blog posts suddenly gets attention, having an email list means you're prepared to capitalize on this surge in interest.

Remember that your email list will provide a stable and direct way to communicate with your audience. So, set the foundation now and build on it in the future. But how? Let's talk about that next.

3 Tips to Build Your Email List

Building an email list from scratch can be daunting, but you can effectively grow a valuable list with the right strategies.

1. Create a Strong Lead Magnet

One of the easiest ways to grow your email list is by providing a lead magnet.

A lead magnet is a free item or service you offer potential subscribers in exchange for their email addresses. You're giving something valuable to your audience, and in return, they trust you with their email.

As an author, your lead magnet should offer a taste of your unique style and content. Here are some fantastic ideas you can consider:

Exclusive ebook or guide. Offer a portion of your book or an exclusive guide unavailable anywhere else. It's like a secret chapter just for your subscribers.

Free First Chapters. Share the first few chapters of your book. Hook your readers right from the start.

Writing Templates or Checklists. If you're into nonfiction, especially how-to guides or self-help, templates or checklists related to your book's content can be incredibly valuable.

Online Workshop. Offer a session where you share your insights on writing, storytelling, or even the publishing journey. It can be a live or recorded session.

Exclusive Short Stories or Poems. If you write fiction or poetry, a small, subscriber-only collection can make your readers feel special.

Your email list ...
[ensures] your
target audience
still hears your
voice in the
increasingly
crowded digital
space.

Now, let's talk about how to create a lead magnet. Fortunately, setting up your lead magnet doesn't have to be a tech nightmare. Here's a simple way to get it rolling:

Create Your Content. Whatever you choose, whether it's a PDF or video series, to offer as a lead magnet, keep it short and simple. Most word processors allow you to save your content as a PDF. And, for videos, you can create private playlists and share the link.

Choose an Email Marketing Service. Platforms like Mailchimp, ConvertKit, or AWeber offer user-friendly ways to automatically manage your email list and distribute your lead magnet.

Set Up an Opt-In Form. Use your chosen platform to create an opt-in form to embed on your website or blog. Each platform will have individual instructions on adding this form to your website. More on this below.



Deliver the Magnet. Once someone signs up, your email service should automatically send the lead magnet. Make sure this process is smooth. Your first interaction sets the tone for your relationship with your subscriber.

2. Optimize Your Website for Sign-Ups

So, let's talk about your opt-in form. Your email marketing tool might provide multiple types of opt-in forms that you can use on your website. But what are the best practices for displaying your email newsletter opt-in form? Let's break it down:

Make It Visible. Your sign-up form should be one of the first parts of your site that visitors see. Don't hide it away in a corner. Consider placing it prominently on your homepage, in the sidebar, or as a header or footer on every page. A floating sign-up bar is also a great option, as it stays visible when the user scrolls.

Keep It Simple. The sign-up process should be straightforward. Ask only for essential information, like an email address and a first name, to personalize emails. Long forms can be intimidating and may drive potential subscribers away.

Use Engaging Calls to Action (CTAs). Your CTA buttons and text should be compelling and clear. Use action-oriented, persuasive language like "Join the adventure," "Get your free guide now," or "Start your journey." Make the button stand out with a contrasting color.

Offer a Sneak Peek. Show a preview or teaser of what subscribers will receive. It could be a snippet from your newsletter, a sample eBook cover, or testimonials from current subscribers.

Leverage Pop-ups Wisely. While pop-ups can be effective, they can be intrusive if not used correctly. Time them to appear after the visitor has spent a certain amount of time on your site or is about to leave (exit-intent pop-ups). Always ensure they're easy to close and don't disrupt the overall user experience.

As for email marketing tools, there are several user-friendly and cost-effective options available that can help automate and streamline this process:

Mailchimp. Known for its user-friendly interface, Mailchimp offers a free plan, which is excellent for starters. It allows you to create forms, send out emails, and analyze the success of your campaigns.

ConvertKit. This platform is designed specifically for authors and bloggers and is very intuitive. The free tier offers basic features; you can upgrade as your list grows.

Sendinblue. This tool is also friendly for beginners and offers a free plan. It's fantastic for managing email campaigns, transactional emails, and SMS messages.

MailerLite. Known for its simplicity and beautiful design options, MailerLite offers a free plan for up to 1,000 subscribers and includes features like automation, landing pages, and pop-ups.

Remember, the key is to start simple and authentic. As you get more comfortable, you can experiment with different placements, wording, and tools to see what resonates most with your audience.

3. Use Social Media Platforms

So, earlier, I said that it's easy for your message to get lost in social media because you're at the mercy of constantly changing algorithms. But that doesn't mean you should ignore social media altogether. Just remember that social media isn't a place for direct sales. It's more like a cocktail party. It's a place for mingling and sparking interest.

Use your social media platforms as a bridge to your email list. Share snippets of your content, teasers of your lead magnets, or insights into your writing process, and then gently guide your followers toward your email list for more in-depth, exclusive content.

This way, you turn the fleeting attention on social media into lasting connections through your email list without getting lost in the noise.

Leveraging these platforms can significantly amplify your reach and attract subscribers to your email list. Here's how you can make the most of social media to promote your lead magnet:

Choose the Right Platforms

Not all social media is created equal, especially for your target audience. For authors, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn can be particularly effective.

Instagram and Pinterest are your go-to spots if your content is more visual (think book covers, infographics, or short video teasers). For more professional or business-related content, LinkedIn can be incredibly effective.

Create Engaging Content

Different platforms require different levels of engagement. Here's a quick breakdown:

Facebook. Share posts about your lead magnet with captivating images of your book cover or a sneak peek



of the content. Facebook groups are also a goldmine. Join groups relevant to your genre or topic and actively participate before sharing your lead magnet.

Twitter/X. Craft attention-grabbing tweets with relevant hashtags. Twitter is great for short, snappy, and frequent updates. You can also engage with your followers through polls or by asking thought-provoking questions about your lead magnet.

Instagram. Use visually appealing images or short video clips (Reels or Stories) to promote your lead magnet. Use Instagram Stories' swipe-up feature (if you have access) or direct users to the link in your bio.

LinkedIn. Share articles or posts that provide value and introduce your lead magnet subtly. LinkedIn is ideal for more in-depth, professional, or educational content.

Pinterest. Create visually appealing pins that link directly to your sign-up landing page. Pinterest is fantastic for evergreen content and can drive traffic to your site for months or even years.

Regardless of the platform, highlight the value of your lead magnet. What will your readers gain from it? How will it entertain, educate, or inspire them? Make it irresistible.

Social media is a pay-for-play medium. If you want to get more eyeballs on your posts, you need to pay for it. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram offer sophisticated targeting options to reach your ideal readers.

Lastly, remember to engage with your audience. Social media is not a one-way street. Respond to comments and messages, and engage with your followers' content. Building relationships can lead to more sign-ups.

Other Ways Authors Build their Email Lists

There are many creative and effective ways authors can build their email lists beyond the strategies already discussed. Here are additional methods to consider:

1. **Speaking Engagements and Author Readings.** Participate in literary events, book clubs, or writing workshops. Offer a sign-up sheet for your email list, or make your presentation interactive using a digital sign-up method accessible via smartphones.
2. **Collaborate with Local Businesses.** Seek out local bookstores, cafes, or libraries for partnership. They can display your books along with a sign-up

sheet for your newsletter or even host a signing event where you can collect email addresses.

3. **Book Launch Parties or Virtual Events.** Host a launch party for your new book, in-person or virtually. Encourage attendees to sign up for your email list to receive exclusive content or a chance to win a signed copy.
4. **QR Codes in Printed Materials.** Include a QR code in your printed books, flyers, or business cards that direct the audience to your sign-up page. This convenience makes it easy for readers to join your list.
5. **YouTube Channel or Podcast.** If you're comfortable creating content, start a YouTube channel or podcast about writing, book reviews, or discussions about themes in your books. Include a call to action in each episode, encouraging listeners or viewers to sign up for your email list.
6. **Utilize Amazon Author Central.** If your book is on Amazon, use your Author Central page to direct readers to your website, where they can sign up for your email list.

Final Thoughts

Remember, the key to a successful email list is the number of subscribers and their engagement and interest in your work. Your email list aims to build a community around your writing, so whatever strategy you choose, ensure it aligns with your brand and provides genuine value to your readers. Happy writing, and here's to new subscribers! ✍️

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How to **Reconnect** with a Draft You No Longer Want to Write

by Anne F Hag

There comes a moment in many writers' lives, sometimes early, sometimes much later, when the manuscript they once felt passionate about suddenly falls silent. You open the file and feel ... nothing. Not dread, not excitement. Just a dull, gray emptiness.

It's not "writer's block"—it's not that you can't write. It's that you don't want to. And in many ways, that feels worse.

You might wonder: Is the project dead? Am I done with this book? Should I move on? Am I done writing altogether?

This moment can play out no matter the genre, experience level, or personality. The truth is that losing the spark doesn't necessarily mean the book is over or lost. But it does mean something in the creative relationship has shifted.

Below are seven reasons why this may be happening, and ideas for how you can gently find your way back to your draft.

1. Battery 0%: burnout (and not just from writing)

It's easy to assume you've lost your creative spark when you stop feeling passionate about a project. But the real culprit could easily be creative burnout, a depletion that reaches beyond the page. You feel empty, not just uninspired. And it's likely tied in with emotional exhaustion, chronic stress, or being overstretched due to life's demands.

As K.M. Weiland wrote in a blog post on her website: "Creative burnout isn't just a temporary slump; it's often a deep-seated physiological and emotional response to overwork and stress. It's not about the absence of ideas but about a system that's too full to allow creativity to flow." [helpingwritersbecomeauthors.com/the-writers-road-to-creative-burnout-recovery]

To recover from creative burnout, the first step may be not to write (if you have that luxury). Instead, you should recalibrate.

How to reconnect

- First, give yourself full permission to pause without guilt. Rest is not a luxury, it's a (creative) necessity. And by rest, I don't just mean sleep, but also giving your head a rest: meditate, limit social media, watch a raindrop race down the windowpane. In other words, slow down and just be.
- When you begin to feel a small inkling of interest in writing again, revisit your why: why did you start writing in the first place? What about this story excited you when you got the idea? Reconnect with these feelings.
- Reaffirming your why may get you back to your draft, but I advise doing it slowly. Reread a scene or chapter you loved. Revision is not the goal here. The goal is to remember your own voice. And remember why you have to raise it.
- And when you do start writing again, do it gently: set realistic expectations and honor them. Establish a structure that you follow, such as time blocking and using Pomodoro timers, to ensure you don't overdo it. And keep the habit of rest! It makes life a more enjoyable experience all around.

2. Critique coup: fear and doubt

You're deep into your draft and suddenly your inner critic comes through loud and clear: This isn't good enough. Who do I think I am? The more you press on, the louder the inner critic gets.

As Steven Pressfield writes in his book *The War of Art*: "Resistance will tell you anything to keep you from doing your work. It will perjure, fabricate; it will seduce you... Resistance is always lying and always full of shit."

And perhaps more pointedly: "Resistance is experienced as fear; the degree of fear equates to the strength of Resistance. Therefore, the more fear we feel about a specific enterprise, the more certain we can be that that enterprise is important to us and to the growth of our soul."



In other words, fear and doubt (also known as resistance) are signposts. When your inner critic goes crazy, it doesn't mean something is wrong; it means something is real.

Fear and doubt are not meant to run the show. Your inner critic is not a reliable judge of good or bad. Your inner critic will do its best to convince you it's not worth continuing, it's too late, someone else can do it better.

In my opinion, these are "full speed" signs telling you not to quit. You can't silence your inner critic as it's part of being human, but you can do things to lessen the effect, things that will let you write anyway.

How to reconnect

- Name the fear, write down your doubts. "I'm afraid people will hate this/laugh at me." "Am I good writer?"
- Write anyway, badly if needed: Instead of wanting to write the next bestseller, lower the bar. Let yourself write one messy, authentic paragraph. Writing badly could include employing the 5-second rule. Only allow yourself 5 seconds to solve anything that gets you stuck: a word, a sentence, a scene. If it's still unclear, insert a placeholder like [FIX]—and keep going.
- "Collaborate" with your inner critic (my personal favorite): Instead of fearing the inner critic, make friends with it. You're stuck with it, after all. Treat it like an annoying younger sibling: it talks too much, gets dramatic, and interrupts at all the wrong times. But you know it only wants to be part of the process. Instead of banishing it, let it help within boundaries you set. I constantly have dialogues with my inner critic. It goes something like this: "I see your point, but I think I'm on to something. If you just let me try this, you can rewrite it later." It sounds a bit woo-woo, but it works like a charm.

3. Let it simmer: incubation

Sometimes, you're not writing because of timing. The book simply isn't ready to move forward. You've reached a natural pause point because the next layer hasn't revealed itself yet. You might be forcing scenes that haven't emotionally matured, or plot points that need space to develop subconsciously.

This kind of resistance is sneaky because it doesn't always come with obvious emotions. You might feel detached, mildly bored, or oddly indifferent. Your writing starts to feel flat, no matter what you do. You're stuck.

Some parts of writing can't be forced. Like seeds underground, story elements sometimes need time to settle, tangle, and root. They need space to become what they're trying to become. No amount of pushing will speed that up. In fact, pushing can damage something that is quietly forming. "Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you," says Anne Lamott in *Bird by Bird*.

How to reconnect

- If you can't write forward, write around it. Write about your character's motivations, fears, or their backstories. Explore themes without expecting usable prose. Writing around your story can accelerate your rediscovery of what it is.
- Incubation thrives in unstructured thought. Take a walk, do dishes, stare out the window. Trust that your brain is still working on the story while you're living your life. The critical word here is trust; don't force it.
- Track your sparks: Keep a notebook handy for sudden lines, images, or plot fixes that drift in. Incubation often delivers gifts in flashes, and your job is to catch them. I usually get sparks when showering, so I have a notebook in my bathroom.

4. Vision upgrade: outgrowing the draft

Some manuscripts stall because you've changed. The worldview, tone, or structure that once excited you no longer fits with who you are, or what the story wants to say now. You reread early chapters and cringe: Did I really think this was the book? This is a particular challenge for new writers. They learn so much while writing, making it likely that their original vision will not hold up as they write forward.

Growth isn't betrayal of the project; it's evidence that you and the story are alive.

William Zinsser reminds us in his book *On Writing Well* that discovery happens in revision: "Rewriting is the essence of writing well: it's where the game is won or lost." If the draft you have no longer matches the writer you've become, (major) revision isn't a setback.

How to reconnect

- Reread with fresh eyes: Highlight the scenes, ideas, or sentences that still feel electric. Those sparks point toward the book's next, truer shape. Also,



list what no longer fits, whether it's characters, plotlines, or even a POV. Naming what feels stale frees you to release or reinvent it.

- Free-write a “version 2.0” premise. Ask yourself, “What is this story about now?” Don’t police genre or length.

5. The “should” trap: writing for others

Sometimes a manuscript ices over because it has started to serve everyone’s agenda except yours. Maybe you pivoted to chase a hot trend, tightened your voice to match feedback from your critique partners, or sanitized a scene after imagining your mother’s reaction. Little by little, the draft stops feeling like your playground and starts feeling like a performance review. The book becomes a product instead of a process.

Stephen King advises in his memoir *On Writing*: “Write what you like, then imbue it with life and make it unique by blending in your own personal knowledge.” This advice is freeing: the best story is usually the story that means the most to its author.

How to reconnect

- Ask yourself: What part of this story still feels alive to me? What would I write if no one were watching? You can do this scene-by-scene. For each major beat, note if it’s a “I want this” or “I think I should want it” scene. Keep the “wants” and renegotiate the “shoulds.”
- Free-write a secret version: Rewrite one chapter the way you prefer. If your energy spikes, you have proof the story wants its original spark back.
- Create a permission slip: Literally write: “I give myself permission to...” (break the genre mold, include the weird subplot, use the snarky voice). Sign and date it; stick it above your desk.

Remember: a book’s success comes from emotional truth. A draft powered by genuine curiosity is easier to finish, and more compelling to read.

6. Boredom alarm: flat scenes

Boredom might be your creative self calling for a change in stakes, structure, voice, or scene dynamics. It doesn’t mean the book is a failure—it may just need fresh energy. As Donald Maass noted in *Writing the Breakout Novel*: “If a scene bores you to write, imagine what it will do to your readers.”

Boredom is a creative smoke alarm.

How to reconnect

- Set a timer for 10 minutes and ask “What if?” questions. Wild or silly is fine; look for the one that makes you sit up and take notice.
- Skip ahead to the scenes you’re dying to write: Draft those first, then bridge the gap later. Excitement is contagious; let it pull the dull sections forward.
- Rewrite from a fresh lens: Take a scene that feels flat and recast it in a radically different voice or POV. Let the antagonist narrate, write the scene as a diary entry, or give the snarky dimension of the protagonist a couple of dials up or down.

Boredom isn’t a verdict on your talent. It’s feedback from your creative self.

7. Safety glass case: hiding from critique

The closer you get to finishing, the more vulnerable the project becomes. This can make a new form of resistance grow: the urge to keep tinkering forever. If you never finish, no one can judge the work (or you). It’s easier to keep it safe inside than risk bringing it into the world.

But we should bring it out into the world. As Margaret Atwood once said: “If I waited for perfection, I would never write a word.”

How to reconnect

- Choose a gentle first reader: Pick one trusted person who will respond with curiosity, not demolition. A soft landing builds confidence.
- Write a post-mortem page: Before feedback arrives, jot down what you already know needs work. This primes you to receive notes as collaboration, not condemnation.

Finishing isn’t the moment your book is perfect; it’s the moment you invite it to grow beyond you.

Deepen the reconnection: your action plan

Every creative lull is information. The trick is not to muscle through, but to listen and respond with intention. So how do you approach this?



Step 1: Run a “story health check”

- Choose one quiet hour this week.
- Reread the “why” behind your project (your original note, outline, or pitch).
- Ask: which of the seven resistance points am I feeling most right now? Name it; that gives you something to solve.

Step 2: Select one reconnection ritual and schedule it

- Examples: a 48-hour unplug to let the story incubate, a scene rewrite from a radical POV
- Block it on your calendar; treat it like any other commitment.

Step 3: Finish something small

- Pick a bite-size task (draft a single paragraph, outline one stubborn chapter, or jot down ten “What if?” questions). Completing a mini-goal rebuilds trust between you and the book.

Step 4: Plan the next check-in

- Momentum returns when reflection is routine. Set a reminder two weeks in advance to review what has changed and choose the next experiment.

Parting thoughts

Your manuscript may not need a miracle, just a series of deliberate, forgiving adjustments. Consider this phase a dialogue rather than a verdict. The book hasn’t stopped talking to you; its voice is simply different now. Quiet the noise, lean in, and you’ll hear it again—maybe more clearly than ever.

This article was originally published on janefriedman.com and is reprinted here with permission.

Anne F. Hag is an indie author and Author Accelerator Certified book coach who firmly believes that prioritizing creativity is key to living a fulfilling life. After spending most of her life as a health researcher, she needed a change and turned to books and creative writing. In her book coaching business, she enjoys working with new writers, especially women from STEMM fields. Learn more about Anne at annefhag.com.



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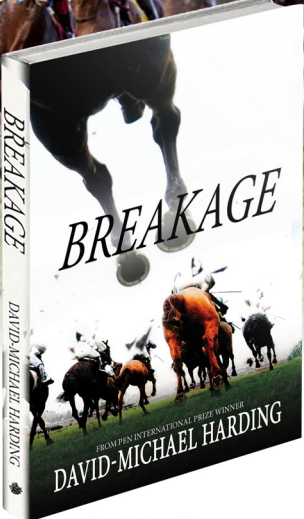
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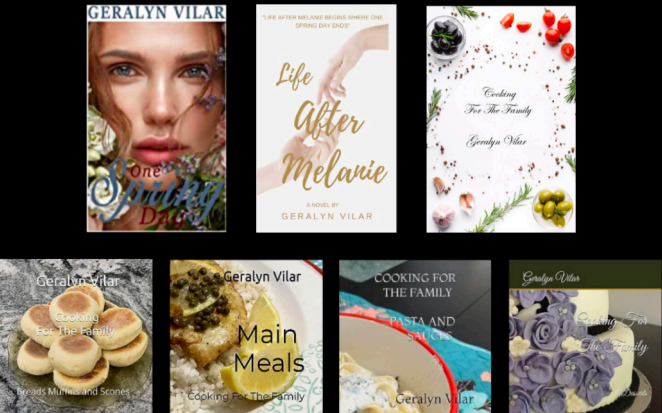
But when early onset Alzheimer's causes his unique gift to fail him, mobsters from Manhattan to Las Vegas aren't happy. Chariot needs his estranged daughter to help him, but their rocky past keeps them apart.

When Donnie's granddaughter is kidnapped to force his daughter into the game, he controls everyone. Until he doesn't. His mind failing, his daughter getting wise, and wiseguys wiser still, it's a race to save a family before the momentum of the past destroys their future.

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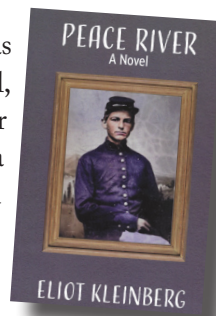
Nancy Christie's third novel, *Moving Maggie*, was a third-place winner in both the Summer Beach Read and Women's Fiction categories in the International Firebird Book Award competition. For more information, visit her website: www.nancychristie.com.



Florida Writers Association celebrates **Niki Kantzios (N.L. Holmes)** for her years of service and many contributions to the FWA blog—over eighty posts at last count. Niki is a former nun, archaeologist, poet, and author of fifteen historical novels set in antiquity. She also reviews for the Historical Novel Society. A longtime resident of Florida, N.L. now lives in France with her husband, cats, and poultry. There, she dances, weaves, gardens, hikes, and plays the violin. And reads, of course. Subscribe to the FWA blog to read her smart and clever posts: floridawriters.blog. Visit her website: nlholmes.com.



The Florida Historical Society has published **Eliot Kleinberg's** debut novel, *Peace River*, a saga of betrayal, murder and redemption set mostly in Florida during the Civil War. The Society called it “a compelling novel that presents lesser known facts about the Civil War, and life in Florida during that period. The novel has intriguing fictional characters set in historically accurate settings and situations.” Florida native Eliot Kleinberg spent nearly a half-century writing on local news and about Florida and Florida history. He produced two columns and wrote fourteen books—and co-wrote or contributed to more—all about Florida.



Tanya Young of Sarasota, Florida has received first prize in the 2025 Malovrh-Fenlon Poetry Prize for her poem “Snatching the Sunset.” More than 800 individual poems were submitted by poets from all across the country to the contest, sponsored by Orchard Street Press Ltd. Her winning poem will be one of fifty to be included in the publication, *Quiet Diamonds 2025*.



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- William Prince
- Kelley Rene
- Terri Rutter
- Tracy Taylor
- Jasmine Warsaw





Born Into Absence

Norma Beasley

I was born into absence.

It was early 1940's, the world fractured by war. Overseas, men fought and died. But in a quiet corner of America, one man—my dad—died for reasons that had nothing to do with bullets or borders. Pneumonia. One month to the day before I took my first breath, he took his last. I arrived in silence that had already settled in, into grief that had already begun to harden around the edges.

I never heard his voice, never felt the warmth of his hand. He left no letters, no recordings—only a name, one photograph of him standing with my paternal grandparents in a three-piece suit with his younger brother Joe, one of himself, and another in an oval frame that hung above by bed at the Beasley household. I still have the sepia-colored photo of the family which I dearly cherish.

I have no memory of my mother either. None. Not the feel of her skin, the rhythm of her voice, the scent of her hair. She was there, briefly—a flicker in the earliest part of my story—but by the time I was two, she too was gone. I'm told she remarried. I'm told there was a man, a stepfather, someone who might've taken my hand, but I have no memory of him either. But memory is a gate that doesn't open backward unless something lives behind it, and for me, there is nothing. Only the faint idea of a woman who once held me, once whispered my name. So, I became a child raised by memory keepers who silenced those memories.

Somewhere between the age of two and seven years, I was a fragile heirloom in the home of my paternal grandparents. I think they loved me fiercely because I was the last living thread that tied me and dad to them. I was a baby, unknowing, in a world that had been stunned by war.

Grandma then lost her remaining son and husband, but she carried the loss with strength I would come to understand much later. She read me nursery rhymes which I memorized. She sent me to Sunday school, took me to church, allowed me to walk to school alone and gather the mail since she was crippled. She was a tall quiet woman who allowed me to discover my surroundings with little chastisement. She expressed kindness towards me even when she gave me a spanking for misbehaving.

I was not spoiled but protected. She gave me what she could: structure, stability, and love.

At seven, I was passed into the care of my maternal grandparents. They were different—less cloaked in sadness, more rooted in routine than reflection. Granddad Dooms owned a restaurant that supported a family of four. Their love was practical. There were chores and expectations, rules, and early bedtimes. They had lost a daughter, my mom. But they didn't speak of her. Every Mother's Day granddad brought a gardenia home. "Granddad," I said, "Why do you bring this flower home. Grandma always lets it die."

"It was your mother's favorite flower," he replied.

Her beautiful, framed photograph sat on a small table in the vestibule for all to see when they entered our home. It was the absence of mention that taught me her presence once mattered.

As I grew older, I began to understand that I came from people I would never know—not through hugs or holidays or everyday conversation, but through memory, and the delicate ways love can echo long after a person is gone. I wish they could have lived to see me graduate from college. They would have been proud, I'm sure. I carry their shadows with me, trying to shape my identity around silhouettes.

Sometimes I wonder what it would've been like to grow up in a house with parents, siblings, to hear stories directly from the source, to be wrapped in voices that said, "I remember when you were born." Grief was the soil I was planted in. Mine is a different kind of origin story—one that begins not with presence, but with absence, and somehow continues. ✨

Norma Beasley retired as managing art director, Harcourt Inc., New York.





Excerpt from “The Lightkeeper”

Tom Bruce

The village aspect of Truro is the town square, where the daily gossip is exchanged, the latest summer fashions are on display, the tropical summer dresses, the alligator logo pastel polos and shorts, the Ray Bans and flip flops, the lines at the coffee shops, the year rounders, the summer residents, the vacationing tourists, the day-trippers, the commercial fisherman, old, young, and everyone in between, all walks of life, and all moving to a clarion call that spills over everything and everyone, all part of a tapestry that is Truro. This postcard style New England town, this summer place, one town with many different personalities, and many reasons to believe that you’ve arrived in a place where you can finally give voice to a longing heart. From the historic Highland Lighthouse to the majestic sand dunes, and the quintessential small-town center, Truro is a transformative place, and something in me changes when we drive across the Sagamore bridge heading for the Outer Cape, not something definable, but something that lifts me, and fills me with a sense of serenity I find no place else.

Though not matching the grandeur of Truro, we both consider Provincetown to be hallowed ground. But first, we make a quick pit stop at the Atlantic Spice company located on the outskirts of Truro, and once inside, we fill our senses with an explosion of natural aromas I could never begin to describe. After that, we cross into Provincetown, the outermost tip of Cape Cod, using the only road that leads there—an old two-lane highway. We meander through our day strolling the tourist filled streets and taking in everything we can. There are whimsical small gift shops, original art galleries, and countless windowfronts displaying the latest hipster fashions. We stop for a brief respite and a richly flavored New Orleans iced coffee at

our favorite café. Then, its back into the fray, as we step out into the mid-afternoon sun and follow along with the slow languid pace of the Commercial Street crowds. We melt into the eclectic gathering, as they disembark from buses and ferries and descend down the steep hilly side streets, before spilling onto the main thoroughfare. A mass of humanity, all finding common ground on the modestly wide street. They come from everywhere and from every direction, a colorful prism of life that we can never seem to get enough of.

After we take in all of our old haunts and find a few new ones, we climb the steep hill to the top of Carver Street and check in to our usual digs at the old Gifford House Inn. From our perch at the inn’s renowned outdoor Porch Bar, we can people-watch the laidback crowd moving below us, all drawn to this place that awakens your soul.

Then, like clockwork, as the sun casts long shadows across McMillan Pier, the crowds start to diminish. The day trippers head for their cars, the parking lots empty, and the buses and ferries fill up for the return trips to the mainland. The dusk filled streets are about to be transformed. The colorful lights of the small shops and restaurants start casting a warm inviting aura over everything and everyone still left on Commercial Street. Soon, the sun would vanish behind the distant towering sand dunes on the western horizon, and the true soul of Provincetown would be fully exposed in the darkness of night. 🌌

Tom Bruce: “This excerpt is from one of the essays in my unpublished first book.”



PARAGRAPHS & STANZAS



My Grandparents

Chris Marek

My grandparents are the ideal kin to comfort a young man like me; they are sweet and endlessly caring. That is the good part. What drives me a little crazy is their adorable, yet seemingly lifeless, predictability. Each time I visit them, they wear the same clothes, sit in the same seats, and say the same things as the last time—and the time before that. It is like being in church or a museum.

In the living room of their tidy wooden house, I sit in a chair built before I was born. My eyes drift briefly over family photos, the same faces that have been smiling from the wall since before I can remember. When I look back at them in their chairs, I get the strange impression they have been old all their lives.

While we talk, I secretly study them: What deeper understandings might I find behind their kindly faces? Does the rhythm of familiar routines comfort them—or is their constancy a sign of depression, of giving up on the idea of going out in the world and living life, or at least my notion of it?

I mentally explore a couple of youthful musings: For fun, maybe they could sit and play in the backyard digging holes for magical gnomes to occupy, or poke make-believe twig people in the dirt and pretend they are characters in a miniature city. Well, maybe not. The bell of “living well” in old age does not ring clearly in these scenarios. What else, I wonder, might light their inner burners and bring more variety to their lives?

What if I tried to steer them toward less routine activities? A stroll through a public garden. View photos of places they have never been. Maybe these catalysts would open pathways to more stimulating conversations. Or would I only encumber them with my silly ideas?

As we talk, these unanswered questions spin around my mind. Somewhere beyond my dimly lit understanding hover truths about this gentle couple, these people who have lived two or three of my lifetimes. And then for the first time I notice how they look at each other, and I peer from my small world with a clearer, more adult view.

When two people have come to know the other this well, each of them already knows what the other is thinking.

Grandmother knows when Granddad wants to watch a certain TV show or what he wants for lunch. Granddad knows in advance that Grandmother wants to read a book later before taking her nap. Could it be that the comfort of familiarity is more important to them than what I believe matters? Do I, in my handful of years in the world, even know what matters?

They have held hands, and they have held each other so many times that they no longer feel the desperation of wanting the next time to arrive quickly, yet they are wise enough to make sure they often do so anyway—just not in front of others.

In other moments, in the privacy of their bed, they softly say silly things to each other. In their pajamas, they lie on their backs and hold their feet up in the air as they wiggle their toes. Soft giggles escape. They rotate their feet overhead, one way then the other, in a goofy four-foot ballet. They play in their own way amid the touching and warmth and wonderful smells and the magical sound of their beloved’s voice that still charms them the way it always has and always will.

This is how, without their having to say so, without their having to move a muscle, they know in their hearts that they are always holding hands. And this, I realize, is what is on their minds as they smile at me and talk to me and sit here in this living room on the same furniture as the last time. ✨

Chris Marek is an RPLA winner
and Collections contributor
living in Gulfport, Florida.





Fallen

Charlene L. Edge

A tree branch hanging over our roof exploded, scatter-shot pieces across the lawn,
shortening years of tree-life in less than one ghastly second.
We were in the house. A thunderclap pitched me off the bed.

The tree came down last Tuesday after growing up two hundred years.
Sweaty men in swirls of sawdust-rain chain-sawed the thing to death,
death accelerated by lightning sizzling branches and conjoined trunks.

Later in the yard, I found wood-shrapnel—charcoal edges told the story.
I carried some to the bin. Heavy, so heavy, the fallen were.

What remains—an elephant-size girth of stump, insides open to the sun.
Innumerable rings evidence long age, the tree's protective shade and more
than twenty years of fright. In 2004 alone:
Charley roared through here at 95 miles per hour. Ripped countless trees from the earth.
Weeks later, Frances and Jeanne shredded even more.

When we could not flee we curled on the floor close to the bed, or in the tub, or in the
closet—we held each other, we begged the tree above to hold itself together.

Charlene Edge is an award-winning poet
and author of *Undertow*, her cult memoir.
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Anger Sister

Rob Rogers

Your voice quivered the first day you arrived at our therapy group, hands shaking as you struggled to describe the explosions detonating inside your mind. I knew the moment I looked into your eyes that I saw myself.

You sat across the room that day, a collection of plastic tables and chairs fashioned into a daytime hospital for the invisibly sick. All of us fled there from lives that had become too hard to bear. We had stopped going to work every morning and instead were spending workdays trying to cure the diseases that haunted us, before returning at night to families who couldn't understand us. Most of us were fighting depression; almost all suffered from anxiety and insomnia. Until the morning you arrived, I had not met anyone else who struggled to control anger.

You clutched your purse with icy knuckles as you poured out your soul to people you'd never met, struggling to find the words to confess sins you couldn't understand. Plates thrown at walls during family dinners, drivers pursued after they cut you off in traffic. Staring at the table while quaking in your seat, you were a Doberman caught in a bear trap, desperately in need of help but afraid of what you might do to anyone who came close enough to try, resigned instead to chew through another limb to continue staggering through the darkness alone.

"My husband always tells me to just calm down," you sobbed that morning.

"As if it that's so easy." I couldn't help interrupting you.

You and I were from totally different worlds. I grew up in a waspy conservative suburb with dismissive parents who never abused me. You had known violence and abandonment your whole life and survived by harnessing rage. Both of us were stumbling through lives where our fury was unwelcome, struggling to appease wary spouses and disappointing unforgiving bosses. Intensity polluted our minds and ferocity distorted every emotion we felt. Even with those we loved the most, we fought in vain each day to express ourselves with civility. We had been losing that war for decades, our pasts littered with friendships and romances left behind as casualties.

Scarred by my own impulses, I confessed how I can often only calm down by blasting rock music during long drives to unnecessary destinations, lowering my face while stopped at intersections to prevent other drivers from seeing me arguing with the voices screaming inside my head. How I buckle under the weight of people who can just calm down whenever they want, and how much it hurts to see their rolled eyes when I can't contain an outburst.

As our eyes met that first time, tears cascaded down your cheeks. For once, finally, someone understood.

The next day you sat beside me, and you remained there for the next four weeks. We spent breaks pacing outside, showing each other our wounds, sharing lessons on box breathing and journaling. We intuitively knew when the other entered the room if a crisis had erupted. We vented, empathized, coped, and encouraged, first with each other, then with others as we began loving ourselves for the first time. As the weeks wore on, we reveled in each other's milestones. Landmines with loved ones dismantled through pleas for understanding, provocations from clients and supervisors ignored.

And then several weeks later, we returned to our lives, strangers once again.

Initial intentions to stay in touch have been thwarted by busy careers and families who need us more. Perhaps it just hurts too much to return to the memory of those processing groups and the agony we had to endure to get better.

But you remain in my thoughts. I know you are out there somewhere, and I know you will survive.

I dream of seeing you years from now, sunshine beaming from your eyes, the years of pain sealed in photo albums now buried on dusty shelves. Grandchildren cling to your side and bask in your glow. They've never heard your voice raised. Your children now treasure the mother they've never thought they'd know. You are no longer alone.

Few thoughts give me more joy. 🌿

Rob Rogers is an award-winning author and attorney from Winter Garden, Florida.





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