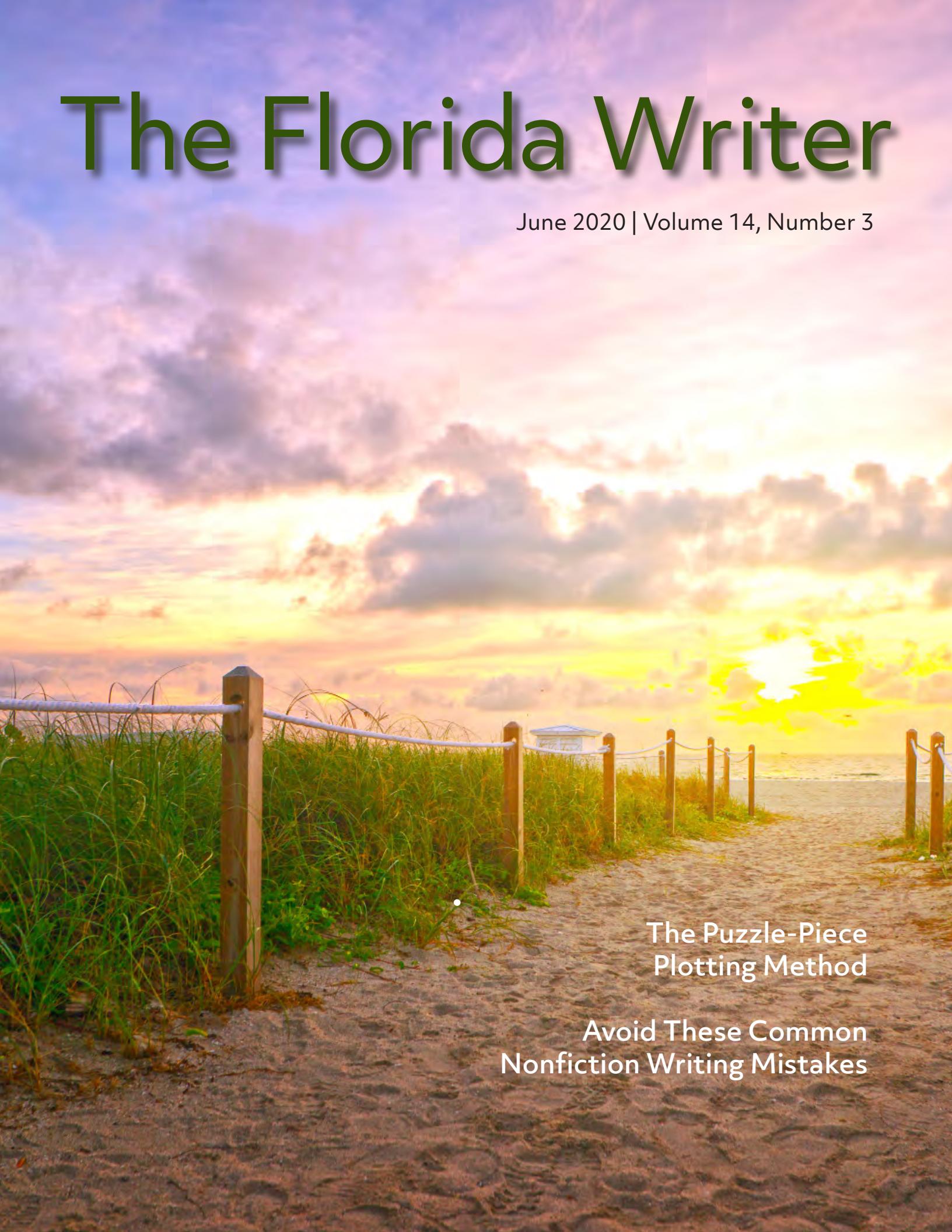


The Florida Writer

June 2020 | Volume 14, Number 3

A photograph of a beach at sunset. The sky is filled with dramatic, colorful clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and pink. A wooden fence made of posts and white rope runs along the sandy dunes, leading towards a small white lifeguard tower in the distance. The ocean is visible on the right, and the overall atmosphere is peaceful and scenic.

**The Puzzle-Piece
Plotting Method**

**Avoid These Common
Nonfiction Writing Mistakes**



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The Florida Writer

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS

Celebrations

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- Submit a one-paragraph announcement written in third person.
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- One entry per issue, per person
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- Follow all “Additional Requirements” listed below.

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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
- 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.
- 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 tfw@floridawriters.net

Prompts & Deadlines

August 2020 Issue – Deadline July 1, 2020

Janet Burroway said, “In literature, only trouble is interesting.” For August’s prompt, conflict—large or small—between two characters should be apparent.

October 2020 Issue – Deadline September 1, 2020

The sense of smell is the most evocative. Write a piece that revolves around an aromatic encounter.





Networking Online: Won't You Be My Neighbor

Mary Ann de Stefano
Editor

You know you need to have a social media presence to successfully market your work. So you sign up for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and various niche sites, but you wonder what the big deal is, because you don't see how doing so has made any difference at all in your book sales. What's the point of online social networking, anyway?

Think of a social networking site as a community, a neighborhood. It's just that simple. Some neighborhoods are merely a place to live. But some neighborhoods provide residents with a rich and rewarding community experience. It all depends on the people who live there and how they interact with each other. People like these...

Ina Invisible. You saw her move in. She had the house repainted and planted a garden in the first week she was there. But ever since then her shades have been drawn. You never see her come or go. Newspapers have piled up in her driveway. She doesn't answer when you knock on her door. Uh oh. Is she ... You never got a chance to know her.

Mimi Allmee. Mimi is always asking for something. She wants your biscotti recipe—the one it took you years of experimentation to develop. She asks you for rides to the airport and wants you to feed her cat when she's going out of town. You like her, and you don't mind helping out even though she asks for favors so frequently. But you have to admit, your feelings were hurt when you sang in the town talent show, and she didn't show up. Come to think of it, the only time you see Mimi is when she wants something.

Karrie Klass. Karrie is a one-woman welcome wagon. Whenever someone new moves into the neighborhood, she delivers a basket of homemade muffins with a warm welcoming smile. When you see her on the street she always asks about your kids and your Great Aunt Fanny by name. Not only did she come see you in the town talent show, she sat in the front row, cheered loudly, and took photos. When Karrie held a fundraiser for homeless pets, neighbors happily pitched in to help.

Sammy Sales. Whenever you see Sammy, he says you need to buy life insurance—from him. When you talk about sports, he talks about life insurance. If you say your cat died, he talks about life insurance. He never asks you how you're doing. He just talks about the life insurance he's selling, oblivious to what others are doing or whether or not they're interested. It has gotten so that when anyone in the neighborhood sees Sammy coming, they hide.

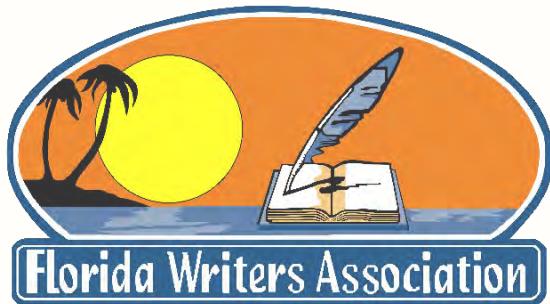
Frank Fixit. Everyone in the neighborhood knows Frank owns every tool and gadget one could ever need. He's generous about sharing them, and he seems to enjoy showing others how to use them. He's also the kind of guy who is always there when you need help with a project. He volunteers his truck to move your daughter to her new apartment and holds the ladder while you climb up to clean out your gutters. When word got out that chinches bugs killed Frank's lawn, most of the neighborhood turned out to help him lay new sod.

Perhaps you've met some of these characters in your neighborhood. And maybe you've met people like them online, too. My portraits may seem silly and extreme. Nevertheless, we see similar behavior in our online communities, don't we? Which neighbor do you want to know? Which neighbor do you want to be?

Don't expect immediate rewards from your online networking efforts. Cultivate your online persona. Opportunities to give and gain support will develop naturally from regular, authentic interactions. Connect. Contribute. Share. Support. Listen. Build relationships. Be a good neighbor. That's how you network online. ☺

Mary Ann de Stefano has been the editor of *The Florida Writer* since 2013 and publishes MAD's *Monday Muse*. She's an independent editor with 30+ years' experience. Besides working one-to-one with writers who are developing books, she designs websites and organizes writing workshops. Visit madaboutwords.com.





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The Florida Writer

August Issue

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August 31, 2020

Kaye Coppersmith Award

Closed to nominations

September 1, 2020

The Florida Writer

October Issue

Ad & Submission Deadline

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News in Brief

First Teen Member Joins the Board of Directors

Michael Farrell has been voted onto the Board of Directors and is the first-ever teen member to have a seat on the board. Michael was drawn into the world of writing by his childhood dreams and the stories in his head that he wishes to bring to life. He loves psychology, fantasy worlds, and stories about the wonders of life. He is a black belt in tae kwon do and has practiced the art for ten years. He also has a background in tumbling. Michael joined the Florida Writers Association in 2019.

Arielle Haughee Named Marketing Chairperson

Arielle Haughee (Hoy) is a five-time RPLA-winning author and the owner of Orange Blossom Publishing. She is an editor, writing coach, publishing consultant, contest judge, and on the Board of Directors for the Florida Writers Association. She is the author of *The Complete Revision Workbook for Writers*, *Falling Into You*, the children's books *Grumbler* and *Joyride* as well as the editor for the How I Met My Other anthology series.

New Members

Welcome new members in April: Arnav Adi, Eshaan Adi, Joanne Alfano, Robert Amon, Martha Bireda, Carol Campbell, Pat Caren, Robert Conover, Darrel G. Crawford, Brenda Dee, Gina Elia, Annie Esser, Jay Gilbert, Dianna Graveman, Jill Green, Pamela Grey, Larissa Hardesty, Melody Harris, Daniel Holub, Ralph Hornbeck, Hafsa Maria Ishret, Rebecca Jordi, William McCombes, Dianne McConkey, Jennifer McKenna, Kimberly Morris, Charles Palmeri, Jane Plitt, Meredith Stevens, Sally Suttenfield, Stan Walker, Dana Weber, Matthew Woltemate. And welcome Richard Cowley, who we neglected to mention as a new member in the last issue.

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Collective Wisdom: Best Advice from Writers Groups

They Didn't Think They'd Do *THIS* When They Joined, Part 2

by Chris Coward & the Collective Wisdom panel

As of this writing, most of us are in lockdown, and FWA's writing groups are Skyping, Zooming, and doing the Google Hangout thing. If it seems odd right now to discuss our groups' many face-to-face activities, it seems fitting, too. Something to look forward to.

But first, context: For many of us, life may be on hold, but FWA benefits are not. There's the subscription to this acclaimed magazine, a subscription to the FWA eNews, reduced advertising rates in FWA publications, access to the FWA Network, and a credit card processing solution. As always, members are eligible to attend webinars at reduced rates, take advantage of editing services, be published in *The Florida Writer*, and become leaders within the organization. And until April 30, you were eligible to enter the 2020 Royal Palm Literary Awards and Collection competitions.

When Florida reopens, members may attend the annual Florida Writers Conference, which is currently open for registration. For details of these benefits, check the Membership & Benefits tab at floridawriters.net.

And then there are the writing groups.

Part 1 of this article showcased some of the unusual activities of several groups. Here in Part 2 are more.

Many of us joined FWA to up our chances of getting published. Ask and ye shall receive! At least three groups have published anthologies: the Suncoast Writers Guild in Englewood, Florida, led by Harry T. Barnes; the Freedom Writers Group in Ocala, Florida, led by Carol Jones; and Clay County Writers in Orange Park, Florida, led by Maureen Jung. Each anthology is different, recording local history, following a theme, or opening its pages to just about anything.

"There's so much to learn," Carol Jones says. "The experience affords members not only an opportunity to

be published but also to gain experience in the publishing process."

The Suncoast anthology is annual! As Ann Favreau, past president, explains, "Our *Inklings* anthology has kept pace with technology. It has gone from a typewritten tome to one published online."

Some groups, such as FWA affiliate the Writers League of The Villages (WLOV), led by Paula Howard, thrive on innovation. Every meeting features an unusual speaker or event, and every month, members may borrow one another's books for free, with the understanding the reader will return the book next meeting and write a review for it.

Other things the group has done:

- Learned to make a video on their smart phones. Book trailers, here we come.
- Interviewed professionals about their jobs, speed-dating-style. Writing a medical thriller? You could interview an emergency-room doctor. Writing crime fiction? You could interview a police officer—and a felon. Writing a cyber-thriller? You could interview a Fortune 500 company network administrator. For this meeting, there were 13 professionals in all.
- Practiced their pitch before a crowd. Hey, if you can pitch to a full room, a private pitch to an agent at the conference should be easy. (And by the way, the winner's pitch took ten seconds.)
- Mingled at a social with eleven area writing groups and 27 book clubs. Word of mouth in action.
- Manned author tables at WLOV's Central Florida Book Fair. Talk about word of mouth—there were more than 2,500 visitors.
- Learned to deliver a great podcast—the future of interviewing?



"It's a brave new world out there," Paula says. "There are always new ideas and new ways of doing things."

These are only a few of our groups' unusual activities. All groups are open to innovation, and given the upheaval of our world and our industry, thank goodness. The groups are more relevant than ever.

If you have an idea for a special activity, mention it to your leader. If you have an idea or question you'd like the Collective Wisdom panel to address, let us know through the contact form on floridawriters.net.

In October, join us for "Group Coronacation," the Collective Wisdom article about what we learned during lockdown and how the COVID-19 experience will change the way we live and write. ☺



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Chris Coward is the leader of FWA's Oxford Writers critique group in Oxford, Florida. She is chairperson for the Royal Palm Literary Awards competition, past FWA president, and a juror for the Florida Book Awards competition sponsored by Florida State University Libraries, an FWA affiliate.



Harry T. Barnes is president of Suncoast Writers Guild, Inc., in Englewood, Florida. He is the author of two historical fiction books and a collection of short fiction stories. Other short stories and poems have appeared in various anthologies.



Ann Favreau is a judge for the Royal Palm Literary Awards. Her writing has been featured in the *The Florida Writer* and Collections. She joined the Suncoast Writers Guild, Inc., in Englewood, Florida in 2002, is a life member, and served as president 2009-2010 and 2012-2014.



Paula F. Howard, RN, APR, is an award-winning writer and returned Peace Corps volunteer who served in Bolivia, South America, teaching healthcare. After a career in public relations, marketing, and special events, she became a Registered Nurse. Now, as author, editor, and publisher with Hallard Press, she volunteers her time to Writers League of the Villages (WLOV), serving as president.

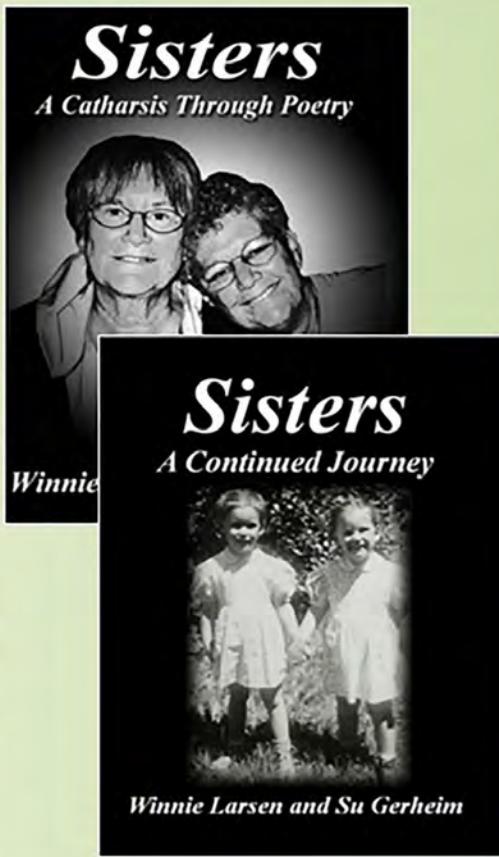
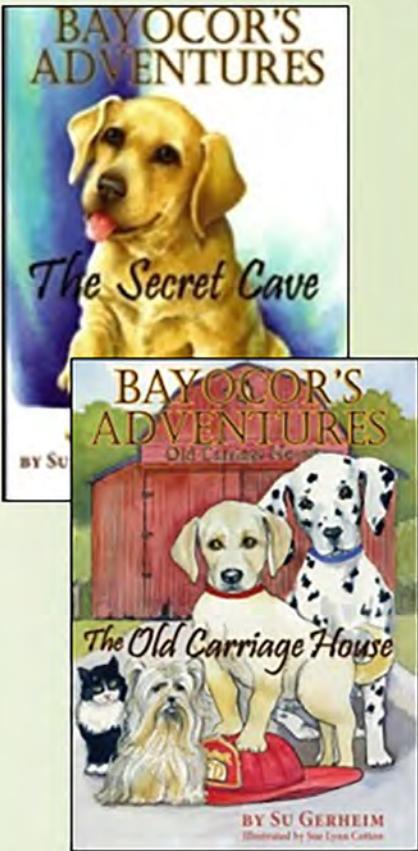


Carol Jones is leader of Freedom Writers Group in Ocala, Florida. She is author of a nonfiction book and two-time RPLA winner. Her short stories appeared in her group's anthology, FWA's Collection series, and Ocala's *Good Life* magazine.



Maureen A. Jung, Ph.D., started Clay County Writers in 2010—a group that's still going strong. She began leading writing workshops in 1981 at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and was named a Fellow of the South Coast Writing Project. Since then she has published more than 100 articles and facilitated scores of seminars for businesspeople.





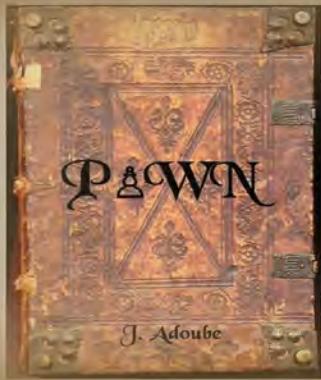
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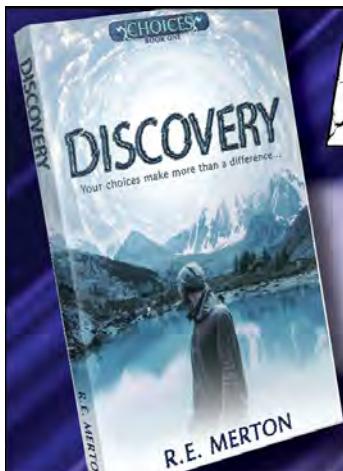


Su Gerheim



Newly published: PpWN is an historical fantasy novel. The pieces of a magnificent and mysterious chess set named Richesse are created with the embedded souls of willing volunteers who sacrifice their lives to bring peace to a warring world through the game of chess (all willing, that is, except one...). Richesse travels through the millennia, encountering dark secrets of intrigue, magic and murder. By 1800, it reaches America, and the crux of the story takes place in Medina, New York, near the Canadian border. Here the desperate search for a missing pawn becomes a central and compelling issue.

PpWN is available as an e-book on Amazon for \$2.99.



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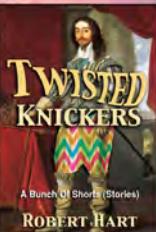
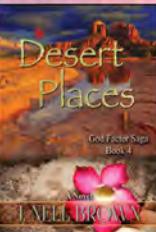
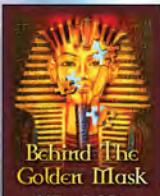
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CLEARLY LEGAL

3 Points about 5 Pointz

by Anne Dalton, Esquire

In 1892, a water meter manufacturer built a factory in Queens, New York. In the 1990s, this now-empty warehouse was converted into 200 artist studios. These artists, and others from around the world, painted aerosol art murals covering the exterior of the building. It attracted thousands of visitors each day, with the building becoming world-famous under the sobriquet "5 Pointz." The exterior walls ultimately held approximately 10,650 works of art, which were changed out under a strict schedule devised by curator and aerosol artist Jonathan Cohen.

The property owner, who had originally given permission for these murals to be constructed, later decided to demolish the building. A group of the artists sued for an injunction to prevent destruction of the site and for access to the site to photograph or otherwise remove the murals. Notwithstanding the lawsuit, on the night of November 12, 2013, the owner whitewashed the murals. They were destroyed in "an act of pure pique and revenge" in the words of the district court.

Seven years later, the New York appellate courts came down on the developer like a ton of bricks (pun intended), awarding twenty-one artists the total sum of \$6.7 million for the developer's destruction. The Court ruled that ephemeral art (such as spray-painted murals) may carry copyright protection of a special kind under the Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA). While this act is too long to summarize in this column, a relevant part states that a qualifying artist can prevent modification or destruction of artwork if such modification or destruction is harmful to the artist's reputation and receive a monetary award if the Act were violated.

The Court ruling is instructive to authors for several reasons. First, the Court firmly decided that ephemeral spray-painted art murals have automatic artistic copyright protection under U.S. copyright laws. An author might intuitively believe that their photograph of a subway

or building mural, or acquisition of a photograph of ephemeral art on the internet for use in their work, is ok under some sort of public domain theory. That intuitive belief is incorrect. Any use of ephemeral art requires either the permission of the artist or a carefully reasoned fair use analysis.

Secondly, the Court determined that no one may alter qualifying ephemeral artwork without the artist's permission. Accordingly, an author's decision to "alter" a photograph of ephemeral art in an attempt to create a fair use defense could be subject to challenge under the VARA.

Thirdly, by logical extension, copyright protection extends to other forms of ephemeral art—chalk drawings, sand sculptures, and temporary art installations of all kinds.

The bottom line: Whenever an author wishes to use a photograph of ephemeral art, follow standard copyright rules! ↗

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 43 years. She proudly serves as General Counsel to 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 daltonlegal.com. Contact her at adalton@daltonlegal.com.



The Puzzle-Piece Plotting Method:

Using What You Know to Build What You Don't



by Justin Attas

For some, the most intimidating part of writing a novel happens well before pen ever hits paper:

Planning, or plotting, as those in the business like to say. The trick is finding a plotting, or outlining, style that works for you. In my experience, one of the most effective ways to plot a novel is to Puzzle-Piece your story together from details you already know.

This article will walk you through assembling the puzzle *you already have the means to solve*, starting with Genre, then moving to Setting, Themes, Characters, and ultimately a Sequence of Events, or outline.

Genre

In the simplest terms, a genre of books is a set of parameters that put your novel in one group or another. I break them down into two categories.

1. Genres that influence theme. These genres affect the big ideas of your story and dictate the emotional aspects of it. For example, romance stories focus on themes of personal connection between one person or a few. Adventure stories illustrate growth through travel. Thrillers find characters in tense situations. Mysteries put their narrative power in the hands of unanswered questions.

2. Genres that influence setting. This category includes science fiction, based at least somewhat on real science, proven or theoretical, from off-planet colonies to biological augmentation. It also includes realistic fiction, in which the rules of reality are followed explicitly, and locations either are real places, or based on them.

Conversely, stories in the fantasy genre disconnect from the rules of reality. They do, however, still need a set of consistent rules outlined by the writer. Dystopian stories

tend to take place in environments of strict control, such as camps, cities, or even entire countries under the influence of an oppressor.

Your story probably fits well into one of the two categories above. If it fits into both, even better! It helps to have a genre combination: one that influences setting, and one that influences theme. There are two reasons for this. First, it sets your story apart from millions of others. For example, everyone has seen a fantasy full of knights and dragons. But how many people have read a fantasy with a mystery plot line, where your faithful knight is employed as a sort of old-world detective to solve a conspiracy against the crown? Much less common.

Having a combination also opens the door for the next step in the Puzzle-Piece method of plotting.

Setting

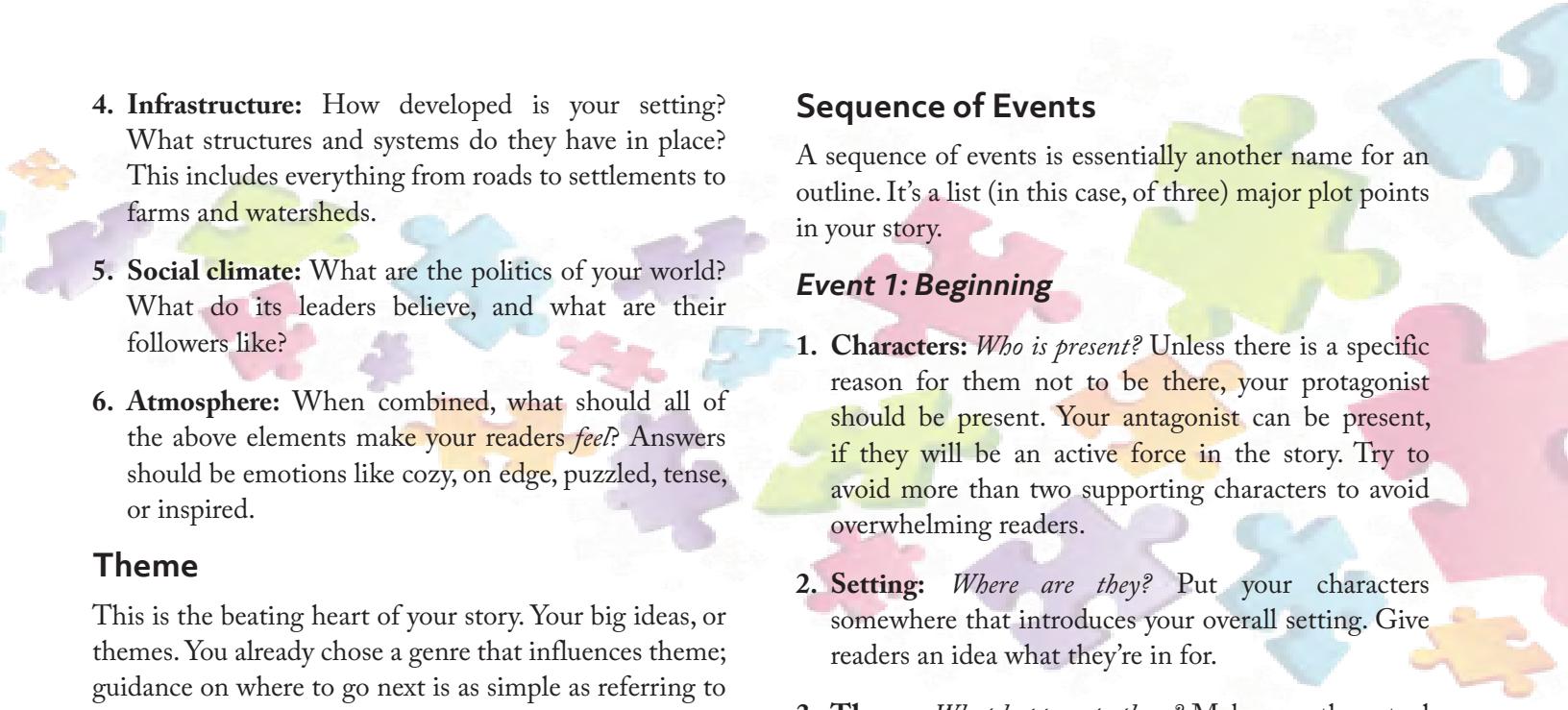
You should already have some loose guidelines. Observe the rule of your genre that influences setting. What follows is a list of questions that will help you build your setting.

1. Size and Scale: How big do you want your setting to be? No matter the answer, remember it should be able to be broken down into smaller, easily identifiable parts. Differentiating between the regions of a large country or the wings of an estate are crucial for readers to retain information.

2. History: Now that you have some basic details about your setting, explain why it is the way it is. Details of history enrich your world and will stir up ideas about the following aspects.

3. Geography: What is the natural character of your setting? Is it mountainous, flat, or a mix? Are there many bodies of water, or is it primarily dry?



- 
- 4. Infrastructure:** How developed is your setting? What structures and systems do they have in place? This includes everything from roads to settlements to farms and watersheds.
 - 5. Social climate:** What are the politics of your world? What do its leaders believe, and what are their followers like?
 - 6. Atmosphere:** When combined, what should all of the above elements make your readers *feel*? Answers should be emotions like cozy, on edge, puzzled, tense, or inspired.

Theme

This is the beating heart of your story. Your big ideas, or themes. You already chose a genre that influences theme; guidance on where to go next is as simple as referring to that.

Characters

If you've made it this far in the planning process, you have ideas for at least a few characters. It's hard to imagine a story without people in it.

Take your rough list of characters and refine them into specific roles for your plot. For the purposes of the Puzzle-Piece method, you'll need at least five characters. Don't worry, you really only need a protagonist and antagonist right now—the method itself can help you come up with three more.

- **Protagonist:** This should be the character (or characters) whose perspective best illustrates your theme.
- **Antagonist:** This character works in opposition to your protagonist(s), someone who wants to prevent the protagonist from accomplishing his goal. There should be a reason for this that's justified in the antagonist's eyes.
- **Supporting characters:** While your remaining three characters fit into this category, it does not mean they will all be the same. To ensure that they each have a unique relationship with your protagonist, choose one of three ways these characters are bonded to him or her: through friendship, a mutual goal, or obligation.

You now have everything you need for the final step of the Puzzle-Piece method.

Sequence of Events

A sequence of events is essentially another name for an outline. It's a list (in this case, of three) major plot points in your story.

Event 1: Beginning

1. **Characters:** *Who is present?* Unless there is a specific reason for them not to be there, your protagonist should be present. Your antagonist can be present, if they will be an active force in the story. Try to avoid more than two supporting characters to avoid overwhelming readers.
2. **Setting:** *Where are they?* Put your characters somewhere that introduces your overall setting. Give readers an idea what they're in for.
3. **Theme:** *What happens to them?* Make sure the actual event introduces your theme. If you picked cross-species warfare for a science fiction story, illustrate or at least allude to that conflict. If you're working on a romance with a theme of love at first sight, we should see the lovebirds share that initial zing, or meet them both in a way that shows how they could work together.

Event 2: Ending

We jump to the end next to prevent plot holes!

1. **Characters:** *Who is present?* Unless they have sacrificed themselves or left the story, your protagonist should be present. The same goes for your antagonist, if he or she is still alive, and hasn't been removed. Your most important supporting characters should also be present, at least in the thoughts of the protagonist, if not in person.
2. **Setting:** *Where are they?* Choose a dramatic location from the scope of your setting. This is the finale—it should have a grand stage. This means something different depending on your story's genre.
3. **Theme:** *What happens to them?* Your final event should complete the exploration you began. It should conclude your protagonist and antagonist's developments; it shows every character's final stance on your theme. Show how they have grown. For instance, the protagonist of a romance story dealing with a theme of forbidden love may find the courage to embrace their partner, no matter who says they cannot be together.



Event 3: Middle

Now that you know your beginning and end, you can begin to bridge the gap without fear of contradicting yourself.

- 1. Characters:** *Who is present?* Your protagonist is a must. The antagonist should also be present, as a force to drive the conflict, if not in person. Any supporting characters you want to develop should also be present.
- 2. Setting:** *Where are they?* Consider a scene location tied to whomever you want to grow the most.
- 3. Theme:** *What happens to them?* The event in the middle of your story serves as a measure of growth for your characters. Whatever situation you put them in should show how each of their stances has changed. Change is objectively good for the reader, even if not for your characters. No one wants to read a book about people making the same choices and suffering the same consequences, repeatedly, without so much as a revelation. At this middle event, characters who refuse to change should fail in some way and learn from it. This facilitates growth. For instance, if your protagonist in a story with a theme of class division refuses to bend on his stance that the rich are worth more than the impoverished, he may find his fate in the hands of those he deems lesser.

Connecting the Dots

Think of your Sequence of Events as three dots to be connected. All you have to do is write a line from one to the next. Your Sequence of Events gives you a framework of what can happen in your story. For instance, if your novel starts with your protagonist suspected of murder and your middle event sees them outrunning detectives on main street, there are only a few things that can happen between those points that will make sense. You know the detectives eventually find your protagonist, so a few scenes showing their investigation are in order. So, too, are some scenes of your protagonist doing whatever he or she needs to stay hidden. Say this story ends with your protagonist being declared innocent in court. That means that, between your middle and ending, you'll need to have your characters discover the real murderer. These three starting events lend themselves to many others just waiting to be added to your sequence.

The way you proceed is up to you. You can continue to brainstorm new events to add between your big three. You could write your way from your beginning, to your

middle, and ultimately your ending, if you're more spontaneous. Whichever way you go, the Puzzle-Piece method of plotting a novel gives you a solid framework to get started.

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by Justin Attas

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Justin Attas has written twelve novels across multiple genres including western, science fiction, supernatural, mystery, and crime thriller and is the author of the science fiction novel *Strand: The Silver Radio*. On his YouTube Channel, <http://bit.ly/roadsidewriter>, he offers free resources for writers. Website: justineattas.com.



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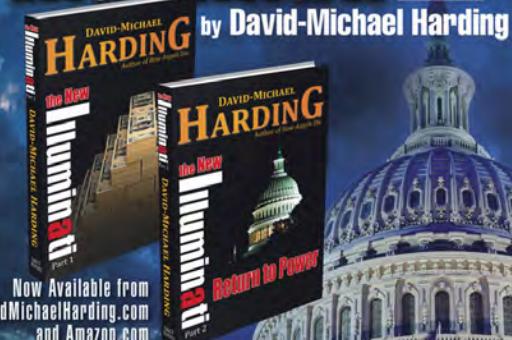
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Avoid These Common Nonfiction Writing Mistakes

by NY Book Editors

According to writer E. L. Doctorow, “There is no longer any such thing as fiction or nonfiction; there’s only narrative.” We agree.

While we tend to view fiction and nonfiction as opposites, the two are similar. Both require creativity, intentional storytelling, and an understanding of your target audience.

Your nonfiction story shouldn’t read like a dry Wikipedia entry. While you are limited to facts, you aren’t limited to boring. True events can be shared in a fresh and engaging way. Even though you’re documenting real people, you can still insert a little imagination into your storytelling without crossing into fiction territory.

In this post, we’ll discuss how to improve your nonfiction writing by sidestepping common mistakes. Let’s get started.

Mistake #1: Not Telling an Actual Story

The human mind craves stories.

Even if your book is a self-help book and a collection of personal essays, you can use stories to illustrate an idea and provide context. Whether you’re writing a self-help book, a travelogue, or some other type of literary nonfiction, your book will benefit from the addition of a story. The subgenre dictates whether you write a single, overarching story or sprinkle multiple smaller stories throughout.

Whatever story you write, be sure to include the basic five elements of storytelling:

1. Plot: The plot is a sequence of events and is a crucial part of storytelling. You must show how one event leads to another.
2. Setting: The setting describes the time and place. The setting gives your story a mood and helps your reader engage.
3. Characters: The characters are the people in your story. Characters are used to move the plot forward. In other words, the events in your story don’t happen to your characters. Your characters cause the events to happen.

4. Conflict: The conflict is the central struggle in your story. It can be an internal (mental) struggle or an external one. In a layered and nuanced story, there are both internal and external conflicts. Conflict creates tension in a story.
5. Theme: The theme is the big idea of your story. It’s what your story is about (i.e. love, forgiveness, acceptance). Every story needs to have one over-arching theme.

Mistake #2: Not Putting Effort into Storytelling

Because it’s nonfiction, you may be tempted to just share the facts in chronological order and not put any effort into storytelling. But if you really want to engage your reader (and, trust me, you do), you need to think carefully about how you tell the story.

Here are a few mistakes that will suffocate your nonfiction story:

- Using passive voice instead of active voice. (ex. Passive voice: She was hit by the paper airplane. Active voice: The paper airplane hit her.)
- Wordiness. Eliminate excess words.
- Poor word choice. The thesaurus is the writer’s best friend.
- Using the same word too often. We all have crutch words and phrases. Eliminate them to make your writing more dynamic.
- Poor readability. If your 12-year-old nephew can’t read it, your writing is too difficult to consume by the average, casual reader.
- Academic tone. Unless you’re writing a textbook (and even then), your book will benefit by using relational and conversational language.

Mistake #3: Not Knowing Where to Start Your Book

Starting at the beginning can be a mistake. Even if you’re writing a biography about a historical figure, you don’t have to start the book at birth. You can start at a formative



event in their life and then flash back to their beginnings. This is especially useful if the subject matter's early life is unremarkable or doesn't fit with your theme.

You may find that it's easier for you to write the start from its beginning and then rearrange it during the editing process. Let your gut and creativity dictate where your book should begin. But also, be careful about adding too many flashbacks, which tend to slow down the pace of a story.

Mistake #4: Not Hooking Them from the Beginning

Your nonfiction narrative needs to hook the reader. There should be a reason why they picked up your book and decided to read it. Beyond name recognition, beyond a catchy title and book cover, there must be something that draws your reader to the story itself.

So, you're the 15,139th person to write a biography about George Washington. Why should the reader invest in your book instead of the other 15,138 books out there? Your fresh perspective, the stories that you include, and the overarching theme will hook the reader and make them interested from the beginning.

Mistake #5: Not Remembering Your Audience

It's crucial that you know who will read your book. Otherwise, how will you connect with and create compelling content for that reader?

You can't. You'll be all over the place.

At the very least, you need to know the age of your average reader. This way, you can write directly to them.

But it's also a good idea to know what your reader is hoping to gain by reading your nonfiction book. Do they want to be inspired? Do they want to know how to reach a goal? Do they want to learn something new? What do they already know about the subject?

Answering these questions will help you figure out who's reading and why.

Mistake #6: Giving the Reader Too Much Information (TMI)

TMI is a classic nonfiction writing mistake. We also see this in fiction, too, especially in the sci-fi subgenre.

TMI is giving too much information about a subject that the reader doesn't care about. Your casual reader doesn't care about the inner workings of carburetors if your subject matter is about Nikola Tesla. The only reason the reader

would care is if those facts about carburetors are directly tied to a pivotal moment in Tesla's life.

While it may be interesting to you, be careful that all of your information is used to enlighten the reader and move the story forward at the same time.

Mistake #7: Not Finding the Emotional Element

Every book needs an emotional tug to pull the reader in and keep them invested. This is known as raising the stakes. Raising the stakes introduces much-needed suspense into your narrative and makes the reader ask, "What's going to happen next? How will this problem be resolved?"

If the reader doesn't ask those questions, they may not pick up your book again. They may not even turn the page.

First of all, you need to define the stakes. In other words, give the reader something that they want. For a nonfiction book, the reader may want something for the protagonist or they may want something from themselves (which is often the case in a self-help book). You can raise the stakes by showing them the end goal for the protagonist or themselves but then introducing the conflict that will prevent them from reaching that goal.

Two ways to raise the stakes in your nonfiction story are:

1. Implement a time limit or deadline to complete a goal and avoid doom.
2. Describe what will happen if the protagonist/reader doesn't reach their goal.

If you don't raise the stakes, you have a cutesy story but not a gripping, edge-of-the-seat narrative. You want your reader to be emotionally invested in what happens next, whether that's because they're living vicariously through the protagonist or trying to get clarification on a personal struggle.

Final Thoughts

Writing a nonfiction book gives you a platform to inspire, educate, and motivate others. But if you're not careful, you could make a common writing mistake with your nonfiction narrative. Follow the above tips to improve your writing and pen a captivating nonfiction story.

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Creative Ideas for a Successful Pre-Order Campaign

by Penny Sansevieri

As you create your book marketing plan, you may be thinking about doing a pre-order as a way of getting some early sales. But it takes more than just making your book available for a pre-order to be successful. But when done right, pre-orders can be a great way to engage your existing fans and bring in new ones.

What are some effective strategies that can help create buzz and lead to a lucrative pre-order? I've outlined some of my favorite ideas below to jumpstart your pre-order marketing.

You'll notice that a lot of these strategies require a proof of purchase. The benefit of this is that not only do you verify who is really buying, but it also helps build your mailing or newsletter list which is author marketing gold.

Let's dive in!

Update Your Back Matter

Effective author marketing requires you to stay current. That means keeping your already published titles updated as well.

In prep for a new release, you'll want to update the e-book files for any of your already published titles in the same genre. Why? To ensure they're directing people to the new book with a link to the product page.

You should already have your current titles in regular marketing rotations, so the effort you're already putting in should benefit your upcoming book as well, right?

Plan Special Pre-Order Pricing to Pull in More Buyers

Lots of authors ask me how to market a book and still make money on each sale. And that is literally one of the toughest things to answer because of all the factors involved. But the reality is, everyone loves a deal. One of the most effective ways to sell more books during a pre-order promotion is to discount the book. I know it; just trust me. The key is constantly reminding people through all your other efforts that the book goes back to full price on the release date!

Offer Cool Swag Packs

People love free stuff! If you want to sell more books, there's a good chance you'll see a better return if you get a little more generous with your brand swag.

Swag is a good author marketing investment in general. It doesn't have to be super expensive with some smart planning. Once you have it on hand, you'll be amazed at how many ways you come up with to use it, which will enhance your marketing efforts on multiple levels.

How to Market Your Book by Offering Cool Digital Swag

If you don't have the budget to mail out physical swag, you can do something fun with digital material, too. Don't stress.

Poster-quality art downloads, excerpts, deleted scenes, etc. There are so many options and this is a great way to strengthen your brand as well.

Create a Teaser Excerpt to Build Excitement

A great way to build the excitement for an upcoming release is by sharing an excerpt. And don't be stingy. If you're asking people to buy the book on pre-order, then give them the first few chapters to really get them excited!

Don't Waste Anything and Collect Some Deleted Scenes

This is more for authors who write series, or write in a very defined genre, but readers love insider info. Deleted scenes from previous titles can be fun ways to reward established fans for pre-ordering. The parts that you cut end up living a new life and supporting your brand loyalty!

Do a Cover Reveal to Get People Excited

Another great way to milk a pre-order campaign and potentially sell more books is with a cover reveal. Covers can make or break a book. They also create such a strong psychological connection to your brand.

Discount and Cross-Promote with Other Titles

Another question I get asked a lot is how to market your book without leaving your previous titles in the dust. My



response is always along the lines of, if you really want to ramp up to sell more books during a pre-order campaign, consider discounting other titles.

You've already updated the back matter of your previous titles to announce the new release, so limited-time discount promotions will help you get those books in more hands to spread the word.

Update Your Social Images

When you truly get down to business for how to market your book, you'll realize images can make or break you. Be sure you're updating your website and social media headers to represent the new book, promote the cover, the pre-order dates, and especially pre-order pricing.

Set Up a Countdown to Build Last Minute Buzz

This is a super simple strategy that doubles as a social media marketing strategy. Plan out (schedule) posts that push the pre-order and remind people when the pre-order ends. This strategy is particularly effective for selling more books when combined with a special pre-order discount price.

Run a Branded Contest

Sometimes selling more books isn't about selling more books. Let me explain. Sometimes when you consider how to market your book you have to keep your current fans front and center. Show your followers that you truly appreciate their loyalty, no strings attached, by giving them something just because. But this doesn't mean you can't still get some immediate benefits.

You can ask people to follow you on social and share a post of your book release announcement. There are lots of ways to benefit from reader engagement aside from just asking people to buy the book directly.

How to Market Your Book to Get Early Reviews

Asking people to engage with you in some way to be eligible to win something is a great way to generate early reviews too.

Ask people to do something for you, share a post, sign up for your newsletter, follow your blog, etc. Then, start handing out advance copies of the book with the understanding that you really want people to get on Amazon and review as soon as the book is officially released.

A personalized note goes a long way to communicate the importance of reviewing, I assure you.

Run a BOGO Offer

I love running BOGO (Buy One, Get One or Buy One, Give One) offers because it builds exposure.

I prefer Buy One, Give One, because when you think about how to market your book you always need to be thinking about drawing in new potential fans. So I ask people to pre-order my book, send me the receipt, and a name and email address of friend or colleague I can gift a digital copy to.

People love to share books they enjoy, and you can be a part of that while also getting introduced to new potential fans and followers.

I've even invited people to include a short note they'd want me to include, to take the personalization up a notch when I'm gifting.

Create a Video or Ten

Video is becoming increasingly important for social media exposure, in regards to generating more interest and more engagement.

Make an official announcement about the pre-order. Do videos to announce discounts or to describe a giveaway or swag offer. There's really no reason you can't do a video to accompany any of these strategies. Plus, with proper planning, you can record all these in one afternoon and release them as appropriate.

Get camera-ready and get to work!

The Takeaway

The key to a successful pre-order campaign is preparation. By choosing the strategies that will work best for your book ahead of time, you can create a plan and prepare what you'll need to execute it in advance. This really helps to keep your author marketing stress-free.

But it can be a lot of work so to stay organized, I recommend downloading my free monthly book marketing planner here.

With creative ideas and proper planning, you'll be well on your way to a successful pre-order that will lead to great exposure, an expanded fan base, and more book sales. ☺

Penny C. Sansevieri, Founder and CEO of Author Marketing Experts, Inc. is a best-selling author and internationally recognized book marketing and media relations expert. She is an adjunct professor teaching self-publishing for NYU. She was named one of the top influencers of 2019 by *New York Metropolitan Magazine*. Visit amarkeetingexpert.com.





An Excerpt from *Florida Man* by J.C. Bruce

I wanted to get to Florida in the worst way, so I arrived in a coffin.

I wasn't dead. Not yet. But I knew death was lying in wait, stalking me, ready to pounce. Death was lurking in the shadows outside the beams of the hearse's headlights as if the Grim Reaper himself were in pursuit.

Or is it herself? Do we really know the Grim Reaper's gender? Maybe Grimmy is an it. Whatever, my plan was to outrace her, him, it for as long as I could.

Most souls are blissfully unaware of the moment their mortal coils will unwind, a comforting ignorance allowing us to pursue daily life with a kind of mad denial of the inevitable. But I had been warned my time was nearly up. I would soon kick the bucket, buy the farm, cash in my chips.

A palm reader in New Orleans, my previous stop, told me so. And here I was in a pine box.

Well, that's a tad euphemistic. It was, actually, a metal casket made of chromium stainless steel with a continuously welded bottom, chemically treated to resist rust and corrosion and featuring a special watertight seal guaranteeing the deceased would remain nice and dry even if water tables rose with climate change.

And why was I in a hearse if I had yet to reach my expire-by date? Because hitchhikers can't be choosers.

The sun was dipping below the horizon when my engine died. One instant, I was barreling along Interstate 10, top down, buffeted by the cool breeze of twilight. The next instant, the engine simply stopped turning over—a fatal case of internal non-combustion.

Fortunately, I was cruising in the outside lane and was able to glide off the roadway onto the grass before some passing semi steamrolled me.

I was west of the Alabama-Florida state line and traffic was brisk. I positioned myself at the edge of the highway and stuck my thumb out, facing an onslaught of hurtling sedans, SUVs, pickups, eighteen-wheelers, a growling peloton of Harleys, and, in short order, a black and chrome meat wagon.

The corpse-mobile sported a vanity plate reading DIRT NAP. I walked over, and a teenager who barely looked old enough to drive lowered his window. I leaned down.

"Dirt nap? Really?"

He laughed. "Yup, my daddy, he got a funny sense a humor. We own the funeral home back in Bay Minette." That was nineteen words and about forty syllables.

"Bay Minnow?"

"Minette. It's right on the Styx River."

I felt a chill tingle my spine and my heart skipped a beat. "Styx?"

"Yup. See that ahead there?"

I turned around and the hearse's headlights painted a bridge over a small stream.

"That's the Styx River," he said. "Flows all the way back to Bay Minette."

"So, we're about to cross the River Styx? In a hearse?"

"Yup," the kid drawled. "Just like in that Greek mythology. I've studied up on that since I plan to take over from Daddy when it's time for him to cross. We lay 'em out in the parlor on the west bank of the river and take 'em over to the cemetery on the other. We got 'em crossin' over the River Styx two, three times a week."

The kid said he had a coffin to deliver in Pensacola. "Funeral home's workin' a double, a murder-suicide, and they need a matching casket."

He directed me to the rear of the hearse. "We ain't got far to go, and there's no room up front."

"Uh, you saying you want me to sit in the coffin?"

"Sure. I take naps in 'em all the time. Best seat in the hearse."

Was I in the coffin destined for the murder victim? Or the suicide? I didn't ask.

I sniffed the air. It smelled of the silk lining of the coffin, of metal, of upholstery, and something else, but I couldn't quite place it. Maybe a little embalming fluid? Maybe death?

Then the kid hit the gas and the carsophagus shot onto the highway. The G-force from the acceleration rocked me backward into the coffin, and as the hearse fishtailed onto the interstate the lid slammed down. ☀

J.C. Bruce is an author and journalist living in Naples, Florida.



Change

by Tamatha Cain

There never is a parking space at Publix,
the fancy little one, in Riverside?
Like stirred-up soup in a steamy bowl
I drive around and around,
Tapping the wheel and searching, searching
Checking the mirror for stress lines
between my eyebrows,
And wondering about the empty trellis
stuck on the storefront
There is no vine in sight!
Ticking off the mental list
dinner supplies and maybe some dessert,
I've been good today
The familiar aisles are waiting
With open arms, ready to welcome me back,
And I really shouldn't shop when I'm hungry

Walking to the door,
Smug as hell with my great parking spot
and purse full of potential,
I head toward the sliding doors,
Arms swinging and high heels clicking on brick.
And I am off and ready and on a mission and
She steps in front of me and bends down,
Unaware, unconcerned with my existence.
A dull ashen nest of hair
And her cheeks burned black,
Her eyes faraway and her hands damaged
She has spotted something good,
Some treasure on the ground
and she will have it, just in case
A fat, flat nickel

Her destiny in my path
I always stop and pick up pennies,
No matter what, or where,
Pop's favorite song was Pennies from Heaven,
and they might be a sign
Or a message from him
I value change
I am not above that, not me
Wasn't there a coin on the floor
When I carried warm, fresh laundry through the kitchen
yesterday
past the chili and cornbread ready on the stove?

I meant to pick it up, slip it in the coin can,
and oh! I said I'd come back later
I think I did, but now I can't remember
The store and the aisles, the freezer section, the bakery,
wait just beyond those doors,
Holding everything a woman may need.

Tamatha Cain is in Jacksonville, Florida.



“No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader.
No surprise in the writer, no surprise in the reader.”

Robert Frost



The Culling Experiment by William Clapper

Mikka couldn't hide her enthusiasm. Her eyes danced. Her voice, muffled by a surgical mask, bubbled. Her bracelets migrated along her forearm adding to the intricate patterns of body art.

"We passed another milestone." She handed a blue binder to her boss and executed three more hops of a happy dance. "Numbers are spiking. We're over 10,000 reported cases."

Hans Belkin mumbled a thank you and scanned the report. Indeed, the numbers were up from yesterday, and coverage was creeping into every state.

Mikka raised her arms overhead, pirouetted, and drew a smattering of applause from the white coated staffers at their workstations.

"Okay, people." Belkin raised his voice. "Good news for sure. But we're far from finished. We still have work to do, so let's get to it."

Mikka sidled up to the grey-haired virologist. "You look concerned, dear doctor." She playfully hip bumped him. "Something doesn't look right? The numbers off?"

"No. The numbers don't lie. All we have is numbers." Belkin snorted. "They can make numbers say whatever they want. The numbers are going up, but at what cost? Where does it end?"

Mikka shrugged. "We've accomplished what they told us to do. We've done our job. Now they've got to live with it." She skipped back to her computer, humming a melody behind her surgical mask.

Belkin flipped through the pages. He knew the reported numbers ballooned each day because more tests were performed, and more results came out positive. To the doctor, the number of cases, while large, was but a fraction of the actual cases that were not reported and never would be.

A few pages further on, he found the heart of the report—the number of verified deaths. A few hundred, but enough to cause panic in much of the world. Governments scrambled to assure the public that the numbers showed a minuscule death rate. But to maintain a semblance of calm and credibility, action was needed. Schools closed, sporting events played out to empty arenas, performances canceled, travel restricted.

Belkin removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes. He woke to a headache that continued to pound behind both eyes. He made his rounds of the lab, chatting with staff and getting updates on various parts of the project.

Ending his tour at Mikka's station, he leaned in and rested his elbows on the worktable. "I'm done for the day. This headache won't go away." He straightened and pressed both palms on the sides of his head. "And I'm feeling a little congested. It's so dry in here."

Mikka peered over the top of her glasses. "Allergies. Go home, drink fluids, and get some rest. You'll feel better in the morning, old man. We've got this for the rest of the day."

"Where did you get that sage medical advice? Facebook?"

"Nah. Facebook is full of conspiracy theories. I heard it on television. Government says that's what we should do. Get tested, if symptoms worsen. Great advice, huh? They're all jerks."

"What kind of theories?"

"You know. This all started in China when people ate bats. The virus can go through clothes and even skin. Don't shake hands. Face masks won't work. Stay home." She pulled at her mask revealing a thick coat of scarlet on her lips. "My theory is the virus hates red and won't pass my mouth."

Belkin forced a chuckle, even though it furthered the scratchiness of his throat. "That's a good one, Mikka. Protection from lipstick. See you tomorrow."

"Hope so," she said, fixated on her screen.

He sneezed into his elbow halfway down the corridor leading to the double security doors. He expected the virus to start mutating but numbers weren't going down. Another month and we'll see a leveling off.

No matter what happens as the virus runs its course, he and his team fulfilled their mission. No fatalities among children or young adults. Nearly all deaths occurred in the over 60, white male demographic.

Belkin didn't bother to shield a cough with his free hand. He realized his achievement performed too well. The culling virus was working as designed. ↗

William Clapper finds inspiration for his short stories from his home in Bradenton, Florida.



About Lloyd

by Dianna Graveman

“So I tell Dale, I say, ‘How come we can’t bring Lloyd in the house?’ And he says, ‘After what he done, you want I should let him in back in here?’”

Carla’s hairdresser, Phyllis, is holding a conversation with herself as she snips away at the split ends. All that is expected of Carla is an “uh-huh” now and then to show she’s listening.

“So we just keep him in the garage,” says Phyllis.

“Uh-huh,” Carla says as she flips a page in her *Good Housekeeping*. Lloyd must be Phyllis’s dog. Or maybe her cat. Although a dog is more likely to have done something so they can’t let him in the house.

“So anyways,” continues Phyllis, “I just can’t stand to see poor Lloyd sitting out there, day after day, night after night—”

“Uh, not so much off the front,” interrupts Carla. Phyllis tends to get carried away with the scissors when she’s excited about her topic.

“Well! I should think I know how to cut hair by now,” huffs Phyllis.

Carla ignores the outburst. Phyllis is the best after all, even if she does get her feelings hurt too easily. “So go on about Lloyd,” she says.

This has unruffled Phyllis’s feathers. “As I was saying, I just can’t stand to see poor Lloyd out there all alone. It’s not like he committed murder or anything.”

Carla agrees premeditated homicide would definitely be difficult for most dogs. “So what did he do that was so bad?”

“Well.” Phyllis lowers her voice. “He made more than a few passes at me, for one.”

Carla looks up from her magazine, suddenly interested. “Just exactly who is this Lloyd?”

“My brother-in-law!” exclaims Phyllis. “Didn’t I mention that part?”

Carla is pretty sure she would have remembered that. “And you keep your brother-in-law in the garage? Doesn’t he have anyplace else to go?”

“Nah. We’re his only relatives,” Phyllis says, pulling a comb from the blue liquid on her vanity. “But it’s okay. We don’t mind keeping him.”

“Doesn’t your husband—Dale—worry Lloyd might make a pass at you again?”

Phyllis snorts. “He ain’t in no shape for that, hon. Not even ol’ Lloyd could pull that off.”

Carla tosses the magazine aside. It’s no use. “So what about in the winter? Doesn’t it get too cold out in the garage for Lloyd?”

“Oh, we let him sit in the Corvette,” says Phyllis matter-of-factly, clipping more of Carla’s hair. “Lloyd always did love that car. So now we just keep him in the front seat. I think it’s the least we can do, bein’ we’re his only living relatives and all. But Dale says, ‘Lloyd’s gettin’ off easy after makin’ a pass at my wife. We should have just thrown him out with the trash.’”

“So do you serve him his meals out there?” asks Carla.

“Oh, hon.” Phyllis giggles. “He don’t eat much these days.”

“What in the heck’s wrong with him, then?”

“Well, he’s dead! Didn’t I mention that part?”

“What?” Carla shakes her head. *You think you know somebody.*

“Yeah,” says Phyllis. “We got his ashes out there in a little box. Sitting right in the front seat of that Corvette he always loved, seein’ as Dale won’t let me bring him in the house and all.”

“Oh. Well then. How did he die?”

“Well,” says Phyllis, still cutting. “That’s the strange part. I come home from work one day, and there’s Lloyd, dead as a doornail, right on the kitchen floor. Ambulance is on the way, and Dale says, ‘Damnedest thing happened. Lloyd just up and slipped on the wet tile and hit his head.’ Hit it real hard too. Broke the tile all to hell.”

“Was there an investigation?” Carla asks.

“Oh, no, hon. Mighta been under different circumstances. But see, Dale’s friend, Frank—he works down at the coroner’s—he says we been through enough that night. So everybody just let things be.”

“Helps to have friends in high places, I guess,” says Carla. “Uh, that’s enough off the back there. I don’t want it too short.”

“Well! I should think I know how to cut hair by now,” huffs Phyllis. ☺

Dianna Graveman is a freelance writer and editor in Palm Harbor, Florida.



1 The Old Truck by Philip L. Levin

On the day we missionaries arrived at the Mozambique compound, each of the dozen teenage boys stood in turn, telling of their life ambitions. One wanted to be a doctor. One wanted to be a priest. Most of them wanted to be mechanics. They practiced their skills on a twenty-year-old pickup, constantly taking it apart, piece by piece, and putting it back together.

I watched them take the engine out, strip it down, grease it up, and reassemble it. They scattered wheels and brake pads and widgets and whatnots across the soccer field, cleaned them, and stuffed everything back into the rattletrap. They'd start it up, race the engine a bit, then turn it off and start the deconstruction all over.

That pickup drove us all through the Maputo slums, and sometimes high into the mountains, where we set up our clinics at small schools or churches. The natives came quietly and left smiling. After the sun set, we'd push the truck to get it started, weave around the many road potholes, and arrive exhausted back in the compound.

At the end of our two-week mission we missionaries had a two-day decompression in South Africa's famous Kruger National Park. We squeezed into the mission's van and that old green truck, stuffed like sardines as we oohed and awed at the watchful lion, the sleek leopard, the graceful gazelles, and the enormous elephants. My spot was in the front seat middle. Actually, there was no middle seat. The truck sported bucket seats, so I straddled the axle hump, one buttock on each seat edge, the truck driver shifting the gears between my legs.

Rolling along at sixty kilometers per hour, the truck began shaking, acting like it had a flat front left tire. We streamed out of the truck to stretch our legs and inspect the damage. To our dismay, the tire wasn't flat. Instead, the boys had failed to tighten the lug nuts adequately. The wheel had come off, hanging onto the axle by one last lonely nut. If that wheel had come loose the truck might have flipped, and I would have been squashed.

As we stood gaping, the wildlife rangers pulled up and suggested we get back in the truck.

"Why is that?" we asked.

"Because the lionesses and leopards love to feast on tourists standing outside their vehicles. We've lost three so far this year."

If there was an Olympic event for how quickly people can pile into a disabled truck, our team would have won the gold medal.

With armed guards at the ready, the rangers reattached the tire, gave the truck the necessary push to get started, and we headed back to our camp. The boys were glad to see us. They were eager to work on the truck. 

Dr. Philip Levin has published 27 books and over 300 articles, poems, and stories.



"Fiction is the truth inside the lie."

Stephen King



Q An Unusual Pet

by Angie M. Mayo

I heard the tapping noise the first night in our new house. It had a rhythm to it: tap, tap... tap, tap.

I listened while I lay in an unfamiliar, stark bedroom. I reached for my sleeping companions, but they were not beside me in the bed—my dolls were not unpacked yet. I was five years old, and I felt lonely. Because of my father's job, we had moved from Puerto Rico to Venezuela

The rhythmic sound persisted, but eventually, I fell asleep. By morning, the noise was gone. I mentioned nothing about it to my parents.

The second night, after the house was dark and still, the same noise started again, and it sounded close. Curiosity forced me to leave the safety of my bed. Opening my bedroom door, I called, "Mami, are you there?" No response. Only my father's thunderous snoring resonated from my parents' room at the end of the hall.

I followed the tap-tap noise, which led me to the bathroom next to my room. The light from the street lamppost shone through the small window and allowed me to see the metal floor drain cap moving. It was being pushed up at a regular beat. Something was trying to get out. I got closer. A pair of glossy eyes fixed on me. They reminded me of those of the green iguanas in Puerto Rico. I grew up with them; they roamed in our backyard. Nothing to fear. With a sigh of relief, I returned to my bed and made plans for my newfound pet.

With no friends in my new neighborhood, the prospect of having a pet comforted me. My main concern: I had to feed it. Since iguanas love bananas, I planned to smuggle one from the kitchen in the morning and stash it in my room until nighttime. I thought it best not to tell my mom about my recent friend. My mother didn't appreciate animals in the house.

The third night, my reptile friend returned. Every time the drain cap lifted, I threw a little piece of banana down the crack. This nightly adventure repeated itself for more than a week.

Then, one evening, my parents went out to attend a party. They would not be back until the early hours of the morning. They left Toribia, our cook, to babysit me. Toribia, a native woman of formidable size, scared

me. She had taken charge of our house and not even my mother would dare stand in her way.

When I heard the drain cap tapping that night, I tiptoed out of my bedroom, banana in hand. As I threw banana pieces down the pipe, Toribia stormed into the bathroom. "What are you doing out of bed and what are you doing with that banana?"

Caught red-handed, I confessed.

"A pet? You have a pet who lives in the drain? You're in a lot of trouble, little girl. Out, right now." Saying that, she scooped me up with her colossal arms. Even in the semi-darkness of the bathroom, I could see Toribia's face glowing with anger.

Next, like a commando on a mission, she grabbed a chair and placed one of the legs on top of the drain cap to hold it down. "We're safe now," she proclaimed with satisfaction.

Safe? Safe from what? I wondered as I dozed off to sleep. But I was sure my parents were going to hear about this.

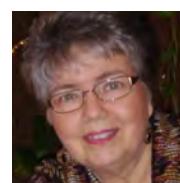
The following morning, a man was crouched in my bathroom working on the floor. I watched with dread as he secured the cap with additional screws.

My mother took me to the living room. She sat in the oversized armchair, put me on her lap and explained. "Darling, we're now in Venezuela, a country with many kinds of snakes. Sometimes the snakes get inside the pipes under the floor. The one in your bathroom is very dangerous. Stay away from it. It's a *mapanare*, and it likes to come out at night to eat. But it doesn't eat bananas."

"So, it can't be my pet, Mami?" Tears rolled down my cheeks.

"We'll buy you a puppy. How's that?" ↗

Angie Mayo, a retired pharmacist, is a member of the Freedom Writers Group.



My Fair Turkey

by William Opperman

In the fall of 1974, in what would prove to be my final semester of college, I was living alone off campus. The approach of Thanksgiving filled me with self-pity since I was not going to be able to be with my family. I had, however, arranged with my friend Jeff to share Thanksgiving dinner with him and his sister, Jerri, whom I'd met briefly about five years before.

Jeff was going to pick me up at noon and drive me over to his sister's house, but he didn't show up. I didn't have a phone at the time, and of course, cellular technology was decades away. I couldn't bike over to his sister's house, because I didn't know where she lived. I didn't dare leave the apartment to call Jeff from a pay phone at the gas station around the corner, because that would certainly be the time he'd show up. And I didn't know Jerri's number.

At about 1:30, hungry and fearful that every restaurant would close early for the holiday, I biked to the outskirts of town and found a chain eatery that was still open. In company with other quiet, solitary diners, I ate one of the least remarkable Thanksgiving dinners of my life, with perfectly formed slices of turkey breast laid over pallid mashed potatoes and an indifferent cornbread stuffing and covered by an absolutely smooth, bland gravy. There was a spherical plop of cranberry sauce on the side.

Feeling splendidly sorry for myself and furious with Jeff, I biked back home and began to study. At about 4:00, I heard someone running up the stairs to my door and then a lively knock. It was Jeff, irritatingly unrepentant—joyous, even.

"Come on," he drawled. "We gotta go!"

"What's going on? Where have you been? You said noon!"

"Nope, never mind all that. We gotta get going! We're delivering puppies!"

Jerri had long been a fancier of golden retrievers, and her lovely dog, Happy, had chosen Thanksgiving Day to produce her brood.

So we spent the late afternoon that day helping Happy, who was the friendliest and most wonderful dog in the world, but not strong on the motherly-instinct

scale. She was much too pleased to see me, a total stranger, and Jeff, clearly her favorite person in the whole world, to pay much attention to those silly things that popped out from time to time. Bless her heart, she was too slow to lick off the caul, and the puppies were breathing in too much fluid. All were having difficulty breathing. One had already drowned.

Thank goodness, Jerri knew what to do. While Happy smiled her unquestioning approval, Jeff and I breathlessly followed Jerri's instructions.

"All right. We've got to get the liquid out of the tubes, or they'll drown, and the only way we can do that is with centrifugal force. You've got to hold the puppy firmly enough so that you don't drop it, but not so firmly that you injure it. You're going to hold it up over your head and then fling your arms downward as if you were trying to break a coconut on the sidewalk. Got it? That should force the fluid out of the nose."

"Here. Take a dish towel and put it over the puppy. Now pick it up from the sides, body between the palms, like this, head between the fingers. That's right. OK? Secure? Not too tightly! All right, remember, you can't let go, and of course, you can't hurt the puppy."

It was unbelievably intense.

And it worked. We had to perform this savage but delicate procedure on all the rest of the puppies, but we only lost the one.

When Happy was finally ready to offer Thanksgiving dinner to her new family, Jerri and Jeff, who had not had their turkey, after all, decided that we humans needed something to eat as well. I was invited to stay, and we ordered delivery pizza and settled back to watch *My Fair Lady* on television.

I'd seen the movie before, and my dinner wasn't much tastier than my lunch, but it was still my favorite Thanksgiving ever. ☺

William Opperman delights in movies, operas, and the Oxford comma.



Mushroom Hunt

by "Doc" Sanborn

I'd wanted to hunt mushrooms ever since my next-door neighbor and best friend, Jake, treated me to a mushroom soup he'd made following a recent foraging expedition. Jake, a biologist by training, taught at a nearby college and frequently led trips focused on the local flora and fauna. Mycology was one of his passions. He'd invited me to join him a few times, and I'd been tempted. I'd grown up in the city and was used to walking on concrete, not earth, smelling gas fumes, not fresh air. However, I'd always wondered what it was like to be in the wild. There were always reasons to demur. But his soup, rich and hearty, with chunks of mushrooms he identified as chanterelle, morel, and maitake, and the fact that he'd found them himself, like a Davy Crockett or Natty Bumppo, impressed me. I wanted to go on his next field trip.

Well, I thought, here I am, in the wild, as I slapped at another mosquito. Our group of ten spread out at thirty-foot intervals and meandered along the banks of a wide river. The terrain was corrugated into deep gullies five to fifteen feet deep, carved by feeder streams over the centuries. Walking along the bottom of one of these gullies, I jumped over one such stream, misjudged the distance, and both feet splashed in, knee-deep in the icy water.

I made my way to a moss-covered boulder and sat down. Immediately, my rear end became soaked. It had briefly rained during the night and the moss, like a giant sponge, retained the water. Now my feet and my butt were wet.

A group member on the gully's lip shouted down to me, "Hey, buddy, you doing okay down there?"

"Yeah. Just got my feet wet. You go ahead, I'll catch up."

He moved on and out of sight. I found a dry spot to sit and take off my Nikes and socks. I wrung out my socks, rendering them damp rather than soggy, emptied my shoes, and rebooted. I considered wringing out my trousers and underwear, but modesty and thoughts of mosquito bites in tender regions intervened. I tried to scramble up the side, but it was steeper than I thought.

Halfway up, my feet slipped and I slid backwards. I grabbed at a bush and yelped in pain. I'd grabbed a stinging nettle plant. Within minutes my hand became numb with pins and needles.

"Screw it," I muttered. "I'll walk the bottom after all." I did so—until the stream took an abrupt dog leg to the left. Lying diagonally across the stream, a large hemlock blocked further passage. Now I had to climb out of the gully.

It took a while, but I finally made it to the top. I stood there—still wet, dirty, mosquito-bitten, with my hand numb and stinging with embedded microscopic needles—and looked around. No one was in sight. Which way should I go? I had no idea and no sense of direction.

I shouted, "Jake! Jake! Anybody?"

I yelled several more times, each time increasing the volume. It didn't take long for my throat to hurt and my voice get scratchy. I stopped and reassessed my situation. I was lost. I saw little point in leaving my location—I'd only get more lost. Sooner or later Jake would realize I wasn't in the group and start a search. They'd retrace their steps and I'd be found—and that would be that, except for my embarrassment.

I sat down and leaned against the trunk of an old, half-dead crab apple tree, and waited to be found. The mid-May sun felt good on my face. I awakened to the sound of voices shouting, "Hello! Hello!"

I stood up, waved my arms, and hollered, "Over here!"

Jake and the group came up and clustered about. Jake looked at me, then around me. His eyes widened and a grin split his face. "You son of a gun, you," he said. "Are you going to share?"

I looked in the direction he indicated, and on the other side of the tree I saw a patch of golden-brown morels, several the size of my fist. ☺

"Doc" Sanborn is a member of the Florida Writers Association-Manatee.





No Answer

by Jess Chua

“It's so bright!” my younger sister exclaimed. She pointed to the planet Venus, which was high in the night sky. “Will it always be there?”

“Sure it will,” I answered, straining as I thought the planet had flickered for a split second.

Suddenly it disappeared altogether.

“Could that happen to Earth?”

I couldn't answer her. ☀

Jess Chua is a writer and editor who loves exploring the human psyche.



13.1

by Sharon Sigler Allen

I've got some medals hanging in the abyss of what I call my closet. The cheap metal kind tied with brightly neon colored ribbons. Tacky looking things. I'm talking seriously tacky here. And truth be told, there are several of them. Don't judge me. I've earned those trinkets. But there they are, collecting dust, ignored.

I'll throw them away when I move, I tell myself. But, I won't. I just can't. They are a reminder, a source of strength, for when I go into those dark spaces of myself. You know that place. You are writers after all. The spaces filled with doubt, insecurity, stress, and thoughts of what the hell was I thinking? I can always look at those medals with the 13.1 etched on the front and I am transported back to the early morning of race day where the sun is barely peeking out over the office buildings of downtown, casting long shadows on the streets. The excited buzz in the air is palatable, the mass of people pressed tight at

the starting line, the feel of my feet as they slap hard the uneven bricks of downtown Orlando, reaching the nine-and-a-half mile mark where I'm convinced that I am surely going to die, which is juxtaposed by the sheer exhilaration of crossing the finish line. Wearing that cheap looking medal as I make my way across the field, which is encompassed by exhibitors peddling their wares and services, I walk taller, proud. Reaching the concessions table, I hand over my drink coupons, inhaling the first beer. The second is cherished.

So, those tacky medals I will leave to my children to do with whatever they wish. But for now, they are in my closet collecting dust, ignored. But I know that they are there as proof. A tribute to endurance. A reminder. If I can do that, then surely I can write a sentence, a paragraph, a page, a story. ☀

Sharon Sigler Allen lives in Winter Park, Florida.



Untitled

by Rodney Romig

There are so many kinds of beauty in the world and so few who appreciate the kind we have in the Sandhills of Nebraska. It's a beauty born of the blood and bones of people who put a furrow in the dust hoping to put a bale in the barn.

People out here didn't know being creative was something special any more than a cow knows it's special to give milk to her calves. They patch and weld and solder and use more chicken wire on that old horse trailer than they do on the chicken coop. And sometimes it rains and sometimes it's good and sometimes you get lucky and don't lose but two fingers when the damn clutch popped at the wrong time. And sometimes you look at your dusty neighbor and the only way you find strength is to know

that if he can make it, so can you. So you wake up and get up one more day. And that's a beautiful thing to see. In the fence that is new-mended. In the backhoe digging a root cellar. In a hammer held high ready to bang down on a crankcase. In the tomatoes, ripe on the vine, just outside the kitchen window. In the wave hello from every pickup you pass. It's there. All you have to do is look for it. ✝

Rodney Romig has published nine Dr. Dan Trix mystery novels and an FWA winner.



A Doll House

by Richard Conrath

An excerpt from *Blood Moon Rising*. 2019 RPLA Silver medal winner for unpublished mystery or crime.

It has been raining for five straight days now and the river is swollen, threatening to spill over the banks and inundate this small southern Ohio city. It's late autumn and this is what happens every fall. On the river. Rain, rising tides, flooded homes, and people stranded on rooftops watching cars and animals floating down the river. People ask why don't they just move? The answer is because this is their home.

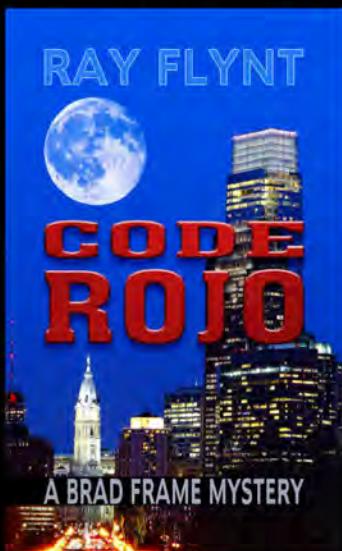
It's late, 3:00 a.m., and the waters of the Ohio are racing toward the Mississippi, the blood moon riding low in the sky now, watching the whole scene like a curious silver eye, casting its light on the waters and illuminating the flotsam that is beginning to jam the river and force it onto the shore. The people who were standing on its banks earlier in the evening have gone to sleep, hoping for a better day tomorrow, which means, of course, that the rain will stop.

What they aren't seeing now is a body, or should I say, parts of a body, washed against a pile of tree branches, bouncing like a rubber doll, one arm flopping as the waves from the torrent strike it. The other arm missing. Skin peeled back on the trunk. Her face, or what's left of it, is swollen and grotesque, the soft light of the moon unable to alter the fact that her body is decaying, the night breeze unable to hide the stench of rotting flesh. Her clothes are torn from the punishing waters, and her eyes, only holes now, stare into the night sky, as if anxious to release the secret of what had happened. ✝

Richard Conrath is the author of two novels:
Cooper's Moon and *Blood Moon Rising*.



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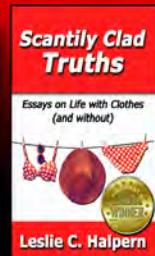
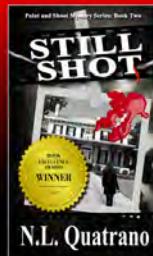
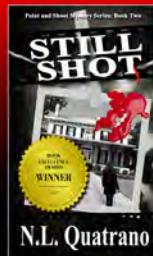
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Celebrations!

Where we shine a spotlight
on our members & cheer their
accomplishments!

Florida Writers Association Collection, Volume 12, Create an Illusion

The 2020 Florida Writers Association Collection Contest drew 143 entries submitted by 108 members. The contest remains one of FWA's favorite member benefits. Our Person of Renown, Mark H. Newhouse, winner of the 2019 RPLA Published Book of the Year award, had the daunting task of choosing his top ten favorites from among the 60 winning authors chosen for this edition. We are pleased to announce the winning authors and their entries.

- JC Gatlin, Collections Co-Coordinator



Mark H. Newhouse's Top Ten Picks

1. Shutta Crum, Okefenokee
2. Ricky Keck, It's Time
3. Jody Lebel, A Good Man
4. Mike Summers, Chosen
5. Grace Epstein, A Shrouded Forest
6. Frances Hight, Mable's Fight
7. Janet K. Palmer, The Graying
8. Robert Hart, The Safe Tree
9. Barbara Rein, Canceled
10. Phyllis McKinley, Yellow Leaf in a Puddle

50 Winning Authors (alphabetically, by author)

- Ruth Alessi, Masks of Clay
Monika Becker, Alternate Universes
Linda Callan, The Treasure Hunt
Linda Ray Center, Bookend Friends
M.P. Christy, Illusion Tubes
William Clapper, Love's Illusions
Danielle Cook, Space Bar
Michael Cox, In the Hospital (Again)
Melody Dimick, Insanity
Betsy Donohue, Perspective
Arthur Doweyko, Billy and the Time Machine
Bob Ellis, The Bank Branch
Jessie Erwin, Moon Flying
Kimberlee Esselstrom, Harmy
Ann Favreau, The Mirrors
Linda Feist, A Serving of Winter Solstice
Chris Flocken, Elusive Illusions
J.W. Garrett, Away From It All
Fern Goodman, Jesus Ants
Lee Fanning Hall, Illusions
Suzy Hart, Break the Rules
Ellen Holder, Thalia's Portal
Laura Holian, The Picnic
John Hope, The Visit
Sharon Keller Johnson, Derailed
Henry James Kaye, No Good Deed
Ian Kirkpatrick, Good Morning, George

- Alice Klaxton, Memories
Linda Kraus, Inner Beauty and All That Jazz
Teresa Little, The Camping Trip
Christopher Malinge, Jealousy
Arleen Mariotti, Behind Closed Doors
Lawrence Martin, A Grand Illusion
Robert Marvin, The Last Coupon
Frank T. Masi, Gray Rider
Mark McWaters, The Other Side
Sharon Menear, Ghost Writer
John Charles Miller, Words from the Earth
Joan North, Illusion or Reality
Donna Parrey, When Mother Nature Caught the Virus
David M. Pearce, The Matryoshka Doll
Virginia Pegelow, Dancing with a Star
Elaine Person, Don't Refuse the Muse
Nancy Pflum, A Night to Remember
Don ("Doc") Sanborn, Could This Be Real?
Lynn Schiffhorst, Soothing the Dark
Ruth Senftleber, The Reunion
Henry G. Silvia, The Chinese Room
Tom Swartz, Johnny B's Freedom
Ed N. White, Water, Water Everywhere

We are also pleased to announce the winning authors for the seventh year of the youth collection.

Winning Youth Authors within Age Group

Age Group 9-13

- 1st Place: Lincoln Silverio, The World Beneath the Waves
2nd Place: Secelia Henning, Beautiful World
3rd Place: Daniel Creve-coeur, Unforgotten Dream
Honorable Mention: Arianna Perez, Without My Glasses
Honorable Mention: Ebelle Creve-Coeur, Shadow Man
Honorable Mention: Nicole Collett, Freaked!

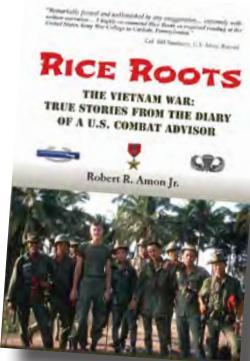
Age Group 14-17

- 1st Place: Jacqueline Cook, Blue and Black
2nd Place: Kazimir Reyes, Definition of Mortality
3rd Place: Sarah-Catherine Jackson, Clouds
Honorable Mention: Rachel Galpin, The Flame Within
Honorable Mention: David Creve-coeur, Fright Night

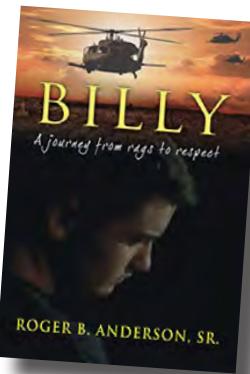
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accomplishments!

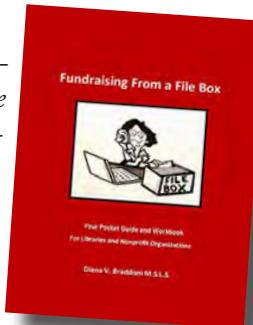
Robert R. Amon's Vietnam memoir, *Rice Roots*, published by Legacies and Memories of St. Augustine, was released April 17th. His diary-based true story vividly relives daily occurrences from 1969, one of the bloodiest years of the Vietnam War. The profound impact on his life and overwhelming desire for closure causes him to return later to a village he helped defend. The book lives up to its Foreword by Green Beret commanding officer, Col. Bill Stanberry, who writes, "... his relation of events, of which I had personal knowledge, is remarkably factual and unblemished by any exaggeration to make himself a hero."



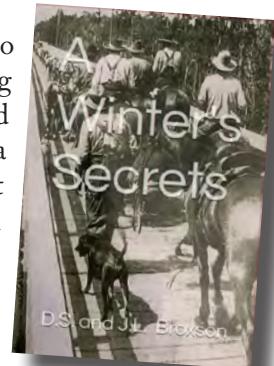
Roger B. Anderson, Sr. is pleased to announce the publication of his fifth novel, *Billy, A Journey from Rags to Respect*—a coming of age story about a boy growing up in Alabama. Orphaned and homeless for a short time, he avoids the underbelly of life and strives for acceptance and respect. His rags to respect journey is lonely, but he takes advantage of a few helping hands and gains some leadership skills along the way. The Army gives him opportunities, and his skills at the controls of his helicopter wins him a Bronze Star for valor.



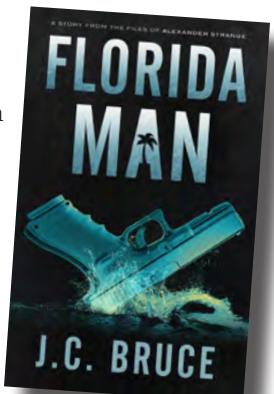
Diana Braddom published *Fundraising from a File Box: Your Pocket Guide and Workbook for Libraries and Non-profit Organizations*. About fundraising, the book is based on her experience as a library director, nonprofit board member, workshop leader, and teaching fundraising as an adjunct college professor. As a member of the American Library Association's Fundraising and Financial Development Committee, she has learned strategies and techniques from fellow fundraisers. This methodology can be adapted for computerized files and folders which can greatly improve one's readiness to respond to a funding opportunity or grant proposal.



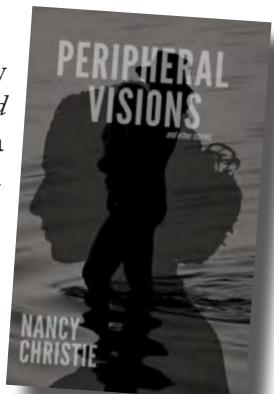
DS and JL Broxson are pleased to announce Amazon is publishing their book, *A Winter's Secrets*. Based on true stories from JL's past, it's a post-Civil War family saga about Bud Braxton, a farmer who is in the awkward position of loving two different women and struggling to support a growing family. He's not deserving of the forgiveness he's been granted for his transgressions, but will he have the strength to forgive another for their crimes against him? Twists, turns, and harrowing moments, but it leaves you in a comfortable place, glad to have journeyed with the Braxton family.



J.C. Bruce announces publication of *Florida Man*. There are countless ways you can arrive in the Sunshine State: planes, trains, and automobiles come to mind. Boats, too, for sure. But weird-news reporter Alexander Strange wants to get to Florida in the worst way, so he arrives in a coffin. He's not quite ready for a dirt nap. Not yet. But to avoid an unpleasant visit from the Grim Reaper he must solve a tricky puzzle that takes him to the state's most haunted places. Does he have a ghost of a chance? It depends on what the Fates have decreed.



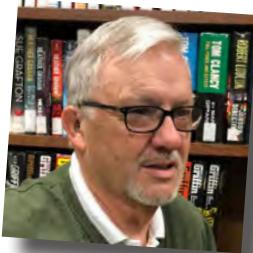
Nancy Christie's second short story collection, *Peripheral Visions and Other Stories* (Unsolicited Press), a second-place winner in the Florida Writers Association 2018 Royal Palm Literary Awards (RPLA) competition, was released May 2020. She also released her second book for writers, *Rut-Busting Book for Authors* (Mill City Press), Fall 2019, which was a 2019 Best Book Awards winner. Christie can be contacted via her website: nancychristie.com.



Celebrations!

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Writing is the capstone of a life well-spent. **RJ Cowley, Jr.** devoted twenty years to mentoring troubled teens as an educator and counselor. His diverse career includes another twenty years as a corporate manager and executive. An MS Ed with a focus on social and developmental issues shapes his sense of history and systemic social inequity. Vignettes are a hallmark of Mr. Cowley's writing, as is his uncluttered, yet emotional writing style. His well drawn dramatis personae reveal the human condition through up-close and personal dialogue that brings the reader into the scene and stimulates imagination. Coming soon: *Her Second Husband*.



Shutta Crum announces the publication of *When You Get Here* (Kelsay Books). Of this collection of poems professor emerita of humanities, Sharon Scholl says, "Here's everything you want in poetry. Understandable language—check. Interesting, inventive use of words—check. Topics that reference matters of common interest—check. Insights way beyond the usual—check. Don't skim this collection. You'd miss way too much that makes our lives meaningful. Enter and walk 'unafraid in this new topography.'" *When You Get Here* is now available on Amazon or through Kelsay Books. For more info about Shutta: shutta.com.



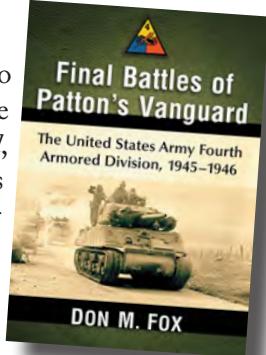
McKenna Dean is pleased to announce that *Bishop Takes Knight* (Redclaw Origins Book 1), has been voted Best Paranormal/SFF Romance in the 2020 New England Reader's Choice Awards. Desperate for work in the winter of 1955, former socialite Henrietta (Rhett) Bishop stumbles into a job with Redclaw Security. But there's more to the firm than meets the eye. Soon she's dodging wolf shifters while having promised to solve the murder of Dr. Peter Knight's wife. Toss in mysterious stolen artifacts and a magical dog, and you have a recipe for a budding romance. Provided Bishop and Knight don't die first.



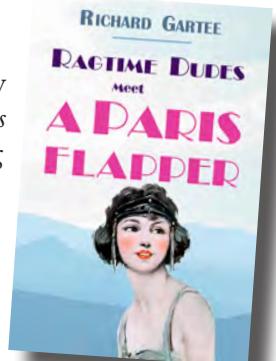
Kathy Sullivan Evans is celebrating the publication *365 Soulful Messages*, a collection of short stories, to which she is a contributing author. The day this book was launched, it became a #1 Bestseller under 9 categories! Also, her anticipated novel entitled *A Senseless Shame*, inspired by actual people and events, reveals a long-held family secret, and how one act of transgression impacted four generations of women. This book challenges the reader to find that voice deep inside oneself, which has been silenced by fear and a senseless shame. Due to publish late Fall of 2020.



Don M. Fox is honored to announce the March 2020 release of *Final Battles of Patton's Vanguard*, a companion volume to Fox's acclaimed 2003 work, *Patton's Vanguard*. Final Battles captures the division history from January 1, 1945 through the end of the war in Europe. With help from veterans of the Fourth, Fox presents a gripping narrative that shatters the well-worn myth of the war's end being a foregone conclusion. Among the highlights is the story of Task Force Baum, which on Patton's order, drove 45 miles behind enemy lines to conduct the most controversial American operation of WWII.



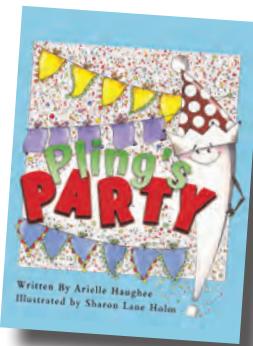
Just published, the latest novel by **Richard Gartee**, *Ragtime Dudes Meet a Paris Flapper*. The Roaring Twenties are underway when Cherie, an American flapper living it up in Paris, returns with her sister to their tiny New Mexico hometown to reconnect with three ragtime dudes and help a shell-shocked war veteran recover. Winner of the Silver Royal Palm Literary Award in the category of unpublished historical fiction, it is now available from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and independent booksellers.



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Congratulations to **Arielle Haughee** for her publication of *Pling's Party: An Exclamation Point's Story*. Pling is an exclamation point—he adds excitement to stories. He has one rule to follow: he can only appear twice in the story. As the tale of three goats unfolds, Pling has trouble staying out of the story until he's needed. Things get a bit out of hand and hilarity ensues. The book received a Five Star rating from Reader's Favorite and also was called "instructive but punctuated with excitement—a rousing read-aloud work" by Kirkus Reviews. Great job!



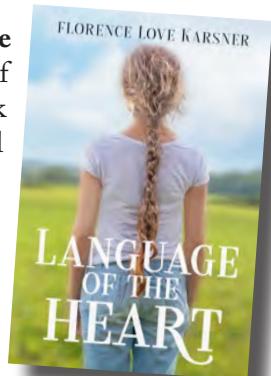
Best-selling romance writer, **Rebecca Hefflin**, is pleased to announce the release of her tenth romance, *A Season to Love*, Book #2 in the Seasons of Northridge series set in a fictional North Georgia town. Kristen McKay and Tyler Kincaide have a past—one that has left her with a bone-deep animosity for him. And a secret. Will this secret compel Kristen to seek forgiveness from the very man she swore never to forgive? Expect the release of the third book in the series, *A Season to Dream*, next spring.



Don't miss the latest books in **N.L. Holmes'** two series set in the Bronze Age! *The Singer and her Song* follows a diva from the kingdom of Mitanni whose life is upended when she becomes a refugee. She must confront her worst enemy—herself—and rethink what she knows of strength. *The Crocodile Makes No Sound* is the second book in the Lord Hani Mystery series. Hani gets caught up in a rivalry between the royal wives, while trying to hide his rebellious brother-in-law. "Replete with rich historical detail and lavish physical descriptions." Available on Amazon and other online bookstores.



Language of the Heart by **Florence Love Karsner** tells a tale of friendship between an old black woman and a young white girl in 1955 South Georgia. They are caught in flood waters and must get to higher ground to survive. During the frightful night, Rosie tells the heart-wrenching tale of Quetta, her Gullah/Geechee ancestor, who was kidnapped and brought to America on a slave-trading ship. This unlikely pair forms a lifelong friendship. A thirst for knowledge and an appreciation of life is instilled in a child who struggles to find her place.



Joshua J. Lane, an ambitious African-American writer in Jacksonville, is currently looking for a literary agent to represent an adult speculative novel. It's about a deadbeat father, living in New York City during the 1920s, who unexpectedly dies and enters a retro-futuristic afterlife on the brink of collapse as he tries to reunite with his kids to become the father he never was. It's about 97k words and has been thoroughly reviewed. Mr. Lane also has four other unpublished works. If you're an agent or a publisher, please e-mail him if interested: joshuajlane@outlook.com



Tamara Lawyer, writing as TK Lawyer, is happy to announce the publication of her eleventh book in her six-year writing career, *Crossroads*, which released on March 20, 2020. Her first Contemporary Romance novel is a prequel and tells the story of Marisole and Clay, two college students with similar humanitarian interests. Attending separate colleges, they bump into each other often, but Clay's extracurricular activities and his best friend's warning keep Marisole untrusting of his intentions. Yet, their similar backgrounds and his kind, protective character keep her questioning her resistance to his charm.



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Philip Levin released his 28th book last month, a ghostwritten ghost story. Set in a haunted house in an Alabama small town, this 15,000-word novelette gives a cheery feel during the telling of a young couple falling in love as they try to solve the mystery of the murder of the ghosts haunting their Civil War era home.



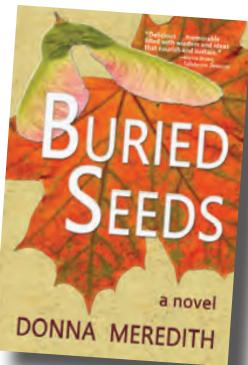
Arleen Mariotti announces the publication of *Creative Writing Prompt: A Teen's Journal*. The journal provides a wide variety of creative writing prompts and ideas to get the creativity flowing. The activities in the journal provide a safe environment for expression. *Creative Writing Prompt: A Teen's Journal* is a place to explore one's thinking through self-expression without the fear of failure. Available from Amazon.



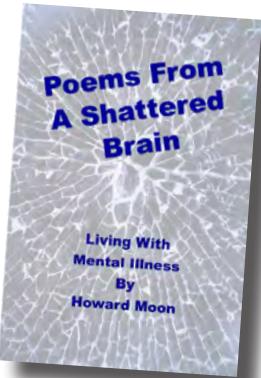
Llewellyn McKernan has poems in recent issues of *Appalachian Heritage*, *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, and *Pine Mountain, Sand, & Gravel*. Her poem, "Getting Out of Bed at Dawn," is included in the anthology, *Feminine Rising*. Her latest chapbook *Getting Ready to Travel*, was published by Finishing Line Press. She was the judge for 2020 Flagler Art League Poetry Competition.



In *Buried Seeds*, by Tallahassee writer **Donna Meredith**, two women born a century apart, become leaders in the social movements of their eras. In 2017 Angie Fisher is reluctantly drawn into a leadership role in the West Virginia teachers strike, fighting for better health insurance. She draws courage and inspiration from her Great-Great Grandmother Rosella's example. In the early 1900s, Rosella endures life-threatening illness and an earthquake, but nothing derails her determination to control her own destiny and win the right to vote for all women.



Howard Moon is pleased to announce the publication of his book, *Poems from a Shattered Brain: Living with Mental Illness*. Howard is the survivor of two major strokes. His brain has been shattered, and as a result he suffers from multiple mental illnesses. His poetry reflects what it is like to live the day-to-day struggles of recovering from a brain injury and the struggles of living with a mental illness.



Chris O'Byrne has released his second book, *The Beautiful Addiction: Learning to Fly Fish Near Your Home*. O'Byrne, a teacher in Polk County and member of the Lakeland Writers, has been teaching fly fishing through group meetings and appearances for ten years. *The Beautiful Addiction* is published by The Peppertree Press in Sarasota. It includes illustrations by Pete Chadwell and a foreword by Macauley Lord to teach and entertain anglers all over North America. O'Byrne blogs about fly fishing and human life at featerwater.com.



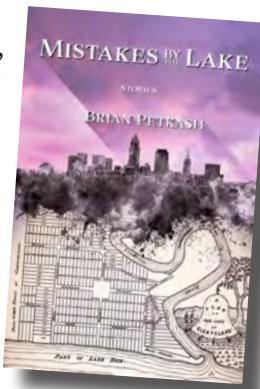
Mango Rains, a debut novella by Fernandina Beach writer **Anne H. Oman**, has just been published by Galaxy Galloper Press, a small indie press dedicated to reviving the novella as a literary form. It's a tale of love, loss, and political intrigue in Southeast Asia during the turbulent 1960s. Kirkus Reviews called *Mango Rains* a "richly descriptive and poignant book ... An engaging, disturbing tale of love, loss, and human frailties set against cross-cultural conflicts." A former Foreign Service Officer and longtime journalist, Anne Oman is currently Reporter at Large for the Fernandina Observer. More information is at mangorains.net.



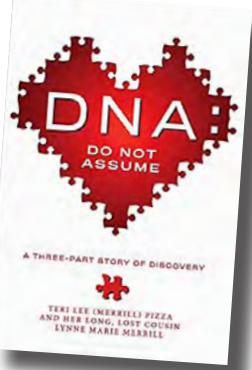
Celebrations!

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Brian Petkash's debut collection, *Mistakes by the Lake*, is out now from Madville Publishing. Set in Cleveland, Ohio from its earliest beginnings as a forested frontier to the urban blight of modern times, *Mistakes by the Lake* is a collection of ten thematically linked stories spanning the many faces of the city's history: a motorman navigates his 1920's back-and-forth trolley until he snaps; a stockyards knocker encounters the Virgin Mary during the 1954 World Series; a wannabe wrestles his unruly mind along the flammable 1960's Cuyahoga River. "I'll remember these souls and this Cleveland for a long, long time," (Ander Monson).



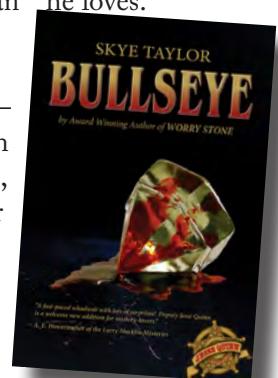
DNA: Do Not Assume, by **Teri Pizza and Lynne Merrill**, is a true story of what happens when DNA tests uncover buried secrets. Written as a biography, autobiography, and memoir, it uncovers the illicit romance a deceased mother and unknown father took to their graves. Uncovered is betrayal, hate, and brutality, as well as unknown family, like co-author Lynne Merrill. This is a story about spiritual journey and self-discovery. The memoir is written alternately by the united cousins and brings the book to a satisfying conclusion. Reviewers say it is: "Articulated with suspense and honesty; "Riveting;" and, "Intriguing!"



Donna Scott's debut novel, *Shame the Devil* (May 11, 2020), offers a powerful story set during the English Civil War when young Scot Colin Blackburne witnesses his mother's murder by Parliamentarian soldiers and is forced into indentured servitude in Yorkshire as punishment for his father's allegiance to the king. Colin puts his plan for vengeance against his aggressors into motion, though it will have disastrous consequences. Forbidden romances, clandestine alliances, and deadly enemies are formed. Ultimately, Colin must decide whether his desire to avenge those responsible for his family's ruin is worth sacrificing a future with the woman he loves.



Skye Taylor just released *Bullseye*—first in a new mystery series set in St Augustine, Florida. Jesse Quinn, the only woman on the Major Crimes Squad with the St John's County Sheriff's Department, is a single mom juggling a demanding job, two teenagers and a hopeful suitor. Powerful people want a good man and old friend locked up for murder. A rival in the Sheriff's office wants to take over the investigation and time is running out. "A fast-paced whodunit with lots of surprises! Jesse Quinn is a welcome new addition for mystery lovers." A.E. Howe, Larry Macklin series



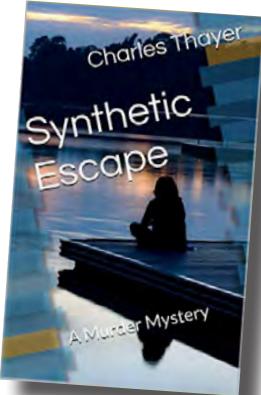
**Your writing-related accomplishments
can be published here.**

See the submission requirements for the "Celebrations" section on page 2 of this magazine.

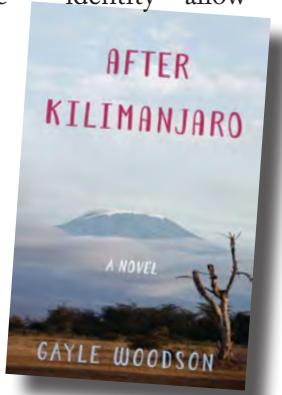


Celebrations!

Charles Thayer is pleased to announce the publication of *Synthetic Escape*, Book #4 in his Paradox Murder Mystery series featuring Steve Wilson, a financial investigator. Each of Thayer's first three books has reached #1 on Kindle's Financial Thrillers Best Sellers Page. Steve's visit to his high school reunion leads to his investigation of a potential fraud that intersects with a tangled web of deceit, blackmail, and murder. Steve discovers old friends are not what they seem and have secrets to hide. Will a synthetic identity allow the killer to escape?



Gayle Woodson's debut novel, *After Kilimanjaro*, was awarded a silver medal in the Independent Book Publishers Association's 2020 Ben Franklin Awards. This is the tale of a young woman who has been jaded by the rigors of training to be a surgeon. Her boyfriend prescribes a brilliant remedy: a break year in Africa, doing feel-good medical work and climbing Mount Kilimanjaro. When his funding runs out, she embarks on the adventure alone. Kirkus Reviews calls it "An engagingly written story of a woman's transformation that's begging for a sequel." Booklist says, "Medical Fiction of this kind is rare."



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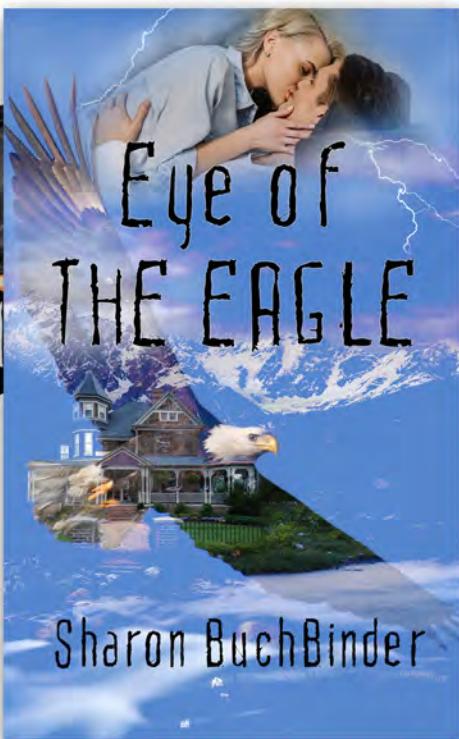
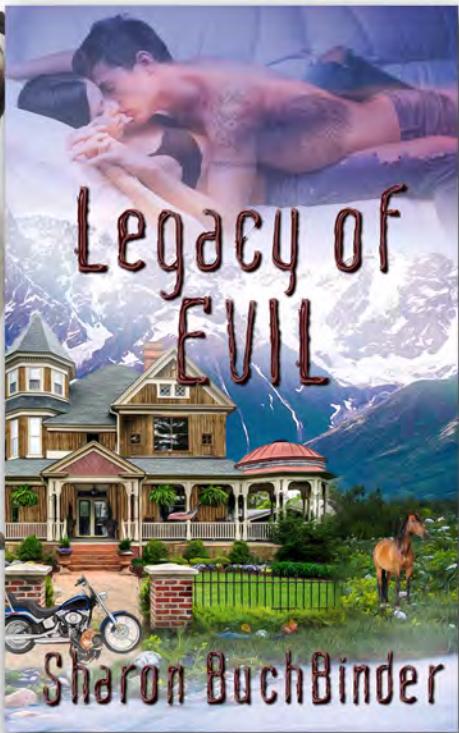
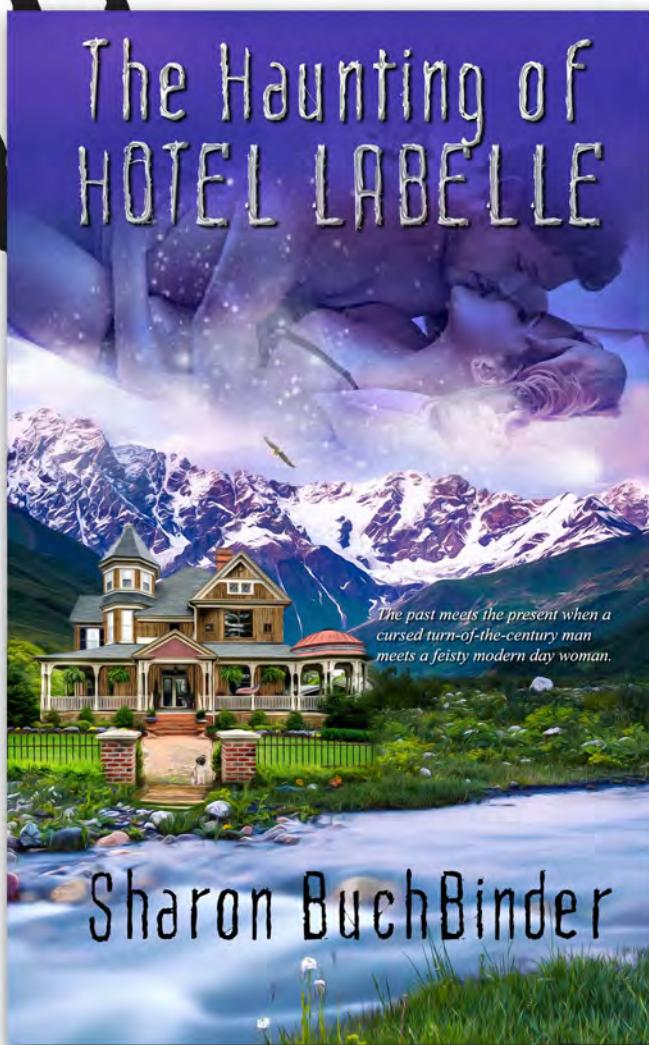
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