

The Florida Writer

December 2016 | Volume 10, Number 6



A 2016 Florida Writers Conference Diary

Conference Photos Collage

Royal Palm Literary Award Winners



Writers Helping Writers



In 2017, we make the switch from mini conferences to **FOCUS DAYS**, where there will be a full day focused on one topic. Multiple speakers...and a panel at the end!

4/29 - Focus on Character Driven Stories
Orlando/Altamonte Springs

5/20 - Focus on eBooks
Boca Raton

6/24 - Focus on Marketing
Orlando/Altamonte Springs

7/22 - Focus on Plot Driven Stories
Fort Myers

See FloridaWriters.net for more information
Your eNews will also have details as we get closer to 2017!

The Florida Writer

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COVER: Winslow Homer, *Red Shirt*, 1904, watercolor,
Homosassa, Florida, National Gallery of Art



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The Florida Writer

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

GUIDELINES

Step 1: What to Submit

Celebrations

Let's celebrate your writing successes together. Marking a milestone in your writing career? Members who have good news to share about their writing-related accomplishments should send announcements for publication.

- Write a one-paragraph announcement in third person
- Type "Celebrations" in the subject line of your submission email
- One entry per issue per person
- Maximum word count: 100

Paragraphs

We publish selected creative writing by members who respond to a prompt. Prose, poetry, and excerpts from larger works that can stand alone are all welcome.

- Type "Paragraphs" in the subject line of your submission email
- One entry per person per issue
- Maximum word count for prose: 700
- Maximum line count for poetry: 50

Prompt for the February 2017 issue:

Someone has left a note on a car windshield.

Prompt for the April 2017 issue:

Open with a character saying he or she is the world's greatest _____. You fill in the blank with something the character brags about or something said in a self-deprecating way. Then have the character tell an anecdote that supports the claim.

Step 2: How to Submit

- Deadline for February 2017 issue is 1/1/2017
- Deadline for the April 2017 issue is 3/1/2017
- Send all submissions in doc format as an email attachment. Please do not embed your submission's text within the email message.
- Include your name and contact information within the attachment
- You may include one headshot or a photo of the front cover of your book to accompany your entry, but it is not required. The image file must be high resolution, 300 ppi, jpg format, and sent as an attachment. Please don't send embedded images.
- To be eligible for publication, you must be a member of the Florida Writers Association
- Before hitting the "send" button, please double check to be sure your entry meets all the requirements and is as free of typos and other errors as possible
- Email your submission to tfw@floridawriters.net

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- For rates, specs, and deadlines, contact tfw@floridawriters.net





Editor's Notes

About You

Mary Ann de Stefano
Editor

Did you know that your "About" page is probably the most frequently visited page on your website? Check your analytics. You may be surprised.

Is your About page as compelling as the rest of your site? Or is it ordinary, an afterthought? Here are some ideas to spur you to write a more compelling About page.

Write in your own voice.

Maybe it's because people find it difficult to write about themselves. Maybe it's because they think that professional means formal, but often About pages are dry, stiff, and boring. You're a writer, for heaven's sake. Don't stop being creative here. Make your personality and your writerly voice come through on your About page, too.

By the way, it's more than okay to write your About in first person. (Unless you're a Famous Person, we know you've written your own bio anyway.)

Write for your audience.

Who are they, and why do they come to your website? Your About page should help you accomplish your goal for the site. Address readers directly. If you're an author who wants to attract more readers, then engage them in a personal way that builds connection and loyalty. If you're a freelancer wanting more clients, give people a sense of what it's like to work with you. Differentiate yourself from competitors.

Tell a story.

People will connect with you through your story more readily than they will through lists of facts or credentials. (Show, don't tell!) No, don't tell your full biography, and don't go on and on at length, but do share a story that shows why you do what you do. An author's story could answer such questions as: Why do you write? When did you first start writing? Where do you get your ideas? A freelancer might have a story about how she helped a client. Show people who you are and what you believe in.

Show the real you.

Post a good photo of yourself or two. An avatar or stock photo just won't do. I am surprised by how many author and freelancer sites don't include profile photos. (I wonder: what are they hiding?) People want to know the real you. Add something personal, too. Something unrelated to your writing. Mention a hobby, a special talent, a pet, or a favorite food. Give people another avenue for connecting with you, human to human.

Include your credentials, but don't pad.

Include your publications, your experience, your education, and your skills. You can also list honors you've received and associations you're involved in, but try to incorporate your credentials in an elegant way. And don't pad! Name only the biggies, and keep it relevant and concise. Unless you can make an intriguing story of it or it's related somehow to your work, your potential readers or clients don't really care if your Chihuahua placed first in show in your town's pet show.

Include a sample review or endorsements or two, and don't forget a call to action. Add a button to click to buy your book, sign up for your mailing list, or contact you.

Take a look at the websites for authors you admire, and examine their About pages. What intrigues you? How does your About page compare? 🐾

Mary Ann de Stefano is the editor of *The Florida Writer* and MAD's *Monday Muse*. She is an independent editor with 30+ years experience in publishing and consulting. Besides working one-to-one with writers who are developing books, she organizes writing workshops and designs author websites. Mary Ann does business at MAD about Words, named as a play on her initials and love for writing. Visit madaboutwords.com





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Main Website: floridawriters.net
Networking: fwanetwork.ning.com
Questions: ContactUs@floridawriters.net

Mark Your Calendar

January 1, 2017

Royal Palm Literary Awards Competition
Florida Writers Association Collection Competition
Submission guidelines posted on website

January 14, 2017

Taxes: An Introduction for Authors
Webinar with Cheyenne Knopf Williams

January 15, 2017

Royal Palm Literary Awards Competition
Opens to submissions

February 1, 2017

Florida Writers Association Collection, Volume 9
Opens to submissions

March 1, 2017

Royal Palm Literary Awards Competition
Entry fee increases

April 1, 2017

Royal Palm Literary Awards Competition
Entry fee increases

April 29, 2017

Focus on Character-Driven Stories
Hilton Orlando/Altamonte Springs

April 30, 2017

Royal Palm Literary Awards Competition
Florida Writers Association Collection Competition
Closes for submissions

May 20, 2017

Focus on E-Books
Lakeside Terrace, Boca Raton

May 21, 2017

2nd Annual I ♥ Books
Lakeside Terrace, Boca Raton

June 24, 2017

Focus on Marketing
Hilton Orlando/Altamonte Springs

July 22, 2017

Focus on Conflict-Driven Stories
Crown Plaza at Bell Tower Shops, Fort Myers

October 19 – 22, 2017

16th Annual Florida Writers Conference
Hilton Orlando/Altamonte Springs

For more information visit floridawriters.net



President's Notes

Happy Holidays!

Cheyenne Knopf Williams
President

Happy Holidays! I hope everyone had a wonderful Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving happens to be my favorite holiday. As a child it was when we got to see the entire family. It meant grandma, or Memaw as we called her, and mom creating amazing smells in the kitchen on Thanksgiving Eve and the morning of Thanksgiving. You could hear the guys, and grandma, arguing over football. And everyone was trying to keep grandpa out of the kitchen before grandma knocked him over the head with a frying pan for tasting the turkey early. Now, I work to create these same memories for my family. The memories they will look back on to warm their hearts and souls in years to come.

As a writer, the memories created this November may not seem as tranquil. Your month was probably filled with madness from all sides. Did you participate in NaNoWroMo? If so, your month probably consisted more of coffee-drinking, hair pulling, and sleepless nights. Who had time for nice tranquil days with family when writers block has set in? How do you fight through these times? Did you attend your writers group meeting for support? Maybe log in to the FWA Network and see how others were coming along during the month? Either way, I hope you managed to finish writing the novel you were working on and you enter December feeling accomplished.

On the other hand, you may be rummaging through all the information you collected at the 15th Annual Florida Writers Conference. The panels and workshops were top notch this year. I want to send a huge thank you to our presenters and faculty. Not to mention our volunteers. The entire conference is put on by volunteers, and without their amazing service and support the conference wouldn't happen. They ensured attendees knew where they were going, found any lost items, and seemed to pop up at just the right time to help with whatever was needed. While the conference is still fresh

in your mind, make sure to mark you calendars for next year's conference, October 19-22, 2017.

How can you stay networked and learning the craft until the next conference? We have four Focus Days coming up in 2017. The first Focus Day is April 29th at the Hilton Orlando/Altamonte Springs, the same hotel where the annual conference is hosted. The day will focus on character-driven stories. We have a wonderful team put together to provide the workshops. To view the scheduled lineup along with bios visit our website here: floridawriters.net/conferences/focus-character-driven-stories/. I hope to see you in Orlando!

We also have our webinar series to assist in keeping you in touch and staying up with technology. There are quite a few planned and scheduled through the year. Our first is scheduled for January 14 from 11 AM-Noon. I would personally love to see you there, as I will be the one delivering the webinar. The discussion will revolve around taxes. The class will provide authors with an understanding of sales versus income taxes, whether you need to pay sales tax, and how to keep track of the taxes you owe the state. We felt this would be a timely webinar since tax time is right around the corner. The webinar is free. Make sure to sign up today!

I want to wish everyone a wonderful holiday season. I hope you have a little more time to spend with those you love, even if that's the characters in your stories! Ring in a safe and happy 2017, and we will see you on the flip side. 🍀

Cheyenne Knopf Williams is a lifetime member and President of FWA. She also sits on the board of the Florida Writers Foundation. She is currently launching *The Authors Academy*, a 4-course series on understanding publishing, marketing your book, and social media.



Collective Wisdom: Best Advice from Writers Groups

Your Group Members Write in Different Genres: Good or Bad?

by Chris Coward

and panelists Bria Burton, Alison Nissen, and Veronica Helen Hart

Here we go again, weighing in on a controversial issue. This one concerns the composition of a critique group. More specifically, it concerns the genre-specialties of its members. If the members write in different genres, is it a good thing or bad?

One school of thought is that a critique group is best when it is comprised of writers (“experts”) writing in a single genre. The argument goes that these experts know the “rules” of your genre better than writers of other genres do.

The other school of thought is that gathering writers in multiple genres can inspire new insight, like cross-pollination.

So is a mix good or bad? Let’s see what our Collective Wisdom panel has to say.

Bria: Good

“I’ve only ever participated in critique groups where writers write in different genres. One reason this works well for me is that I write in multiple genres, and I like to read in multiple genres. But even if I only wrote epic fantasy (one of my genres), I’d still prefer to have critique group members who write in other genres, as well.

“While certain genres have specific rules, most have breathing room. It’s important to know the rules of the genre you’re writing in, and to understand that your writing

can combine multiple genres. This could even be done subconsciously at first. Examples would be Historical Christian Fiction, Romantic Suspense, Medieval Fantasy, and Paranormal Romance. Even Memoir has rules similar to those of fiction writing, and I’ve been in groups where someone was writing a memoir while the rest of us were writing fiction.

“I’ve learned a lot from seeing the different options available to writers—practically limit-less. It’s possible to expand audience reach if you’re willing to borrow from other genres. The best example I can think of is treating your novel like a thriller and/or mystery, whether that’s your genre or not. Why? Because good storytelling keeps readers turning pages and desperate to know what’s going to happen, no matter what the genre.”

Alison: Good

“Variety is the spice of life. Without it, we would all be day-old bread. And that’s the benefit to attending writers’ groups that welcome a variety of genres—our writing stays fresh and spicy. By reading (and writing) outside of our chosen genre, we grow as writers.

“With the popularity of today’s Indie Market, many rules are flying out the window. Sure, some publishers follow strict genre guidelines, but when we review, listen, and react to writing in other genres, we use a different metric to measure success. We consider different audiences, different language styles, different value systems. FWA is a writers’ association that encourages a plethora of creative writing types—in the 2016 RPLA competition, there were 26 genres for adults and 5 for youth. And I like to read from each of them.

“I bring that interest with me when I attend a small writers’ group meeting, and I find that most other members do, as well. I continually learn from all attendees, regardless of their

As of this writing, FWA has 68 writers groups throughout Florida and one in Nevada. See floridawriters.net for information about a group near you.

Are you a writers group leader who would like to join the “Collective Wisdom” panel? We have two open slots. Contact Chris Coward at chrisbusiness@comcast.net for details.



chosen genre, which means my writing is constantly evolving. And that is the biggest benefit of Writers Helping Writers.

“So stay spicy, my friends. Your writing will thank you for it!”

Chris: Fabulous

“The core group of Oxford Writers (OW) has met for many years. Our members write fantasy, historical fiction, YA, romance, memoir, and poetry, among other genres. Talk about cross-pollination! One member, who writes fantasy, inspires us with his creativity. Another, who writes historical fiction, keeps us focused and precise. Yet another, who writes YA and romance, has a poet’s gift for creative and economical turns of phrase. Still another, a thriller writer, shows by example how to stoke tension in our scenes. Space doesn’t permit mentioning the genres of all of OW’s writers, but you get the idea. Each and every talented OW member adds depth to the critiques.”

Ronnie: It’s Unanimous

“As I’ve said before, I moderate three different groups, each having its own personality.

“On Tuesday nights we are fiction only, with any genre welcome. We mostly have novels, as opposed to short stories. The genres are definitely mixed, with historical, women’s, mystery, and science fiction most common. We have had one prize-winning paranormal murder mystery and another as a work in progress. The best part of this group is the diversity of knowledge among the members. It’s a pretty safe bet that if one makes a critical error, someone else is an expert on the subject. From medical issues, to weapons, history, geography, and science, someone is an expert and willing to help improve a manuscript.

“The Thursday read-aloud group tends toward fiction, a little memoir, and occasionally poetry. Not so many experts in this group, but eager listeners happy to offer constructive comments, no matter the genre.

“Then there is Saturday, the largest of the groups. Anything goes here; however, we rarely see poetry. We do see a lot of autobiography and memoir writing, which we also see improving as the authors adopt fiction writing skills to enhance their life stories. This group includes many beginning writers who are happy to learn by critiquing the wide variety of stories submitted every two weeks.

“As with all groups, it’s all about learning through reading, critiquing, and writing—and rewriting.”

So it’s unanimous, but with a catch. Obviously, if you write thrillers, working with a critique group comprised solely of children’s writers may be limiting. But if your group is a mix, you may gain insight from writers of mainstream, autobiography, poetry, mystery, short story, and, yes, children’s books. Cross-fertilization—it can be a beautiful thing. ✍️

Chris Coward is the co-leader of FWA’s Oxford Writers critique group, chairperson for the 2016 Royal Palm Literary Awards competition, a member of the FWA Board of Directors, and past FWA president. She is also 2017 chairperson for general fiction for the Florida Book Awards sponsored by Florida State University Libraries.



Bria Burton is a blogger for St. Pete Running Company, an award-winning author, and wife to a wonderful husband. Find out all about her writing at briaburton.com.



Alison Nissen is a writer who does daily battle with laundry and dog hair. She is managing partner of 3 Dog Tales Productions, a ghost writing company, the chair of the FWA’s Lakeland Writers, and author of *Resolve, Courage, Hope*. Read “Tales from the Laundry Room” at alisonnissen.com.



Veronica Helen Hart (Ronnie) is WGL for Daytona Writers, facilitator for CIFW at B&N, and president of The Ormond Writers League. She recently formed Uppity Women Press. Her books are available at Champagne Books, Amazon, and all the usual book sites. veronicahhart.com.



THE DANIELS FAMILY SAGA

Family values, traditions, and long-held beliefs shatter as three privileged South Carolina siblings struggle to survive while their “planned” lives crumble during the Civil War.



BOOK 1: INTERRUPTED ASPIRATIONS, 1860

The first-born grandson in a southern dynasty, Wesley Daniels discovers his northern grandfather, Reverend Samuel Daniels, is a Stationmaster with the Underground Railroad. Although he strongly opposes his grandfather's illegal fight against an institution he believes will eventually end, he jeopardizes his life by taking eight fugitive slaves on the run from bounty hunters and the law.

Second grandson and centerpiece of his plantation-owning maternal granddaddy's plans, Payne Daniels joins V.P. John Breckinridge's presidential campaign. Drawn into a world where money, power, and unrealistic pride are directing the country's course, he must choose whom he wishes to serve.

Madeline Daniels, the youngest sibling, marries Lieutenant Vaughn Johnston—a man lacking southern roots. With rumors of war plaguing the country, the military consumes Vaughn's time and energy, so Madeline pours herself into her work—painting portraits for Washington DC notables. Her career blossoms and she must choose: life as her spouse's appendage or being a serious artist.

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for speculative fiction writers



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On Finding the Agent You've Always Wanted

by Sandra Elliot

Did you ever send out query letters and receive rejections from every agent except the one you really wanted to hear from? Maybe you kept wondering what that particular agent thought of your story until your curiosity ignited a fire that just wouldn't go out. But how could you learn, if the agent didn't answer? That's what happened to me. I couldn't stop thinking about that agent.

In my quest to talk with her, I considered conferences with three to five minutes sessions where writers could tell agents about their manuscripts. In such brief encounters, how could anyone understand what my book was about? For me, even a ten-minute pitch without an agent's feedback wouldn't work. I considered retreats where authors and agents met on leisurely weekends in the Bahamas or Hawaii, but those were too expensive.

Then I discovered a literary conference where agents would read the first fifteen pages of a manuscript well in advance of a session and offer fifteen minutes of feedback. The agent I wanted was on the readers list. I signed up right away.


After that, I began to worry. Had I made a mistake? Maybe the agent I'd signed up for wouldn't be helpful. Or even nice. To assuage my concerns, I read the books of authors she represented and selected memorable quotes from her interviews. I finished by reviewing her manuscript wish list and books she'd praised. By conference time, I'd done my homework.

At an opening conference gathering, the person next to me talked about the agent she wanted—the one I was about to meet. Midmorning, I found my way to the anteroom to wait my turn. A guide accompanied me into a room where three agents sat at small tables spaced far apart. My agent welcomed me cordially; she seemed even friendlier than I'd imagined. Then I saw her notes all over my manuscript pages, and my heart sank. I took a deep breath and reminded myself I'd come there to learn.

She praised my characters and the setting, and liked the era I'd chosen to write about, her eyes telling me she meant what she said. I sat agape at her comments and insights. She understood the story I wanted to tell, but it wasn't ready—not yet.

I told her about a change I planned to make and her eyes grew wide in agreement. Alone later, I read and reread her remarks and marveled at the care she'd taken to provide them. I knew I was on the right track when her suggestion on the last page matched the changes I'd explained on the day we met. Her words matched mine. I was on the right track. What a confirmation!

For me, the real take away from that meeting was the insight I'd gained on how an agent can see into a story and sculpt it. I was fortunate to have met such an effective person, someone I know I could work with. Maybe I'll have that opportunity, but I'm not counting on it. I'll keep looking. Kelly Luce, in the Authors Guild blog post "Choosing a Literary Agent," says a writer's search for an agent is one of the most important investments he or she can make in a writing career.

If you're just starting your search, literary agency websites are a beginning reference point. If you follow an agent on Twitter or like her on Facebook you may discover her interests, activities, and achievements. The Internet is filled with agent interviews and articles. Chuck Sambuchino publishes a literary agents blog and an annual resource book for writers in search of authors. On Publishers Marketplace, you can find out which agents represent specific authors and books, and learn more about other writers they represent. Goodreads and Amazon offer book synopsis and interviews. Kindle provides sample pages for their readers. 

An artist and writer, **Sandra Elliot** is polishing her novel *Partenope's Secrets*, a coming-of-age story of a young American who accompanies her military family to postwar Naples, Italy, an ancient city also coming into its own.



How Great Book Descriptions Can Help Indie Authors Sell More Books

by Penny Sansevieri

Book descriptions are more important than most authors realize. I'm going to share some tips you may want to implement in order to enhance your own book description for the maximum punch on Amazon.

Is it Meaningful Whether Scanned or Read Word for Word?

Most people don't read websites or book descriptions—they scan. If you have huge blocks of text without spacing, bolding, bullets or other formatting that helps readers scan, then they're likely to move on. Strategic formatting is visually appealing, and psychologically it invites the reader to delve in, instead of click off.

This is even true of sites like Amazon where consumers often spend a lot of time comparing products and reading reviews. It's important to keep in mind that most potential readers will move on if your text is too dense.

How can you make your description more scan-friendly?

- **Headlines:** the first sentence in the description should be a grabber, something that pulls the reader in, and it should be bolded. If you're looking at your Amazon book page, you could also use the "Amazon Orange" to set it apart from the rest of the text.
- **Paragraphs:** Keep paragraphs short, 2-3 sentences max.
- **Bolding:** You can and should bold key text throughout the description. Just be sure you aren't bolding too much – so don't grab 2-3 sentences to bold; choose a few key words.
- **Bullets:** If your book is nonfiction, consider bulleting key points and "here's what you'll learn" elements.

Use Code to Enhance Your Amazon Book Description and Headline

There are several types of code you can use to enhance your headline and description. Though this won't affect

Amazon's algorithm, it will help make your book description more visually appealing.

Here are some of the coding enhancers available:

- **Bolding:** ``The text you want bolded``
- **Italics:** `<i>`The text you want italicized`</i>`
- **Headline:** `<h1>`Your Headline Text`</h1>`
- **Amazon Orange Headline:** `<h2>`The text you want bolded`</h2>`
- You can add in numbered lists and bullet points, too.

Answering Readers' Biggest Question "What's In It For Me?"

The biggest challenge authors face is writing a book description that highlights reader benefits, regardless of whether it's fiction or nonfiction. With 4,500 books published every day, you can't afford to have a vague book description. Following are some of the things you should consider as you write your book description:

Nonfiction: Your target audience likely already has 10+ similar titles. So keep in mind that you're likely serving a very cluttered market, and you'll need to be clear about why your book matters, starting with your first sentence. If you have a strong bio that helps carry the topic of the book—you lead research on XYZ topic, for example—then factor that into your book description. Keep it brief though, because you can elaborate on your expertise in your bio.

Fiction: Fiction is tougher because of the tendency to reveal too much of the story. Instead, focus on the elevator pitch because every other piece of the story anchors to that. When it comes to fiction, buyers have a lot of options, so be clear on what your book is about and lead with the hook.

Children's or Young Adult: Make sure to include the intended age range in your book description. Parents say it helps.

Developing Your Elevator Pitch

An elevator pitch is a short description (one or two sentences) about the book. With ever-shrinking attention spans, you need to capture someone's attention in a very short, succinct pitch, and this short blurb is an excellent way to start building your book description.

Keep Your Verbiage Simple

When it comes to writing a book description, save your five-dollar words for another time. The best book descriptions use simple language that anyone can understand.

How Excited Are You? And How Excited Will Your Readers Be?

Book descriptions with a ton of exclamation points or caps feel like someone is screaming at you. Exclamation points should be used sparingly, although studies show that an exclamation point used here and there can help improve authenticity. In terms of caps, don't even bother; this feels amateur.

Spellcheck

It goes without saying, but it happens. Don't put up a book description with typos.

Is Your Book Part of a Series?

If your book is in a series, tell your readers, and add it to the headline, and perhaps to the title. For example, you might word your title: *Deadly Heat: Heat Series Book 4 of 7*. The reason for this is that readers (especially fiction readers) love a series, so tell them up front that your book continues the story.

Include Top Keywords

Keywords are as important to your Amazon book page as almost anything else. I've written a lot on Amazon-specific keywords that you can see on my blog, amarketingexpert.com/blog, but here is a quick overview:

The term "keyword" is inaccurate because readers don't search using a single word. Think instead of keyword strings. For example, "romance second chances" has been a popular search string on Amazon for a while now. By inserting that phrase into your book description, you can boost your visibility on the site as well as keying into your readers' direct interests. If they search "romance second chances," and they see it in the book description, they'll think: "Oh! This is the exact book I've been looking for." That said, it's best to avoid overstuffing your book description with keywords. I recommend finding six or seven strings and using them sparingly.

Don't Market to Your Ego

I often tell authors that no one outside of friends and family cares that you wrote a book. If you want to pull in your intended audience, make sure your book appeals to their needs and their interests, not yours. I often hire someone to write descriptions for me because I'm just too close to it to see what may matter to my readers.

Tailor Your Bio to Your Book

I often see author bios that have nothing to do with the book. If you wrote a book about marriage, but your bio talks about how you live in Maine with your wife and three dogs, that doesn't substantiate your expertise. The same is true for fiction. If you have multiple books, or a fun, quirky writing habit, mention it. List any credentials as they may matter to the book topic and/or any research you've done. Most of all, make it interesting, and keep it short. Long, boring author bios don't sell books.

Include Quotes and Reviews

So often I see quotes such as, "This is the best mystery book I've read in ages!" but they aren't attributed to anyone. Reviews and quotes are fantastic to use in your book description when cited appropriately. Several authors told me that they often don't cite them because they feel the name won't lend credibility. If it's a friend or neighbor, consider asking them to review the book instead.

Update Your Page Often

Your Amazon page shouldn't be static. As you get blurbs and awards, update your book page. And if you're doing a special promotion, book promo, discount, why not mention that in your book description?

Finally, a great book description is compelling and pulls readers in from the first sentence. Consider leading off with bolded reviews, even if they aren't from highly recognizable names such as Booklist and Publishers Weekly, you should still add and cite them.

A book description, whether on Amazon, iTunes, or Barnes & Noble, is your sales page. Ultimately, it is what will or won't help sell your book, so make sure it's tightly written, exceptionally engaging, and most of all, turns a browse into a buy. 📖

Penny C. Sansevieri, CEO and founder of Author Marketing Experts, Inc. (AME) and Adjunct Professor at NYU, is a best-selling author and internationally recognized book marketing and media relations expert. Her company is one of the leaders in the publishing industry and has developed some of the most cutting-edge book marketing campaigns. Visit amarketingexpert.com.





ASK THE BOOK DOCTOR

Commas, Dialogue, and Verbs, Oh My!

by Bobbie Christmas

Q: Do I need a comma in dialogue after “Oh” here:

“Oh no, I can’t do that.”

“Oh my, that’s a good question.”

A: No comma is required after “Oh” in your examples; the commas after “no” and “my” are sufficient.

Q: Referring to your book *Write in Style* on the subject of dialogue interruption, your example shows a quotation mark following the em dash. I’ve just heard from my editor. I hadn’t put quotes at the end of interrupted speech because the quote hadn’t ended. She put them in, but they went in backwards, so she wondered if she’s wrong; perhaps they shouldn’t be put in. I checked your book for reference and see that after the dash you do have quotation marks, and they face the correct way. Can you shed some light on the subject?

A: Yes, I certainly can. Even if the person speaking did not finish a sentence, the dialogue ended. Quotation marks must appear at the beginning and end of dialogue.

As for which way the quotation marks turn, computers are fallible. When we use curly quotes, an option with some fonts, the computer often gets confused, because some keys have more than one function. For example the apostrophe and the single quote mark are the same key on the keyboard, but an apostrophe turns to the left, and an opening single quotation mark should turn to the right. Opening and closing double quotation marks also share the same key on the keyboard, so it is up to the person typing the manuscript to ensure that the marks are turned the intended way. Sometimes typing a period and then quotation marks will fix the issue of quotation marks turned wrong, but then the person typing must go back and delete the period and leave the quotation marks. I am glad the editor knew that every piece of dialogue must begin and end with quotation marks. Let’s not let a computer glitch make us question our knowledge.

Q: I can’t find anything in *Chicago Manual of Style Online* about how to edit testimonials for my mom’s book of memoirs. How do I find out how to edit testimonials for a book jacket and what to include and omit?

A: No rules govern how to choose, edit, or omit testimonials. It’s a matter of taste, room, and message. Each testimonial you include should have a unique message; no two should be too similar. Use the ones that seem appropriate, and edit them for length, grammar, and punctuation. That’s about it.

Q: While flipping through an old issue of *Writer’s Digest*, I came across the following puzzling comment by a reader: “I’ve learned to show, not tell, by circling to be verbs and changing them before submitting a draft. However, you publish famous writers who use *to be* verbs when stronger verbs might be used. *Would, could, and should* also appear more often than my instructors have taught me.”

What are *to be* verbs?

What is weak about *would, could, and should*?

A: *To be* verbs include any form of the verb to be. Such linking verbs are passive; they show no action. They tell, rather than show. Linking verbs simply say one thing is something else, for example, “The rain was cold.” Some *to be* verbs include *be, being, been, is, am, are, was, and were*. While writers cannot entirely avoid the common verb to be, whenever a writer replaces a passive *to be* verb with an active verb, the sentence becomes stronger and often more visual. To avoid using a linking verb, “The rain was cold” might be recast this way: “Cold rain poured from the sky.” See how the use of the verb *did* not give a visual picture, but the stronger verb, *poured*, does?

Would, could, and should are auxiliary verbs (verbs that must be linked to other verbs), so they, too, offer opportunities for tighter, more visual writing. Instead of this: “Every morning Mary would make pancakes for her family,” consider this recast: “Every morning Mary cooked pancakes for her family.”



Q: I don't think I'll ever stop spacing twice after a period. Any suggestions?

A: You can quickly repair all those extra spaces, assuming you are using Microsoft Word, which has become the standard in the publishing industry. Press Ctrl + H on a PC or Command + F on a Mac, and you'll get a Find and Replace dialogue box. Put the cursor in the Find What box and press the spacebar twice. In the Replace With box, press the spacebar once. Next press the button that says Replace All. The computer will find and change every double space to a single space. You may have to tell it to do the same thing more than once, to catch all the extra spaces, but just continue the process until the computer reports that it has made zero replacements.

Q: Explain to me this: *it's*, *its*, and *its'*.

A: I always have to stop and think about it, too, because it goes against convention. We think of words that end with an apostrophe followed by an "s" as being possessive, but in this one case, the possessive does not have an apostrophe. I'll explain in detail.

It's (with the apostrophe) is the contraction for "it is." Example: It's okay if John comes along. (We know "it's" is a contraction, because the sentence can be written this way: It is okay if John comes along.)

Its (without the apostrophe) indicates the possessive. Example: The seminar had its own schedule.

Its' is always incorrect. Period.

The "its" words often get confused, because they break the rules of possessive apostrophes. If you confuse these two words, you are not alone. Here's a helpful hint: Every time you use *it's* or *its*, ask yourself, "Am I saying *it is*?" If so, only then do you use the apostrophe (*it's*).

Q: I did not see anywhere in your book *Write In Style* that you address this point directly, but when writing internal dialogue, I take it from your book that you would never say he told himself or I told myself something. Is that correct?

A: Such a conclusion might be drawn from the fact that in my book I say "thought to himself" is redundant, because we cannot think to anyone but ourselves. We can, however, tell other people things, just as we can tell ourselves things, so I have no problem with saying he told himself, she told herself, or I told myself.

Q: I'm fifteen and really into writing. Right now I use an online site to post my stories, but I would really like to get a book out. Do you have any ideas on what I can do about this?

A: Yes, but you cannot learn in one e-mail all that you must know. Join writers groups. Write. Take classes in creative writing. Write. Join a critique circle. Write. If possible, attend conferences for writers. Write. Subscribe to and read publications for writers. Write. Volunteer for your school newspaper or yearbook. Write. Read *Strunk & White's Elements of Style*. Read *Write In Style* (my book). Read William Zinsser's book, *On Writing Well*. Write. Learn to use standard manuscript format. After all that, edit, edit, edit, revise, revise, and revise, and eventually you may have a polished manuscript. If so, read books on how to submit a manuscript. Learn how to write a professional query letter. Write an irresistible synopsis. After doing all those things, you may be ready to submit a manuscript to a publisher or agent.

Bobbie Christmas, book editor and owner of Zebra Communications, will answer your questions, too. Send them to bobbie@zebraeditor.com. Read more "Ask the Book Doctor" questions and answers at zebraeditor.com.



No Ordinary Life

Mary J. Freeman

Betts, a British business woman meets Filipina expat, Elvie, working in the Middle East. Their unusual relationship reveals a message that Betts is compelled to share.



No Ordinary Life is no ordinary book

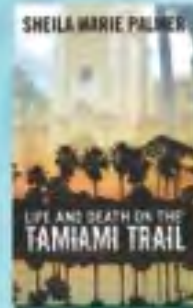
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CLEARLY LEGAL

Pitching Your Ideas While Protecting Your Copyright

by Anne Dalton, Esquire

This year's Florida Writers Conference was magnificent! I always keep track of questions that are asked in my sessions, over lunch, and in the hallway. The most frequent question this year was "how do I protect my copyright and still pitch my story?"

Let's look at how the New York Courts answered that question. Several years ago, Hayden Christensen (Anakin Skywalker in Star Wars), his brother Tove, and their production company, Forest Park Pictures, pitched a series treatment (written materials plus a verbal presentation) to USA Network for a television show called *Housecall*. *Housecall* was about a doctor who made house calls to wealthy patients in Beverly Hills. The series treatment contained themes, story lines, and detailed character biographies. USA Network representatives began to negotiate to acquire the rights to *Housecall* but eventually declined the pitch. Four years later, it created its own show called *Royal Pains*. *Royal Pains* chronicled the life of a "concierge doctor" who made house calls to wealthy patients in the Hamptons on New York's Long Island and had numerous other similarities to *Housecall*.

The Christensen brothers decided to sue for breach of contract rather than for a copyright violation, thinking that it was an easier road to travel. Hayden Christensen told the Court that he had an implied contract with USA Network. His theory was that his brother and he never intended to work for free and clearly (in his

mind anyway), USA Network agreed to reasonable compensation for the *Housecall* material if it was ever used. Conversely, in asking the Court to dismiss the lawsuit, the USA Network argued that the plaintiff could only bring a copyright infringement lawsuit.

There is nothing in the copyright law that requires anyone to pay anyone else compensation, let alone reasonable compensation, for use of copyrighted material. The New York Court decided that, since this was a lawsuit for compensation, it was outside the copyright law. The lawsuit was not dismissed. Eventually, a settlement was reached between USA Network and the brothers.

What does this mean to us? It means that, even if you think it may be difficult to prove all the elements of a copyright infringement lawsuit (for example, you failed to register your copyright in timely fashion), you might, just might, have a claim for breach of contract. A caveat, though: these cases are very fact-specific! ⚖️

Anne Dalton, Esquire, has provided business and personal legal services to creatives for 38 years. She is licensed in Florida, New York, and Pennsylvania. Her credentials can be viewed at daltonlegal.com. Contact Anne at adalton@daltonlegal.com.

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.

"Writing well involves walking the path of most resistance. Sitting still, being patient, allowing the lunatic dream to take shape on the page, then the shaping, the pencil on the page, breathing, slowing down, being willing—no, more than willing, being wide open—to press the bruise until it blossoms."

DANI SHAPIRO



Carpe Diem!

A 2016 Florida Writers Conference Diary

by Ken Pelham

Thursday.

One great thing about the Florida Writers Conference is that there are so many and so varied workshops and events from which to pick. That's also the worst thing; prior to my arrival, I circle multiple can't-miss workshops, all occurring simultaneously. So hard to choose, but choose we must. Tosca Lee, author of megahits including *The Progeny*, headlines the day, blitzing attendees with an all-day workshop on her ten secrets of achieving bestseller status. The Annual Celebrity Workshop, which raises funds to promote literacy in the state of Florida, was sponsored by the Florida Writers Foundation.

As always, the conference sneaks up on me. I beeline straight from work and find the place already abuzz. People checking in, rooting through complimentary gift bags, getting reacquainted. As a faculty member, I make my way to the orientation. Chrissy Jackson welcomes us and gives us the rundown of the next few days.

I catch up with friends over a beer in the hotel bar.

Friday.

Two talented souls—Elaine Person with poetry prompts, and Melissa Gibbo with fiction writing prompts—present Early Bird Workshops that run Friday through Sunday. At 6 AM. Yeah. They're insane.

I set out copies of my books in the bookstore and step back to appraise them. Hmm. Others have glitzy posters while my books look forlorn and unloved. I hop in my car, zip over to the FedEx shop, download a PDF, and hover over the tech's shoulder as he prints, cuts, and mounts it on a board with a built-in stand. I hand him \$9, and I'm back at the Hilton in a half hour, and my books now sport

a glossy poster. Every couple of hours for the duration of the conference, I drop into the bookstore, pretend to browse, and stealthily count how many of my books are still on the shelves. No one is on to me.

A pal attends Sharon Plotkin's all-day forensics workshop, "To Catch a Killer." It's hands-on and hands-dirty, with a mock crime scene and working crime scene lab. My pal reports that it is fantastic and worth every minute. Since I write mystery and suspense, I kick myself for not attending, and I kick him for not making me. But he has a fingerprint magnifier from the workshop and gives it to me, so there's that.

Over lunch, this year's FWA Person of Renown & International Man of Mystery, John Gilstrap (author of International Thriller Writers' 2016 Best Paperback Original, *Against All Enemies*), gives a shout-out to authors of the latest FWA anthology, *Hide and Seek*. Tasked with reviewing all the stories, he raves about the quality of the writing and the production values. John has ranked his top ten, tabbing Chris Hamilton's "Can I Help You with That" as his number one pick. High praise indeed.

Later, I slip back into the bookstore to count my books yet again, and there sits John signing copies of three novels. His table is four feet from my two thriller novels. A golden opportunity. I will dazzle him with wit and eloquence. I select his novel, *Friendly Fire*, and saunter up. He greets me warmly and signs it. I point to one of my novels and say something to the effect of, "This my book. It good book. Me write good." He smiles and nods. Him nice man.

At dinner that evening, Gilstrap strolls to the stage and seizes the day. He's the keynote speaker and the pressure is on but he doesn't flinch and doesn't disappoint. His address is, by turns, witty, warm, hilarious, moving, and rousing. And as something only a true artist can do, he makes it both personal and universal. Be aware of serendipity, he tells us. Stuff happens. Deal with it, go with it. Stuff works out. You have no idea what the future holds so grab the bull by the horns and hold on tight. "Cowboy up!" he demands of us.

Mic drop time. Try following that.

"Cowboy up" becomes the refrain that rings through the rest of the conference.

Saturday.

Up early again Saturday, get dressed. I'm participating in two panel discussions so my wife says, "You're going like that?" It's not really a question. I change and head out the door.



All day, folks pop in and out of a demonstration on putting on Facebook events—launch parties and the like—by FWA’s resident social media mavens. Cool thing is, while learning the steps the attendees also assist a live Facebook event put on by the conference, so they not only learn the how-to but see it from the end user’s perspective.

Lunchtime, and the Youth Writers take center stage with Youth Writers RPLA. So many great writers of the future, and the Candice Coghill Award for the highest-scoring entry goes to Sarina Patel for her poem, “She Comes Home.” The future of American literature is bright.



Photo Credit: Karen Lieb

By the afternoon, after hoofing here, hustling there, I’m beat, and I’ve just eaten a big pile of turkey. Dirty secret time; I’m attending a really good talk, but I begin to doze off anyway. I’m a notorious snorer; this could be a crowning embarrassment. But I rally and enjoy the rest of the talk.

I’m that guy who loses raffle tickets. All the time. That’s all I’m saying about that.

My wife joins me at the pre-banquet reception. Wine. Good talk, catch up with friends, including a long-timer who just joined FWA recently. More wine.

The RPLA banquet is the crowning fete of the conference, an even more appropriate analogy given the theme and decor for this one. Tables are decked with gold coins, gilded chalices, and the accumulated wealth of empire.

Conference and FWA business is attended to, and thanks and kudos issued to the hard-working hotel staff and the many volunteers who make such an event happen. Meanwhile, members and guests tuck into their meals. Delicious, as usual, and out comes the dessert, a wedge of dark chocolate cake to die for. But there is an 800-pound gorilla on the table. Or rather, a 4-ounce bit of chocolate. At my table, attention centers on the little square thing. What is it? A picture frame? With a little ceramic FWA coaster or something stuck in it? Nervous glances. Who will be first? That would be me. I grab and bite and

announce that it is indeed an edible dessert, including the ceramics. There’s a good chance this little dessert square becomes the most tweeted and Instagrammed item of the conference.

On to the awards, the heart of the matter.

Recognizing tireless dedication to the cause, Chrissy Jackson announces this year’s Kaye Coppersmith Award winner, Chris Coward, the President’s Award winner, Robyn Weinbaum, and the Vice President’s Award winner, Mary Lois Sanders.

The numbers of RPLA entries continues to grow each year. In 2015, 393 entered. This year there are a whopping 479, a 22% increase. To handle the workload, the number of judges is 168, up from 125 a year ago.

Chris Coward gives a rundown of changes in the judging criteria, thanks the judges for their hard work, makes them stand, and launches into a list of impressive works and writers.

Throughout the calls to the stage to award recipients, reactions range from shock to elation. Something gets in my eye and makes my eyes water a bit.

Highlighting the event, runners-up and winners of the three highest honors share the spotlight, with Bill Dougherty taking home the Dahrís Clair Memorial Award for his screenplay, Shinyo Maru, Jennifer Boddicker winning Unpublished Book of the Year for her mainstream/literary novel, *Cleaning House*, and E.J. Wenstrom taking Published Book of the Year for her fantasy novel, *Mud*. Rumor has it these three have yet to touch the ground in the aftermath. “It’s such an unexpected honor,” E.J. tells me later. “Particularly among such a talented group of writers.”

Sunday.

I get through my presentation without fatalities, so it’s a good day. To wrap things up, designated cut-up Chris Hamilton emcees the callouts for auction winners. Parting remarks, well wishes to all, and the curtain is drawn on another fabulous Florida Writers Conference.

I gather my books from the bookstore and circle the 2017 conference dates on my calendar before I leave the hotel.

See you then!

Ken Pelham is a member of International Thriller Writers, and author of award-winning thrillers *Brigands Key* and *Place of Fear*. A founding member of the Alvarium Project writers’ collaborative, he lives in Maitland with his wife, Laura.





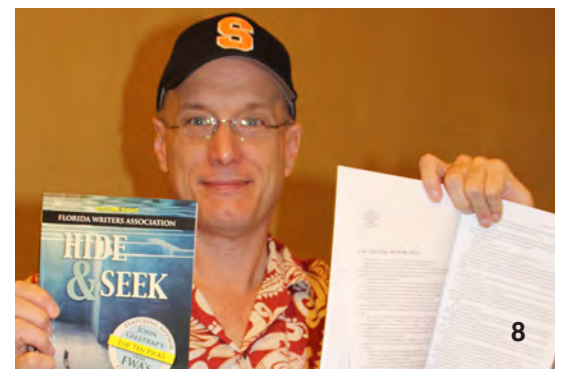
15th Annual Florida Writers Conference

October 20 – 23, 2016



Go to floridawriters.net for more conference photos.

All photos courtesy Karen Lieb.



1. Bria Burton Social Media Workshop 2. Cheyenne Williams, President of Florida Writers Association and Thomas Swartz, President of Florida Writers Foundation 3. Conference Chair Chrissy Jackson awards a prize 4. Elizabeth Sims Dialogue Workshop 5. Gong Show Pitchfest 6-7. Interview appointments with agents, editors, and industry experts 8. John Gilstrap selected Chris Hamilton's entry for first place in this year's Collection competition 9. John Rehg Getting Published workshop





10



11



12



13



14



15



16

10. Kathryn Bain Online Book Party workshop 11. Keynote speaker, best-selling author John Gilstrap 12. Authors selected for Florida Writers Association Collection, Volume 8 Hide & Seek 13-16. Members network at genre breakfast

Go to floridawriters.net for more conference photos. All photos courtesy Karen Lieb.



17. Royal Palm Literary Award Winners 18. Conference Marketing Chair Shannon Bell and faculty member Jon Bell 19. Photo booth fun 20. RPLA Chair Chris Coward and Youth Writers Chair Kristen Stieffel 21-22. Sharon Plotkin's CSI Workshop

Go to floridawriters.net for more conference photos. Photos 21-22 courtesy Kira Lieb; all other photos courtesy Karen Lieb.



15th Annual Florida Writers Conference

October 20 – 23, 2016



23. Bookstore Committee 24. Interview Committee 25. Silent Auction Committee 26. Registration Committee 27. Room Monitors

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We Can Sleep When We're Dead

by Ernie Audino

We ain't sleeping, and no one's stopping to piss. Oh, sure, we'll need to do both, if we're not careful, but we're careful. That's why we hydrate as little as possible and suck on packets of instant coffee crystals.

Staying awake, though, is not enough. Staying alive is what counts.

That's where the body armor, IED jammers, and the human drive for real-time situational awareness come in. Several thousand rounds of ammunition and digital satellite links to on-call attack helicopters help, too. Welcome to another night on the job.

And it's a dark one, supremely dark and supple in the way of plush velour. The midnight sky drapes as a curtain, pulled down around us and deep upon the desert soil. We are swallowed in its folds as we push across the hollow vastness of sand forty kilometers to the southeast of Tikrit, Saddam Hussein's hometown. It's a very dangerous middle of nowhere.

Here priority makes all the difference. For a weak moment you might think sleep is the most important thing, and that's natural, but then you better hope the enemy thinks so, too. He doesn't, by the way. His priority is on killing you, and because of that he will endure miserable conditions, heat, dirt, night, seclusion, threat of bodily harm or even his own death. He values killing you more than he does living. Still feel like taking a nap?

The funny thing, however, is not so much that sleep increases the likelihood of getting killed. It's the fact that dozing off might mean missing the start of a fight. None of us are even remotely willing to risk that. Not for us, but for our buddies. For each man to our left and right. For comrades advancing somewhere unseen in the blackness, those who are no more able to see you, but who are counting on you. Yes, we count on each other to execute our assigned parts of the overall mission, to do what we are supposed to do, in the dark, without anyone needing to remind us. It's a trust that defines trust, and it's so noble and rare, we actually feel sorry for those who've never experienced it.

It's not unique to my ten-man team of American soldiers. The 500 Kurdish fighters with whom we are embedded tonight know it, too. It binds them to us and us to them. It's what makes an army a brotherhood of arms.

A Kurdish radio crackles. Our lead element has reached a planned refuel point and comes up on the net to inform us they are securing it. We roll in behind them, tactically disperse into the darkness and halt. We will remain here only long enough for each vehicle in our formation to transfer fuel from onboard jerry cans.

I dismount to walk to other vehicles, to check on other crews. They move through their duties. They transfer fuel, check their ammo, sneak a smoke, and coordinate with the crews on their flanks. There is little talking. It's just work and weary men.

My Kurdish counterpart walks over from the vehicle in front of mine and puts a hand on my shoulder. His other clenches what remains of a cigarette. He is a long-time commander of *peshmerga*, the legendary Kurdish fighters whose name translates to Those Who Confront Death. When I linked up with him some months ago, he wore the scars of eight old combat wounds, and then later I was with him in Tikrit when he earned a ninth. That's nine purple hearts to an American.

None of that matters to him tonight. He speaks to me only of his men.

"They are tired, brother," he says to me as we walk amongst his crews. "We are all tired."

I smile a knowing smile.

"But that is okay. We have a mission to complete." He smiles back. "We can sleep when we're dead." 🦋

Ernie Audino lives in Port Orange, FL.





Tale of a Weary Park Ranger

by Daniel R. Tardona

It was already late in the afternoon. It had been a long 27 hours since she started her observations on the high ridge above the melting river. Leah's eyelids felt as if filled with lead weights. Her back felt like it was part of the stiff tree stump she was leaning on for what seemed like days.

"Life should be stirring by now according to my calculations," she said aloud. The sound of her own voice startled her.

She was certain the family had survived the long harsh winter. It had been months and many feet of snow since she last made any sighting of the family. Still, Leah was certain the mother and her cubs would emerge any moment. It was that anticipation that kept her fighting against the relentless need to sleep.

Lifting her binoculars, she knocked off her lightweight glasses. "Jeez, when this family finally does appear, I am going to take a long winter's nap myself." Again, the sound of her voice made her brain snap back into alertness. *I am so privileged to have a job where I get to spend long hours in the wilderness, observing things that most people only read about in National Geographic. Such is the life of a park ranger.*

A deep urge to yawn suddenly came on. It was the kind of yawn that stretches the jaw until the cheekbones hurt. I need to stay vigilant no matter how strong my desire to sleep, she thought. "I should do an equipment check." Leah ran through her checklist. "Radio is off, check, camera pointed and focused on the den, check" It was time to take another swig of black coffee from her thermos.

"Yuck!" The coffee was now icy cold. "Boy, I needed that jolt" Another long hour passed. The sun was beginning its slow decent on the horizon. *I am jealous of you mister sun getting to go to bed now.* The thought made her chuckle out loud. *This has been my project and despite my tiredness, I will be dammed if I am going miss this observation.* She decided it would be ok to stand and

stretch for a moment. She rolled her shoulders and tried to stand on her worn out and stiff legs. As she stood, she lifted the thermos intending to take another swig of cold caffeine.

A large crash filled her ears just as the tip of the thermos met her bottom lip. Icy cold coffee splashed down the front of her chin and down the front of her neck sending chilly, electric like impulses through her body. The sudden noise combined with the jolt of cold coffee caused her to jerk forward knocking off her glasses.

"Jeez oh me!" she exclaimed as she went down, taking the tripod and camera along with her as her binoculars caught and wrapped around the equipment. She rolled as she fell almost crushing her glasses. A bit dazed but still coherent, she quickly realized what the sound was. Unwrapping herself from the tangle of accoutrements, she retrieved her glasses.

Lifting up the binoculars, she looked through the messy lenses. "Just what I thought, Mama has emerged and following on her heels are her two cubs." In spite of their long nap, they all looked healthy. Regardless of the long weary hours of waiting to document the emergence with photographs, Leah felt elated and renewed. Even though her mission was to photo document the event, she made a split second decision. She decided to take in the moment.

Knowing that Mom was focusing on finding food and keeping alert of any large males around that might endanger her young ones, Leah was no threat. Soaking up the vision of these wild creatures completely indifferent to her presence, Leah watched as the bear family wandered off into the wilds. A feeling of utter aliveness filled her being. It was one of those experiences she would cherish the rest of her life with no regrets. She would return to the ranger station exhausted but delightfully refreshed and renewed and thinking, *now I will have a long peaceful sleep.* 🌲

Daniel R. Tardona lives in Jacksonville, FL.





Missing Kitty by Terri Curtis

“She’s just a cat,” my husband reminded me. “She’ll come home when she’s hungry.”

He rolled his eyes and my hackles rose to full alert. He wrapped his arms around me in a smothering hug that only resulted in irritating me more.

“That’s not the reason she stays here,” I mumbled against his chest.

“I know,” he crooned. “She loves you.”

“You’re darn right, she does,” I said, extracting myself from his embrace. I pulled open the front door.

“You’re not going out to hunt for her now, are you?” Rich glanced at his iWatch. “It’s midnight!”

I aimed my best glare at him. “Kitty might be laying somewhere hurt. She depends on me.” I stepped out onto the porch and yanked the door shut behind me.

Even at this hour, the Arizona heat hit me like a dragon’s fiery breath. I stood very still listening for any Kitty sounds. I heard the whoosh of an occasional car on the freeway a half-mile away. Leaves of the orange trees in our front yard rattled, and a dog barked a few houses over. The sweet scent of orange blossoms mingled with dust and manure from nearby horse properties to form a distinct Southwestern aroma.

“Here Kitty, Kitty,” I whispered and walked around the side of the house. “Here, Kitty, Kitty.” I’d forgotten to grab a flashlight, but I refused to go back inside and listen to Rich lecture me about staying home. Honestly? He was probably right, but I had to do something. I couldn’t just sit around while Kitty might be in trouble.

After searching our property, I marched down our dimly lit street whisper-shouting, “Here, Kitty, Kitty,” every few yards trying not to wake the neighbors.

I ventured out to the main street that led into our subdivision. As a car whizzed by, I squinted at the blacktop momentarily lit by headlights. I spotted no furry lumps on the roadway.

I headed back toward the house passing a pasture where several horses snuffled in the darkness. A nearby streetlight showed no tromped feline lying on the ground.

Arriving back home, I sat down on the porch steps to wait. Kitty usually arrived at the back door around six pm for her supper, but not last night. I hadn’t set eyes on her for almost twenty-four hours. I felt like the worst pet owner in the world.

I closed my eyes and heard the front door open then close. Rich sat down next to me and put an arm over my shoulders.

“Any luck?” he asked.

“No. I checked the entire neighborhood including Gilbert Road. “I know it’s silly, Rich, but I’m worried.”

“I know, Baby, and I’m sorry I wasn’t more understanding. You’ve been out here for a long time. We both have to get up to go to work in four hours.”

I raked my fingers through my hair. “I’m going to sit out here a while longer.”

“At least sit on the bench where it’s comfortable.” Rich stood, pulling me up with him. He guided me to the cushioned seat and plopped down beside me.

“What are you doing?” I asked, looking at him in surprise.

“I’m going to wait with you.”

“Why would you do that? You don’t even like Kitty.”

He leaned over and placed a gentle kiss on my cheek. “You’re right,” he admitted, “but I like you.”

I smiled and rested my head on his shoulder. I don’t know how long I dozed, but I awoke to a stiff neck and a sound like fingernails on a chalkboard. My first thought was that a breeze had kicked up scraping tree limbs against the house windows.

“What in the heck is that noise?” Rich untangled himself from me, opened the front door, reached inside and flicked on the porch light. A fur rocket shot out of the house and jumped onto my lap. Kitty purred loud enough to wake the neighbors.

I looked at Rich who still held the doorknob. He shook his head. “I’m going to bed,” I heard as his footsteps faded into the house. 🐾

Terri Curtis lives in Daytona Beach, FL.





The Girl and the Stars

by Colleen Kastner

Long ago, before the world was filled with Wi-Fi and cellphones, there was a poor woman who waited thirty-five years for a rich husband to marry. Her sisters and all her friends got married and whispered behind their hands that surely this plain girl would never marry. April wanted a big house and a husband more than anything else in the world.

Spring arrived and she watched the snow melt in rivulets down the roof of her cottage and she realized her life was dripping away just as quickly. She decided to visit the wise woman in the Manhattan penthouse overlooking Central Park to ask what she should do. The crone in her Chanel suit peered over her green reading spectacles and snorted.

"Well that's an easy one, my dear. You need a complete makeover. Your hair is a mess, you have no make-up, and have you ever had your nails done?" She rolled her rheumy eyes.

"Your future lies in the stars." She rang a silver bell to summon her butler.

April ran to the nearest spa and had every inch of herself exfoliated, waxed, and made over and bought new clothes from a fancy store on Madison Avenue. The man opposite her on the train home smiled. It was a sign. April felt anticipation and hope well in her heart.

That evening she spread a blanket on her lawn scented with fresh cut grass, and lay back to watch the stars come out. Crickets chirped as the first star appeared. It twinkled and began singing in the most beautiful voice April had ever heard. More stars appeared in the gloaming and began singing until the air was perfumed with music. April was enchanted and listened until it was late and she grew sleepy and went to bed. But the sound of the stars kept her awake. She closed her bedroom window but she still she could hear the stars singing. She put on her sound machine, stuffed cotton in her ears, and even put a pillow over her head but nothing helped.

Days rolled into weeks and still April could not sleep because of the twinkling songs of the stars. She walked

around like a zombie, dark smudges under her eyes, and a bottomless cup of coffee in hand. Eventually her hair turned grey and she lapsed into a kind of walking coma, neither awake nor asleep, from which state she could suddenly quite clearly understand the language of the stars. She became known as a seer and people lined up to consult her about what the stars had to say.

April charged a substantial fee for her consultations and soon was able to buy a big house and had a financial advisor who made large investments for her on the New York Stock Exchange. Late one Thursday night he asked April to marry him.

But still she could not sleep and her new husband suggested that since she was awake anyway she should use the time to see more people. It occurred to April her advisor had married her for the money but her mind was mushy from exhaustion and she couldn't think what to do. She shuffled and staggered like a drunk old lady, black bags under her eyes, and her hair now whiter than snow. In desperation she cried out to the stars for help.

"Why are you complaining, April dear?" The stars replied. "You have the rich husband and big house you asked for."

"If I don't sleep I think I will die," April whispered. "I wish I could just sleep."

Instantly, the musical voices were gone and April fell into a deep, magical sleep. The lines of people disappeared and her husband moved her to the nursing home down the street. April never woke up again. If you visit the nursing home you will see her sleeping there. And when the stars are out you may see her smile as if she were listening to the most beautiful music. ✨

Colleen Kastner lives in Davie, FL.



Aftershocks

by Micki Morency

A catastrophic earthquake shook Port-au-Prince like a Ragdoll twenty-four hours ago. Dazed people covered in dust and blood wandered the apocalyptic streets like the zombies that had crowded twelve year-old Maggie's dreams her whole life. Now she wanted dreams to take her away. They would not come. She followed her mother Leda, as the overcrowded city quivered as if it was in the midst of a grand mal seizure. The aftershocks chafed Maggie's nerves worse than her little brother Gerard ever had. And he irritated her a lot.

They stopped at a neighboring town where blue tents dotted the ground like kites before taking flight. At her friend's tent, Leda put a sleeping Gerard down on the floor and shook her arms to relieve the cramps.

"Maggie, go lay down next to your brother. You need to sleep," Leda said. "Tomorrow we'll make our way to grandma's in Cabaret."

"Is it safe there, Maman?"

"Yes baby. Now say your prayers and go to sleep."

"I can't sleep." Maggie clamped down on her bottom lip to stop the sobs. "Where's Papa ... I ..."

"Maggie, the building where Papa worked collapsed. No one ..." Leda sniffled.

"I don't want to go." River of tears left tracks in the dust that coated Maggie's dark brown skin. "What if Papa's not..."

Leda sighed. "Then Papa will come to Cabaret. He'll know." She pushed Maggie's head down on her lap as they sat on the dirt floor.

Her mother's long fingers stroked Maggie's back in circular motion, as if to coax the sleep to come from hiding. Maggie's eyes itched from dryness but started to grow heavy. A growling from the ground pulled her away from her mother like a pair of strong hands. The zigzag opening in the earth yawned in hunger. Maggie threw her short arms towards her mother but could not reach. Sleep vanished from her body to make room for more fear. Within seconds, darkness and silence blanketed the tent city, punctuated by moans. Raw dusty throats could no longer scream. Maggie carried a small wooden bench to the mouth of the tent and sat. Her bulging eyes searched for the sun through the ink black night.

After a breakfast of meals-ready-to-eat from the Red Cross man, Maggie and her family started the long walk to the depot. As they passed by her flattened three-story school building, Maggie stared at a black laced-up shoe attached to a bloated leg that disappeared under a pile of rubbles. Maggie's legs buckled. Leda took her daughter's hand and slowed down her strides.

Squeezed on the bus between a woman with breasts that spilled onto Maggie's flat chest, and a chain smoking man whose skinny elbow jabbed her ribs through every pothole, sweat washed Maggie's face clean of dust and sleep.

"Maman ... Maman," Maggie shook her mother's thigh on the seat across from her. Gerard stirred and shifted on Leda's lap. "Are we ... almost there?"

Leda wiped her face a couple times and focused on her daughter. "Did you sleep, baby?"

"How much longer?" Maggie's voice cracked. She wanted to cradle her pounding head. Her pinned arms between her companions needled her body like daggers with every movement.

"Not much longer, baby. You look ... pale."

"There's no earthquake in Cabaret. Right, Maman?"

"It will be peaceful. You will sleep. I promise."

After the long bus ride, Maggie grinned as she stretched her sleepy arms when she saw debris-free streets, intact houses, and children playing on the streets of Cabaret. She filled her lungs with the dust free air before entering the small mud house with the thatched roof.

A bountiful supper and a bath in the river buoyed Maggie to near normalcy. She lay on the straw mat on the floor with Gerard. She squeezed the pillow and purred as her mother put out the kerosene lamp. The moon filtered through the cracks in the wooden window. Maggie closed her eyes. Sleep hovered over her heavy lids. Something tickled her lips. Annoyed, she raised her hand and delivered a swift punch to Gerard. Warm liquid splattered her face. Her eyes flew open. The dead rat stared at her as if in shock. Maggie screamed. 🦁

Micki Morency lives in Hudson, FL.





Midnight Promises

by Tyler Omoth

“Ha! I told you he couldn’t do it!”

Jacob’s eyes shot open and he stared his brother down. He wasn’t sleeping. He had blinked. It had been a long blink, but it was just a blink.

He was going to see that ball drop in Times Square on the television even if it killed him.

“Every year,” his brother said. “Every year you say you’re going to stay up until midnight and you can’t do it!”

Jacob took a swipe at his older brother’s pointed party hat to no avail. “It’s not fair if you keep talking. You’ll bore me to sleep!”

I have to do it this year, Jacob thought.

“Somebody’s cranky!” his brother said. “Wait. Is this about Abby? Dude. She’s gone. She’s been gone for a year. Let it go!”

“Shut up!” Jacob’s voice shook with anger. “Just because you didn’t like her. You don’t care about anything except your stupid basketball team. Tonight is the night. She promised!”

She promised. She promised, he thought to himself. She said when I was 10, she’d stay up with me, and we’d watch the new year come in together. She couldn’t have known that a drunk driver would T-bone her Ford Fusion two years ago on New Year’s Eve and break all of her promises for her.

Tonight, their parents went to a neighbor’s house for a community get-together. Jacob knew that every moment closer to midnight his mom was closer to tears. His father would put an arm around her and pretend he was stronger, but it was killing him, too. Only Jacob’s brother, Tony, seemed impervious to the pain of New Year’s Eve.

“Next year,” Abby had said, “Next year, kiddo. It’s you and me. We’ll stay in, drink some cola so we can stay up late, and when that ball drops, we’ll dance along with ‘Auld Lang Syne.’”

Jacob looked at the clock. Why was it blurry? Were his eyes watering from the repeated yawning or was he crying? In either case he couldn’t let Tony see it. He ran to the fridge to grab a cola, just like she’d said. He wiped his eyes and went back to the couch, keeping his face as close to the television as his eyes could bear.

He opened his eyes again. For a split second, he panicked. Did he fall asleep? Did he miss it? Jacob looked at the television where a clock was still counting down to midnight. Only a minute left! That was his longest blink yet.

He watched with anticipation, dread, and hope all at once as the clock ticked down. It was almost time.

10!

Why did Abby have to go out last year?

9!

Where is Tony? Is he sleeping in the bathroom?

8!

I can’t stand this! Abby should be here! She promised!

7!

Even Mom and Dad aren’t here. They went to a party with friends and left me, too.

6!

Jacob heard the front door unlocking and looked to see his mother and father rushing into the living room towards him. His mother’s mascara was streaking down her face.

5!

She grabbed him from the couch, hugged him, and held him close as they watched the final seconds count down.

4!

“Mom,” Jacob said, “I miss her.”

3!

“I know, honey. We do, too. I’m sorry we left tonight.”

2!

“Mom, I almost fell asleep,” he said. His eyes were tearing up again.

1!

“But you didn’t. You kept your end of the promise.”

The television erupted into loud cheers and cries of “Happy New Year!” and a cacophony of noisemakers lived up to their names.

And then the music started and the old familiar song played. Jacob and his mother danced along with the rhythm and wondered if the new year would hurt any less than this one had. When the song was over, Jacob walked over to the recliner where his father sat, wiping his eyes. He climbed up into his dad’s lap.

Jacob’s father put one arm around him and held him close. I made it, Jacob thought. With a small sob, Jacob laid his head on his father’s chest and fell asleep. 🌟

Tyler Omoth lives in Brandon, FL.



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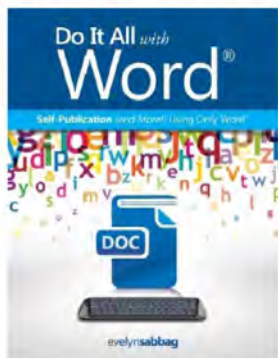


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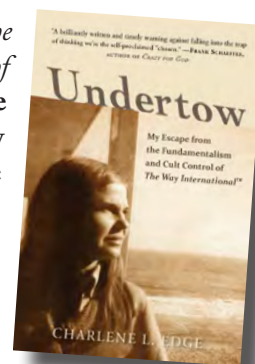
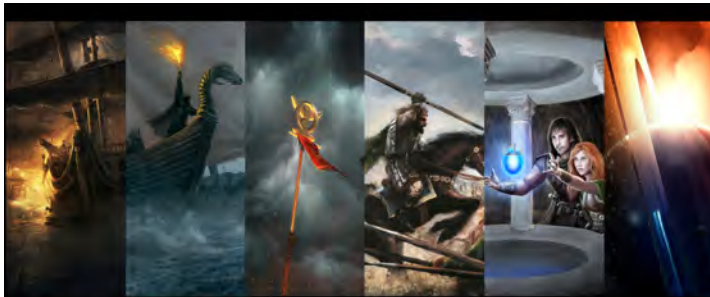
Congratulations to 2010 Royal Palm Inspirational Romance Winner **Kathryn J. Bain**'s 10th release, her third KT Morgan Short Suspense, titled "Reunion." Twelve-year-old Becky Sidleman thinks things might be looking up when she bumps into KT Morgan in the small town of Marshland, Indiana. However, two men on their way will show Becky that sometimes excitement isn't always what it's cracked up to be.



Write In Style: How to Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing by Book Doctor **Bobbie Christmas** has won four honors this year. *Write In Style* won First Place in the How-To Category of the Florida Book Festival and a Bronze IPPY in the Writing and Publishing Category of the Independent Publishers Awards. The book has also been named one of only five finalists in the Writing/Publishing Category of the 2016 Next Generation Indie Book Awards, and one of only five finalists in the How-To Category of the Eric Hoffer Book Awards. To learn more or order go to zebraeditor.com/book_write_in_style.shtml.




Undertow: My Escape from the Fundamentalism and Cult Control of the Way International™, **Charlene Edge**'s beautifully written new memoir, sheds light on the compelling pull cults have on vulnerable people. After a family tragedy struck, teenaged Charlene rejected Catholicism, family, and college to join what became one of the largest fundamentalist cults in America: The Way International founded by Victor Paul Wierwille. Eventually promoted to the inner circle of biblical researchers, Charlene discovered Wierwille's plagiarism, misuse of Scripture, and sex abuse. Amid chaos at The Way's Ohio-based headquarters, Charlene escaped—for her survival and her child's. Order at charleneedge.com.

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Patrick Hempfing's first book, *MoMENTS: A Dad Holds On*, launched this summer. The former CPA turned stay-at-home dad writes a self-syndicated column about the joys and challenges of parenthood. His book is a compilation of his tender, humorous "MoMENTS" columns and new material. His monthly column has been published in regional parenting magazines and newspapers across the country and Canada. Patrick and his family moved to the Orlando area this summer, and he enjoyed attending his first Florida Writers Conference in October. Patrick's website is patrickhempfing.com. His book can be purchased on Amazon.



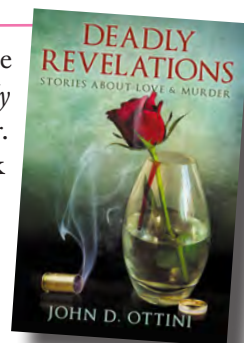
Little Miss Chaos, the debut novel by Fleming Island author **Paula R. Hilton**, has been awarded a Kirkus Reviews star for books of exceptional merit and was named a Kirkus' Indie Books of the Month selection in September. This girl-meets-thief YA romance was also a shortlisted finalist in the William Faulkner-William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition.



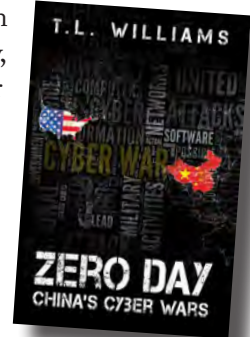
Trisomy XXI by **G.A. Minton** has received the following honors: (1) Benjamin Franklin Digital Book Award Silver Honoree by the Independent Book Publishers Association, based on exceptional content, design, and technology, (2) Second Place winner of the Indie Book Awards in the Best Young Adult category, (3) Nominated by the Baltimore Science Fiction Society for the Compton Crook Award, which honors the best first novel of the year in Science Fiction, Fantasy, or Horror, (4) Recommended for consideration of a Bram Stoker Award in the New Novel category (5) Multiple 5-Star reviews from Readers' Favorite, Amazon, Goodreads, and Reader Views.



John D. Ottini would like to announce the release of his new book, *Deadly Revelations: Stories about Love & Murder*. On sale at Amazon in paperback (\$7.99) and e-book (\$2.99) format.



First Coast Publishers, will release Veteran CIA officer, **T.L. Williams'** third novel in the Logan Alexander series, *Zero Day: China's Cyber Wars*, on February 1, 2017. Shifting between Chongqing, China and Langley, Virginia, this fast-paced spy thriller revolves around a plot by the Chinese government to seize the edge on global power by undermining the U.S. economy. Armed with an underground force of hackers, China's Cyber Executive, through the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), has a mission to destroy confidence in the dollar by launching persistent, aggressive cyberattacks on America's banking system.



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Volunteers Recognized at Conference

Every year, three volunteers receive special recognition for embodying the motto of the Florida Writers Association (FWA): "Writers Helping Writers."

The Kaye Coppersmith Award was created to honor Kaye who, because of her kindness, support, and warm encouragement to both seasoned and new members, will always be remembered as the welcoming arms of the FWA.

Any member can nominate another member for the Kaye Coppersmith Award. A committee reviews submissions and top-ranking entries are submitted to the Board of Directors for blind judging.

For the other special awards, the President and Vice President of the FWA each select a person they feel has contributed the most to FWA in the spirit of Writers Helping Writers. All three award-winners are announced and applauded at the annual Florida Writers Conference.



Kaye Coppersmith Award Chris Coward

Chris Coward is a lifetime member of FWA, the co-leader of Oxford Writers critique group, chairperson for the 2016 Royal Palm Literary Awards competition, an FWA Director, and past FWA president. Her smiling face can be seen in every aspect of FWA. Whether a question needs direction, or a member needs help, she is always there, and always encouraging. Her energy is boundless, she is a people-person extraordinaire, and her tireless support for every individual and nuance our growing membership produces makes Chris a perfect example of the welcoming arms of FWA.



The President's Award Robyn Weinbaum

Robyn Weinbaum, PTIN, MBA, a lifetime member, brings her knowledge in tax law to the position of Vice President of Finance on the Executive Committee. Always open to a good debate, her dry wit and humor bring smiles to the faces of everyone she meets. Her willingness to provide assistance at the last minute and ability to make quick, level-headed decisions puts her at the top of any list of valued members.



The Vice President's Award Mary Lois Sanders

Mary Lois Sanders joined FWA in 2006 with a strong background in writing from her parents both of whom were published authors. She is a preacher's daughter, native Texan, and found a talent in singing which led to her double degrees from Baylor University and another from seminary. She has been the Lady Lake Writers Group Leader for several years, volunteers in the FWA Bookstore, sings our National Anthem at the annual conference and fields the wide range of questions that come through the FWA website, a fast-paced position, not unlike an EMS unit for a hospital. Her congenial, calming personality and encouraging demeanor make her a perfect recipient for this year's Vice President's award.



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2016 Royal Palm Literary Awards

Published Book of the Year

Fantasy

Mud

by E.J. Wenstrom



Unpublished Book of the Year

Mainstream/Literary

Cleaning House

by Jennifer Boddicker



Dahris Clair Memorial Award

Screenplay/Stage Play/Teleplay

Shinyo Maru

by Bill Dougherty



*Winners were announced at the 15th Annual Florida Writers Conference
awards banquet Congratulations to all!*



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BOOK-LENGTH FICTION

Published Blended Genre

First Place
The Girl in the Glyphs, David C. Edmonds

Second Place
Fraccidental Death: An Eco-Thriller,
Donna Meredith

Third Place
When Darkness Fell, Susan Lindsley

Unpublished Blended Genre

First Place
Fairy Free, Janet D'Andrea

Second Place
Lisbeth, Marina Brown

Third Place
The Other Shoulder, Benjamin Seeley

Published Fantasy

First Place
Mud, E.J. Wenstrom

Second Place
One Little Word, T.A. Peters

Unpublished Fantasy

First Place
Fairy Free, Janet D'Andrea

Second Place
The Tournament of Moons, Joseph Mazerac

Published Historical Fiction

First Place
Tortuga Bay, SR Staley

Second Place
A Place: We Knew Well, Susan Carol
McCarthy

Third Place
Roland: of Pirates and Patriots, Timothy
Freriks

Unpublished Historical Fiction

First Place
The Prince of Glencurragh, Nancy Blanton

Second Place
The Artisan, Gene Luke

Third Place
Refugees, Claire Hamner Matturro

Published Humor/Satire (fiction)

First Place
The Cow in the Doorway, Gino B. Bardi

Unpublished Humor/Satire (fiction)

First Place
Ragtime Dudes in a Thin Place, Richard
Gartee

Second Place
George Ade Malone and the Paradise Test,
Jean Sullivan Johnson

Published Mainstream/Literary

First Place
The Loss of All Lost Things, Amina Lolita
Gautier

Second Place
Tortuga Bay, SR Staley

Third Place
A Bit of Sun, Ann Henry

Unpublished Mainstream/Literary

First Place
Cleaning House, Jennifer Boddicker

Second Place
George Ade Malone and the Paradise Test,
Jean Sullivan Johnson

Third Place
Liwayway, Carding Mor

Published Mystery

First Place
The Perdiccas Scroll, John Marling March

Second Place
Emerald Obsession, Carolyn Greeley

Unpublished Mystery

First Place
False Front, Keith Gockenbach

Second Place
Billie Mae, Elle Andrews Patt

Third Place
The Other Side of the Coin, Henry James
Kaye

Published Novella

First Place
Crystal Night, Charles A. Cornell

Second Place

Mistletoe Justice, Carol J. Post

Third Place

Little Angel Helper, Bria Burton

Unpublished Novella

First Place
Butterfly in a Hurricane, Kerryn Reid

Second Place

Raina's Run, Elizabeth Nebergall

Third Place

The Sorolole Suicides, Patricia A. Crumpler

Published Romance

First Place
Winter Harvest, Anne Nichols Reynolds

Second Place

Worth Her Weight, Janet Franks Little

Third Place

Dreams of Her Own, Rebecca Heflin

Unpublished Romance

First Place
One More Breath, Amber Garr

Second Place

Esther and Me, Stephen Leitschuh

Third Place

Glass Promises, Janet Franks Little

Published Science Fiction

First Place
Zara, Jade Kerrion

Second Place

Reflection: Book One, W. Scott Causey

Third Place

Xin, Jade Kerrion

Unpublished Science Fiction

First Place
The Brazos Formation, Matthew A. Rieder

Second Place

Henry the Last, Arthur M. Doweiko

Third Place

The Roswell Swatch, Scott Michael Powers

Published Thriller/Suspense

First Place
The Lost Concerto, Helaine Mario



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Second Place

Mast Island, Anne Nichols Reynolds

Third Place

Fraccidental Death: An Eco-Thriller,
Donna Meredith

Unpublished Thriller/Suspense

First Place

Gatorman, Mark McWaters

Second Place

The Dark and the Dead, Dana J. Summers

Third Place

The Heretic of Granada, David C. Edmonds

Published Women's Fiction

First Place

The Girl in the Glyphs, David C. Edmonds

Second Place

Bookish Meets Boy, Dianna Dann

Third Place

Four of a Kind, Vanessa Russell

Unpublished Women's Fiction

First Place

The Middle of Somewhere, Faun Joyce
Senatro

Second Place

North of the Killing Hand, Joni M. Fisher

Third Place

Negotiating Her Way, Jennifer Leigh Cook

BOOK-LENGTH NONFICTION

Published Autobiography/Memoir

First Place

Managing Bubbie, Russel Lazega

Second Place

We Were Amateur Soldiers, Victor DiGenti

Third Place

A Movable Marriage, Tricia Pimental

Unpublished Autobiography/Memoir

First Place

Resolve, Courage, Hope, Alison Nissen

Second Place

Casualties of Peacemaking, Beverly Johnson
Biehr

Unpublished Biography

First Place

The Bed I Made, Robert M. Lynch

Published Educational/Informational

First Place

The Power of 2—Jump Start Your Business,
Jack L. Hayes

Second Place

The Novel Pitch, Ann Henry

Third Place

The Single Dad Detour, Tez Brooks

FICTION FOR YOUTH

Published Early Reader / Picture Book

First Place

Once Around the Lake, Susan Woods
Golder

Second Place

A Home for Kayla, Kim English

Third Place

Jeremiah Josephat Jeepers Malone, Linda
Leggett

Unpublished Early Reader / Picture Book

First Place

Wait for me! Would you mind?
Agnes Deglon

Second Place

Ace of Hearts, Patricia A. Crumpler

Third Place

Tally and Talulah the Outdoor Adventurer,
Aimee Taylor

Published Chapter Book

First Place

True Friends are Hard to Find, Book Five,
Linda J. Chapman, Mary Lois Sanders

Unpublished Chapter Book

First Place

Finnigan the Circus Cat, Mary T. Wagner

Published Middle-Grade Fiction

First Place

Jacqueline, Jackie Minniti

Second Place

Pankyland, John Hope

Third Place

Welcome to Monstrovica, Mark H.
Newhouse

Unpublished Middle-Grade Fiction

First Place

Mormor's Piano, Amy Brown

Second Place

The Boy Who Dreamed Mount Everest,
Lawrence Martin

Third Place

The Mystery at Moz Hollow, A.K. Hicks

Published Young Adult/New Adult

First Place

The Cow in the Doorway, Gino B. Bardi

Second Place

Tortuga Bay, SR Staley

Third Place

Surf Shop Sisters, Laura Kennedy

Unpublished Young Adult/New Adult

First Place

Wayward Girls, Claire Hamner Matturro,
Penny H. Koepsel

Second Place

Waking the Dead, Amber Garr

Third Place

Silencing Sharks, John Hope

GENERAL CATCH-ALL

Published General Catch-All

First Place

Professor Birdsong's Law School Guide,
Leonard Birdsong

Second Place

Now We Will be Happy, Amina Lolita
Gautier

Third Place

The Slave's Diary, Kenneth R. McClelland

Unpublished General Catch-All

First Place

Backpack Blues, Melody Dean Dimick



Celebrations!

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

SCREENPLAY/STAGE PLAY/TELEPLAY

Unproduced Play

First Place

Shinyo Maru, Bill Dougherty

Second Place

St. Alden's, David-Michael Harding

Third Place

Ascent of Evil, Michael Brim

SHORT FICTION

Unpublished Flash Fiction

First Place

"The Choice," Aimee Taylor

Second Place

"What Dog Today," Zeke Mattheus

Third Place

"He knows, Son, He knows," Mark McWaters

Published Short Story

First Place

"Daddy Was Santa," John Hope

Second Place

"Water, Ice, and Vice," Antonio Simon, Jr.

Third Place

"Two Milers," John Hope

Unpublished Short Story

First Place

"Spears and Promises," Robert Hart

Second Place

"Can you help me with that?" Christopher Hamilton

Third Place

"Hard Times and Bright Stars," Joan King

SHORT NONFICTION

Published Creative Nonfiction

First Place

"R.I.P the Meatball," Mary T. Wagner

Unpublished Creative Nonfiction

First Place

"The Transition," K E Garland

Second Place

"Words," John Hope

Third Place

"River Dreams," Marie Vernon

POETRY

Unpublished Poetry

First Place

"Sonnet IX," Ellinore Jensen

Second Place

"Ysobel Gomez," Melody Dean Dimick

Third Place

"Dilemma," Phyllis McKinley

YOUTH WINNERS

Candice Coghill Award

"She Comes Home," Sarina Patel

FICTION

Book-Length Fiction, ages 16-17

First Place

Sphere of Energy, Daniela Banks

Second Place

Apocalyptical, Michaela Brushwood

Book-Length Fiction, ages 9-11

First Place

The Two Gates, Mary Grace Galione

Short Fiction, ages 16-17

First Place

"Nine Lives," Kat Golding

Second Place

"The Ventriloquist," Daniela Banks

Short Fiction, ages 12-15

First Place

"The Mermaid and the World," Dilly Carson

NONFICTION

Short Nonfiction, ages 16-17

First Place

"Fixing Fluency," Kat Golding

POETRY

Poetry, ages 12-15

First Place

"She comes home," Sarina Patel

Second Place

"The note that started it all," Sarina Patel

Third Place

"Lonely the Rogue," Sarina Patel

2016 Royal Palm Literary Award Winners

by Chris Coward,
2016-17 RPLA Chairperson

Huge congratulations to everyone who won, finished, semifinished, or entered the 2016 Royal Palm Literary Awards competition! This was one tough and nuanced contest, and you all should be commended.

RPLA is a service of the Florida Writers Association that recognizes excellence in members' published and unpublished works while providing objective and constructive feedback for all entrants. There's even a Youth RPLA.

RPLA is big. This year, we had a record-breaking 479 entries, a 22% jump over the 392 in 2015. And because at least three judges reviewed each entry, the 168 powerhouse judges worked very, very hard.

Below is the list of winners. Details, including loglines, are at floridawriters.net.

Oh, and if you're planning to enter next year, the submissions window is January 15 - April 30. (Note: earlier closing date!) Guidelines will be posted the first of the year. Good luck!





RIGHT in SIGHT NOWHERE in SIGHT

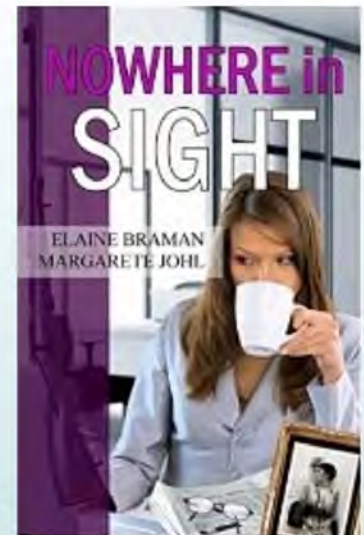
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Elaine Braman and Margarete Johl

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Elaine and Margarete have a unique writing collaboration. They share the passion for writing witty mysteries and thought provoking sci-fi

while plotting through heat waves and hot flashes under balmy palm trees, but they write together 3000 miles apart. Elaine lives in Florida and Margarete lives in California. They met one time by chance—mixed like paper and pen—and have been writing together for the past seven years.



"She's the scene setter—the voice in the narrative—the point-of-view of the protagonist—the twist in the plot and the killer of my babies." We are ...

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