A vibrant blue-headed vireo with a bright red breast is perched on a tree branch. The bird is the central focus, with its head turned slightly to the left. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting a dense forest or garden setting. The lighting is natural, highlighting the bird's colors.

The Florida Writer

August 2018 | Volume 12, Number 4

Building a Believable Chain of Events in Your Novel

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IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 **How to Submit to the Florida Writer**
- 3 **Three Free Apps I Use Every Day**
Mary Ann de Stefano
- 5 **President's Notes**
Alison Nissen
- 6 **Building a Believable Chain of Events in Your Novel**
Steven James
- 9 **How to Price a Re-release to Sell More Books**
Penny Sansevieri
- 11 **The Ethical Writer:
A New Writer in the Group**
Chrissy Jackson
- 13 **Florida Writers Conference: Agents, Acquisition Editors,
and Publishers**
- 15 **Clearly Legal:
No Happy Ending: Copyright Problems in the Romance
Fiction World**
Anne Dalton
- 17 **Florida Writers Foundation**
- 20 **Ask the Book Doctor**
About Scene Shifts, Coined Words, Writing About Animals
Bobbie Christmas
- 22 **Lifetime Members**
- PARAGRAPHS**
- 24 **Martha** | Linda Feist
- 25 **Plot Points and Change** | Robert Hart
- 26 **From Bad to Worse** | Ellen Holder
- 27 **A Circle of Life** | Teresa Miller
- 28 **They Walk Among Us** | Don "Doc" Sanborn
- 29 **That Old Florida Tonic** | Dana Thomas Weber
- 30 **Celebrations**

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Click this symbol (on most pages)
to return to this table of contents.

The Florida Writer

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

REQUIREMENTS

Celebrations

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

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

Paragraphs

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

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

Additional Requirements

1. To be eligible for publication, you must be a member of the Florida Writers Association
2. Send all submissions as an attached Word document. Do not embed your submission’s text within the email.
3. Include your name and contact information within the attachment.
4. Photo image files must be high resolution, 300 ppi, jpg or png format, and sent as an attachment, not embedded in a document.
5. Email your submission to *tfw@floridawriters.net*

Prompts & Deadlines

October Issue – Deadline September 1, 2018

An old friend comes to call.

December 2018 Issue – Deadline November 1, 2018

Use this line somewhere in your piece: Everything had changed.





Editor's Notes

Three Free Apps I Use Every Day

Mary Ann de Stefano
Editor

It seems there's always a new app or other technology being pushed as "essential" for writers. I admit I'm attracted to shiny techie things. I try just about anything new, although I'm finding it harder and harder to keep up with all the innovations.

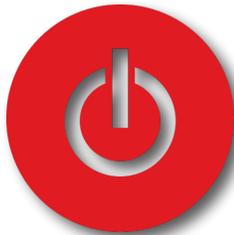
Some apps with steep learning curves can make life more complicated. At some point one has to do a cost vs. benefit analysis. And by cost, I don't just mean dollars; I also mean time.

Here are three free apps I've used every day for a long time. These digital assistants all make my creative life easier.

Toggl (toggl.com) is a simple time tracker.

In a small app window on my computer's desktop, I type in what I'm working on, start the timer, and stop it when I'm done. Toggl will even remind me to start the timer when I haven't and nudge me to stop it when I've been inactive.

I can access the week's times in the app, and all my data via my account on the web. I use it primarily to track and report time I've spent on projects for clients, but it also keeps me honest with myself about how much time I've spent on my own creative writing. All my Toggl data is available on my computer, tablet, or phone as well as on the web.



Google Drive (google.com/drive) provides a private place to back up files.

When I put a file in the drive, it's accessible via the web from any location and from my computer, tablet, or phone. I can create folders on Google Drive to share work easily with others or keep my data private.



I used to rely on Dropbox for the same things, but since it offers only 2 GB of free storage, I kept running out of space. Google Drive gives me 15 GB, so I made the switch.

Evernote (evernote.com) is a note-taking and scrapbook tool.

With Evernote, I can write and store notes and lists, create reminders, save images and videos, capture ideas on the fly, and— with a quick tap to its browser add-on "Webclipper"— save articles and links as I browse the internet.

I'm a digital packrat. I've kept what could be an unmanageable number of articles for my own information or to share with clients or online. It's easy to organize these articles along with random thoughts or snippets of writing, and ideas for projects with Evernote's folder and tag systems. (I even keep recipes there, and it's handy to be able to access them when I'm at the grocery store.)

Everything I store in Evernote is available to me online or offline using my computer, tablet, or phone as well as on the web.

All of these tools are free, although for a price they offer additional features. And they're all easy to learn.

I work at home, and spend most of my day sitting in front of a computer screen. I've tested apps that remind you to stand up and get some exercise. But I have a dog. Who needs an app when you have a furry assistant to remind you to take a break, go for a walk, chat with a neighbor or two, and relish the sunny Florida sky? 🐾



Mary Ann de Stefano is the editor of *The Florida Writer* and the *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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Mark Your Calendar

October 18, 2018

Florida Writers Foundation Celebrity Workshop
Hilton Orlando/Altamonte Springs

October 18 - 21, 2018

16th Annual Florida Writers Conference
Hilton Orlando/Altamonte Springs

October 20, 2018

6th Annual Florida Writers Youth Conference
Hilton Orlando/Altamonte Springs

A full-color PDF version of *The Florida Writer* is automatically e-mailed to all members of the Florida Writers Association free of charge. Members can download past issues in the FWA Network. Starting with the February 2018 issue, a grayscale print version will be available for a charge.

The annual Kaye Coppersmith award recognizes one out of hundreds of members who embody the motto of the Florida Writers Association: Writers Helping Writers. Any FWA member can nominate a member for the award. Nominations are open until August 31. Go to: floridawriters.net/kaye-coppersmith-award/

Register for the full Annual Florida Writers Conference by 7/31 for the best price and attend Thursday Book Camp workshops for no additional cost!

Go to: floridawriters.net/registration/



President's Notes

Alison Nissen
President

Dear Florida Writers Association Friends and Members,

Every morning, I rouse myself out of the house to attend a dance class. Before you start to believe I'm going to be the next contestant on *Dancing with the Stars*, I'll briefly tell you this: I can barely tell my right foot from my left, I have little rhythm, and my instructor can't help but laugh at me, and I can't blame her. But I enjoy the music and camaraderie. I am also inspired by Janine, a woman bound to a wheelchair, who has more moves than I do.

Janine dances unencumbered by her limitations, happy to shimmy and sway as much as her circumstances allow. She smiles and sings and claps her hands—her spirit is as bright as sunshine on a cloudless July afternoon.

Janine's joyfulness reminds me that while I may feel frustrated my latest plotline is sinking as fast as the Titanic or that the last rejection letter I received makes me want to change my line of work, I rejoice in the opportunities I do have. I have the opportunity to regularly meet with and talk to both experienced and fledgling authors about the world of writing and publishing. I read novels as research (a supercharged bonus). And I am able to live the Florida Writers Association motto: Writers Helping Writers. This is a dream come true.

We shouldn't expect life to be perfect. As writers, we work late into the night, when the house is still. We struggle with choosing the right word to convey the correct tone and fret over punctuation, spelling, or editing ambiguity. To the outside world, these angst-provoking decisions might not make sense. But they matter. Writing matters and it's our job to breathe life into words.

While there are days that I regret my 9:00 AM commitment to dance class, I rarely go home from the gym without a spring in my step, ready to put pen to paper. Some days are like that. And there are days I wish my muse wasn't calling me—the one who helps me build

other worlds, the muse who distracts me from everyday life.

We face challenges that might seem insurmountable at the moment. Challenges that throw us off kilter. But it's how we dance to the music that reveals our potential. I enjoy making my instructor laugh as much as I enjoy laughing at myself for my awkward salsa, rumba, and cha-cha-cha. Likewise, we writers enjoy creating worlds, bringing words to life, and connecting with readers. Circumstances are what they are. It's how we use them that really counts.

And I'm counting on you to join me for the upcoming conference in October. Not only do we have an all-star faculty lineup, we also have an outstanding agent and editor lineup. I hope you put on your dancing shoes and swing by the interviews office for an interview or to just say hello—even if you have two left feet like me! ✨

Alison Nissen is lifetime member and current President of the Florida Writers Association. She is also a writer who does daily battle with dog hair and laundry. Currently, she is a professor at Southeastern University and the managing partner of 3DogTales Productions, a full-service ghostwriting, editing, coaching, and publishing company. Alison is a graduate of both Denison University and Norwich University with a BA and MA in Literature and chairs Lakeland Writers, an FWA chapter. She was the winner of the 2016 Royal Palm Literary Awards Unpublished Autobiography/Memoir for *Resolve, Courage, Hope*. Follow her *Tales from the Laundry Room* at 3dogtales.com. Follow her *Tales from the Laundry Room* on 3DogTales.com.



Building a Believable Chain of Events in Your Novel

by Steven James

A game of billiards begins with the cue ball striking the racked balls, which then scatter across the pool table. After that, the players take turns trying to clear the table by pocketing another ball (either stripes or solids), all while keeping the cue ball out of the pockets.

We all understand that the game must start somehow. Normally that happens when one player hits that cue ball to break the triangle of racked balls. And from then on, every time a ball hits another, that contact results in an effect.

It's the same with a story.

One opening event causes things to splinter apart for the main character in your novel. After that, there's a chain of events that are all linked and caused by the ones that precede them.

A story moves from choice to consequences, from stimulus to response, from cause to effect.

This happens on the macro-level, as the results of each scene set the stage for the next, and on the micro-level, as every action and every line of dialogue affects what comes next.

Cause: One ball strikes another.

Effect: That ball rolls across the table.

An event's effect on a character should be immediately evident to readers.

Even if the character is trying to ignore or repress a response, he'll be impacted somehow. He must be. If he isn't, readers will lose trust in the story's believability.

Every action should be justified by the intersection of setting, context, pursuit, and characterization. They all need to make sense. They all need to fit.

If you have to explain why something just happened, you're telling the story backward.

Fixing Causality Issues

Causality is closely related to believability and flow. If an event has no cause, readers will find the scene



unbelievable. If there isn't a strong enough stimulus to cause a certain event, it'll seem contrived.

Neither unbelievable nor contrived events serve your readers or the story.

When you write a scene that doesn't follow from cause to effect, you create a gap that requires readers to ask, "But why didn't he ...?" and requires you to explain what just happened.

And most of the time, that's the opposite of what you want.

If a story moves from effect to cause, rather than from cause to effect, the flow will be disrupted.

For example:

Reggie crossed through the kitchen and opened the cupboard. He was starving and wanted some canned ravioli.

Note how action occurs (Reggie crossed through the kitchen and opened the cupboard), and then an explanation is given for why it happened (he was starving and wanted some ravioli). This is backward. Rather than driving the story forward, the movement of the narrative stops as the author backtracks to explain. The sequence would be better cast like this:

Reggie was starving and wanted some canned ravioli. He crossed through the kitchen and opened the cupboard.

Here, action moves from cause to effect. There's no need to explain afterward why Reggie opened the cupboard. The narrative flows naturally. Too often, novelists show an event and then explain why it happened. This disrupts



the pace and disorients readers. Unless you have an overwhelming contextual reason to reverse the order, show the action and then the result—in that order.

Here's another example of how not to do it:

Suzanne stepped into the shower. She needed to relax. As the water washed over her, she thought of the time she nearly drowned when she was nine. She let the water rinse across her skin. Finally, shuddering, she hastily towed herself dry after turning off the faucet, and tried not to think about that traumatic day at the lake.

As it stands, most of the events in this paragraph happen out of order and sometimes inexplicably. (For instance, Suzanne remains in the shower instead of leaving it right away when the painful memory returns.)

Here's the edited version:

Suzanne needed to relax, so she stepped into the shower. She let the water rinse over her, but it made her think of the time she nearly drowned when she was nine. Shuddering, she turned off the faucet and hastily towed herself dry, trying not to think about that traumatic day at the lake.

Written in this way, no follow-up explanations are needed for why she does what she does. The actions make sense and move the story forward, and readers don't have to ask why things are happening.

Study your story. Can readers see how one ball affects the movement of the others? If not, try reversing the order of events so they string together causally. Move the narrative forward, action to reaction, rather than action to explanation.

Does everything in a story have to be connected?

Unless your novel centers on the absurdity of life, every subsequent event (after the initiating one) should follow naturally and logically; otherwise the story won't be cohesive.

- Analyze every scene, as well as every paragraph, to weed out cause-and-effect problems. Pinpoint the connections between events. Does each action have an appropriate consequence? Does the emotional resonance of a scene fit in congruently from the actions within that scene?

- Do realizations or insights occur after the event that caused them (as would naturally happen), or do I have things in the wrong order?
- Does this scene move from cause to effect? If not, why not? Can I tweak the story to show the natural flow of events rather than stop after they've happened to explain why they did?
- Does context dictate that I reverse the order to effect to cause? Rendering the story this way will force readers to ask, "Why?" Do I want them to do so at this moment in the book? Would lack of clarity about the character's intention help readers engage with the story at this point? If it won't, how can I recast it
- What will I do to ensure that each ball rolls naturally away from the one that just hit it, both in action sequences and in dialogue?

This article previously appeared on janefriedman.com.

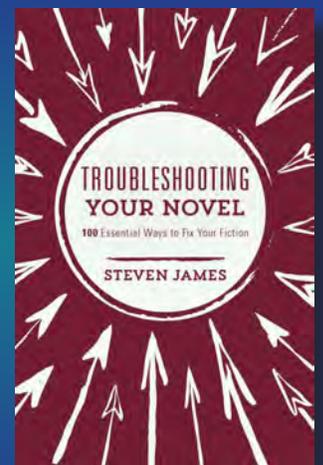
Steven James is a national bestselling novelist whose award-winning, pulse-pounding thrillers continue to gain wide critical acclaim and a growing fan base. *Suspense Magazine*, who named Steven's book *The Bishop* their Book of the Year, says that he "sets the new standard in suspense writing." *Publishers Weekly* calls him a "master storyteller at the peak of his game." And *RT Book Reviews* promises, "The nail biting suspense will rivet you."



Troubleshooting Your Novel: Essential Techniques for Identifying and Solving Manuscript Problems by STEVEN JAMES

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How to Price a Re-release to Sell More Books

by Penny Sansevieri



Re-releasing a book is always an exciting fresh start that means you can also revisit pricing.

Generally I'm not a fan of overpricing a book, unless the print costs are so high that you almost have to. For most of us, print book pricing is often out of our control, but we can control e-book pricing in almost every case. The exception would be if you're traditionally published. Then the publisher controls the price.

Book pricing, especially when it comes to your e-book, can really help your Amazon optimization as well. The optimal pricing on Amazon for an e-book is \$2.99 to \$5.99. If that seems ridiculously low to you, I'd still encourage you to stay below \$9.99 in order to stay competitive. And below \$7.99, a popular traditional publishing price, is even better.

There are a few other determining factors to keep in mind regarding pricing:

Your Genre: What you write about will largely determine your pricing. Consider your genre and what the bestsellers cost. Keep in mind bestsellers with household names are likely not what you want to compare yourself to.

Book Length: Shorter books shouldn't get full book pricing, meaning that if you have a book that's under 100 published pages, you shouldn't be charging as much as someone with a 300-page book. Taking that into consideration is important, because a higher price with a low page count will deter new readers.

By the same token, you don't want to cheapen your work by offering every smaller book you write for \$0.99. The happy medium, however, is not that far removed from the 99-cent mark. \$1.99 or \$2.99 (again, depending on your genre) are still pretty reasonable, and your profit margin goes up to 70% at the \$2.99 point.

Playing with Pricing

Playing with your pricing is an excellent strategy for boosting an Amazon algorithm. And it's not that difficult to raise and lower pricing when you do promos, or to just offer deals to your super-fans.

Authors often ask me how often they should change their prices. Weekly? Monthly? Well if you have only one

book, you won't have as much flexibility as you would if you had, say, four titles out there. Because more than one book allows you to do a price drop rotation that's consistent without overdoing it.

If you have just one book, I'd recommend doing a price reduction along with an e-book promotion, or just to your super-fans, twice a quarter. But if you have more books on Amazon, I'd try to rotate them to keep at least one on some kind of pricing special.

Starting Low and Going High

If you're putting the re-release book on Amazon as a pre-order, I'd recommend starting your book a bit lower in price and raising it after it's launched. This will help you gain a solid foothold on Amazon sales. Doing a book launch using the Amazon pre-order option and strategically pricing it so it's not full price right out of the gate can also keep you on the "new release" list a bit longer, which is fantastic.

But if you do this, don't miss out on the obvious marketing angle here. If your book is going to be less expensive during the pre-order period, by all means make sure your current network knows, and ask them to share with their networks!

Need more help with your re-release? I recently published a book that will help you out! *How to Revise and Re-Release Your Book: Simple and Smart Strategies to Sell More Books* can be purchased on Amazon. And if you'd like to give your book a kickstart, I'd love to help you do that. Contact me through my site or via email at info@amarketingexpert.com. 📧

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. See more at amarketingexpert.com.



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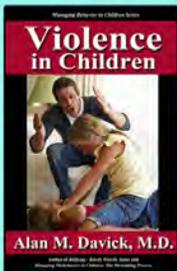
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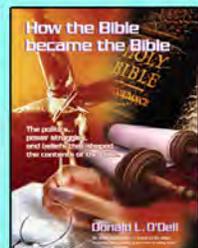
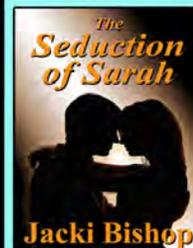
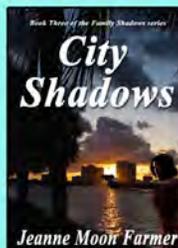
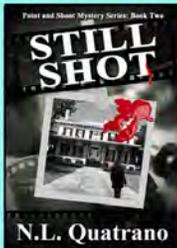
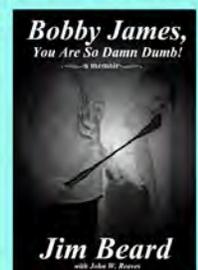
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The Ethical Writer

A New Writer in the Group

by Chrissy Jackson

A critique group that functions well is normally one that has been established for long enough that each member knows every other one and what they write. Each member understands the value of strengthening works without losing the sound of the author's literary voice. And each member recognizes the value of confirming the strengths in every paragraph while making suggestions for improvements.

Then sometimes there is a new member—a breath of fresh air. Or maybe not. What if this newbie writes science fiction/fantasy and the rest of the group writes cozy mysteries or romances or poetry? How to bend and flex to adapt to this new genre?

How to handle a conversation with someone who seems to be speaking a foreign language? Someone who invents worlds with made-up names and seems comfortable in situations that would never have occurred to the rest of the group?

Is it ethical to ask them to leave, to perhaps find a group that fits them better? Or is it more ethical to look at their writing, discover the strengths of their plots, look for their character arcs, and stretch your own learning? Might your writing improve a tad if you learn something from them? Are you willing to learn anything from someone with interests so different than your own?

Does exercising the proper ethics require you to be open to helping all writers improve their craft, even if you are not a fan of the finished product? Could you find it in yourself to stretch for them? Kant would say the reasons you do something tell you if you are acting in an ethical way. So, for example, in this scenario, Kant would say if you approach it intending to help them strengthen their story and writing techniques, you are indeed acting in an ethical way. Kant would also say that if your only interest in helping them is to learn something that will improve your writing, you are acting in an unethical way—even if the end result helps the science fiction author.

Do you agree with this Kantian premise of ethics? If the outcome is good, isn't that all that matters? If your writing is helped along the way, isn't that just icing on the cake? If no one knows you have a hidden agenda to further

yourself, does that change the intent?

Or is it more ethical to honestly try to dedicate fifteen minutes of your time to learning a genre different from your own and something about the writing of it, thinking not of your story in the works, but of this new author asking for help?

Most published books have an acknowledgments page where the author thanks those who have given of their time and expertise to help the author produce a finished book. Acting in an ethical manner requires that you not take credit for what someone else has done when you benefit, no matter how minute that help had been.

Is that similar to a newbie, coming to a group of strangers looking for someone to help overcome the author's weaknesses and strengthen his/her writing? Would ethics require you to also acknowledge them in your writing for what you learn?

Future columns will be driven by you, dear reader. What ethical dilemma are you struggling with in your writing life? What drives your thoughts and decisions—legalities or morals? Is it something from a team where there is a personality conflict or decisions being made that conflict with your sense of right and wrong? Is it something happening in your writers group that just makes you squirm and does not feel right?

Please write to me at jacksoc@eckerd.edu and perhaps you'll see your question with discussion in a future article. ✍

Chrissy Jackson has been a member of Florida Writers Association since 2004, co-founded Florida Writers Foundation in 2007, and holds leadership roles in both organizations. She graduated with high honors from Eckerd College in 2016, earning a behavioral science degree with a focus on nonprofit leadership. The subject of what is right and wrong from an ethical viewpoint is fascinating to her and she would love to share a discussion with all FWA members.



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Chuck Sambuchino is a freelance editor, bestselling book author, and former longtime staffer for Writer's Digest Books. For many years he edited the Guide to Literary Agents and the *Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market*. His Guide to Literary Agents Blog was one of the largest blogs in publishing, and he wrote the platform guidebook *Create Your Writer Platform*. Sony Pictures optioned his 2010 humor book, *How to Survive a Garden Gnome Attack*. Chuck's books have been mentioned in *Reader's Digest*, *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *Huffington Post*, *Variety*, *New York Magazine*, *Buzzfeed*, *Mental Floss*, *O*, and many more media outlets. He is a successful freelance editor of queries, synopses, and manuscripts—seeing dozens of clients get agents or book deals following his consultations/edits. He loves meeting new writers.

- *When: Thursday, October 18, 2018*
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Your workshop fee is tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. Proceeds support the Florida Writers Foundation, Inc. (FWF), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation formed to promote literacy and enhance the writing skills of children, youth, and adults. FWF makes a difference by supplying grants and volunteers to programs around the state, donating books to public libraries, and much more.



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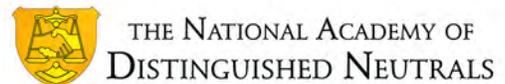
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No Happy Ending: Copyright Problems in the Romance Fiction World

by Anne Dalton, Esquire

“A wealthy teenage girl falls in love with a boy of Native American heritage and becomes pregnant, before they are cruelly parted. ... only to rekindle their fiery romance years later, while their child explores his indigenous heritage with his father’s guidance.” Not only is this a variation on a standard romance novel, it is also the beginning paragraph of an Illinois copyright court decision.

The facts are as follows. In November 2010, Kelly Rucker submitted a detailed synopsis and chapter of her romance novel, *The Promise of A Virgin*, for Harlequin Books, for their romantic fiction contest. She did not win the contest. Three years later, she purchased Amazon’s e-book best seller, *Reclaim My Heart*, written by Donna Fasano. Claiming that Fasano had stolen the detailed synopsis and first chapter previously submitted to Harlequin, Rucker sued her for copyright infringement. The court’s analysis is a valuable primer for every writer who is concerned about how to protect his or her copyright.

Plaintiff Rucker’s novel featured Sheridan, a teenager who had a secret tryst with the family’s pool boy, Kacey, a member of the Navaho Nation. Defendant Fasano’s novel featured the heroine Tyne, who had a secret affair with Lucas, a member of the Nanticoke Lenni-Lanape Tribal Nation. Both heroines became pregnant as a result and each gave birth to a son. Tragedy strikes and the lovers part only to reunite years later (10 years in Rucker’s book and 16 years in Fasano’s). In each book, the respective hero finally meets his son and teaches him about his indigenous heritage. Each set of lovers falls in love again and gets married.

In ruling that the Fasano had not violated Rucker’s copyright, the Court considered two factors: the timeframe for completion of each author’s work and distinctions/similarities in material plot elements.

Fasano had kept careful records of her writing timeline. Therefore, she was able to prove that she had written *Hindsight*, a previous version of *Reclaim My Heart*, in 2004 and had submitted a synopsis of *Hindsight*

to Harlequin in 2006. The court found that Fasano’s two works, *Hindsight* and *Reclaim My Heart*, were identical except for some minor additions and wording changes.

The second factor involved an analysis of Rucker’s and Fasano’s work. The court found that Plaintiff Rucker’s book was a “highly sexualized romance” and Defendant Fasano’s work was more of a “courtroom drama.” Specifically, the court observed that “Rucker’s first chapter opens with the heroine admiring the hero’s physique from the side of her pool, [while] Fasano’s book begins with the arrest of the heroine’s fifteen year old son and the heroine’s difficult decision to hire the hero, her former lover, as his lawyer.”

While there are various technical elements to the Court’s ruling, the following lessons can be gleaned from this case. First, be sure to document the timeframe for development of your work, including the preparation of any early versions. Secondly, compose and keep a narrow description of your material plot and character elements. ✎

Anne Dalton, Esquire, has provided business and personal legal services to writers and other creatives in all phases of their creative development for 40 years. She proudly serves as General Counsel to the Florida Writers Association and is an FWA Lifetime Member. Licensed in Florida, New York and Pennsylvania, Anne’s credentials can be viewed at daltonlegal.com. Contact her adalton@daltonlegal.com.

Comments contained in this article are informational and educational only and do not constitute legal advice.

“If writing seems hard,
it’s because it is hard.
It’s one of the hardest
things people do.”

William Zinsser





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A Note from the President of the



by Melody Dean Dimick

The motto of the Florida Writers Association (FWA) is Writers Helping Writers. The Florida Writers Foundation, (FWF), its sister organization, is a nonprofit formed to promote literacy.

One of the most fascinating FWF programs is called "Sit. Stay. Write." In this program, award-winning children's author Diane Ochiltree and her dog Sally, a trained therapy dog, visit schools and encourage children to write.

About 32 million adults in our country and 55% of the juveniles in the court system are functionally illiterate. Former president Bill Clinton said, "Literacy is not a luxury, it is a right and a responsibility. If our world is to meet the challenges of the 21st century, we must harness the energy and creativity of all our citizens."

I hope to harness the energy and creativity of all the members of our writing community to further FWF's goals. Please help with your donation to the FWF silent auction fundraiser. Books, journals, gift cards, and tickets to events in your community make wonderful contributions. The year Marie Bostwick, creator of the Cobble Court Quilt Series, was the celebrity guest at the Florida Writers Conference, I designed and donated a paisley quilt based on her description of the quilt her main character was sewing.

Selling books to people who cannot read is a tough sell. What can you contribute to help fight illiteracy? ❧

Melody Dean Dimick is President of the Florida Writers Foundation. She grew up in northern New York. She's a teacher, tree hugger, member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, speaker, RPLA judge, poet, and writer of young adult novels. Five of Melody's short stories and a poem have been published in *FWA Collections*. In her spare time she loves to read and play pinochle and pickleball with her husband and fellow writer, Barry Dimick.



Be a Silent Auction Muse

by Susan Boyd

We writers reach out to our Muses for inspiration. They speak to us at unexpected times to propel us through our stories. I have heard their voices when trying to sleep, waking in the morning, and yes, even chugging along in my golf cart. This afternoon, my Muse spoke a different tale. She reminded me of the generosity shown to achieve the goals of The Florida Writers Foundation (FWF)—to support literacy and enhance the writing skills of children, youth, and adults. The donors to each year's silent auction fundraiser are FWF's Muses.

I'm reaching out to the FWF Muses for this year's event, held in conjunction with the Florida Writers Conference. Past donations have included tickets to amusement venues, certificates for professional writing services, and a plethora of baskets filled with books, wine, candy, and other cool stuff.

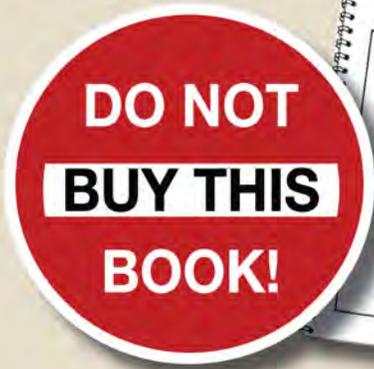
I am reminded of a quote from former First Lady Barbara Bush. "If we don't give everyone the ability to simply read and write, we aren't giving everyone a chance to succeed." FWF lives up to her words. Our volunteers have made a difference by visiting elementary schools for reading days, sponsoring poetry contests, donating books to under-privileged schools, and sponsoring both elementary and middle school writing contests. We partner with the Florida Writers Association, Friends of the Library, the Florida Library Association, Pinellas County Schools, and the Florida Literacy Coalition on some of these projects.

I invite everyone to join the parade of Muses who donate to support FWF's goals and programs. Please email me at susandlar@gmail.com, and I will hold a special spot at this year's silent auction for your donation. ❧

Susan Boyd, Chairperson for the FWF Silent Auction, made her career with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). Susan's first novel, *Secrets of the Charles*, was a first-place winner in the 2010 Royal Palm Literary Awards (RPLA) competition. Her second novel, *Secrets Hide Lies*, was published in 2013 and was an RPLA finalist. Her third, *Grey to Black*, was also an RPLA winner. Several of Susan's award-winning short stories have been published. She resides in The Villages, Florida.



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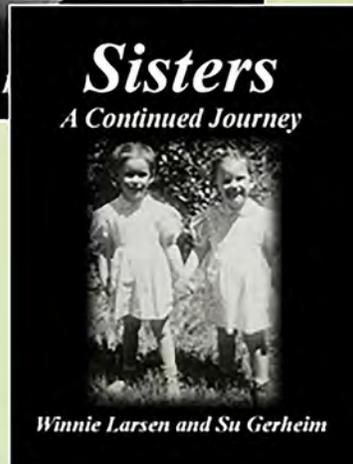
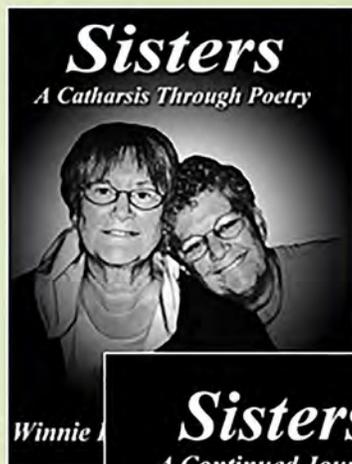
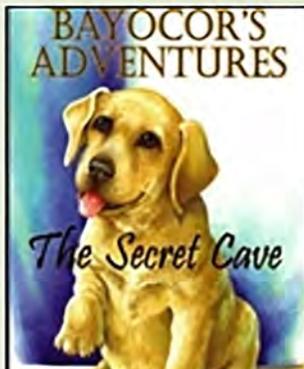
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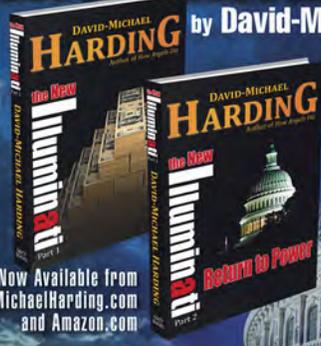
Ripped from current headlines, *The New Illuminati* chronicles a unique group of friends who pool their varied talents to right the injustices parlayed by the powerful. Digital attacks mushroom into physical assaults as a reluctant District Attorney, unsure whether to arrest the group—or join them—teams with the FBI—and the chase is on!

This is the time of

the New Illuminati



by David-Michael Harding

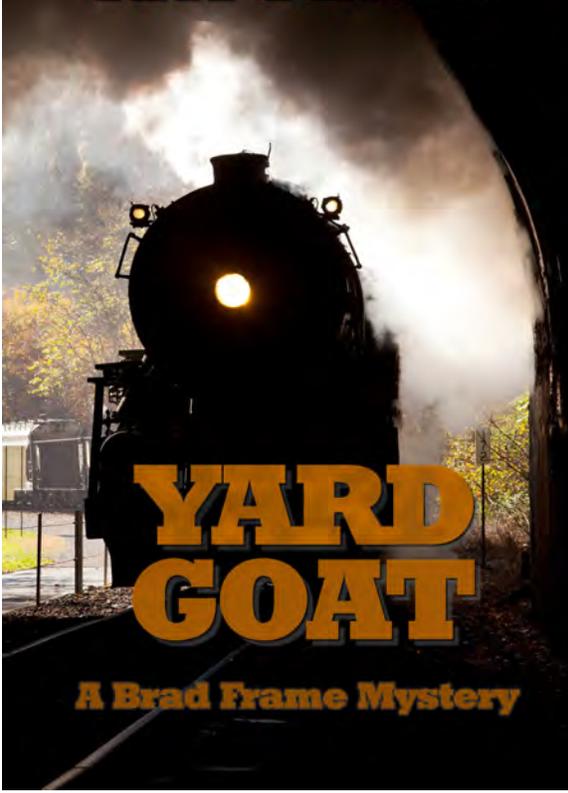
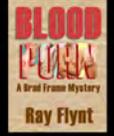
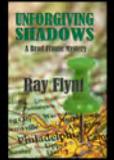


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Ask the Book Doctor

About Scene Shifts, Coined Words,
Writing About Animals

by Bobbie Christmas



Q: The members of my group write romance novels. I have always used *** to separate scenes within a chapter. One writer suggested that using symbol drops is no longer a publishing practice. Instead the new scene should be written with transitional language or use several blank lines, because readers are smart enough to figure out the change.

What do you think?

A: Not to be snarky, but I found it interesting that someone in your group presumes to know what is no longer a publishing practice. Instead of presuming anything, I turned to *The Chicago Manual of Style*, the book that sets the book publishing practices for American publishers. The latest edition of CMOS says that a set of asterisks (***) is appropriate when a break stronger than a paragraph but not as strong as a subhead is required. The book says a blank line in a manuscript has the disadvantage that it may be missed if the break falls at the bottom of a page.

Q: Sometimes, a fiction or poetry writer invents a word to retain concision or rhythm or both. I cannot find a word for someone who acquiesces. I'm vacillating between my creations of acquiescer and acquiescor. Am I leaning toward a big, bad mistake? I certainly wouldn't do my inventive thing in nonfiction, but poetry

seems to have no limits. I'd be interested if you addressed the tendency of creative writers to be, on occasion, wordsmiths of a different sort.

A: I think poets are wordsmiths of the highest order. If we didn't create new words or use old words in new ways, publishers would have no reason to produce newer versions of dictionaries. English is a changing, malleable language. Of your choices of new words, I like the second better, acquiescor, although both make me want to pronounce the word with a hard k sound in the last syllable. For that reason consider concenteror, accedor, or even surrenderer instead.

Q: In my novel, if I use the word Brobdingnagian in dialogue, is capitalizing it adequate, or must I further acknowledge it as a word coined by another writer?

A: Brobdingnagian is an accepted word in the dictionary and, as you suspect, it is capitalized, but not because it is a coined word; it is capitalized because it refers to a specific land called Brobdingnag. There is, however, no need to give credit to Jonathan Swift, the author who created the fictional land and coined the word pertaining to that land.

Q: How can I tell when to capitalize an animal breed and when not to?

A: The rule is that if a breed name contains a proper noun (a name of a person or place), that word is capitalized; all other



words in the breed name are not. For example, we would write German shepherd and Maine coon. Unfortunately the rule is easier said than followed, though. How is a writer to know which words are proper nouns? The answer can be found in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the source preferred by book publishers. Look up German shepherd, and you'll see that the G is capitalized, but not the s. Look up Maine coon, and the m is capitalized, but not the c. The same goes with American shorthair, Australian terrier, and French poodle, but breeds such as basenji, beagle, borzoi, and bloodhound are not capitalized. The exotic shorthair cat also is always lowercased. The list of breeds is endless, but many do include or even stand for a proper noun, such as in Sphynx, Abyssinian, Burmese, and Bolognese.

The ragdoll cat breed is an interesting one, because it used to be trademarked, and trademarked words and phrases are capitalized. While the dictionary puts the capitalized Ragdoll as the preferred usage, ragdoll without the capital is now also acceptable.

If you're not sure whether a breed should be capitalized, don't look up the capitalization on a site featuring breeds, because few websites follow Chicago style, the style that book publishers follow. Instead check with Merriam-Webster, which is also available free online.

Q: Someone in my critique group chastised me for having talking animals in the children's book I'm writing. When my children were small many of the books I read to them featured talking animals. How do I respond to the critic in my writing circle?

A: Your critic is parroting information that has been floating around among agents and publishers for more than a decade. Publishers have indicated they no longer want talking animals in children's books and would rather have more realistic stories with which children can relate. Yes, the naysayers are out there, yet if you go into a bookstore, you'll still find some contemporary books that feature talking animals. If you watch cartoons on TV, you'll see many talking animals there as well.

Some folks ridicule the use of talking animals. Some writers continue the practice. Who is right? Everyone is right, because creative writing has few immutable laws. If you sense that you cannot get your story out in any way other

than through talking animals, go ahead and write it your way. You may be bucking a trend, but you won't be alone. You may have a little more difficulty finding an agent, but your book may also meet with great success. Who's to tell?

Q: I am a veterinarian who has been asked to write a monthly advice column for pet owners. As soon as I started the first article I ran into problems with pronouns for the pets. Should I call them him, her, or it? "It" sounds too impersonal to me.

A: Using the pronoun "it" may be politically correct and perfectly grammatical, but pet owners probably would perceive it as cold and impersonal.

My suggestion is to vary the pronouns and use other words for the animals as well. You can use feminine or masculine pronouns for animals you name in the article, as in these examples: When Muffin kept shaking her head, I inspected her ears. If you take Max for a walk in summer, be sure the asphalt is not so hot that it burns his paw pads.

As a neutral moniker, you can use words such as fur baby, partner, furry companion, fur kid, adoptee, and fluff ball. As you write more articles you will probably develop your own style and come up with even more alternative descriptions for our hairy sidekicks.

Bobbie Christmas is book editor, author of *Write In Style: Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing*, 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.

"Don't hang around with people who are negative and who are not supportive of your writing. Make friends with writers so that you have a community"

Augusten Burroughs



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6th Annual Florida Youth Writers Conference

— October 20, 2018



by Mark Newhouse & Kristen Stieffel

Are you a middle or high school student who loves writing, or know one who shares our passion? You'll want to attend this year's exciting Florida Writers Association Youth (FWAY) Conference on Saturday, October 20, 2018, at the Orlando Hilton Altamonte Springs with an all-star cast of presenters and new features.

Thanks to a generous grant from the Florida Writers Foundation, the first 30 registrants will receive a \$20 discount! But even at the full price of \$50, this opportunity to learn and work with best-selling authors, agents, and publishers, is a memorable day you shouldn't miss.

Where else can future writers meet and learn from Florida Writer of the Year, best-selling author Heather Graham or have the rare opportunity to meet Florida Poet Laureate Peter Meinke? Famed author Linda Fairstein will answer questions about all aspects of writing, while Joni Fisher will deal with dynamic dialogue, which can make or break writing. What's a story without characters? Valerie Willis will show you how to bring characters to life.

Want excitement? John Wilkerson will reveal secrets for writing fight scenes, and Peter Telep will talk about the world of writing for video games. You'll be inspired and informed by these fascinating presenters and award-winning authors Mark Newhouse and Kristen Stieffel will be your tour guides.

Great presentations are only part of the story. We'll celebrate the finalists and winners of the FWA Collections youth contest and Youth Royal Palm Literary Awards with hundreds of FWA members at the annual FWAY Awards Luncheon. This year, again thanks to a grant from the Florida Writers Foundation, all youth attendees will receive free copies of this year's amazing Collections anthology, a wonderful keepsake, which they can get signed by the winners of the FWA contests during a special signing session for our youth winners. In addition, attendees have the option to create free video trailers and set up optional interviews with authors, editors, and

agents for an additional fee. And of course, they will visit the bookstore where they will be inspired by the work of FWA authors. Every youth attendee will receive free publishing guides and be eligible for door prizes.

We invite FWA authors to win fans by donating your age-appropriate books as door prizes for these great aspiring writers. Use the contact form at aimhipress.com for simple donation procedures. Your books will be appreciated and help inspire future writers.

From dialogue to video game writing, this year's Florida Youth Writers Conference promises to be a spectacular experience, and we hope you will help us spread the word to local schools and libraries about this wonderful opportunity for youth writers. Imagine the impact FWA can have on our youth if we work together to get them involved.

We invite all youth writers to try free membership in FWAY's online community to get acquainted before the conference, share critiques, or chat about writing and related areas. Group Leader Kristen Stieffel invites you to join via the contact form at kristenstieffel.com. FWAY is the way to success for our young writers!

Please visit floridawriters.net/conferences/youth-writers-conference/ for information and registration forms. ✍️

Mark H. Newhouse is an award-winning author and FWAY Chairperson. A former Long Island teacher, he is a multiple RPLA winner whose stories have appeared in a number of FWA Collections and other anthologies. He is also Director of Development for AimHi Press, a division of Newhouse Creative Group. His latest mystery is *The Case of the Crazy Chickenscratches*. He invites you to contact him at aimhipress.com.

Kristen Stieffel is an award-winning author, former FWAY Co-Chairperson, and this year's FWAY Conference Co-Chair. She hosts FWAY's Slack Community, which includes a critique club. Kristen is a writer and freelance editor specializing in speculative fiction and fantasy. Her fantasy novel *Alara's Call* debuted in 2017. Her website, kristenstieffel.com, contains useful resources for writers.





Martha

by Linda Feist

I wasn't blessed with the craft gene like most members of my family. Honestly, I'd be okay with that, if I wasn't repeatedly reminded of my inadequacies by a person who's dominated the crafty do-it-yourself circuit for decades. To this day, she's managed to make me feel guilty for not owning a glue gun.

Every time I flip through a magazine or start up my laptop, there she is. But seeing her face, full-blown on the side of a bus, well, that was the last straw! Come to think of it, she'd probably create a magnificent centerpiece out of a straw.

Recently, on a department store video, I watched her breeze through an outlandish project. I decided to share my angst. I turned to a fellow shopper and said, "Aren't you sick to death of Martha Stewart?" The woman looked aghast and proudly stated that Martha's newest cookbook topped her Christmas wish list. I should have checked her shopping cart filled with Martha Stewart sheets and towels—right down to color-coordinated garbage pail liners—before I tried to recruit my first non-fan, fan. Martha's face was plastered all over the packages sneering up at me through the shiny plastic as if she were saying, try, just try to win her over to the other side.

The next day, Martha was featured on the morning show. I wanted to change the station, but the remote was on vacation basking in a stream of sunlight on a far-off table. Couch-ensconced and coffee cup in hand, I was too lazy to get up, so I endured.

Martha demonstrated how to make a unique picnic lunch for children—everything was edible, including the food's wrapping. I was intrigued until I realized to wrap a sandwich in lettuce leaves, (instead of handy Handi-Wrap) the lettuce had to be soaked in an expensive solution. As if that wasn't enough of an inconvenience, one head of lettuce produced just a few leaves worthy of the task. I started figuring. Three kids, one sandwich each—well, two for Spike—that's roughly four heads of lettuce plus the solution ... hmm. The cost started *cha-chinging* in my head.

Martha happily moved along as she instructed how to peel (saving the rind for future wrapping, of course) and thinly slice cucumbers to make itsy-bitsy sandwiches. She tied the cucumber slices together with strips of green scallions in neat little bows. Like kids even eat scallions.

I surmised to have this ready by noon, you'd need to shop your brains out the day before and be up at the crack of dawn to soak, slice, trim, taper, peel, pare, wrap, and tie!

I pictured my kids waking up doe-eyed and sleepy. They'd shuffle into the kitchen asking for breakfast. I'd toss them each a Pop-Tart, Frisbee fashion, and tell them to grab a glass of water. Geez ... couldn't they see I was preparing my Martha Stewart picture-perfect picnic lunch?

One Saturday afternoon, while I waited in the checkout line at my favorite store, I grabbed a magazine. Surprisingly, Martha's face wasn't dominating the cover. I sighed with relief until I flipped through the pages. There she was, beaming at me from the glossy section of *Entertaining with Style*. She presented a step-by-step lesson on how to convert dinner napkins into shapes of tropical fruit.

In the article, Martha outlined how to iron, fold, pleat, crease, turn, twist, and tuck the fabric. Heaven forbid if you got an itch, or your kids needed a band-aid, because you wouldn't have a free hand for nearly six hours. I pictured the headline: Woman Passed Out in Kitchen—Dehydrated and Tangled Up in a Heap of Napkins!

I sighed with resignation, closed the magazine, and turned to the man behind me, who I suspected was reading over my shoulder. From the side of my mouth, I whispered, "Martha Stewart ... pretty loony, right?"

He glared at me and crossed his muscular, tattooed arms over his massive chest. I followed his eyes as he looked down into his shopping cart filled with Martha Stewart dinner napkins.

Ah yes, the craft gene is far-reaching. Is that pink duct tape I see? 🐞

Linda Feist, two-time RPLA finalist, is published in *Chicken Soup* and *FWA 2017 Collection*.



Plot Points and Change

by Robert Hart

In 1951, I stayed overnight for the first time at Meikles Hotel in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. I was twelve years old, travelling alone.

For the next five years, I passed through Salisbury six times a year on my way to and from home in Nyasaland and school in Swaziland, a trip of over a thousand miles. It took three days—two by air, one by train and bus. Each time I stayed overnight in Salisbury at Meikles.

Today is tomorrow's history but living in the present we are often unaware of its significance. I did not know that I was living through the last days of the British Empire, or that the currents of nationalism and self-determination were already stirring below the surface. On that first trip, I experienced something more immediate—something that made an indelible impression. I saw the movie *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* starring Ava Gardner and James Mason. The film itself is now cloistered with other forgotten memories except for its opening sequence—the screen filled with a stanza of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*.

The Moving Finger writes; and having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

Although the language is the poetic creation of the translator, Edward Fitzgerald, a British literary scholar who had never been to Persia, it expresses the philosophy of its Persian author, the eleventh century astronomer, physicist and mathematician who took the name Khayyám, tent-maker, referring to his father's trade.

I fell in love with *The Rubáiyát*, the words still as vibrant now as when I first read them 67 years ago. They are part of my history. A plot point in the unfolding story of my life.

Buried in every writer's history are many such singular moments.

Other personal plot points were the discovery of the power of descriptive and unexpected language from three masters of the short story, H. H. Munro, Saki, and O. Henry.

Sometimes the plot of our life twists and spirals,

creating coincidences and synchronicities. Recently I found Omar had met O. Henry in "The Handbook of Hymen," a short story in O. Henry's book of western short stories, *Heart of the West*.

The courting by a cowboy, plying troth to a widder-woman, Mrs. Sampson, relies on guidance from verse XII of *The Rubáiyát*.

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!

Mrs. Sampson does not appreciate Omar's romantic hedonism. She is horrified by his advances and scandalized by the idea of singing and cavorting in the woods with a man carrying a jug of wine and a loaf of bread.

"A woman may take a little claret with her meals," she said, but, she believed, he should take Ruby Ott to the woods with him.

When I met my wife, Veronica had recently returned from Iran in the dying days of the Shah's regime. She spoke and wrote Farsi, the language of *The Rubáiyát*. The name plaque on my office door is in Persian script, and two copies of *The Rubáiyát*, covering five editions, sit on my desk.

In just over a decade after my first stay at Meikles hotel the familiar countries in central Africa would convulse, first through the creation of the Federation of Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, then to its rapid dissolution and the creation of three independent and self-governing countries. Our family, home, and livelihood were changed forever.

Empire is now Commonwealth. Iran is a Muslim state. Northern Rhodesia is Zambia, Southern Rhodesia is now Zimbabwe, Nyasaland is Malawi, Salisbury is Harare, Swaziland is eSwatini, and children dare not undertake such journeys between them unaccompanied any longer.

Moving through the successive plot points of life is characterized by social or personal change—like the arc of the characters we create. ✎

A member of the Daytona Area Writers,
Robert Hart lives in Ormond Beach.





From Bad to Worse

by Ellen Holder

In just a matter of minutes, how could anything so thoroughly go to hell? The morning had begun like any other: Mark kissed Christie goodbye and left for work. Shortly afterward, she left for her daily workout at the gym. Somewhere along the way, engrossed in music from the car radio, Christie lost her bearings. She awoke from her musings and did not recognize a thing in sight.

She turned around and went in the opposite direction, backtracking to find where she had taken a wrong turn. The gym was only seven miles from home with just a couple of turns. She read street signs, looked carefully at stores and buildings, searching for something familiar. Nothing.

The farther she drove, the more disoriented she felt. “I should be using the GPS on my phone,” she scolded herself, pulling off the road onto a wide shoulder. Christie reached for her bag and puzzled over the pristine white purse she had never laid eyes on. She pawed through the bag for a phone. The one she found was not her phone, nothing like her phone, and she couldn’t make it work.

Dropping it back in the purse, she fished out a pink wallet, flipped it open, and saw her own face on the driver’s license. Spikey hair! She slapped it shut, feeling light-headed and thirsty. Reaching for her ever-present water bottle, she found the cup holder empty.

Sudden tapping on her window made her jump against the steering wheel, setting off the horn. Heart thudding, she looked into the eyes of a stranger.

He looked frantic, like he desperately needed to speak with her. With questioning eyes, Christie lowered her window just a fraction.

He sputtered, “Linda! I thought you had a doctor appointment. What are you doing here?”

“You have me confused with someone else. My name isn’t Linda,” she told him.

The man stared at her, ran hands through his sandy hair. “Honey, don’t kid around. I was worried about you.”

Christie shifted gears and started to pull away.

“Wait!” he pleaded. “Talk to me! What’s wrong?”

She pressed the brakes. “Everything is wrong,” she snapped. “I don’t have a clue who you are. Can you just

tell me where I am? I’m trying to find Fit & Trim Gym in Winter Haven.”

His mouth fell open, and he raised his hands slowly, in a take-it-easy gesture. “I’m afraid you’ve maybe had a bump on the head. Don’t get mad, but you’re acting strange, like you don’t know your own husband. I’m Drew Palmer and you’re my wife, Linda. Let me just take you to your doctor,” he begged.

“Look, I’ll call my husband right now and we can clear this all up ... except my phone doesn’t work.”

The strange man offered his phone, and when Christie seemed confused, showed her how to enter the number. After several rings, the message she heard was “invalid number.” Three tries, same message.

He finally convinced her that he should drive her home, a place where she would be greeted by her little dog, Kiki. A familiar place that would trigger her memory, he promised. Totally addled, she moved to the passenger seat and allowed him to drive. She kept her head down, watching her fidgeting hands, thinking back over the morning. Maybe the music had made her lose track of time ... maybe more than time.

The car slowed, pulling in to the drive, and her skin prickled. Something had changed. Eyes darting to the driver, she recognized her husband in an instant! His build, his height, even a glimpse of his elbow verified that this was Mark. She saw the back of his head, the familiar dark hair, as he reached to adjust his retreating seat belt.

Either her mind was clearing or the whole world was spinning smoothly again! She grinned broadly as Mark’s head turned to face her.

A scream froze in her throat. His skin was metallic, his eyes like small windows. As inhuman as he appeared, he still looked puzzled. He spoke to her in a voice reminiscent of her husband. “Who the hell are you? 🌀

Ellen Holder, a Polk county resident, enjoys writing short stories, novels, essays, and poetry.



A Circle of Life

by Teresa Miller

As a young girl, my mother was upset about the troubles in her life,
 And her mama said, “It could be worse—
 You didn’t have to go through WWI and wonder if our soldiers would come home,
 And you didn’t have to go through the Great Depression and lose everything and start over from scratch,
 And you didn’t have to live through the Dust Bowl where it was night all day and we could barely breathe
 through all that dust.
 But honey, I am here—take my hand and we will dance together through your tears.”

In my youth, I was upset about the troubles in my life,
 And my mama said, “It could be worse—
 You didn’t have to live through WWII and wonder if our soldiers would come home,
 And you didn’t have to live through the rationing of all our supplies,
 And you didn’t have to live through a great flood that wiped out all our land.
 But honey, I am here—take my hand and we will dance together through your tears.”

And as they grew, my own children were often upset about the troubles in their lives,
 And I said, “It could be worse—
 You didn’t have to live through the Viet Nam War and wonder if our soldiers would come home,
 And you didn’t have to live through the 60s and assassinations and marches and riots,
 And you didn’t have to live through inflation that wiped out all our savings.
 But children, I am here—take my hand and we will dance together through your tears.”

In their youth, my grandchildren were upset about the troubles in their lives
 And their parents said, “It could be worse—
 You didn’t have to live through 9/11 and the Iraq War and wonder if our soldiers would come home,
 And you didn’t have to live through the Oklahoma bombing that led to more acts of terror on U.S. soil,
 And you didn’t have to live through the dot.com bubble burst and the impact on a global economy.
 But children, take our hands and we will dance together through your tears.”

And so it goes. Now, I am the one upset about the troubles in my life,
 And my grandchildren said to me, “It could be worse—
 We know your soldier is gone, but we are here.
 We know your health is failing, but we are here.
 We know your time is running out, but we are here.
 So, Nana, take our hands and we will dance together through your tears.” 🌸

Teresa Miller is a retired educator and writer, a transplant to Florida from Kansas.



They Walk Among Us by Don “Doc” Sanborn

I was savoring a glass of hearty Burgundy, when my daughter-in-law, Terri, asked how my writing was going. I scowled and said, “Not so well lately. I’ve been stuck for the past week.”

“What do you mean, ‘stuck’?”

“Ah.” I took a sip of Burgundy. “There’s writing and then there’s writing. I’m stuck on my novel. It’s a logistical problem—how to get a body past a guard without being seen. Until I figure out a solution, I’m writing flash fiction and short stories. Sooner or later, a solution will pop into my mind, and I’ll be back to the novel.”

“I see.” She smiled. “You need to throw in a vampire or a zombie. That’ll help.”

I snorted in derision. “I know you’re an avid watcher of *The Walking Dead* and stuff like that, but this is a serious novel, and I don’t think the supernatural fits in.”

In a low voice she said, “They walk among us, you know.”

“Who? What?” I stared into her periwinkle eyes. Their seriousness belied the smile on her face.

“People all over the world have believed in vampires for centuries. There’s got to be something to it.” She sipped her drink—a Bloody Mary, sans celery stalk.

“I believe,” I said, “the whole vampire thing began with Bram Stoker’s novel, *Dracula*.”

Terri picked up her drink, and I noticed a tattoo on the inside of her wrist.

Sensing our respective views on vampires, zombies, and the partially or entirely dead were incompatible and probably irreconcilable, I decided to change the subject.

“Hey,” I pointed to her wrist, “Is that a new tattoo?”

Terri preened as she flipped her hand over so I could see it plainly—a heart with a date etched in the center.

“I had it done for our 23rd wedding anniversary. Pretty cool, huh?”

“Very,” I said. “You can’t get a divorce now.”

“Not as long as Nick treats me right.”

“Did I just hear my name?” My son’s lanky frame appeared at Terri’s elbow.

“I was showing Dad my anniversary tattoo.”

“Yup. It’s really something,” I said.

“I wonder if vampires get tattoos,” Nick goaded playfully. Oh, crap. Here we go again with the vampire shtick, I thought.

“You can make fun all you want,” Terri pouted. “But I wish I could be a vampire. I mean, how cool would it be to have super vision and hearing, be super strong, and best of all, to live forever.”

“Yeah,” I said. “And think about how much money you could invest over the years. In a few centuries, you could be rich.”

“You guys are impossible. You just don’t understand.” With that, Terri left the table, saying, “I need another drink.”

I sat at my desk. The laptop’s monitor showed “Chapter Nine”—and nothing else.

Vampires indeed. I might as well have a Roman god appear in my novel to solve the problem, or a sudden earthquake, or any kind of *deus ex machina*. Does she really believe such drivel?

Three days later, at 6:30 AM, the incessant ringing of the telephone woke me. Cursing, I reached for the bedside phone and snarled into it, “What.”

“Dad? Dad? Thank God you answered.”

Nick’s panicky voice cleared the fuzziness from my brain.

“What’s going on? Is everyone okay?”

“It’s Terri. She’s cold. I think she’s dead. The cops are here. I need you”

When I arrived a few minutes later, there were three police officers huddled in a group with Nick, and what might be a plain clothes detective. Terri’s sheet-covered body lay on the floor. A man wearing a jacket with the word “coroner” across the back was examining her. I walked over to him.

“I’m her father-in-law. What happened?”

He looked up and said, “I’m not sure.” He pulled back the sheet from Terri’s face, which appeared dead white as a fish’s belly. “She’s completely exsanguinated and there’re two puncture wounds on her neck. You got any ideas?”

I stopped myself from saying, “Vampires?”

Don “Doc” Sanborn lives in Bradenton, FL.



That Old Florida Tonic

by Dana Thomas Weber

Sand drifted across Highway 98 by Gulf breezes whispering whims of new beginnings. Birdie had imagined the Cadillac would struggle with the bulk of the matching red and white Shasta, but the winged convertible proved competent during that 1957 month of June when society was barely accepting of a woman hitting the road alone. At any rate, Eisenhower was improving the highways and Birdie looked to improve her mindset. With a crimson and gold Shell roadmap as her guide, she was a glamour gypsy hell-bent on discovering her country while discovering herself.

Meanwhile, home from the office, her cheating husband wandered to the hollow beat of an atomic kitchen clock. The table not set, a note taped to the icebox: “Had to run an errand. Have some fried chicken.”

She had made sure to leave beer, too. A case of Schlitz in exchange for time needed to leave town. The man loved his beer as much as his mistresses.

A gust pushed the little camper around, causing her to glance in the rearview mirror—something she had avoided doing since leaving Tallahassee. Seeing that the trailer was secure, she adjusted her white organza headscarf along with the oversized sunglasses before another gust of wind caused an uptick in nerves and she tightened her grip on the large steering wheel. Mother Nature flaunting her Floridian prowess with harbingers of hurricanes.

Bring it on, she silently dared. The 40-year-old had left considerably more trouble inland upon hitching trailer to Eldorado.

Earlier, ancient oaks canopied a two-lane road and Birdie’s nerves had eased. With mossy, coaxing branches entwined in gossipy fashion, the dramatic trees were eager accessories to scandalous departures. Birdie forged on and into the open arms of a citrus country abundant with groves of cheerful orange and yellow spheres. Slowing to take in the top-down, blue-sky scenery, a farmer atop his plow tipped his hat and made her smile. America’s prominent peninsula offered sundry charms to lure her deluded heart from an insufficient life. The Sunshine State would have none of Birdie’s previously downtrodden attitude.

Open spaces had been abundant where Birdie navigated her haulage off-road at first sight of the white stand with green trim the color of palm fronds. She stretched outside the car and drew in the luscious earth soaked in salt air tinged with berries, pines, grapefruits, and oranges. The hem of her pink cotton dress fluttered around her calves. For mere pennies, the farmer’s daughters handed her a paper bag of oranges, blueberries, and neon red strawberries. A sack of Florida gold.

Delighting in the juicy bounties while rolling along a back road peppered with assemblages of palmettos, the farmland serenity was effortlessly swapped for forested tranquility. The Apalachicola National Forest marched into view with her sentry of tall pines reaching for sapphire skies. These fir guardians had observed her travels through their emerald estate until Highway 98 took over with fleeting views of illusory turquoise water beyond mushrooming dunes. Never intimidated by the sometimes angry sea, the grand pines remained on her right, often casting seeds to thrive among dunes. The natural landscape was wildly competing against itself while challenging the synthetic road dividing it all.

Now distant views along the Gulf of Mexico’s north corner shoreline were made hazy with coarse salt air. The Cadillac wore the resulting scaly windshield like a vagabond’s badge of honor. Birdie turned the wheel to drift aside. Ignition off, head back, eyes closed.

“Relax.”

Whether encouragement carried upon the voice of the ocean or her fugitive subconscious was speaking out, it made no difference. She obeyed while the gulls cried out for spellbound spirits to join them at the water’s edge. Birdie removed her pastel pumps and thankful feet slid gently into grains of sand. Step-by-step was the commanding mantra. Over the dunes, moving forward in wonder.

“Ahhhh.”

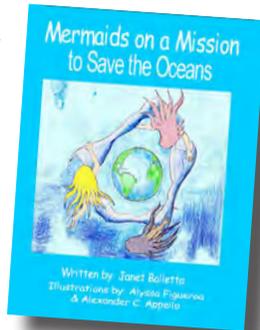
Icy water refreshed free feet. She turned to respect a descending sun. Streams of pink and purple emerged then burst about until the line between air and water and sand could not be differentiated. The fanciful orb engorged with its fiery evening destiny. Birdie beamed in admiration. The Florida sun flourished in the moment. So, too, would this woman. ✨

Dana Thomas Weber lives in Cocoa Beach, FL.

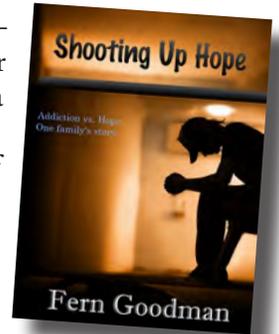
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Janet Balletta is a K-2 teacher and author of three children's books. In June 2018, Janet received the International Latino Book Award for Best Educational Themed Books for her new children's book, *Mermaids on a Mission to Save the Oceans*. It teaches themes of environmental awareness, water pollution, and conservation. Janet is also the author of *The Legend of the Colombian Mermaid* and *The Legend of Roberto Cofresi—A Puerto Rican Hero*. Her books are available on Amazon, B&N, or her website. You can download free learning activities to go along with her children's books on her website, janetballetta.com.



Fern Goodman is an award-winning creative nonfiction author and poet. *Shooting Up Hope* is a root reality short story, written as only an affected family member of addiction can expose. This offering bears witness to the heavy honesty, reality, raw emotion, hope, and helplessness with a light hand. One reader wrote, "It really opens your heart and gives a truth to the heartbreak that the family goes through in dealing with the addicted person and longing for their healing." Find the Kindle Short Read on Amazon.



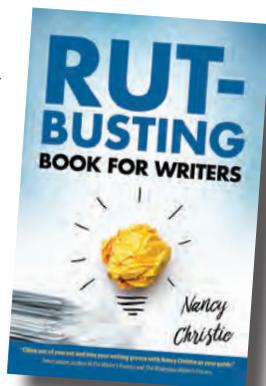
Award-winning author **John Chaplick's** *Parchments of Fire* reflects his lasting respect for the Greeks' passionate devotion to their homeland and their pride in its illustrious history. Near the island of Antikythera, sponge divers discover a 2,000-year-old Roman shipwreck that harbors secrets potentially catastrophic to the public image of Greece. The government of Greece and two criminal organizations will stop at nothing to seize the documents for their own ends. Visiting Harvard classics professor Tobias Romulus Finch becomes the unwilling guardian of the documents, and his life becomes dependent upon finding a solution acceptable to both opposing forces. Available on Amazon.



Paul Iasevoli is happy to announce his novella "Winter Blossoms" is included in the anthology *Seasons of Love*, published in the US and UK by Beaten Track Publications. Of the anthology, the editor states: "Love follows no rules. Like sun in winter and rain in summer, love can blossom in the most unexpected places. This richly diverse collection of stories proves that love is as universal and as varied as the seasons." The stand-alone novella, *Winter Blossoms*, an LGBTQ+ m/m romance and *Seasons of Love* are both available on Amazon, Smashwords, and directly from beatentrackpublishing.com.



Nancy Christie's latest book, *Rut-Busting Book for Writers*, was recently named a Notable 100 Book in the 2018 Shelf Unbound Best Indie Book competition. Her short story, "Pandora's Box" is a semifinalist in the Florida Writers Association 2018 Royal Palm Literary Awards (RPLA) competition.



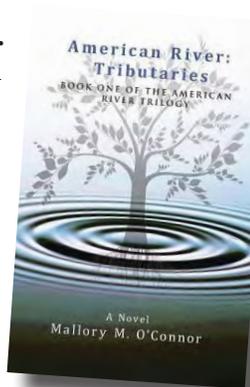
The 49th Biennial Conference of the National League of American Pen Women was held in Des Moines, Iowa in April. Members in the fields of art, music, and letters submitted works for judging. **Virginia Nygard**, Vero Beach Branch member of the group and an FWA Regional Director and Group Leader, was honored with the first place poetry award of \$100 for "Sylvia," a piece that captures the mood of writer and poet Sylvia Plath's darker days.



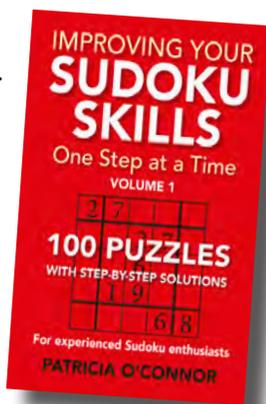
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Gainesville author, **Mallory M. O'Connor**, has won first prize in the fiction category from Northern California Publishers and Authors for her debut novel, *American River: Tributaries*, Book One of the American River Trilogy. O'Connor's historical fiction trilogy follows the interwoven stories of three California families as the descendants of Irish, Japanese, and Mexican immigrants embark on unique journeys to pursue their dreams amid an unsettled 1960s world. In *American River: Tributaries*, O'Connor unwinds a compelling yarn about the pursuit of art, music, culture and love, and captures the essence of the 20th century American dream. Visit her website at mallorymoconnor.com.



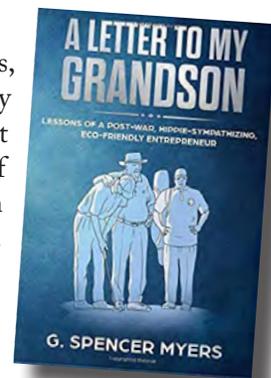
This book by **Patricia O'Connor** is designed to help readers improve their skills while solving challenging puzzles. The puzzles in *Improving Your Sudoku Skills: One Step at a Time* can be solved without guessing or writing in tiny candidate numbers. The reader's eyes are gradually trained to look at the entire grid, knowing that the answer to a particular square is there waiting for them in plain sight if they only look hard enough. This is the process by which the author improved, and she thinks it can help other people to enjoy the game more. Available on Amazon.



Tormented Heart is a novelette by **John D. Ottini**. It's with a heavy heart that Austin Drummond travels to Bodega Bay, California, to honor his wife's final request and to say goodbye to a dear friend. When a meeting with a needy young woman leads to chaotic unforeseen circumstances, Drummond must remain calm in the face of adversity. In the end, he discovers that even when everything goes as planned, there are still things in life that are beyond his control—and that sometimes joy can be found in very unexpected places. Available on Amazon. John blogs at jdonovels.wordpress.com



Published by On Target Words, *A Letter to My Grandson* by **G. Spencer Myers** is about overcoming the challenges of life without losing enthusiasm or compromising on principles. It is about choosing happiness over despair and standing one's ground without being obviously stubborn. It is about integrity. Mr. Myers is encouraging everyone to write your own story and he will help you with his *Guide to Write Your Own Story*. Website: booksbyspencer.com



“Write even when the world is chaotic. You don't need a cigarette, silence, music, a comfortable chair, or inner peace to write. You just need ten minutes and a writing implement.”

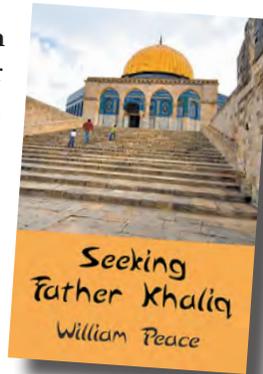
Cory Doctorow



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Seeking Father Khaliq by **William Peace** won in the 2018 IndieReader Discovery Awards, fiction category. In *Seeking Father Khaliq*, Kareem al-Busiri, a secular philosophy professor at a distinguished Middle Eastern university, overcomes terror and tragedy to find spiritual fulfillment and love with the help of the real (or imagined?) Princess Basheera. “For me this book was a labor of love,” said William Peace. “It brought together Islam, Christianity, love and terror, life and death, truth and dreams in a real but different world.”



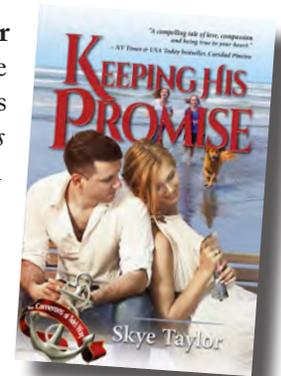
receive this honor from a long-established magazine. Elaine teaches writing workshops at Winter Park Public Library, Maitland Public Library, and Crealdé School of Art. She is a writer, instructor, editor, speaker, performer, and photographer, and writes “Person”alized stories and poems. Contact her at Personalwrite@gmail.com

Elaine Person won second place in the East Lake County Library Poetry Contest with the poem “I Wish Someone Told Me.” The competition received 400 entries. She won first place in *Saturday Evening Post’s* limerick contest, published in the current issue, page 93, and on the periodical’s website. Elaine is thrilled to

Silent Survivor by **Deborah Shlian**—first place winner of the 2017 Royal Palm Literary Award in the unpublished thriller category—is now available in paperback and e-book (Kindle, Kobo, iBook, etc.) formats. Readers’ Favorite reviewer says: “Shlian has produced a medical thriller that churns out suspense at a pace to put a reader’s pulse into overdrive.” For more information, check out Deborah Shlian’s website shlian.com.



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