

**FALL 2018**



The Quarterly Magazine of the Women's Fiction Writers Association

# **WRITEON!**

**TEN DOS AND  
DON'TS OF  
DIALOGUE**

**DIALOGUE  
AS VOICE**

**LISTENING  
TO YOUR  
ARTIST'S  
VOICE**

**+ GET TO KNOW  
YOUR 2019  
WFWA BOARD  
CANDIDATES**



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### WRITE FOR WRITE ON!

You love reading *Write ON!* Now write for it! If you're interested in being a *Write ON!* contributor, pitch your one-time features articles (2,000 words) to Features Editor Cara Achterberg at [carasueachterberg@gmail.com](mailto:carasueachterberg@gmail.com) or your regular column idea (750-1,000 words) to Managing Editor Stephanie Knipper at [sknipper@fuse.net](mailto:sknipper@fuse.net).

## PRESIDENT'S NOTE

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For as long as I can remember, I've been a goal-oriented person. As my mom put it, I was a "scatterbrained" child, so having something to aim for kept me focused. When I got older, goals were ways to measure my progress: as a student, a worker, a manager. In my twenties, a musician friend called my fixation on achievements narrow and restricting. He insisted it was the journey that mattered, not the destination, and quoted Harry Chapin for good measure: *It's gotta be the going, not the getting there, that's good.*

That, to me, sounded like a recipe for chaos. I dismissed his assertion as the folly of an artistic dreamer.

When I joined WFWA five years ago, I did so with goals. Like most writers, I wanted to finish my book, find an agent and get published to international acclaim. In my mind, this new organization for writers could help me get from point A to point B to point C.

Since then, with the help of WFWA, I have finished and polished my book and found an agent. Achieving these goals has been exciting and encouraging. It's also been slow. Like many writers, I've learned just how long it can take to make any progress in the publishing industry. The *getting there*, as my friend called it, hasn't been nearly as easy as I'd expected.

But a funny thing happened to me along the way. I found myself with a lot more time to spend on the *going*. Rather than wallow, I volunteered for WFWA and had conversations with other writers about their paths to publication. I cheered on fellow members and pointed to resources that had helped me on my own journey. I ran for the Board of Directors. And I made a lot of friends. Suddenly, the *getting there* (book deal) was no longer more important than the *going*.

After serving as President for two years, the time has come for me to hand the reins to someone else. We have several fantastic Board candidates on the ballot for 2019, and elections will open in December. Cast your vote to make sure WFWA continues to be an incredibly supportive community for writers. And if progress in your writing career has been slower than you'd hoped, consider volunteering. This organization is run entirely by volunteers, and the people I've met and the lessons I've learned as a result have meant everything.

Having goals is great. But don't pursue them exclusively of all else. Have dialogue along the way. Find your strengths as a writer AND as a human. Apply those strengths liberally in your work and your community. You may be a little further along in the process than a newbie, or you may already be multi-published. Either way, don't forget to reach back and offer a hand to those just starting out. In doing so, you'll make someone else's *going*, as well as your own, that much sweeter.

Write on!

*Christine Adler*

WFWA PRESIDENT



**AFTER SERVING AS PRESIDENT FOR TWO YEARS, THE TIME HAS COME FOR ME TO HAND THE REINS TO SOMEONE ELSE. WE HAVE SEVERAL FANTASTIC BOARD CANDIDATES ON THE BALLOT FOR 2019, AND ELECTIONS WILL OPEN IN DECEMBER. CAST YOUR VOTE TO MAKE SURE WFWA CONTINUES TO BE AN INCREDIBLY SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY FOR WRITERS.**

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## ABOUT THE WFWA

We began this organization in 2013 with the idea to create a safe, nurturing place for writers of women's fiction. The publishing industry is morphing—with new opportunities and, as yet, unknown futures. The founders of the Women's Fiction Writers Association wanted somewhere to amass and disseminate information to and about our chosen genre.

Defining Women's Fiction has proven as subjective as the types of books we prefer. For that reason, our guiding statement is broad and comprehensive: Stories that are driven by the main character's emotional journey.

Our stories may have romance. Or they may not. They could be contemporary. Or historical. But what binds us together is the focus on a main character's emotional journey.



facebook.com/WFWritersAssociation



twitter.com/WF\_Writers

Join the closed WFWA Facebook group by sending an email to: [membership@womensfictionwriters.org](mailto:membership@womensfictionwriters.org)

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Christine Adler  
President

Lainey Cameron  
Vice President, Programs

M. M. Finck  
Vice President, Communications

Laura Drake  
Vice President, Finance / Treasurer

Maggie Marr  
WFWA Legal Counsel

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Heather Webb  
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Annette Gallant  
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Kerry Lonsdale  
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*Write ON!* is published quarterly by the [WFWA](http://WFWA.womensfictionwriters.org). [womensfictionwriters.org](http://womensfictionwriters.org)

### LIKE WHAT YOU'VE READ IN WRITE ON?

Send us a letter! We'd love to hear your feedback and reactions on the stories and features. Email them to [writeon@womensfictionwriters.org](mailto:writeon@womensfictionwriters.org). Submitted letters are considered for publication and may be edited for clarity or space.

## STAFF

### FEATURES EDITOR

**Cara Sue Achterberg** is a novelist, blogger, creative writing teacher, and rescue dog foster mom who lives on a hillside farm in New Freedom, Pennsylvania with her family and far too many animals. She is the author of *I'm Not Her*, *Girls' Weekend*, and *Practicing Normal*. Her memoir, *Another Good Dog: one family and fifty foster dogs*, was released in August from Pegasus Press. For more information, blog links, and plenty of puppy pictures, visit [www.CaraWrites.com](http://www.CaraWrites.com)



### MANAGING AND COLUMNS EDITOR

**Stephanie Knipper** is the author of *The Peculiar Miracles of Antoinette Martin*. She lives in Kentucky with her husband and six children, where she is currently at work on her second novel.



### COPY EDITOR

**Sara Dahmen** is a metalsmith of vintage and modern cookware in tin, copper, and iron. Her debut novel, *Widow 1881*, inspired her Port Washington company, House Copper & Cookware. She has published over 100 articles as a contributing editor, has written for *Edible* and *Root + Bone*, among others, and spoke at TEDx Rapid City. When not sewing authentic clothing for 1830's reenactments, she can be found hitting tin and copper at her apprenticeship with a master smith, reading the *Economist* and reference books, brainstorming with her husband, or playing with her three young children.



### CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

**Patricia Friedrich** is Professor of English at Arizona State University. She is the author/editor of six nonfiction books including *The Sociolinguistics of Digital Englishes* (Routledge, 2016), the award-winning *The Literary and Linguistic Construction of Obsessive-compulsive Disorder* (Palgrave, 2015), and several published short stories. She is currently working on revisions to her first novel-length manuscript, *Artful Women*.



### LAYOUT EDITOR

**Sheri Taylor-Emerly** is an art director who longs to be a novelist. She's still in awe that her *Rising Star* manuscript, *The Fifty-Week Wife*, landed her a fabulous agent. When she's not grinding her teeth from stress, she's rejoicing in seeing her son and daughter turn into amazing young adults, working at a dog rescue once a week, and corralling a one-eyed dog and four cats at home. She lives with her husband outside of Atlanta. She's repped by Carly Watters of P.S. Literary. Vist her at [writeonsister.net](http://writeonsister.net)



# 2019 WFWA BOARD CANDIDATES

By Orly Konig, WFWA co-founder and founding president



This year marked the 5th anniversary for WFWA. It's been amazing to see how far the association has come since those early days when the five founding members were toying around with the idea and nervous about what we were getting into. We hoped, and our hopes have been realized.

WFWA has become the home for over 1,000 women's fiction authors. Since those early days, we've switched to a more robust online platform and have significantly expanded our programming. Looking at the road ahead, we have more exciting programs and opportunities to roll out.

I'm excited about what's to come and the fabulous group of volunteers who have stepped up to serve on the board for 2019. The strength of WFWA is its members. Thank you to everyone who's volunteered to get this organization to where it is today, and to those who are committed to take it to the next level.

## **AND WITH THAT, YOUR 2019 BOARD OF DIRECTORS CANDIDATES:**

### **President**

Tasha Seegmiller

### **Vice President, Communications**

Kerstin March

### **Vice President, Programs**

Lainey Cameron

### **Vice President, Finance/Treasurer**

MM Finck

### **Secretary**

Michele Montgomery



## 2019 WFWA BOARD CANDIDATES: TASHA SEEGMILLER / PRESIDENT

**ABOUT THE POSITION:** The President shall serve as spokesperson for the Association; call, set the agenda for, and preside over all meetings of the Board and the members; appoint, with Board approval, such committee chairs as may from time to time be necessary; serve as a nonvoting ex-officio member of all committees (or assign another Board member to do so); execute Association business as specified by the Board; appoint, with Board approval, qualified members to fill any officer or director vacancies; and coordinate all activities and fulfill any other obligations designated by the Board.

### WHAT TASHA HAS TO SAY:

■ **How long have you been a member of WFWA and what have you gained personally and/or professionally from the association?**

I unofficially joined WFWA when it was a yahoogroup a few months before the organization was founded. The day I found out something like this was in the works, I wept, because I didn't know any place where someone who wrote what I wrote could truly belong, instead of modifying all the other advice out there. I followed the founders on Twitter that day, and can honestly say that it has been one of the integral decisions of my life.

I don't know that I can separate the personal and the professional in terms of what I have gained, as my affiliation with WFWA has nurtured both. Of course, there is the sense of belonging that is oh so important. Even more than that, however, is the fact that these people who wrote the same thing as me, many of whom have had great success with the selling and marketing of their stories, still care about other writers.

All of this has proven that as a member of the Women's Fiction Writers Association, no one is ever alone or better than, and that a women's fiction writer in a small town in southern Utah can feel loved and welcomed, and have an equal or better chance at connection and communication as anyone else in the world.

■ **What do you think is the most important benefit of membership, and what will you do to support that?**

The reason I joined WFWA was to connect and to learn, and this is the benefit that I still consider the most important. Whether is it through the WFWA community page, participating in workshops, giving and receiving critiques on work, or simply having a supportive place for when the querying/submission/publication process makes me want to pull out my hair, the chance to learn and grow through generous members is what makes this association something that continues to add writers. Through integrating a variety of resources available through diverse mediums (including newsletters, events, webinars, podcasts, etc.), I plan to support initiatives that allow WFWA to continue nurturing and educating writers.

■ **What excites/intrigues you about the position you are running for?** As the Women's Fiction Writers Association is over 1000 members strong, it is the opportunity to help WFWA transition from the leadership style that has been necessary for a small organization to one where more people can contribute, where the resources can be more diverse, and where support can expand. I've never been a fan of micro-managing anyone or anything, which I believe will make me a good president at this time. I would love to see members who are passionate about certain areas stepping up in leadership roles, and I cannot wait to get to know more of the members better. I'm excited to hear the ideas from other members of the board, to learn how we can better support our writers, and to continue to expand the great opportunities that are afforded creators who choose to be a member of WFWA.

■ **What about your background makes you uniquely qualified to handle this position?**

As I mentioned earlier, I stalked, ahem, initiated a professional writer relationship with the WFWA founders as soon as I knew they were founders. And in those messages, the very first thing I did was ask, "How can I help?" because I firmly believe if there is something great out there, something that will benefit me, I need to do what I can to benefit it as well.

Originally, I was a columns editor for *Write ON!*. Soon, I transitioned to managing editor, helping with ideas, flow, and resources to assist people in WFWA. I got to read the quarterly president's messages before they went out with a close eye, and have followed the way that this organization has transitioned.

I served as secretary for the WFWA board in 2016 & 2017. I was responsible for all the board meeting notes (and subsequent revisions) which, again, allowed me to see what it takes to make WFWA work. I appreciated the chance to see the differences between two presidents.

There may not be many people who value quality communication and planning more than I do. With an increase in size comes the necessity of increased organization to ensure the moving parts are maintained and nurtured well and often. With my day job, I maintain a student support center at a local university, seeing nearly 2500 visits every 15 weeks. Of course, I don't see all of them, but instead train and support student mentors to listen, to advocate, to support. This is the same leadership style I will bring to WFWA as time has proven that the leaders of newsletters, support groups, programs, events, and so forth are competent and need to have the leeway to demonstrate their abilities while still honoring the purpose of WFWA.



■ **What do you see as WFWA's strengths and what ideas do you have for further promoting those?**

I love the intentionality that WFWA has in their statement, that it "is an inclusive organization of writers creating layered stories in which the plot is driven by the main character's emotional journey." I think there is a great responsibility to help people understand what women's fiction is, to continue discussions of specific storytelling techniques that will allow writers to hone their craft and find a supportive organization. Additionally, I am passionate about making sure that this organization continues to demonstrate its inclusivity for writers who focus the plot of their story on the main character's emotional journey. I want to encourage even more writers in close physical proximity to gather, because there is something synergistic about sitting with people who are striving toward the same goal as you. I want to ensure WFWA continues to be a safe space for brave writers who are passionate about story.

■ **What's one thing you would like to see change for WFWA in the coming year?**

I would like the awareness of WFWA to expand to the point where it is familiar. I have gone to several writing conferences where the typical first two questions (Where are you from? and What do you write?) have led to conversations about how there is support for writers whose stories don't necessarily have great, plot-rich storylines, but who focus on plotting the change of the heart, of the mind, of the soul. I hope to provide enough information and resources for members that ANYONE could start a conversation about WFWA, and how it can provide education and support.

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**ABOUT TASHA:** Tasha Seegmiller believes in the magic of love and hope, which she weaves into every story she creates. She is passionate about helping people nourish their creativity and has been a member of the Women's Fiction Writers Association since 2013, and trusts in the power of Diet Coke. The former high school English teacher now assists in managing the award-winning project-based learning program (EDGE) at Southern Utah University. Tasha married a guy she's known since she was seven and is the mom of three teens. She is represented by Annelise Robey of Jane Rotrosen Agency.

## 2019 WFWA BOARD CANDIDATES: KERSTIN MARCH / VICE PRESIDENT, COMMUNICATIONS

**ABOUT THE POSITION:** The VP Communications is responsible for the overall communications strategy and messaging of WFWA including the development, review and execution of the Communications Plan; maintaining consistency in all internal and external communications; coordinating all communication vehicles including the quarterly magazine and newsletters; assisting the social media and web site teams with message and program opportunities; promoting appropriate successes of WFWA members, including Star Awards and Rising Star awards; assisting in managing any other messaging opportunities for WFWA. The VP of Communications will work closely with the President in all messaging and promotion opportunities, as well as fulfill any other obligation designated by the Board.

### WHAT KERSTIN HAS TO SAY:

■ **How long have you been a member of WFWA and what have you gained personally and/or professionally from the association?**

When my debut novel was released in 2015, I knew I needed to connect with fellow authors for camaraderie as well as advice on how to successfully navigate the publishing industry. I attended several conferences and participated in two other organizations, but I didn't find the right fit until I discovered and joined WFWA in August 2016. Since then, I have gained a greater perspective on writing methods and how to build a career as a women's fiction author. I have also received support for my work, participated in the Star Award program, and most importantly, met several members whose support has been both personally and professionally rewarding to me. It takes a tribe!

■ **What do you think is the most important benefit of membership, and what will you do to support that?**

Relationships! As an extrovert, one of the biggest challenges for me as a writer is feeling isolated. I am more productive, and creative, when I can share and learn from others. Sometimes that means collaborating with a WFWA critique partner or attending an event, and other times it's participating in something as simple as Facebook chats or reading the news and advice in WFWA's online publications. In terms of relationship building and this position, I would like to build upon the excellent publications, tools, and events that are currently in place, find ways to streamline information, and engage more members. I also support programs (events, pitch-sessions, social media

campaigns, publications / articles, etc.) that foster relationships between writers and agents, editors, booksellers, and publishing industry professionals. Lastly, as someone who prefers face-to-face contact over "virtual," I would also love to help create more opportunities for members to meet regionally and/or by state.

■ **What excites/intrigues you about the position you are running for?**

As an author and a public relations / communications professional, I'm excited about the opportunity to combine both aspects of my career in this volunteer position. I am impressed by how much WFWA has accomplished and grown over the past five years and look forward to leveraging that success, further strengthening its visibility in the industry, and helping the organization reach the next level.

■ **What about your background makes you uniquely qualified to handle this position?**

I am a published author who has 20 years of experience working in corporate communications, public relations, and journalism. I have developed strategic communication plans and managed campaigns and events for corporations as well as nonprofit organizations. Additionally, I currently lead the Tall Poppy Writers' public relations efforts.

■ **What do you see as WFWA's strengths and what ideas do you have for further promoting those?**

The first thing I would do is work with the organization's leaders to identify strengths, challenges, and goals. I would then develop a strategic plan with specific objectives, timeline, and creative tactics to address those issues. For example, I consider the growing number of talented and diverse members to be one of the organization's greatest assets. If I were to lead communications, I would like to create turnkey projects (i.e. a social media campaign with customized memes and messages) where we could leverage the power of those members to help spread the word about WFWA, further increase membership, and heighten the organization's reputation and position within the publishing industry... not to mention, heighten awareness of the "women's fiction" genre. I would also like to find new opportunities to showcase WFWA at industry events, in the media, and at conferences. As someone who prefers face-to-face interaction vs. online, I would also love to see more opportunities for members to meet and get to know one another.



**I AM MORE PRODUCTIVE, AND CREATIVE, WHEN I CAN SHARE AND LEARN FROM OTHERS. SOMETIMES THAT MEANS COLLABORATING WITH A WFWA CRITIQUE PARTNER OR ATTENDING AN EVENT, AND OTHER TIMES IT'S PARTICIPATING IN SOMETHING AS SIMPLE AS FACEBOOK CHATS OR READING THE NEWS AND ADVICE IN WFWA'S ONLINE PUBLICATIONS.**

■ **What's one thing you would like to see change for WFWA in the coming year?**

Over the next year, I would take steps toward elevating WFWA's standing within the publishing industry, strengthening awareness of the women's fiction genre, and creating simple, yet effective ways our members can participate in the organization's growth and success – and thereby, through association, their own success.

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**ABOUT KERSTIN:** After graduating from St. Olaf College, Kerstin March built a career around writing. During her start as a newspaper reporter, and then as a public relations professional, she has always enjoyed bringing out the personal side of news stories. Today, she is the author of two women's fiction novels, *FAMILY TREES* and *BRANCHING OUT*, and is currently writing her third. In addition to WFWA, Kerstin is a member of Tall Poppy Writers, where she leads the organization's public relations efforts. She lives in Minnesota with her husband and their three children.

## 2019 WFWA BOARD CANDIDATES: LAINHEY CAMERON / VICE PRESIDENT, PROGRAMS

**ABOUT THE POSITION:** The Vice President-Programs shall assume the duties of the President and preside over all meetings of the Board and members in the absence of the President; be responsible for planning and overseeing all program-related activities undertaken by the Association, including those at regular meetings, workshops, and conferences; and fulfill any other obligations designated by the Board.

### WHAT LAINHEY HAS TO SAY:

■ **How long have you been a member of WFWA and what have you gained personally and/or professionally from the association?**

This will be my third year as a WFWA member, and third year volunteering. I can honestly say that without the support and community of other members I would not have come this far in my own writing journey. So, I appreciate the chance to give back and help others feel supported in the way other writers, now friends, have advised and helped me!

■ **What do you think is the most important benefit of membership, and what will you do to support that?**

Wow, where to start? Although our workshops and webinars that help improve craft skills are very important, for me personally it's been that sense of being supported by a community of other writers who want you to succeed. I see that come out the most in our workshops, where writers help each other improve their pitch or their skills, and also in the Facebook group and in all those who volunteer their time as judges for our competitions or as program or communications volunteers.

To that end, I think I'm most excited in 2019 to see the community aspect when WFWA's first writer-to-writer mentoring program gets off the ground!

■ **What excites/intrigues you about the position you are running for?**

The opportunity to keep giving back. WFWA is growing (now over 1,000 members!) and one of our big challenges is how to pull in more volunteers so we can keep expanding our offerings both in terms of additional programs (like mentoring) but also programs that scale so many more can participate at once (like the webinars). Also increasingly, we are playing a role in helping to promote women's fiction as a genre, through our new reader newsletter (Read On!), and author happy hours.

■ **What about your background makes you uniquely qualified to handle this position?**

We've come so far just in the last year that I've been leading programs, and I think I can be most valuable to our members staying in this role, especially as we have other changes at the organization's board leadership level for 2019. My goal is to stay and help (as the now old timer), as much of the rest of the team changes up for next year!

Looking back on my notes from last year's section here in *Write ON!*, the items I said we needed to focus on were how to scale our technical infrastructure and our programs to support our bigger membership. And I said that ideally we'd get to the point where we have one online event a month.

The great news is that in the last year, we've achieved all of that! We launched an entirely new web site (technical infrastructure) that lets us scale and the monthly webinar program which has unlimited viewers each month, plus we completely revised our happy hours.

For 2019, with even more volunteers to help, we intend to double our pitch events (one of the biggest capacity constraints remaining) and keep growing our workshops, too!

■ **What do you see as WFWA's strengths and what ideas do you have for further promoting those?**

Community, community, community. Our strength is in our amazing members who genuinely want only the best for, and want to help other authors succeed. The places where we've enabled members to help and support each other (Facebook group, in our workshops, volunteering to give webinars, etc.) is where we've seen the best results.

My role here is to keep expanding our program offerings which requires amazing volunteers to step up and help!

■ **What's one thing you would like to see change for WFWA in the coming year?**

We have critical work to do to meet our mission of being an inclusive organization that fosters diverse stories. I'd like to see us work on how to promote and support getting women's fiction from a broader range of voices to market (which means getting that broader range of voices into our own membership).

We've made progress in bringing in a more diverse roster of webinar expert speakers this year, but we still have more work to do in this area, and it's critical to meet our mission as an organization to consciously support all voices and the creation of resonant, diverse women's fiction stories.



**ALTHOUGH OUR WORKSHOPS AND WEBINARS THAT HELP IMPROVE CRAFT SKILLS ARE VERY IMPORTANT, FOR ME PERSONALLY IT'S BEEN THAT SENSE OF BEING SUPPORTED BY A COMMUNITY OF OTHER WRITERS WHO WANT YOU TO SUCCEED.**

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**ABOUT LAINHEY:** *Lainey Cameron spent two decades as a marketing executive, immersed in the irony and absurdity of Silicon Valley. A few years ago, she dropped out of tech, became a digital nomad, and is focused on honing her craft skills and the path to publication. She has run WFWA's programs for the last year. Her first book became a finalist in the Colorado Gold Novel Contest (Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers) and won second place in the WFWA Rising Star Award for unpublished women's fiction.*

## 2019 WFWA BOARD CANDIDATES: MM FINCK / VICE PRESIDENT, FINANCE/TREASURER

**ABOUT THE POSITION:** The Treasurer/VP, Finance handles all accounting and financial transactions including managing bank and PayPal accounts, issuing payments, reviewing PayPal and merchant account transactions, updating the annual budget, and entering data into Quickbooks Online. The position also includes monthly bank reconciliations, quarterly financial statement generation and review, and annual tax return filing. Finally, this position makes suggestions/recommendations to the WFWA Board based on financial status and budget projections.

### WHAT MM HAS TO SAY:

■ **How long have you been a member of WFWA and what have you gained personally and/or professionally from the association?**

I've been a member of WFWA since its founding. I was fortunate to happen to sit next to Orly Konig at another writers' conference. She invited me to the yahoo "loop" which went on to become WFWA. What I have gained from WFWA is not an easy thing to summarize because the answer is too vast. Certainly, it includes: critique partners, industry contacts, emotional support, professional advice, opportunities, improvement of my craft and understanding of the business of being an author, and, last but not least, a strong sense of community.

■ **What do you think is the most important benefit of membership, and what will you do to support that?**

I'm really trying, but I simply can't pick one most important benefit. WFWA provides too many valuable things. I particularly value: the community, the workshops, the Industry News newsletters and *Write ON!*, the growing programs that promote published members to readers, the retreat, and the contests. If I am elected VP, Finance, I will support all of these things by responsibly care-taking the money side of them and continuing to be an active member of the community. (I will also chair the RISING STAR Award for Unpublished Women's Fiction for the fourth time.)

■ **What excites/intrigues you about the position you are running for?**

If I'm elected as VP-Finance, I am looking forward to giving back in a whole new way to the organization that has already given me and every member so much.

■ **What about your background makes you uniquely qualified to handle this position?**

I hold a B.S. in Accounting from one of the country's foremost programs. While I am currently not practicing, I am a licensed CPA. After many years as a consultant for a large, international firm in accounting and finance, I was the Assistant Controller, Special Projects for The John F. Kennedy Center and a Fund Manager for Georgetown University. I now own and operate a small business, Query Quill.



**WFWA PROVIDES TOO MANY VALUABLE THINGS. I PARTICULARLY VALUE: THE COMMUNITY, THE WORKSHOPS, THE INDUSTRY NEWS NEWSLETTERS AND WRITE ON!, THE GROWING PROGRAMS THAT PROMOTE PUBLISHED MEMBERS TO READERS, THE RETREAT, AND THE CONTESTS.**

■ **What do you see as WFWA's strengths and what ideas do you have for further promoting those?**

Speaking from a financial perspective, the former VP, Finance, Laura Drake led WFWA with a responsible, thrifty hand. Given the opportunity, I would carry on in the same way.

■ **What's one thing you would like to see change for WFWA in the coming year?**

I would like to continue to grow our author-promotion programming to readers. I would like to continue to implement the recommendations of the Inclusion Team whose work I deeply admire.

---

**ABOUT MM:** *MM Finck is a novelist, essayist, and query letter coach, opening pages editor, and overall story analyst as The Query Quill. She oversees Women Writers, Women's Books Interviews and Agents' Corner segments. In addition to WFWA, she is also active in Writer Unboxed where she has been a guest contributor and in her local writers group James River Writers. Her women's fiction is represented by Katie Shea Boutillier of the Donald Maass Literary Agency. She chaired the Rising Star Award for the past two years. Her work has appeared in national and regional publications, including skirt! Magazine and upcoming on SheKnows.com. When she isn't working on her work-in-progress PIN UP, you can find her biting her nails over her novel #LOVEIN140 which is currently on submission.*

## 2019 WFWA BOARD CANDIDATES: MICHELE MONTGOMERY / SECRETARY

**ABOUT THE POSITION:** The Secretary shall be responsible for: record the minutes of all meetings of the Board of Directors and the membership; keep Association records, including copies of newsletters, communications, Association business correspondence, committee reports, and all other official documents; mail notices; and fulfill any other obligations designated by the Board of Directors.

### WHAT MICHELE HAS TO SAY:

■ **How long have you been a member of WFWA and what have you gained personally and/or professionally from the association?**

When Amy Nathan's newsletter announced that a group of writers were starting a Yahoo group called WFWA in 2013, I jumped on it. I've been lucky enough to be the Critique Program Coordinator from 2013-2017 then the 2018 Secretary. There is a spirit in WFWA you can't get anywhere else. It both fuels and comforts me on a daily basis.

As for professional benefits, I have a publishing credit because of the kindness of WFWA friends who encouraged me - and suggested resources - when I was in a slump. The Donald Maass courses, the presenters at the retreats and my WFWA critique group have all improved my writing. Our workshops and Facebook groups have helped me navigate the publishing world. Our "hive mind" is unequalled because of the generosity that pervades our organization.

■ **What do you think is the most important benefit of membership, and what will you do to support that?**

I have to pick just one? That's so unfair. In a broader sense, there's power in numbers and - now that we've exceeded a thousand members - I'd like to help us increase our strength. I've volunteered to help get our mentoring program off the ground and that can only improve our position in the marketplace. The more sales our members have, the more we all benefit.

■ **What excites/intrigues you about the position you are running for?**

I love being able to input and vote on some of the issues affecting WFWA. The advances in our mentoring program, pitching efforts, and inclusion program have been close to my heart this past year. As secretary, I'd continue to assist as those programs bloom.

■ **What about your background makes you uniquely qualified to handle this position?**

I can type the notes to the Board of Directors meetings. I've heard no one else around here knows how to type.

■ **What do you see as WFWA's strengths and what ideas do you have for further promoting those?**

Our supportive nature and generous spirit are what makes WFWA unique yet we need to gain traction in the marketplace and become a power genre. I'd like to see our marketing, pitch, and mentoring programs increase the number of WFWA writers who get their novels sold. As secretary, I'll continue to input and help, as I've done in the past year. I have experience in business, I'm a freelance screenplay consultant and I've been a volunteer mentor to high school students. I hope my broad experiences contribute to the board's perspectives.



**OUR SUPPORTIVE NATURE AND GENEROUS SPIRIT ARE WHAT MAKES WFWA UNIQUE YET WE NEED TO GAIN TRACTION IN THE MARKETPLACE AND BECOME A POWER GENRE. I'D LIKE TO SEE OUR MARKETING, PITCH, AND MENTORING PROGRAMS INCREASE THE NUMBER OF WFWA WRITERS WHO GET THEIR NOVELS SOLD.**

■ **What's one thing you would like to see change for WFWA in the coming year?**

WFWA has recently taken steps to improve our inclusivity and widen the range of novels our members write and share with the world. I'd love to see a more diverse membership and more stories that enlighten us on the struggles all women face. Learning what difficulties others encounter not only makes us better writers but better humans as well.

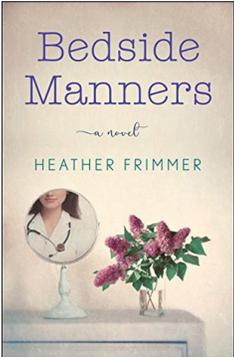
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**ABOUT MICHELE:** Michele Montgomery writes suspenseful fiction laced with offbeat humor. Her novel, *The Disastrous Plans of Trumpet McMann* is out on query and her personal essay "We Were Snubbed by Our Dead Dog, Twice." was published by *The New York Times*. She's the Secretary for the WFWA, a freelance screenplay analyst for Hollywood institutions, and has written for *Write ON! zine*.



# MEMBER RELEASES

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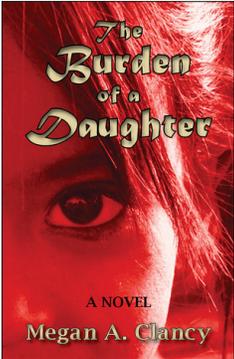
**HEATHER FRIMMER**

**Bedside Manners**  
**10/16/18**

As Joyce Novak’s daughter, Marnie, completes medical school and looks ahead to a surgical internship, her wedding, and a future filled with promise, a breast cancer diagnosis throws Joyce’s own future into doubt. Always the caregiver, Joyce feels uncomfortable in the patient role, especially with her husband and daughter. As she progresses through a daunting treatment regimen including a biopsy, lumpectomy, and radiation, she distracts herself by planning Marnie’s wedding.

When the sudden death of a young heroin addict in Marnie’s care forces Marnie to come face-to-face with mortality and her professional inadequacies, she also realizes she must strike a new balance between her identity as a doctor and her role as a supportive daughter. At the same time, she struggles with the stark differences between her fiancé’s family background and her own and comes to understand the importance of being with someone who shares her values and experiences.

Amid this profound soul-searching, both Joyce and Marnie’s futures change in ways they never would have expected.



**MEGAN A. CLANCY**

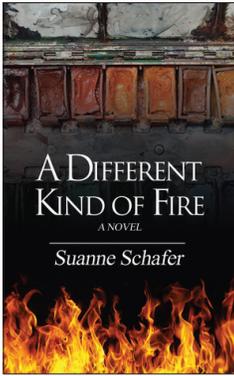
**The Burden of a Daughter**  
**11/1/18**

When a girl’s father promises her away in marriage, she runs away from her small mountain village to Kathmandu where she is met with further tragedy. A mother hopes for love, while a daughter hopes for freedom. Both struggle to find their path in the traditional bonds of their world.

*Continued on page 12*

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## MEMBER RELEASES



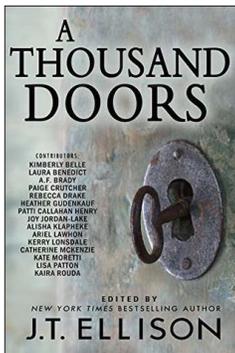
### SUANNE SCHAFER

#### A Different Kind of Fire

11/1/18

Ruby Schmidt has the talent, the drive, even the guts to enroll in art school, leaving behind her childhood home and the beau she always expected to marry. Her life at the Academy seems heavenly at first, but she soon learns that societal norms in the East are as restrictive as those back home in West Texas. Rebelling against the insipid imagery women are expected to produce, Ruby embraces bohemian life. Her burgeoning sexuality drives her into a life-long love affair with another woman and into the arms of an Italian baron. With the Panic of 1893, the nation spirals into a depression, and Ruby's career takes a similar downward trajectory. After thinking she could have it all, Ruby, now pregnant and broke, returns to Texas rather than join the queues at the neighborhood soup kitchen.

Set against the Gilded Age of America, a time when suffragettes fight for reproductive rights and the right to vote, *A Different Kind of Fire* depicts one woman's battle to balance husband, family, career, and ambition. Torn between her childhood sweetheart, her forbidden passion for another woman, the nobleman she had to marry, and becoming a renowned painter, Ruby's choices mold her in ways she could never have foreseen. Includes book club questions.



### J.T. ELLISON (EDITOR)

#### A Thousand Doors

11/5/18

WHAT IF...

We've all played the "what if" game. For Mia Jensen, "what if" is a fact of life. Dissatisfied with her choices, she often dreams about what could have been. Now she has the chance to know. But that knowledge is going to cost her dearly. Only through death can she fully realize the value of her life.

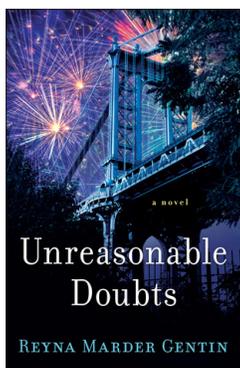
Forty-year-old Mia Jensen is home after a terrible day, trying to figure out how she's come to this point in her life, when she hears a strange noise from the kitchen. She investigates, only to be brutally attacked and left for dead. As she dies, she experiences some of the lives that could have been hers had she only made a different choice.

Can one woman find peace with the path she's chosen before it slips through her fingers forever?

Through the unique voices of New York Times bestsellers and rising stars in women's fiction, *A THOUSAND DOORS* examines how our smallest decisions can create lasting effects, and allows the thought: can we actually change our lives?

*Contributors:*

Kimberly Belle  
Laura Benedict  
A.F. Brady  
Patti Callahan  
Paige Crutcher  
Rebecca Drake  
Heather Gudenkauf  
Joy Jordan-Lake  
Alisha Klapheke  
Ariel Lawhon  
Kerry Lonsdale  
Catherine McKenzie  
Kate Moretti  
Lisa Patton  
Kaira Rouda



### REYNA GENTIN

#### Unreasonable Doubts

11/13/18

Jaded New York City Public Defender Liana Cohen would give anything to have one client in whom she can believe. Dozens of hardened criminals and repeat offenders have chipped away at her faith in both herself and the system. Her boyfriend Jakob's high-powered law firm colleagues see her do-gooder job as a joke, which only adds to the increasing strain in their relationship.

Enter imprisoned felon Danny Shea, whose unforgivable crime would raise a moral conflict in an attorney at the height of her idealism—and that hasn't been Liana in quite a while. But Danny's astonishing blend of good looks, intelligence, and vulnerability intrigues Liana. Could he be the client she's been longing for—the wrongly accused in need of a second chance? Is he innocent? As their attorney-client relationship transforms into something less than arm's length, Liana is forced to confront fundamental questions of truth, faith, and love—and to decide who she wants to be.

If you have a Women's Fiction novel being published in the next quarter (January, February, March) and would like *Write On!* to feature it, please [fill out the submission form here](#).

# Dialogue as Voice



By Sara Dahmen

As veterans of craft workshops and discussions about *Voice*, we've all been asked: *what is your voice as a writer?* *Voice* is usually explained as the tone of our work, the way the words flow, and how we sound on the page. Are we funny, quirky, or romantic? Do we use a lot of colorful descriptions or are we curt and concise?

And that's all very good – *Voice* is important in general.

But how can we use our character's inner and outer dialogue as a way to project our personal sound and cadence as a writer? How can we use dialogue to create character personality? How our characters talk can create *Voice*. Dialogue gives us an amazing tool to “show not tell”, allowing our characters' words and interactions to create our voice.

## CHARACTER'S INNER DIALOGUE AS AUTHOR VOICE

A character's inner thinking or stream-of-consciousness will likely take up just as much on the page as narrative, and therefore can be a great place for an author to transplant his or her tone. For example, examine this inner dialogue from the character of Josef in Alyson Richman's *The Lost Wife*:

*I open my eyes and Amalia is reaching to turn the radio alarm off.  
She kisses me.  
Dryly. Absently. The taste of water.  
My Amalia kissing me.  
There isn't the faintest taste of strawberries in her kiss.  
It is the taste of a snow cone without the juice.  
Ice, without the color blue.*

Most people really do not think like this. The inner dialogue is offered in such a way to give us, the reader, a description of what is happening, but with observations that are very poetic and very visual. In short, the author shows us something about this couple and their marriage, giving us a sense of loss and coldness. She uses language that a man from the 1940's who has seen war would likely not employ on his own, but which allows us to hear and sense without using narrative to tell us what is going on. An author can project that personal rhythm onto a character this way, through the inner workings of the mind, since most characters have their own unique sound on the page, which is what I'll jump to next.

## FEATURE

### CHARACTER'S OUTER DIALOGUE COMBINED WITH NARRATIVE AS AUTHOR VOICE

When your characters interact with one another and speak on the page, they have their own way of talking. Some might have an accent, a drawl, a turn of phrase, or be particularly succinct. All characters come to the story with some sort of background and emotional baggage, which affects how they interact with one another.

Still, the way they talk to one another can be used to create your Voice as a writer, which will then bleed into your description. This can be brought out in repetition, or by creating strong imagery specific to the world you've created on the page (whether that is modern, historical, or otherwise).

Pearl S. Buck, in her Pulitzer Prize-winning classic, *The Good Earth*, does this by having her characters use the words "Well, and" extensively in the way they begin their sentences. She also uses the word "and" a lot overall, so there is an easy flow between how her characters speak and how she describes the rest of the story.

*Then all of a sudden he thought of something and he said,  
"Well, and I would have it moved out to the earthen house and there I will live out my few days and there I will die."*

*And when they saw how he had set his heart they did what he wished and he went back to the house on his land, he and Pear Blossom and the fool, and what servants they needed; and Wang Lung took up his abode again on his land, and he left the house in the town to the family he had founded.*

While it's obvious when a character is talking, the tone of the writing stays the same between dialogue and narrative. We can sense the rhythm of the author's voice, carried through dialogue. The flow of the story isn't lost as the characters' voice and your personal author Voice come together. By using repetitive words in a very obvious way, we know it's intentional and not a grammatical error.

A character's outer dialogue also sets the tone when an author wants to create a sense of time or setting without simply announcing it to the reader. Dialogue once again can reveal tidbits of the culture effortlessly. Mika Waltari's *The Egyptian* does this very well, by using dialogue to be an aid to Voice so there's less telling and more showing:

*I tasted the drink again and as its fire coursed through my body I remarked,  
"In truth, I believe Kaptah would be willing to break a jar with you for the sake of this drink although he knows that after the wedding you would soon begin to throw hot water over his feet."*

In this single sentence of dialogue, Waltari uses phrases that are unique to his book, and create place, time, and world simply through dialogue. To "break a jar" means 'to marry' and throwing "hot water over his feet" means to be a nagging wife. These examples of dialogue show the ancient world of Egypt and offer make-believe ways for the characters to talk to one another so their dialogue essentially creates Waltari's Voice and sets the stage.

### DIALOGUE AS CHARACTER VOICE

When writing fiction, other than the cursory explanation of a character's eye, hair, or skin color, and what kind of clothing they prefer to wear, how else can you give characters personalities that stand out?

This can happen in dialogue; it all comes down to digging into the characters who will do the most talking and discovering why they talk the way they do. This will not only give your characters additional depth by showing how they sound and talk, but it will also allow for easy differentiation during inter-character conversations.



**WHILE IT'S OBVIOUS WHEN A CHARACTER IS TALKING, THE TONE OF THE WRITING STAYS THE SAME BETWEEN DIALOGUE AND NARRATIVE. WE CAN SENSE THE RHYTHM OF THE AUTHOR'S VOICE, CARRIED THROUGH DIALOGUE. THE FLOW OF THE STORY ISN'T LOST AS THE CHARACTERS' VOICE AND YOUR PERSONAL AUTHOR VOICE COME TOGETHER.**

*Continued on page 15*

## FEATURE

Ask yourself questions like these when writing or editing your dialogue:

- Do characters have a certain turn of phrase that sets them apart?
- Does a character often use a certain word improperly?
- How can you show a character to have a visible accent?
- Does your character have poor English?
- Can a character use a foreign language in a certain way?
- What kind of language can show a character as loquacious or terse in keeping with their character?
- Does a certain character always curse? What kind of curses?
- When upset or emotional, will a character stay *in* character? Or will you use dialogue to escalate a scene, showing a character's inner voice and how stress can change how a character interacts with others in the setting?

Showing characterization through dialogue is giving voice to your characters, plus adding to their story. It allows you to inadvertently add back story without having to go into telling details. We can clearly understand if someone is, perhaps, a German immigrant because of how they speak. We might be able to ascertain that they were raised in poverty because of how they react to wealth, and comments they make about fine items. You can show a character is reserved by making their responses short and dour.

Take the following example from my own novel, *Widow 1881*:

*"It's the old sawbones! Come to gather up your housekeeper, is it?" Horeb cackles.*

*"Sure is," Gilroy agrees.*

*"And all merry today, is it? Get to chop off an arm or a leg?"*

*"What if I told you it was somethin' else entirely?" The doctor turns on the two older men abruptly and wiggles his finger.*

*"What if it's an entirely new operation includin' a lot of whiskey on the man, but afterwards he's not much of a man. If you catch my meanin'."*

Throughout all such conversations in the book, the character called Horeb always ends his sentences with a question. Gilroy typically speaks in monosyllables. And the doctor has both a sense of risqué humor and an accent. As an author, I don't need to give as much background on some of these men, simply because their dialogue adds color, entertainment, and creates characterization on its own. I never need to mention the doctor's sense of humor in the narrative; it's right there in his dialogue. His "Voice" is spoken, shown, and delivered without an added description.

In the end, Voice is dialogue, and dialogue is Voice. The two work together to create a book that speaks *your* Voice. Once you find that rhythm, in whatever way it works best for you, your readers will hear it in both your characters and your narrative, creating a seamless flow no matter what is happening in your book. It will be completely your story. Your Voice. And everyone will hear it.



**SHOWING CHARACTERIZATION THROUGH DIALOGUE IS GIVING VOICE TO YOUR CHARACTERS, PLUS ADDING TO THEIR STORY. IT ALLOWS YOU TO INADVERTENTLY ADD BACK STORY WITHOUT HAVING TO GO INTO TELLING DETAILS. WE CAN CLEARLY UNDERSTAND IF SOMEONE IS, PERHAPS, A GERMAN IMMIGRANT BECAUSE OF HOW THEY SPEAK. WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO ASCERTAIN THAT THEY WERE RAISED IN POVERTY BECAUSE OF HOW THEY REACT TO WEALTH, AND COMMENTS THEY MAKE ABOUT FINE ITEMS.**

# Ten Dos and Don'ts of Dialogue



By Cara Achterberg

1

## **DON'T TALK JUST TO TALK.**

All dialogue should have a purpose. It should move the plot forward, develop characters, add tension. Like people who talk just to hear the sound of their voice, unnecessary dialogue is tedious and annoying.

2

## **WHENEVER POSSIBLE, LOSE THE DIALOGUE TAG.**

If you don't need to tell the reader who is speaking—don't. There are plenty of ways to tell them without using a he said, she said formula. Use action instead of tags.

"I have no earthly idea who would be calling at this hour," Jane looked at her phone.

John-Jacob watched the sky. "Sometimes I toss pebbles just to watch them pigeons scatter."

3

## **IF YOU DO NEED A DIALOGUE TAG, STICK WITH SAID FOR 95% OF YOUR TAGS.**

You can throw in an occasional 'asked' or 'hollered' or 'whispered,' but if 'said' will work, use it. Colorful dialogue tags may be fun to write, but they are almost always disruptive to the reader.

Characters should be identifiable to the reader by the way they talk and the things they say. If your characters are clearly drawn, dialogue tags become even more unnecessary.

Whatever you do, do not use an adverb to modify the word *said*. You can convey whatever you were intending with that adverb in the words your character speaks and his actions surrounding his words. Do not *tell* the readers; *show* them.

4

## **DON'T USE DIALOGUE TO DUMP INFORMATION OR LET YOUR CHARACTERS DRONE ON AND ON WITH MONOLOGUES.**

Never mind that it's the sign of a lazy writer, it also bores the reader and stops the action. *Sprinkle don't dump* should be your motto when it comes to back story throughout your work, but particularly when it comes to dialogue.

Shakespeare may have been able to get away with the soliloquies, but not the rest of us. Think about how people talk, and unless you're trying to paint your character as a bore or tyrant, avoid monologues.

5

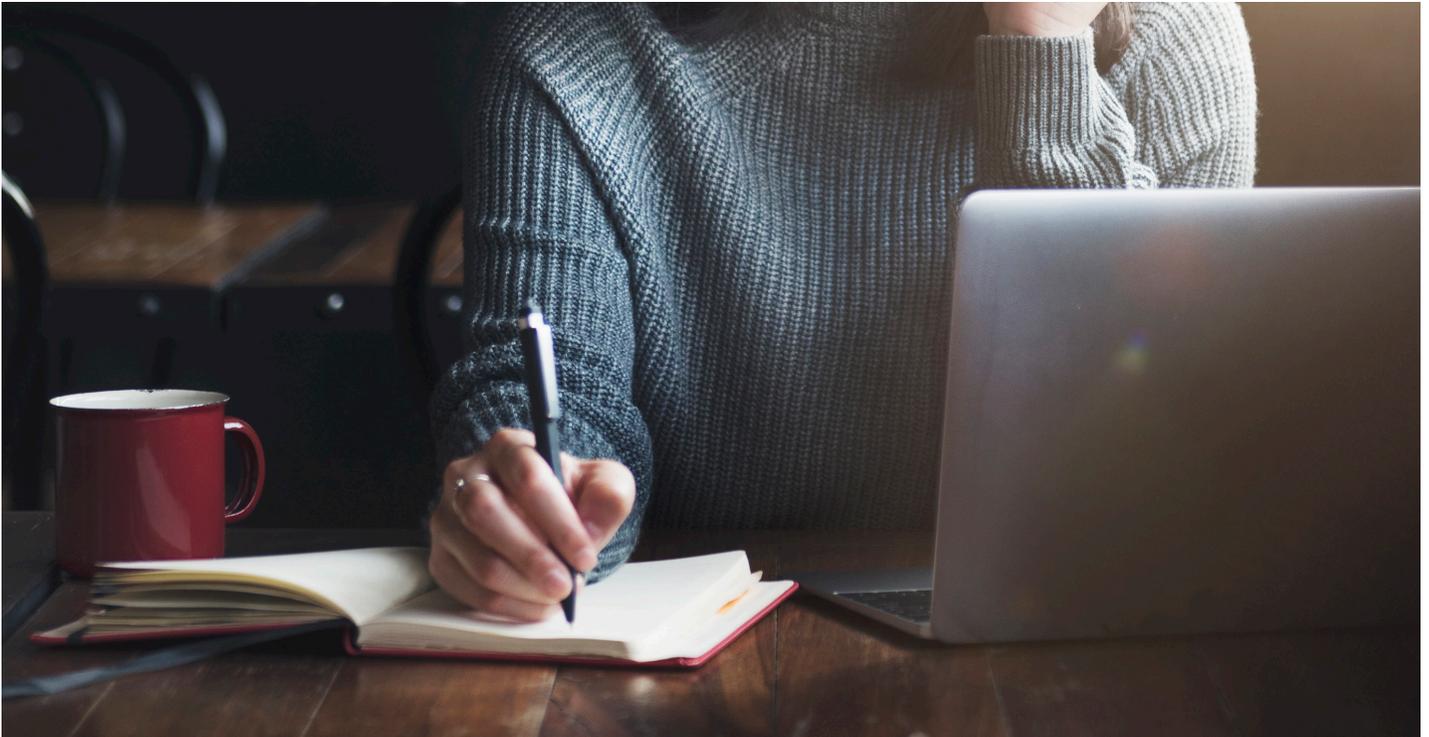
## **DO BE VERY CAREFUL AND SELECTIVE WHEN IT COMES TO SLANG, TECHNOLOGY, AND POPULAR CULTURE.**

Slang can date you and your work, so use it intentionally or not at all. (Same with technology like 'pagers' and 'DVD players' etc.) If you're trying to set your story specifically in the 80's and you want to be sure your audience knows it, feel free to fling around all kinds of references to big hair and hacky-sacks, but remember that not every reader will know what a VCR player or a Cabbage Patch doll is.



**WHATEVER YOU DO, DO NOT USE AN ADVERB TO MODIFY THE WORD SAID. YOU CAN CONVEY WHATEVER YOU WERE INTENDING WITH THAT ADVERB IN THE WORDS YOUR CHARACTER SPEAKS AND HIS ACTIONS SURROUNDING HIS WORDS. DO NOT TELL THE READERS; SHOW THEM.**

*Continued on page 17*



**6 DO KEEP YOUR DIALOGUE SMART AND CONCISE.**

Sure, Aunt Martha might have droned on about her bunions, but don't bore your reader. Say what needs to be said and nothing more. While 'real' dialogue does have all kinds of tangents and sidebars, dialogue on the page shouldn't unless it's necessary for the character or the story. Same with 'ums' and ahhs' and 'errs'.

Characters in novels (especially John Green novels) sound much cleverer and more interesting than the rest of us. They think faster on their feet. You know how you always know the perfect comeback thirty minutes after the altercation? Your characters have the advantage of your long hours of editing. Lucky them. (I've always known my life would be even more awesome if I only had a good editor.)

**7 DON'T USE CHARACTERS' NAMES IN DIALOGUE.**

Think about how often you use another person's name. Other than when you spot someone across the parking lot, it's pretty rare that we say each other's name. I can't even remember the last time my spouse said my name.

While it may be a clever marketing tactic for the salesperson to repetitively say your name on the phone, it's awkward and forced in written dialogue.

Save the names for moments of high tension or high romance—times when using someone's name has significance.

**8 DO READ YOUR DIALOGUE OUT LOUD.**

Listen for rhythm and naturalness. It should flow. Listen for things like contractions and awkward phrases. Read plays to see how effective dialogue can tell the story. Consider writing entire scenes of only dialogue.

People have distinct speech patterns, but they may be subtle. Kids sound different than adults. Educated sounds different than uneducated.

**9 DON'T ASSUME YOU NEED A BEGINNING AND END.**

You can jump write in to the middle of a conversation between two people. You don't need all the tedious hellos and goodbyes and small talk that grease real life conversations. They slow down the story and bore the reader.

**10 PUNCTUATE CORRECTLY.**

Doing it wrong is a giveaway that you are an amateur. There are lots of resources for this – study them.

I'm a big fan of Elmore Leonard's ten rules of writing. Here's a final nugget from that wise, concise tome:

*"Think of what you skip reading a novel: thick paragraphs of prose you can see have too many words in them.*

*What the writer is doing, he's writing, perpetuating hooptedoodle, perhaps taking another shot at the weather, or has gone into the character's head, and the reader either knows what the guy's thinking or doesn't care. I'll bet you don't skip the dialogue."*

## LESS, FEWER, AMOUNT, NUMBER

Not very long ago, a juice brand had to voice over its TV commercials to correct a grammar mistake: maybe a teacher, a linguist, or a writer wrote to the firm to explain that the text should not be “less sugar and calories” but rather “less sugar and fewer calories.” While in that instance, the line was edited, this particular mistake is ubiquitous.

“Amount of people” and “less dollars” seem to be used everywhere. Yet, the forms “number” and “fewer” are the correct ones. This grammatical rule is based on whether the nouns they modify are countable or uncountable. Here is what makes them so.

■ **People, dollars, cups of coffee, students, and flowers are all countable nouns.** To test, one needs to simply try and add numbers to modify these words and notice that a plural form is possible:

One person >>> Two people  
One dollar >>> Two-million dollars  
One cup of coffee >>> Five cups of coffee  
One student >>> Ten students  
One flower >>> A hundred flowers

**When a noun is countable, “number” and “fewer” should be used. Therefore,**

Two people >>> a large number of people >>> fewer people than less time  
Five dollars >>> a good number of dollars >>> fewer dollars than I expected

■ **Sugar, coffee, rice, and money, on the other hand, are all (generally) uncountable nouns.\*** To test, you can use measurements or “containers,” which would make these nouns countable.

Coffee >>> a cup of coffee  
Sugar >>> three cubes of sugar  
Rice >>> a pound of rice

**In those cases, use “amount” and “less”**

Coffee >>> drink less coffee tomorrow  
Sugar >>> a large amount of sugar  
Rice >>> less rice and more beans  
Money >>> a small amount of money

*\*occasionally a unit is implied as when people say “two coffees” to mean “two cups of coffee” when ordering the beverage or ask “how many sugars” to mean “sugar cubes.”*



Photo by Stephen DePolo on Visual Hunt

**“AMOUNT OF PEOPLE”  
AND “LESS DOLLARS”  
SEEM TO BE USED  
EVERYWHERE. YET,  
THE FORMS “NUMBER”  
AND “FEWER” ARE THE  
CORRECT ONES.**

# Negative Space



By Stephanie Knipper

The title character from my novel, *The Peculiar Miracles of Antoinette Martin*, is a ten-year-old girl on the autism spectrum. Antoinette is non-verbal. Creating a character who can't speak felt like hamstringing myself. After all, dialogue is one of the major ways an author reveals something about a character or advances the plot. Yet here I was, deliberately removing an important tool from my author's toolbox.

I became interested in non-verbal communication after my husband and I adopted our daughter, Grace, from China. Grace can't speak, but she does communicate with us. She gestures. She stomps. She shrieks. Most of the time we know what she wants, but there are times we don't. Those times are incredibly frustrating to Grace and to us.

I'm constantly thinking of ways to flesh out my characters, and dialogue is one of my favorite tools. But parenting Grace made me wonder whether the absence of dialogue could be just as useful as its presence. Could a lack of dialogue tell us something about a character? Could it move the plot forward?

I began writing Antoinette without knowing the answer to these questions, but as I worked I realized that the answer is yes. We often learn more about a character by what *isn't* said than by what *is* said.

## CHARACTERS WHO CAN'T SPEAK

Some people physically can't speak. Maybe they're like my daughter and on the autism spectrum. Maybe they've had a stroke. Maybe they have a disorder that affects the larynx or vocal chords. Whatever the reason, a character's lack of speech is likely to cause feelings of frustration and alienation both for them and for those around them. Perhaps this character wants to connect with others, but their lack of speech makes such connections difficult. In this case, the inability to speak becomes a conflict that spans the novel.

Don't mistake a lack of speech as a lack of communication. A character who can't speak will still communicate. It just won't be through dialogue. Consider my character Antoinette. Her relationship with her mother, Rose, is central to the book, but Antoinette never speaks to her mother.

## FEATURE

In the following scene from *The Peculiar Miracles of Antoinette Martin*, Rose takes Antoinette to the doctor because she suspects something is wrong. In her purse, Rose carries a list of Antoinette's milestones. With it she hopes to persuade the doctor that her daughter is "normal". Instead, the doctor suggests institutionalizing Antoinette:

*"Institutions are nicer now. Caring for her by yourself is going to be hard."*

*I lose my breath and I feel something crushing my chest. Then I feel a small hand in mine. When I look down, Antoinette's eyes are closed and she's humming.*

*She hasn't hummed since last September, and I realize how much I missed the sound of her voice. The pressure in my chest eases. Her touch has always made me feel better. When I pick her up, she closes her eyes and rests her head on my shoulder.*

*Dr. Ketters is still talking when I walk out of the exam room, but I'm not listening. As we leave, I think of the second list I made. The one I didn't show the doctor. On it, I listed the way Antoinette's fingers clasp mine when we walk in the garden. The way my heart beats easier when she is next to me. The way she taps my back, and I know it means 'I love you.'*

Here we see that although Antoinette can't speak, she and her mother have their own method of communication. The lack of verbal communication is painful and frustrating for both characters, but because of their love for each other, they are able to transcend that difficulty.

### CHARACTERS WHO WON'T SPEAK

On the other hand are characters who can speak, but choose not to in certain situations. In this case, the lack of dialogue is situational and its use is much more precise. It's not necessarily one of the central conflicts of the novel. Instead, it's used more to illuminate a character.

Consider the following scenario:

Two characters are at a party. The first suffers from an acute social anxiety disorder and has trouble speaking in social situations. The second is a narcissist who stops speaking whenever the topic of conversation veers away from her.

Our characters are surrounded by people, and they're both silent. However, the lack of dialogue reveals something different about each character. The first character is terrified and desperate to avoid notice. She's just trying to make it through the evening without having a panic attack.



Contrast this with the second character who has no problem speaking but becomes bored whenever she isn't the center of attention. Maybe people try to engage her in conversation, but she walks away if they're not talking about her.

Two characters with a similar situation, but something very different is revealed about each character. The first character doesn't speak because she's afraid. The second doesn't speak because she's arrogant. Think of other characters: the woman who grew up in the south, but hates speaking because she's embarrassed of her accent; the man raised by an emotionally distant father who never felt loved. Characters who choose not to speak tell us something about themselves. Their lack of dialogue reveals their secrets; things they are ashamed of; things they love.

### IN CONCLUSION

Negative space is a term that artists use to describe the space around and between the subject. A character's silence does the same thing. It illuminates aspects of their personality. It reveals their secrets and desires. It can become a source of conflict, both internally and externally. People are multi-dimensional. We have reasons for speaking and for hold back. As authors, we need to remember this. There will be times when our characters *won't* speak. There will be times when they *can't* speak. Both are opportunities for readers to get closer to our characters. Because sometimes what isn't said shows the reader much more than dialogue ever can.

**NEGATIVE SPACE IS A TERM THAT ARTISTS USE TO DESCRIBE THE SPACE AROUND AND BETWEEN THE SUBJECT. A CHARACTER'S SILENCE DOES THE SAME THING. IT ILLUMINATES ASPECTS OF THEIR PERSONALITY. IT REVEALS THEIR SECRETS AND DESIRES.**

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# Listening to Your Artist's Voice



By Monica Cox

After two years spent researching, writing, editing, and then editing again my historical women's fiction manuscript, I finally reached "The End," and began to query agents. To distract myself from obsessively checking my email for responses, I turned to other projects. I tried my hand at a few short pieces, revamped my social media platforms, began a website redesign, but creatively, I was stuck. The voices in my head had gone quiet, no characters whispering, no words begging to be

scratched into a journal or typed across the page. I dutifully sat at my desk each morning ready to receive the muse's call, but she was more mute than muse.

I refused to call the silence writer's block. Instead, I filled the void with family vacations and house guests. Armed with a plethora of valid reasons for the dearth of words, I put the writing, and the pressure, aside. At some point, however, I realized I wasn't missing the writing like I usually do during those breaks. My creativity had clammed up.

## FEATURE

As the kids' school break and my subsequent list of ready-made excuses neared their end, I took a look at my calendar and instead of relief at the empty spots open for my writing, a wave of anxiety washed over me at the thought of returning to my desk. What if I sat back down and had nothing to say?

It was then that I realized I had been going full throttle on my manuscript for the last two years. I had forgotten to refill my creative well along the way. It didn't matter how often I showed up to the keyboard, I had nothing new to give. The conversation had become one-sided. As I contemplated the empty hours on my calendar, I decided to make a plan. A plan to spark a dialogue with myself again.

To jump start my creative conversation, I used Julia Cameron's concept of the Artist Date – a solo outing exploring something that interests you. I vowed to do an entire week of Artist's Dates: one date a day for a week. It was important to me to experience a variety of places to touch on different aspects of craft. I focused my visits on the following categories: history, people watching, sensory detail, and art. After a little research, I spread out the calendar again and scrawled in visits to the following:

- A historic cemetery (history)
- A mall (people watching)
- The airport (people watching)
- A large area farmer's market (sensory details)
- A touring national portrait exhibit at a local art museum (visual art)

I am so glad that I chose the mall *and* the airport for people watching. The morning I left for the airport, I was tired. It was near the end of the week. I wondered if I even needed to go. I had already been to the mall a few days before and spent a few hours watching people there. Surely this would be redundant? How (happily) wrong I was. At the mall, I focused on people's physicality: the slope of a back, the weary face of a delivery man, the bouncing gait of a man in a wrinkled suit with a spike through his eyebrow and a smirk on his face. At the airport, I observed people's interactions with each other as they said goodbye, impatiently waited for an arrival, or argued over the bags. It was a completely different listening experience and one I would have missed out on had I given in to the complacency monster.

By the end of the week not only had I found a few sparks of creativity, but that deep desire to work had returned, as had the words whispering in my head. As writers, we need to listen as much as we speak to the page. Whether you can devote an entire week to your dates like I did, or can only spare an hour a week or a month, it's extremely important that we refill our creative wells.

As you plan your own Artist Date, here are the top ten things I learned from my week of dating myself:

### MAKE THE COMMITMENT

And stick to it! Mark the date on your calendar. Do not schedule appointments, run errands, or push it aside to get something else done. We all get busy and it can be very tempting to take back that time to accomplish another nagging task, but this creative time is as important as your writing time, treat it as such.



### DRESS FOR THE DATE

This might seem silly and superficial, but I dressed the part for each date, just like I would if I were meeting a friend or my husband. I wore workout clothes to the cemetery (it was hot, I live in the South, and I was lugging my camera - I dressed for comfort), a cute skirt to the art museum, a blazer and a work tote to the airport, a sundress at the farmer's market. Dressing for the occasion made me more focused on the destination. The more I blended into the scene, the more outward I could look.

### LEAVE THE LAPTOP AT HOME

If I could say leave your phone at home, too, I would, but instead, I'll suggest you leave it in your bag. We are a society dependent on our screens. It is so easy to hide behind them in waiting rooms, at the coffee shop, waiting for friends at a restaurant. On your Artist Date, however, you need to have your eyes and ears open to make yourself vulnerable to the experience. I left my laptop at home and tried to only use my phone to take some pictures and for GPS help (because otherwise I'd still be in that cemetery). It wasn't always easy, but the more I became aware outwardly, the more I noticed how many people do not make eye contact. We are so deeply buried in the safety of our screens that we often miss a smiling stranger or a quiet butterfly or the light through the trees.

## FEATURE

### DO BRING A JOURNAL AND A PEN

You will find that you want to jot some things down: a sensory detail, a snippet of conversation to remember, a question you want to explore later. Make sure you have a pen and paper. I carried a journal with me and found the slower pace of hand writing my notes brought me deeper into the experience.

### BE OKAY WITH THE STILLNESS

It can be really hard to sit quietly. Especially in a public place. Resist the urge to fidget or look “busy” (see number three above). You will soon find your senses awakening again. Perhaps you’ll hear the rustle of an insect in the leaves or the call of a distant bird. Maybe you’ll smell something that reminds you of your grandmother’s perfume. Notice how you physically feel as you move through the situation. Are you hot or cold, nervous or calm, irritated or languid? Why are you having these reactions? It is only when we are still that we can truly listen and interpret our experiences.

### BE OPEN

Once you are still and present in your surroundings, be open to what comes. You might start to wonder if that woman is fidgeting with her purse because she is excited or scared, or you may wonder what would happen if the person she’s waiting for never got off the plane. You may be moved by a piece of art and struggle to understand why. The sights, smells, and tastes at the farmer’s market may simply make you more aware of the sensory details of the world your characters move through. An overheard argument might suddenly crack open the problem you’ve been having in your manuscript. There is no right or wrong way to experience your Artist Date, but just be open to what the experience has to say to you, your process, or your work.

### REST

I admit, by Wednesday, I was exhausted. Dating myself was a lot harder than I thought (I should apologize to my husband!). Many writers are introverts, like myself, and getting out and exploring beyond the confines of our safe and usual writing spaces can be daunting. I forced myself to leave the house every morning, even when I was tired, even when I could have found an excuse to bag it that day and complete that date another day. And each time, I was rewarded with creative energy. Unfortunately, I often had to run to the next thing after my date. The days I had time to sit at lunch or with a tea at home after an outing were much more rewarding and invigorating. So rest, too. After your date, take a bath, a walk, read a book, sneak in a nap, whatever allows you to digest the experience you have gifted yourself.

**DATING MYSELF WAS A LOT HARDER THAN I THOUGHT (I SHOULD APOLOGIZE TO MY HUSBAND!). MANY WRITERS ARE INTROVERTS, LIKE MYSELF, AND GETTING OUT AND EXPLORING BEYOND THE CONFINES OF OUR SAFE AND USUAL WRITING SPACES CAN BE DAUNTING.**

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### DOCUMENT AND SHARE

I used my week of Artist Dates to launch my new author Instagram account. It was an opportunity for new and interesting content as well as a way to stay accountable to my commitment. Each day, I posted a photograph based on that day’s experience. While that added a certain amount of pressure to my outings you might not want, I found it forced me to think with a visual and outward perspective. Sharing my journey also allowed followers to offer suggestions on their own creative inspirations. If you are looking for social media content, an Artist Date could provide an interesting peek into your process and inspiration for your followers.

### TREAT YOURSELF

After visiting an art exhibit, I splurged on a nice lunch (and if I hadn’t had an afternoon jam packed with shuttling kids from one after school activity to another, I might have indulged in a glass of wine as well) and at the farmer’s market, I bought a bouquet of flowers. So, indulge in an ice cream cone or a craft beer at the local brewery or a maybe a souvenir for your desk to inspire and remind you of your outing.

### MAKE A PLAN FOR THE NEXT DATE

If it’s not on the schedule, let’s be real, it’s not going to happen. Once you’re home from your date, go ahead and schedule the next one whether that’s next week, next month or tomorrow. Make it a regular part of your routine to keep the conversation with your inner artist flowing. And, like me, you might find you like what you hear.



**MONICA COX** is a women’s fiction author and freelance writer. She began her career in public relations working on a variety of media campaigns ranging in topics from healthcare to high school sports. After the birth of her first child in 2006, she began blogging to document her journey from the corporate world to at-home motherhood and then on-ramping back into her career a few years later. Now focused on fiction, she has completed two novel manuscripts and a number of short pieces. When she’s not banging her fingers against the keyboard (or her head against the desk), she can be found with a book in hand while waiting for her kids at their various practices and activities.

Monica is a graduate of the School of Media and Journalism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She currently lives in North Carolina with her husband and two boys they are raising to be unabashed Tar Heel fans and avid readers.

# Historical Fiction and Authentic Dialect: When is it Too Much?



By Sheila Myers

“Damfino.”

I remember when I read that word. It took me a moment to figure it out. I was reading an essay written in 1881 by a man who interacted regularly with fur trappers in the Adirondack Wilderness. I quickly wrote the word down and used it in the historical fiction I was writing. A couple of editors deleted and spelled it out “Damn if I know.” But that didn’t ring true to me, so I kept it. I really don’t know if the word jars the reader out of the story or not. So far, no one has told me it does. But herein lies the issue: how much authentic dialogue should an author use when writing historical fiction?

## SPRINKLE DIALECT IN TO CREATE A SENSE OF TIME AND PLACE

Piper Huguley who wrote *The Preacher’s Promise*, an African American historical, suggests that authors run the risk of alienating readers when they use too much archaic language. However, the right mix puts the reader in the time period. It’s a tricky balance; beta-readers may help you determine when enough is enough.

Jenni Walsh, WFWA member and author of *Becoming Bonnie* and *Side by Side*, says people commonly write more formally than they speak, and dialogue should account for colloquialisms and natural banter. Reading dialogue aloud helps to capture the cadence of natural-sounding speech.

## CREATE A VOICE UNIQUE TO EACH CHARACTER

Kim Bannerman who writes historical mysteries including *The Bucket of Blood*, emphasizes the importance of setting characters apart from each other based on their cultural heritage, class, or education. Dialogue, she points out, is the window into a character’s personality and motivation.



## FEATURE

Piper Huguley puts it this way: Writing accurate historical dialogue means remaining aware of the humanity of your characters instead of relying on stereotypes. Huguley balances the dialect of a formerly enslaved character with consideration of readability by using a version of African American Vernacular English – an established structure of speech. An example from her book:

*“Been a free man blacksmithing all my life. Saved up enough money to buy my Sally up out of it. Ain’t nowhere you can go where folks don’t need a smithy.”*

Jenni Walsh encourages authors to have fun with the voice. This line from *Side by Side* provides an example of the main character Bonnie’s playful pattern of speech:

*“Butter my butt and call me a biscuit. Clyde just robbed a bank.”*

### KEEP A DICTIONARY WITH ETYMOLOGY CLOSE AT HAND

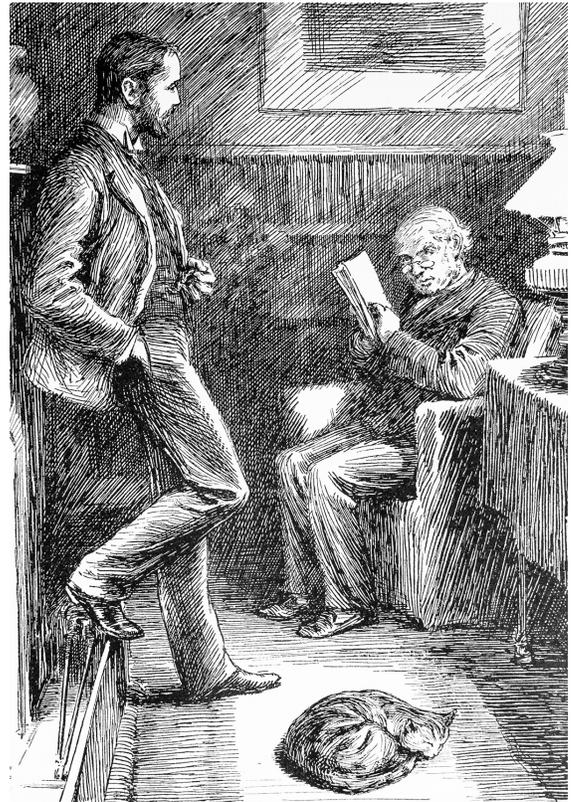
I have found this very useful as I debated the use of words with my critique partner. He insisted the word ‘snit’ was not in use in the late 1890s. I found out it was. It may seem like a small thing to worry about, but *bahlieve* me, readers of historical fiction will catch these anachronisms. Historical fiction readers tend to steep themselves in historical non-fiction as well. They will know when a word you are using was not in use at the time. And they will call you out on it. I had one reader come up to me at a book club meeting to tell me that pike did not exist in the lake in my novel during the late 1800s. (I looked it up, *she* was wrong).

### USE NARRATIVE TO TELL THE STORY USING PROPER ENGLISH

I was impressed with how well Lee Smith does this without losing pace. In *On Agate Hill*, there is a court scene where a mountain man, who would otherwise be hard to comprehend if it were straight dialogue, recounts over several pages an event that led to murder. She writes it as if he’s telling a story. And it works. It would have been burdensome to follow otherwise, and it was such a critical juncture in the book.

### READ BOOKS, NEWS ARTICLES, ORAL HISTORIES, OR DIARIES SET DURING THE TIME PERIOD TO FIND EUPHEMISMS OR TURNS OF PHRASE YOU CAN USE

Here’s a dandy I picked up while reading a court document of a lawsuit between my two main characters, William and Ella Durant, over their inheritance. William is asked by his sister’s lawyer why he insists on appealing.



*“Because my sister is attacking my reputation and my honor, and if her assertions are true, I am a scoundrel of the first water.”*

I had to look up ‘first water’, and learned it’s a term for gems of high quality. Shakespeare used it to describe Sir Andrew in the *Twelfth Night*.

Finally, Piper points out, historical fiction dialogue requires careful reflection and study and should not showcase archaic archetypes. This brings to mind a passage I read while conducting research for my latest novel set in Appalachia. Horace Kephart, who was not from the region, wrote extensively about the culture. His book written in 1913 titled *Our Southern Highlanders*, includes a chapter on the mountain dialect. After showing one of the local residents a book written in mountain dialect, the man says to Kephart: “Why that feller don’t know how to spell!” When Kephart explains that the dialect must be spelled the way it is pronounced, the man says: “That tall-teller then is jest makin’ fun of the mountain people by misspellin’ our talk. You educated folks don’t spell your own words the way you say them.” Touché.



**SHEILA MYERS** is an author of a historical trilogy about the famous Durant family, railroad tycoons from the late 1800s. Her novel *The Night is Done: a Durant Family Saga* won the Adirondack Center for Writing Best Book of Fiction (2017). Sheila regularly blogs about her works in progress. You can find her at <https://www.sheilamyers.com/> twitter: @sheilamyers and her FB author page @sheilamyersauthor

## FINAL THOUGHT

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Totally stolen from Laura Drake

I'VE NEVER HAD  
TO UNSCREW  
ANOTHER WOMAN'S  
LIGHT BULB  
IN ORDER TO SHINE.



**WRITEON!**