



# *Write On!*

Quarterly e-Zine • Winter 2014

## WHAT'S INSIDE?

The Perfect Balance of Plot & Emotion  
by Katie Shea Boutillier

So What Is Women's Fiction Anyway?  
by Shelley Noble

Join Jessica Ferguson at  
The WFWA Cafe'

Are YOU our next rising star?

*... and more!*

# EDITORS

## FEATURES EDITOR

**Erin Bartels** is a copywriter by day, a novelist by night, and a wife, mother, seamstress, and tireless ambassador for the state of Michigan in between. Erin is a board member of the Capital City Writers Association and the author of *The Intentional Writer*. You can find her encouraging writers, talking about craft, and sharing beautiful photographs at [www.erinbartels.com](http://www.erinbartels.com).

## HIGHLIGHTS EDITOR

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## COLUMNS EDITOR

**Tasha Seegmiller** (T + ash + a S + egg + miller) is a high school English teacher in Southern Utah for part of the day, mom to three for the rest, and writes contemporary women's fiction with a dash of magic. She loves owls, runs on Diet Coke, chocolate and cinnamon bears, and a life immersed in words. Tasha can be found at [www.tashaseegmiller.blogspot.com](http://www.tashaseegmiller.blogspot.com).

## MANAGING EDITOR

**Reese Leyva** wrote her first poem at age seven (in a birthday card for her grandmother) and became a narrative addict shortly thereafter, captivated by stories of any form—books, poems, spoken word, film, etc. She's written hundreds of poems, several short films, a novella, a full-length stage play, and an unpublished novel. She's currently working on her second novel while blogging at [www.reeseleyva.com](http://www.reeseleyva.com).



## ABOUT THE WFWA

We began this organization in 2013 with the idea to create a safe, nurturing place for male and female 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:

*An inclusive organization of writers who create stories about a woman'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 woman's emotional journey.

***Write on!***



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# President's Note



It's hard to imagine that this time last year, WFWA was nothing more than ideas bouncing between the founding members and a Yahoo loop. Four months after officially launching as a non-profit organization, WFWA is over 260 members strong.

Looks like Women's Fiction really did need a home of it's own.

Discussions have been picking up in the forums on the WFWA website and I'd like to encourage all of you to come poke around and participate. We all joined WFWA for the community, so don't be shy or intimidated.

The January Write-A-Thin was a great way to jump into the year. It generated lively chatter and much needed support among participants. Just because WAT is over, the discussions and support don't have to be shelved until next year. Continue posting your goals and accomplishments to the forums.

WFWA is launching the Rising Star Contest for unpublished manuscripts. We're very excited to have a contest that focuses entirely on women's fiction. Help us spread the word among your WF writer friends. The contest committee is noodling ideas for a published novel contest.

To better support our published members, WFWA has launched a Goodreads Book Club with our first discussion set for March. All WFWA members can support the club by becoming members, participating, and spreading the word. Together, we can reach a broader reader base and increase awareness of women's fiction and book club fiction.

March will also kick off our workshop series. The Master Class Workshop with Donald Maass is geared to help women's fiction writers as we struggle with creating emotional impact in our stories. In May, we'll hold "Platform Week" with guest presenters who will show you how to grow your platform using social media, a blog, your website, and the support of your agent and publishing house.

Critique partners and writing accountability buddies help keep us going when cleaning the house or changing the oil in the car seem like more enjoyable tasks. WFWA has a Critique Group Program and forums to connect beta readers. A bonus to interacting in the forums? You just might find that special writing buddy who'll poke and applaud when you need it most.

The weekly eblasts were implemented to help you stay aware of upcoming events and discussions. But we also want to share your news with the community. There are easy to use forms online to submit your news so that we can all celebrate with you.

We've come a long way with WFWA and it's thanks to the amazing writers, agents, and editors who've stepped up to support this organization. Thank you to everyone who supported us by joining WFWA; who share their knowledge and experiences in the forums and in the inaugural issue of the Write On! e-zine; who stepped up to volunteer; and who spread the word about us to their writer friends.

If you have questions, suggestions, or just want to say hi, please don't hesitate to contact me directly. Otherwise, I'll see you in the forums!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D. Lopez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Books are mirrors of the soul. — Virginia Woolf

goodreads



## Women's Fiction Book Club is here!

by Kathryn Craft, WFWA Book Club Liason

March will see the birth of a new WFWA program: the Women's Fiction Book Club at Goodreads! Our first book is Marilyn Brant's 2011 release, *A Summer in Europe*. The main objectives for the Goodreads club are to:

- provide greater visibility to WFWA published authors (in time all of our WF titles will be displayed on the bookshelves)
- raise awareness of women's fiction among readers
- introduce readers and aspiring WF writers to our member authors
- provide a benefit that will attract more published authors to our group

Each month the club will run a giveaway for one copy of the upcoming month's book.

One thing we have that not every book club does: access to authors. By way of introduction, we will feature a short written interview with the author during the first week, then conduct a half-hour live Twitter or Facebook session in the final week of the month to encourage reader/author interaction.

To foster the honest discussion of books, though, the rest of the month we'll run this like a regular book club, with questions that prompt discussion.

You do not need to be a WFWA member to join, so please share the link <https://www.goodreads.com/group/123257-women-s-fiction-book-club> via social media.

Here's why aspiring WFWA authors just might want to join, though:

- Education. Reading, studying, and discussing published WF books is a great way to steep yourself in the breadth and depth of your chosen genre, and a great way to absorb craft.
- Connections. Interacting with published WFWA authors is a way to create beneficial relationships and learn more about the realities of the work you are taking on.
- Investment. By "seeding" the new book club with members so that it stands a chance to thrive, it will be there for you when your book gets published.
- Market research. This is a great way to learn the concerns and interests of those who will become your readers.
- Karma. By purchasing the books, you are supporting the industry you hope will support you.

Huge thanks to WFBC committee members Michelle Gable, Susan Meissner, and Julia Baumann for stepping up to get the club into gear, and the ongoing support of WFWA president Orly Konig-Lopez and Communications Director Francine LaSala.

# So What is Women's Fiction Anyway?

Shelley Noble

On March 18, 2010 *The New York Times* ran this headline.

## **Women's fiction: All misery and martinis?**

"Is women's fiction plagued by 'misery lit,' obsessed with bereavement, child abuse and rape? Or 'chick lit,' obsessed with Prada handbags and landing the perfect catch? Or is it torn between the two?"

When people ask me what I write and I say, "women's fiction," I usually get a interested but blank stare. Some answer chick lit? Romance? Those big issue books that we read in our book club? It seems that most readers are not really aware of women's fiction as a separate genre.

"Women's fiction" is a publisher, marketing, and industry designation. Necessary, not to create boundaries, but to give it a place on the shelves, virtual or real. So bookstores, search engines, and publishers can lead readers to the types of books they want. It's part of the general marketing plan, what will be the most effective publicity, who is the target audience, how to reach them, how to bring them in, interest them so that they purchase the book.

Whether you are published by a traditional publisher or indie publisher or on your own, covers, advertising, publicity, branding, placement, all work together to reach your target audience and drive readers to the kind of book you write.

But likewise the author has to be aware of the same kinds of questions. Who do I want to read my

book?

Mystery has its section, science fiction has its section, romance has its section. Women's fiction is generally shelved with general fiction, so how will readers find it among the other thousands and thousands of books.

Cover designs give the next clue. We saw the development and demise of pink covers with martini glasses. Then came pastels of beaches, homes, women and children, water, objects that draw the viewer in. Cover copy, it's tone and word choice, is also geared to appeal to certain readers. This is not meant to confine the work, strip it of its individuality, but to help readers find the books they want to read.

That's all fine and good, but after the fact. What in the novel itself makes it women's fiction?

## **Misery or martinis?**

What exactly does women's fiction encompass? Why do we call some books women's fiction and others chick lit, romance, mystery, literary, mainstream? Can a novel be both, a mystery and women's fiction, a romance and women's fiction? How do I know if that's what I'm writing?

When Lisa Verge Higgins, Lisa Van Allen, and I were asked to give a talk on the current market for women's fiction, one of the first things we did was try to come up with a comprehensive definition of women's fiction.

We went to the experts: editors, agents, publicists, other writers, with several questions.

How do we recognize women's fiction? How do we distinguish it from other novels?

We gained a lot more questions and no definitive answer. Because not even the professionals always agreed.

"WF centers on women and women's issues."

"A woman is the star of the show."

"It's about women's empowerment."

"A novel with any relationship at its center."

"Written for women by women."

"Women's fiction is usually a trade paperback."

"Women's fiction can be literary or commercial"

"Encompasses all aspects of a woman's life."

"Formal or hip, literary or accessible."

"Contemporary or historical."

"It can have small themes or large."

"Can cover years or hours."

"Told from one Point of View or several."

"It's character driven."

"It can be about women in all stages of life, young, old, middle aged, single, married, divorced, widowed."

"Book club books."

"I know it when I read it."

So is it all of the above? Some of the above?

There were a lot of opinions and quite a few guesses. There were purists who wanted to tighten the parameters of women's fiction. There were others who believed that anything that couldn't be categorized as one of the other genres was women's fiction. If the experts couldn't agree, how were we to ever talk about it?

Then we came across one definition that resonated with us more than the others. And strangely enough it came from a man, Michael Hague, script and story consultant, who was giving a women's fiction workshop:

"The development of a character, where she goes from her identity, or how she sees herself, to her essence, which is her true nature."

From identity to essence. From how she sees herself to her true nature.

The story of a woman who thinks of herself in one way and is challenged or inspired or surprised into becoming her true self.

In this way, women's fiction is more than a single genre. It becomes a big stadium-size umbrella beneath which live a lot of different stories that encompass

... *women's fiction is more than a single genre. It becomes a big stadium-size umbrella beneath which live a lot of different stories that encompass many different aspects of a women's journey.*

many different aspects of a women's journey. These stories can and often do include aspects of other genres. In some cases, they are novels that have grown from strict genre to a larger story.

But if the parameters are that fluid, how do we know where our own work stands on the spectrum? Or if it belongs to a different genre altogether?

Take for example, the mystery genre. In the old school—think Agatha Christie and Dashiell Hammett—there was virtually no character development of the protagonist or any of the secondary characters. The mystery was the overriding theme. The plot and the investigation drove the story. As the mystery genre grew and developed, it expanded to encompass other aspects of the protagonist's life. Now mysteries can include family members, love interests, pets, hobbies, neuroses, recipes, and a variety of other aspects of the sleuth's life. However, the core of the novel is still the investigation and solving the mystery.

If the protagonist encounters a mystery as she is on the journey towards her true nature and that mystery is pivotal in her self discovery, and is only one of the elements influencing or driving her, then the story may have moved into women's fiction.

May have? Because unlike some genres where the boundaries are fairly recognizable, women's fiction is more fluid, more inclusive. It may encompass elements of other genres, may borrow elements of those genres to advance the story. A big umbrella. What makes it women's fiction is the use of the elements.

### **Misery or martinis?**

Can there be romance in women's fiction? Love and romance is certainly a valid part of a woman's journey. Perhaps more or less important depending on the age of the heroine or her point in her journey. If love or romance takes up the most page space, becomes the dominant theme around which her actions and growth

occur, then it moves into romance. But if the romance is only one of the motivating factors of her story, it moves the story toward women's fiction.

On the other hand, adding extra facets like family, professions, and girlfriends doesn't necessarily move a romance novel out of the romance genre, in the same way that the addition of family members, hobbies, and love interests don't move a mystery out of the mystery genre.

It's in the balance of the many elements that go into influencing the woman's story.

### **Misery or martinis?**

Can women's fiction have happy endings? Absolutely, or at least uplifting or hopeful endings. An ending where the heroine grows into her true self may be sadder and wiser, but a fuller human being. A lesson learned, a future glimpsed, a fuller, more complete person. Women's Fiction.

### **Misery or martinis?**

There are purists. There are the anything goes-ists, there are the miseries and the Prada handbags, there are romantics, stoics, optimists, pessimists, working class, the rich and famous, young and old. All on a journey. And the beauty of it is that there's room beneath the umbrella for all. •



**SHELLEY NOBLE** is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Beach Colors*, a #1 Nook bestseller, as well as *Stargazey Point*, *Holidays at Crescent Cove*, *Stargazey Nights*, and the upcoming novel *Breakwater Bay*. As Shelley Freydont she is the author of the *Celebration Bay Festival Mysteries (Berkley Prime Crime)*. A former professional dancer and choreographer, Shelley lives near the New Jersey shore. For more about Shelley, please visit her websites: [www.shelley noble.com](http://www.shelley noble.com) and [www.shelleyfreydont.com](http://www.shelleyfreydont.com).

## *Fun Challenge*

Join us in our very first  
Fun Challenge,  
the Write On!  
writing prompt game.

### FINISH THIS SENTENCE

*She walked past  
a blue bucket  
that reminded her of ...*

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Send your response  
(in 150 words or less)  
to Reese Leyva at  
[writeon@womensfictionwriters.org](mailto:writeon@womensfictionwriters.org)  
and you may find your  
submission published  
in our next e-zine.

Thanks you for playing!





# The WFWA Cafe

with Jessica Ferguson

**E**avesdropping is one of the best research tools a writer can utilize. The act of tuning in to what's being said around us goes back to the beginning of time, and historically changed about 10,000 years ago when we began constructing homes with walls, ceilings, and doors.

Today the WFWA Café is throwing open its windows and doors (for the very first time!) and inviting you to "listen in" on five authors, and fellow WFWA members, discussing writing, inspiration, and other activities that keep their creative juices flowing.

This issue we have ...

**Kathleen Irene Paterka,**

**Patricia Yager Delagrange,**

**Robin Cohn,**

**Sonja Yoerg, and**

**Jill Anderson**

... joining us at the cafe'. Sit back with your iced mocha or skinny latte and enjoy our chat.

**Jessica:** *The first thing I'd love to hear about is your writing space. Let's talk about where you make your magic!*

**Kathleen:** I have a cozy little home office where I do my writing. The walls are a deep vibrant red, the trim woodwork is white, and my desk, filing cabinets, and bookshelves are a beautiful warm walnut. My first rejection letter is framed and hangs on the wall before me (serves as inspiration!). Sticky notes cover my monitor, the biggest I could afford since my eyes aren't that great. I love my office!

**Patricia:** I write in what my family and I call my "area" — on the couch, specifically at one end, with my table on the side and my MacBook on my lap. My most enjoyable writing time is with my labrador retriever, Jack, nuzzled at my side with his right ear flapped over the keyboard where he comforts me.

**Robin:** I'm blessed to write on an antique desk made for King George the IV. I don't know much about him, but his desk works really well for me. I live in a WWI flight control tower converted into several apartments and my landlords own an antique business, hence my swanky desk. One of the benefits of living in a tower is watching a young falcon land on the roof right over my desk every day.

**Sonja:** We're renting at the moment, and my office is an enclosed porch next to the kitchen. I can spy on the neighbors from there!

**Jill:** Sadly, I work at our kitchen table as I've discovered my old, small desk doesn't have enough room for my laptop and papers. Thankfully, it is usually just my husband and I at home so I can take over half of our table and not interrupt our eating. And I don't have to worry about little hands getting into my paper-mess and un-organizing my chaotic organization.

**Jessica:** *And whose writing has influenced yours so far?*

**Kathleen:** I love and crave emotionally satisfying reads. Elizabeth Berg and Jodi Picoult remain my ultimate favorites. I've just recently discovered the novels of Eileen Goudge and am having a delicious time working my way through her backlist.

**Patricia:** I discovered (my sister Kathy told me about her) Joy Fielding several months ago and I so wish I could write like her. I love her style. She's one of the few authors that I really feel as if I am in the person's POV. Her work is different than what I'm used to reading. I'm a women's fiction maniac but her

main character is always a bit unusual. It's hard for me to describe.

**Robin:** Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent* inspired me to begin writing novels about women of the Bible from a feminist perspective. Although I've grown out of her style of writing, she gave me permission to think big and write about what I loved. As far as style goes, I'm not very monogamous with the writers I admire. My current fling is with Abraham Verghese and his wonderful book, *Cutting for Stone*.

**Sonja:** Honestly, this stumps me. Maybe *Housekeeping* by Marilynne Robinson, and I admire Wallace Stegner, Anne Tyler, Annie Proulx, Ann Patchett—pretty much anyone named a variant of Ann.

**Jill:** My earliest favorite author was a fellow Minnesota woman—LaVyrle Spencer. I read every single book of hers (my "go to" book while I'm deer hunting is still her book *The Gamble*. Although I've read it several times, I still love it.)

I remember seeing her on a talk show and she had insisted (back in the late '70s) that her books NOT be categorized as "romance" because they were SO much more!

**Jessica:** *Aside from reading your favorite authors, how do you stay inspired?*

**Kathleen:** I fill the writing well by keeping myself emotionally invested and involved with my characters. I write every day, 365 days a year. Even if it's only for one hour, I need to spend time with the people living in my stories. I also find inspiration through reading. I prefer to read great novels, but you can also take away inspiration (and lessons in craft) by reading novels that aren't so great.

**Patricia:** I stay inspired by knowing that every book I've written is better than the last. And I love reading my own books. I write what I want to read and hopefully, one day, others will enjoy my work as well.

**Robin:** Writers' conferences really pump me up, as well as a great writing group that expects me to provide something fabulous every month for their perusal.

**Sonja:** I don't think I do [stay inspired]. It goes up and down a lot. Right before I got my book deal, I thought I might just take up embroidery. If I get stuck when I need to be writing, reading almost always helps. "Oh, look! Other people put words on pages!"

**Jill:** The voices in my head leave me no choice. If I don't write down what they're saying, they gang up on me and pretty soon I'm running down the street having a conversation with them and looking like a crazy woman! Better to just let them have their way and put their words on paper.

*(Laughter ensues.)*

And as Wayne Gretzky said "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take."

**Jessica:** *So true! It sounds like staying inspired isn't a problem with this group. Now, stepping away from the writing itself, how do you congratulate yourself? How do you celebrate your successes?*

**Kathleen:** After completing a novel, I indulge my feminine and fanciful side by purchasing an expensive piece of jewelry to celebrate. When my first novel, *FATTY PATTY*, was finished, I bought myself an 18 karat gold signet ring at Tiffany's with the initial "K." It is my 'author ring' and I wear it every day on the 3rd finger of my left hand. The ring reminds me that I am indeed a writer.

**Patricia:** I celebrate my successes by jumping into revisions after typing "The End."

**Robin:** Wine. Definitely wine. Many days I feel like celebrating and go looking for an excuse.

**Sonja:** Yes, wine. Wait, I do that anyway. Okay, more wine. And sharing the news because I know how great it feels to know good things are happening to other writers. There's hope!

**Jill:** Celebrate? I've written 28 (so far) articles/stories for the women's magazine I write for, and although they take away from my time I could spend on writing my books, they also get my name out there (at least in central Minnesota!) and help me hone my "craft." And every time I have a woman (or man) come up and tell me how much they enjoy reading my stories, I know it's all worth it!

**Jessica:** *Jewelry, wine, more wine, more writing, and kudos from others...yes! All great ways to celebrate even the smallest success. Now, last question. What do you enjoy doing other than writing?*

**Kathleen:** When I'm not writing, I love watching old movies on TV with my husband and going to see new movies at the theater. I also swim laps 3x per week at our community pool. I find exercising at the pool is a great way to release tension. I've also come away with some great ideas. One of my novels starts out at a pool.

**Patricia:** I ride my huge 1,425 pound Friesian horse in the woods in the hills of Oakland, California. I play with my two chocolate labs, Annabella and her son Jack. I spend time with my son Dylan, 19, and my daughter Alessandra, 15, and my husband, James.

**Robin:** I live in the Italian countryside and I enjoy running through artichoke fields and olive groves. Since I write about the Mediterranean world, the sensations I experience could easily end up on my writing page. I also enjoy cooking and traveling in the footsteps of my characters.

**Sonja:** Running (antidote to wine), backpacking, cooking, gardening. Right now we are renovating an old farmhouse, so I can add demolishing, painting, and watching money fly out the window to the list.

**Jill:** Reading books doesn't count? Fine then, I won't mention the reading obsession I've now got my husband addicted to too. Running, curling, bowling, golfing, biking, gardening. (Lots of 'ings'!) With six grown children and eight-plus grandchildren and living on a lake, we rarely have a weekend free of "company," and although it's a lot of work, I'd be bored and sad without them all. :)

**Jessica:** Thank you all so much for joining me! And for those of you not part of the conversation this time around, no worries. Another email will go out in the coming weeks with questions for next quarter's issue.

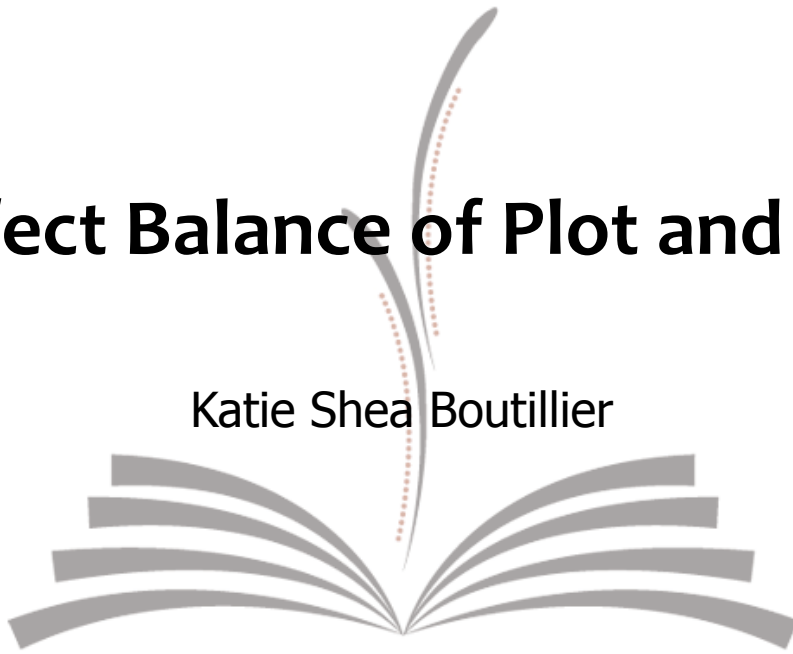
Be sure to answer the survey before the deadline and yours may be one of the lucky names I pluck from my hat. I can't wait to "see" you all again at The WFWA Cafe'. Next time, I'll bring the cookies. •



**JESSICA FERGUSON** is the author of *The Last Daughter*, a novella published by The Wild Rose Press. She interviews authors for *Southern Writers Magazine* and is co-editor of *Swamp Lily Review*, a *Journal of Louisiana Literature and Arts*. In her spare time, she plays with her recently retired husband. Jess blogs at [www.jessyferguson.blogspot.com](http://www.jessyferguson.blogspot.com).

# The Perfect Balance of Plot and Emotion

Katie Shea Boutillier



Being a writer of realistic women's/book club fiction, the challenge of creating the perfect balance of plot and emotion becomes evident. Quoted directly from my profile bio, I say, that I'm looking for "projects with the perfect balance of plot and emotion." Here is my chance to explain what exactly what I mean by this and how you can successfully accomplish this in your project.

Let's take your novel to the next level.

This is going to be bold of me, but I believe that the very first step toward writing a successful women's fiction novel is being able to connect with yourself—emotionally. You have a story. You have a main character. You have her friends, her family, her children, her coworkers—you have created her world. And in this world something happens, a change. Something to light up the eyes of the reader—what will she do? That's your plot. The complexity of your plotline will go through many drafts, while you create the perfect beginning, middle, and end. However, as you develop these experiences with your main character, stop to think—have you experienced the same feelings she may have? Yes, you absolutely have. And now you must recognize them.

Emotions are the only thing that we—humans—can connect to universally. It's what we all have in common—we feel. We do not have control of our feelings, they simply just happen. But the challenge of the writer is to be able to show it; to execute it; to know it—in a unique way; in a way where we—the readers—can feel it on the pages.

Take any moment in your life when you felt happy. Pure happiness. Nothing in the world could change it. Let's say you're driving, and it's springtime, and

it's the first warm day. The windows are down. Your hair is flowing. Your favorite song is on. Take yourself there. Take yourself to that moment. Now, use that feeling and think about where, in your novel, you can describe it. Describing this emotion of pure joyfulness may not be easy, but you can do it if you connect with yourself . . . now.

The genre of women's/book club fiction is exploding. There is a certain depth a writer must reach in order to connect to a major audience. Using emotions to intertwine throughout your novel is the perfect place to start. Draw from your own experiences. Your own wounds. Your own obstacles. Your characters do not necessarily need to experience the same things you have, BUT what you must be able to do is explain the same EMOTION that you felt and draw from it into your characters' lives. I must admit that I believe you can create an entire novel based on emotions you have felt throughout your lifetime. Think about it. Within each scene, there is a mood. A tone. A surrounding. And within this scene, it is filled with emotions.

As you write your novel, there are expectations for you to be able to describe the feelings that your character is going through. One of my favorite ways is to think of body movements you may have felt when you were feeling this certain emotion. Let's say your character is feeling overwhelmed. What might you do? Tug at your hair? Put your hand on your hips? Squeeze your fists? How might you try to calm yourself down? What about the feeling of acceptance? Again, what might you do? Hold your head up higher? Have a slight grin? Open your eyes a little wider to see the world—looking around? No matter what the scene is, you most likely have experienced the same emotion

your character is currently going through, so show it and you will get that reader/character connection that is so important to every novel.

Feelings are underrated. They are what drive us. They are what hold us together.

Emotions are everything in your women's fiction novel. Because with every occurrence comes an emotion, a thought, a feeling. And being able to show these feelings will give you the universal connection that every reader looks for in women's/book club fiction. We want to feel united. We want to feel like we aren't alone. We want to come together as one and to see each other as similar.

If you are ready to connect with yourself in the deepest way—where you can go back to moments you do not want to remember and FEEL again, you are ready. You are ready to write a novel in someone else's point of view by reconnecting with your own emotions. Once you understand your emotions, creating a vivid experience with the reader will come naturally to you and as you write, and the reader will more likely turn the pages.

I would like to make myself clear that while focusing on emotion in your novel, you must have a plotline in balance with it. Think about your own life. Think about some of the most powerful moments of your life. Of those moments, think about how you got there. That journey. What happened before you felt this powerful emotion? What happened afterwards? How did your emotions direct you in certain decisions? How did your emotions help you take a certain path? With every feeling, there is a backstory. Take your own backstory, re-shuffle it. Play with it. And rethink about it from your characters' perspectives, and then write it.

Remember, with a novel, you have all of the options in the world. You can take experiences from anywhere and throw them together into one big dramatic storyline, with plot twists, excitement, character insights, etc. Book club fiction novels are the ones we can talk about, forever. And in order to hold this timelessness, sometimes you need to just let go.

Let your emotions guide you.

Write what you resist.

Write what you fear.

Write what you feel.

Here are some great ways to reconnect with yourself and your emotions while writing women's/book club fiction:

1. Listen to music.
2. Watch a movie clip that has a dramatic scene. Or just watch your favorite movie that inspires you.
3. Look at old pictures of your family and friends.
4. Get outside. Go for a walk. Surround yourself with nature.
5. Pet/cuddle your animals.
6. Play with your kids. Or watch them with play.
7. Kiss your significant other—like you're a teenager again.
8. Call an old friend or family member you haven't spoken to in a while.
9. Take notes. When you experience a major change or a powerful moment in your life, write it down. A simple list will do. A list of feelings. This list will become a great reference to you as you connect (more deeply) with the protagonist of your novel.
10. Surround yourself with beauty. (For example, go to an art museum, light a fire in your fireplace, go look a beautiful view, etc. Be creative.)

We are all human. And we all feel. Getting to the core of it is why we write.

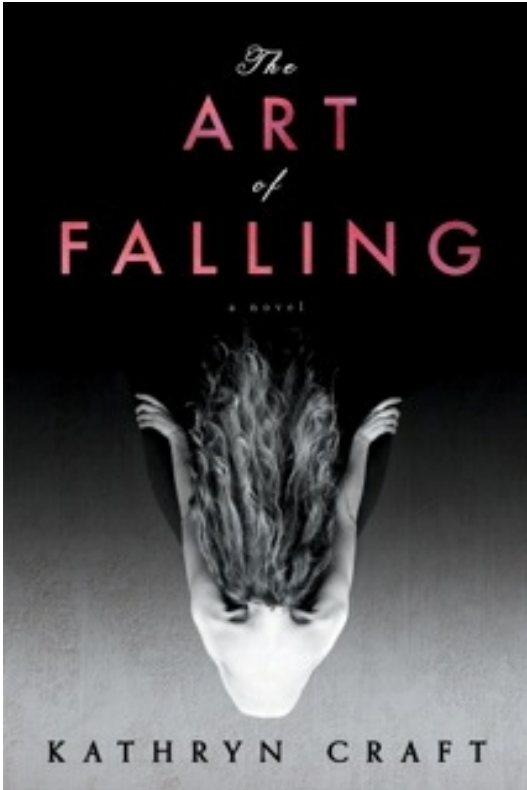
Start digging. •



**KATIE SHEA BOUTILLIER** joined the Donald Maass Literary Agency in 2011. She is the Rights Associate for the agency's Subsidiary Rights Department, where she assists in selling the agency's translation, audio, film, and electronic rights. In addition, Katie focuses on her own client list of women's fiction/book club; edgy/dark, realistic/contemporary YA; commercial-scale literary fiction; and celebrity memoir. She looks for projects with the perfect balance of plot and emotion. Katie loves novels that seek big truths, touch on important social issues, and explore unique family dynamics and unlikely friendships. She is a cum laude graduate of Marist College.

# MEMBER NEWS

We're excited to share these new member releases coming out this quarter.



## **The Art of Falling**

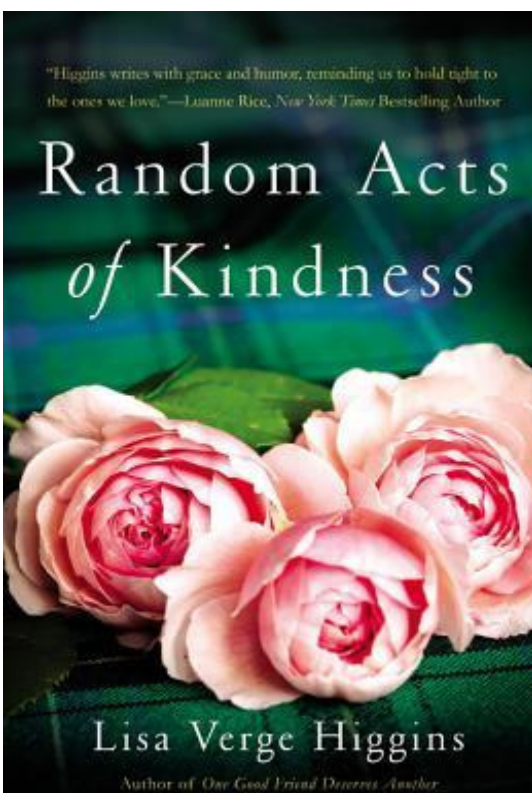
By Kathryn Craft

Release Date: January 28th

Synopsis from Goodreads: All Penny has ever wanted to do is dance—and when that chance is taken from her, it pushes her to the brink of despair, from which she might never return. When she wakes up after a traumatic fall, bruised and battered but miraculously alive, Penny must confront the memories that have haunted her for years, using her love of movement to pick up the pieces of her shattered life.

Kathryn Craft's lyrical debut novel is a masterful portrayal of a young woman trying to come to terms with her body and the artistic world that has repeatedly rejected her. *The Art of Falling* expresses the beauty of movement, the stasis of despair, and the unlimited possibilities that come with a new beginning.

[www.kathryncraft.com](http://www.kathryncraft.com)



## **Random Acts of Kindness**

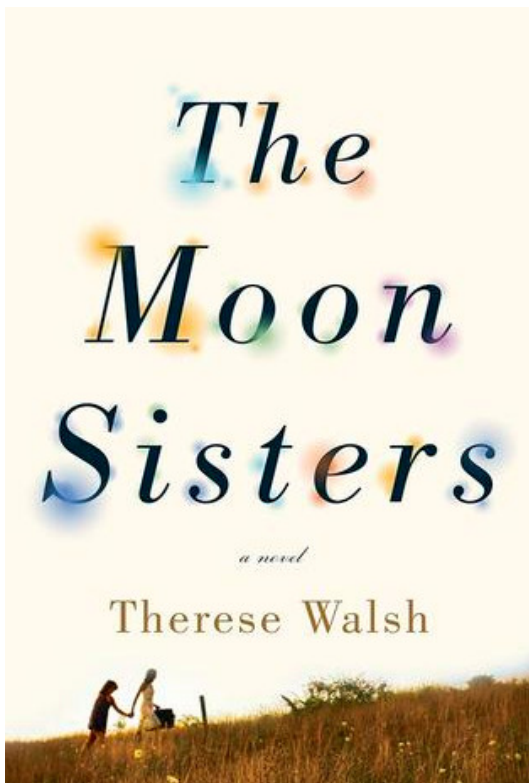
By Lisa Verge Higgins

Release Date: March 25th

Synopsis from Goodreads: With the remnants of her past rattling in the trunk of her Chevy, Jenna Elliott abandons her Seattle home determined to start life anew. Her journey compels her to the door of two friends: Claire, an ex-Buddhist nun and cancer survivor, eager to escape her overbearing family for what may be her last chance to fulfill a dream; and Nicole, a professional Life Coach who can't even control her own teenage son.

But what starts out as an impulsive road trip soon becomes an inexorable journey to their past, as the women grapple with who they were, who they are, and the strange twists that have now set them on the road to their hometown of Pine Lake. There, Jenna discovers that her random act of kindness has rippled out into the world like a stone dropped into a deep pond, coming back to rock her life—and those of her friends—in ways they never expected.

[www.lisavergehiggins.com](http://www.lisavergehiggins.com)



## **The Moon Sisters**

By Therese Walsh

Release Date: March 4th

Synopsis from Goodreads: Therese Walsh's poignant and mesmerizing novel is a moving tale of family, love, and the power of stories. After their mother's probable suicide, sisters Olivia and Jazz are figuring out how to move on with their lives. Jazz, logical and forward-thinking, decides to get a new job, but spirited, strong-willed Olivia, who can see sounds, taste words, and smell sights, is determined to travel to the remote setting of their mother's unfinished novel to say her final goodbyes and lay their mother's spirit to rest.

Though they see things very differently, Jazz is forced by her sense of duty to help Olivia reach her goal. Bitter and frustrated by the attention heaped on her sunny sister whose world is so unique, Jazz is even more upset when they run into trouble along the way and Olivia latches to a worldly train-hopper. Though Hobbs warns Olivia that he's a thief who shouldn't be trusted, he agrees to help with their journey. As they near their destination, the tension builds between the two sisters, each hiding something from the other, and they will finally be forced to face everything between them and decide what is really important.

[www.theresewalsh.com](http://www.theresewalsh.com)



## **All About Us: A Novella in the All I Ever Wanted Anthology**

By Marilyn Brant

Release date: January 11th.

Synopsis from Goodreads: All About Us by Marilyn Brant—All Sami Abbott ever wanted was permission to be herself. At home, she aims to be the perfect daughter but never measures up. At college, she's the bold girl who had a one-night stand with sexy musician, Alex Hamilton. When he arrives unexpectedly in Abbott Springs, her worlds collide and she must reconcile the girl she tries to be with the person she really is.

[www.marilynbrant.com](http://www.marilynbrant.com)

Have something being published between April and June 2014? Please send an email to [writeon@womensfictionwriters.org](mailto:writeon@womensfictionwriters.org). We'd LOVE to get your news in the next e-zine!



# Whatever It Takes

Erin Bartels

Picture a room.

Worn hardwood floors. Windows that flood the space with natural light and look out onto a field and beyond that a dark forest. Slanted ceilings where you can see the rafters. A place of slowly-moving sunbeams illuminating the lazy dust in the air. A toasty cat (that never disturbs you with selfish requests to be fed) curled up nearby. Lining the walls are floor to ceiling bookshelves packed with old books that in some mystic way fill the air with ideas. There is an antique oak writing desk perched on slender legs and a wooden swivel chair that still contains the accumulated knowledge and creativity of all who have sat in it before and slowly dispenses it to you the longer you sit there.

There is a magical unending pot of coffee.

Time in this room is limitless and impenetrable. There are no interruptions. There is no dog barking to be let in moments after being let out. There is no mailman. There are no phone calls. There is no

laundry waiting. There are no small children. There are no demands whatsoever from the outside world. The only reality that exists is the perfect room around you and the world unfolding within you.

There is only one small problem with this very special room. It does not exist.

And if it did, I think you'd find that it's not so perfect after all. When you look closer you realize the windows are drafty in the winter and the place is sweltering in the summer and the cat is hacking up a hairball before your very eyes and at some point you will have to get up and go to the bathroom.

While we may dream of ideal situations in which we feel the act of writing will be as natural and as easy as the rhythmic act of breathing, we will all experience resistance, either from within or without. Time slips away, the desk is a mess, the muse is lost somewhere among the rubble of our discarded dreams.

"To write a work of genius," says Virginia Woolf, "is almost always a feat of prodigious difficulty. Everything



is against the likelihood that it will come from the writer's mind whole and entire. Generally material circumstances are against it. Dogs will bark; people will interrupt; money must be made; health will break down. Further, accentuating all these difficulties and making them harder to bear is the world's notorious indifference. It does not ask people to write poems and novels and histories; it does not need them."

So how do you find the time, how do you carve out the space, how do you court your muse in such a way that enables you to develop a sustainable writing rhythm? How can regular writing become something in which you naturally engage?

Simple. You do whatever it takes. Because you are the only one who can do it. No one else will do it for you.

Okay, fine, you may concede, it is up to me. But where do I start?

Let's break it down, shall we?

## **FINDING THE TIME**

- Quit your job. I'm not kidding. For some people, this may be a viable option and you might consider it if you have the financial stability and support of your family to do so.

- Get up earlier or stay up later. Find times to write when everyone else is sleeping. If you have a 9 to 5 job, this is one of the only ways you will find regular time to write.

- Take writing vacations. Take a week off while your kids are in school and your spouse is working, then write like the devil is at your heels for that entire week. Forget NaNoWriMo. I once wrote 40,000 words in a week that I took off work. The last 10,000 of those words were in one day.

- Start saying "No." Quit some hobbies or groups. Even good, fun stuff can get in the way. When I got serious about finding time for writing, I quit being a docent at the zoo because it required about 60 hours of volunteer time each year. That was 60 fewer hours to write.

- Let your house and body go a little bit, just for awhile. You don't want to become a huge slob living waist-deep in filth, but honestly if leaving the dishes in the sink frees up a half hour to write, you can do it occasionally. If your obsessive exercise routine eats up an hour a day, cut it back a bit, just for the time in which you are working hard at finishing your book.

Dust will wait. Writing cannot.

- Take your novel on a date. If you have a writing spouse (or at least a spouse who likes to surf the internet or play video games on a smart phone) you can go out for a bite and then go to a coffee shop and write on your laptop.

- Downtime redemption. Any time you're sitting somewhere—at the play place at the mall, in a waiting room, in the car—pull out a book, a notebook, your laptop, or a voice recorder and use that time to do research, character sketches, or just note observations.

## **FINDING THE SPACE**

- Take back the guest room. Or some other room. Turn your sunroom into a dedicated writing space. Empty nesters, reclaim your kid's bedroom and make them sleep on the couch when they visit. The landing at the top of your stairs might be big enough for a desk, or a closet—like any of us could give up closet space, but hey, desperate times...

- Go mobile. I have an office, but that's where I work so I don't do as much writing in there. Generally, I go wherever the natural light is. Or, if it's cloudy, I go where I can make it brightest. If the house is a mess, I go to a coffee shop. I have been known to write in parking lots.

- The library. It's generally quiet, there are lots of books and odd patrons around to inspire you, you can easily switch to research mode (though this may be a procrastination problem with some of you), and there are drinking fountains.

- Set up invisible boundaries. If you must write where the rest of the family has access to the room, you have to set up boundaries. "Mom is not to be disturbed for anything less than a fire or a broken limb for the next hour." And then stick to it. Ignore the people around you and refuse to answer them.

Eventually, they will get the picture and it will soon become a normal part of life. Growing up, I was not to talk to my father when he came home from work. He sat in the living room with a drink, eyes closed, his favorite music blaring from the hi-fi. My sister and I knew we were not to talk to him until he was ready to talk to us. We didn't resent it. It was normal in our household.

## COURTING THE MUSE

- Turn off your damn phone! When you are waiting in line or in a waiting room or at a coffee shop waiting for your friend to join you, don't stare at your phone! Notice people! Listen in on others' conversations (that is, if you can find others who are actually conversing and not staring at their phones). Noticing real life is a prerequisite to writing something that is true to life. Here's the thing: STIMULI IN determines CREATIVITY OUT. Just like the food you eat will determine your health and appearance. Your phone, sitcoms, the internet, they're all junk food that make your brain fat. Be selective in your stimuli. Take in what is helpful and gets you thinking. The occasional "junk" is okay, just like an occasional hot fudge sundae is okay—you just can't live on them!

- Plug up the drains. Just as there are drains on your time, there are drains on your creativity. Your blog, your job, your hobbies, anything that you throw your creativity into that isn't your writing. I'm not saying these are bad things. I'm saying that at one time in my life I had nine hobbies that took up a good chunk of my creativity (besides all of my free time). It's good to have hobbies and be creative in different ways, but if you have nothing left for writing, you have to think about your priorities.

- Read widely. It's easy to feel like when you're reading you should be writing, but writers need to read too. You may need to do research, but you may also need to read in your genre so you know what's out there, so you can be inspired, so you can just freaking enjoy yourself once in a while. My pleasure reading happens to mostly be nonfiction, often history, but I also spend time reading the classics and the diaries and letters of authors I love. I also love reading books on writing.

- Find your social balance. Many writers are introverts, but certainly not all. The key is finding your own personal balance between isolation and social activity. If you get great ideas from interacting with others, you need to get out of the house or your well may run dry. If you get all your best ideas when you're alone long enough to think for heaven's sake, you need to find blocks of time where you can be alone. Regardless of whether you are alone or surrounded by friends and family, you need down time.

- Always be running reels of your work in your head. If you think about your story when you're showering, when you're eating lunch, when you're

driving, before you go to sleep at night—you'll be ready to write when you have the time. Your story should always be simmering in the back of your mind so that when the opportunity to write comes, you can make the most of your time. Always, always, ALWAYS have a notebook. My muse is active, but she's also forgetful! Notebooks catch all those ideas and when I sit down to write, I always have something to start with.

- Ignore the naysayers. Not everyone will like what you write. Some people will hate it. Some people will put their dislike into words and post scathing reviews of your work. Others will be offended. Accept that and move on with life. Keep writing anyway.

There are many more tactics you can use, but the bottom line is that it is up to you to carve out time and space and feed your creativity so that when the time comes to write you are ready to write. No one will do it for you. You can waste years waiting for everything to fall into place, for that perfect room with that magical pot of coffee to appear out of nowhere. It won't.

Take charge and make your writing a priority this year. You will never be sorry you did. •



Named by the *Saturday Evening Post* among "the greatest up-and-coming fiction writers today," **ERIN BARTELS** has worked in the publishing industry for twelve years. Her new ebook, *The Intentional Writer*, expands on the concepts found in this article. You can find her at [www.erinbartels.com](http://www.erinbartels.com). She is currently working on a novel. Regularly.



# TECH TIPS

from Tasha Seegmiller

**F**irst and foremost, you are your brand. It is important to make sure every site you joined is done with your name. Every profile picture should be the same too (several agents were just complaining about this on Twitter). You don't have to go spend money on professional pictures right now, but make sure whatever you are posting as your profile pic is you.

## **Blog/Website**

Think of this as home base, the command center if you will. On every site listed below that you utilize, you need to provide a way for them to return to your home.

### Blog Quick Tips:

- Make sure the presentation is readable.
- Allow comments and respond to them. This can be done by replying to comments within the blog or through having comments emailed to you.
- Think about your audience, both current and future, and be adaptable.

## **Facebook**

Facebook gives you the opportunity to post ideas in detail, as it doesn't limit the characters. Many people have both a page and a profile, one being writerly in nature, the other where they share the events that happen in their own lives, pictures of kids, etc.

### Facebook Quick Tips:

- If you are unsure of what kind of content to post on your page, be aware of what people post that makes you take pause and read.
- Go to [www.networkedblogs.com](http://www.networkedblogs.com). From there, you can set up an automatic message to be uploaded on your Facebook page every time you post. If you don't do this, be sure to copy and paste a link from each new post so people know you have updated your home base.

## **Twitter**

It is fast paced, both the frequency with which people post and the ability for an idea to spread quickly. This can work to your advantage, allowing connections with people you haven't "met" and quickly finding ways to meet other people.

### Twitter Quick Tips:

- Lists. When you click on someone's Twitter profile, right next to the follow(ing) button is a little head silhouette with a downward arrow. When you click on that, you can put that person into a list. The list I have right now are Writers/Writing, Agents & Editors, WFWA, etc. This step is essential to quiet the noise and allow you to focus on specific content at a time.
- Tweetdeck or HootSuite. They are both apps that allow you to create columns and filter them by the lists you just created in the step above. They are available for free on Mac or PC and allows you to create some order and ease of interaction while on this fast paced social site.
- Hashtags. When you click on a specific hashtag, Twitter will filter all the other conversations with that same hashtag. #askagent and #wfw are two great hashtags for you experiment with.

## **Pinterest**

Pinterest can serve as your online corkboard when you are in the drafting phase. If you are in a position where you can't reveal a project yet for whatever reason, don't fear—there is a private board function as well.

### Pinterest Quick Tips:

- Share things you like, but organize your boards in a way that is very logical.
- Make sure the picture you are posting reflects the content of the pin.
- When you get a new cover, post it here as well. In the 3rd quarter of 2013, numbers showed the usage of Pinterest went up almost 20%. Posting your cover here will start to create a buzz and get shared quickly.

## **Goodreads**

This is a site where you can post ratings and reviews for what you have been reading. You can add friends, gain fans, and share your love of words with others. If your journey toward publication has you further down the road, a recent blog post by Lisa Verge Higgins is a must read. Lisa outlines TEN ways to make Goodreads work for you, including how to create a page, incorporating widgets, navigating the giveaway feature and much more.

### Goodreads Quick Tips:

- Subdivide reading shelves. The further you break up your labels for books, the better the recommendations you will receive.
- Add friends. You can link your account with Twitter, Facebook, email, etc.
- Read all of Lisa Verge Higgin's article.

### **Women's Fiction Writers Association**

Once you start playing around, you will quickly realize what a great resource it is. When you click on THE HUB, located in the upper right hand of the site, you will see what has been happening since you were last there.

### Womensfictionwriters.org Quick Tips:

- Visit the site often to see what contests, events and programs are coming up.
- Peruse THE FORUM. This is organized by topic, making it a valuable resource for any information.

The all-encompassing rule of utilizing social media is you will get out of it what you put into it. If you just start a profile on each of these sites, you may have a few people trickle in your direction, but if you want to have a presence, if you really want social media to work for you, you can't just be a taker—you have to be a contributor.

If you have questions about anything mentioned in this article (sites, getting started, how to do anything described) feel free to send me a message via the WFWA site! I'll help you get connected. •



**TASHA SEEGMILLER** (pronounced T + ash + a S + egg + miller) is a high school English teacher in Southern Utah for part of the day, mom to three for the rest, and writes contemporary women's fiction with a dash of magic. She loves owls, runs on Diet Coke, chocolate and cinnamon bears, and a life immersed in words. You can find her at [www.tashaseegmiller.blogspot.com](http://www.tashaseegmiller.blogspot.com).

## **The WFWA Founding Team**

Do you know the founders of the Women's Fiction Writers Association?

Orly Konig-Lopez  
President

[www.orkoniglopez.com](http://www.orkoniglopez.com)

Kerry Lonsdale  
Vice President, Programs  
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Laura Drake  
Vice President, Finance / Treasurer  
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Linda Avellar  
Secretary  
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Marilyn Brant  
Guiding Scribe  
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Maggie Marr  
WFWA Legal Counsel  
[www.maggiemarr.com](http://www.maggiemarr.com)

If you haven't already, send them a Friend Request on the WFWA site to stay connected and see their newest posts in The Hub.

# Guiding Scribe: Gratitude & Inspiration for the New Year



Marilyn Brant

**I** was never a big New Year's Resolution maker. Or an especially original one. In the area of diet and fitness, I've had the same vow since about 1983: "Eat Less, Exercise More." Still gotta work a little harder on that, LOL. In the realm of publishing, a frequent promise to myself has been: "Worry Less, Write More." That, too, is unchanged this January. Above all, though, in dealing with the ups and downs of this fascinating, frustrating industry over these 13+ years, my most constant resolution has simply been remembering to be grateful for all the good things—and the good people—that have come my way in the past year.

I've been fortunate. I'm aware 2013 brought me a lot of blessings. But it's easy for all of us to lose focus sometimes. To begin comparing what we have to what someone else has—be it awards or accolades, fame or fortune. You can always find some other writer whose work is recognized more than yours. For aspiring novelists, it might be the fellow author who won a coveted contest or signed with a respected agent. For the published writer, it might be the friend who sold

more novels on Amazon or got a major multi-book contract or hit a big list. But it really does help to take stock of all the incredible gifts (and even the worthy challenges) that crossed your path in the 12 months prior...if only to remember just how far you've come in a single year.

Last year, I wrote the good things down on little bits of scratch paper whenever they happened, and I saved them up in a little pink and white bag until New Year's Eve. Then I read them all, and I got to celebrate and be thankful for each of them all over again.

Regarding the list below, I can't take credit for writing it, but someone I love shared it with me, and I wanted to share it with all of you, too. I found some valuable tidbits in here—not only for personal things that I think are worth letting go of as we start the New Year but, also, as possible motivations/issues for our characters to potentially confront as they deal with relationship conflicts in our stories. I hope you'll find a few worthwhile thoughts in reading the list with both ideas in mind, and I wish all of you good health and much joy in 2014!

Here are 20 things to let go of in order to reach unlimited happiness in 2014:

1. Let go of all thoughts that don't make you feel empowered and strong.
2. Let go of feeling guilty for doing what you truly want to do.
3. Let go of the fear of the unknown; take one small step and watch the path reveal itself.
4. Let go of regrets; at one point in your life, that "whatever" was exactly what you wanted.
5. Let go of worrying; worrying is like praying for what you don't want.
6. Let go of blaming anyone for anything; be accountable for your own life. If you don't like something, you have two choices, accept it or change it.
7. Let go of thinking you are damaged; you matter, and the world needs you just as you are.
8. Let go of thinking your dreams are not important; always follow your heart.
9. Let go of being the "go-to person" for everyone, all the time; stop blowing yourself off and take care of yourself first...because you matter.
10. Let go of thinking everyone else is happier, more successful, or better off than you. You are right where you need to be. Your journey is unfolding perfectly for you.
11. Let go of thinking there's a right and wrong way to do things or to see the world. Enjoy the contrast and celebrate the diversity and richness of life.
12. Let go of cheating on your future with your past. It's time to move on and tell a new story.
13. Let go of thinking you are not where you should be. You are right where you need to be to get to where you want to go, so start asking yourself where you want to go.
14. Let go of anger toward ex lovers and family. We all deserve happiness and love; just because it is over doesn't mean the love was wrong.
15. Let go of the need to do more and be more; for today, you've done the best you can, and that's enough.

16. Let go of thinking you have to know how to make it happen; we learn the way on the way.
17. Let go of your money woes—make a plan to pay off debt and focus on your abundance.
18. Let go of trying to save or change people. Everyone has her own path, and the best thing you can do is work on yourself and stop focusing on others.
19. Let go of trying to fit in and be accepted by everyone. Your uniqueness is what makes you outstanding.
20. Let go of self-hate. You are not the shape of your body or the number on the scale. Who you are matters, and the world needs you as you are.  
**Celebrate you!** •

Best,  
Marilyn Brant



**MARILYN BRANT** is the award-winning women's fiction author and #1 Kindle bestseller of *According to Jane*, *Friday Mornings at Nine*, and *A Summer In Europe*, all from Kensington Books. The latter was a Rhapsody Book Club bestselling title in Fiction & Lit and a featured alternate for the Literary Guild and BOMC2. The Polish language edition came out in June 2013. She's also a USA Today bestselling author and has written a series of fun, flirty contemporary romantic comedies. Her next book, a coming-of-age novel called *The Road to You*, is an October 2013 release. Visit her at [www.marilynbrant.com](http://www.marilynbrant.com).

#### **About the GUIDING SCRIBE Position**

The Guiding Scribe serves as the respected guiding voice within the Association. S/he is published in Women's Fiction and provides advice to members and the Board about topics related to the genre of Women's Fiction.

Women's Fiction Writers Association  
presents the ...

# RISING STAR CONTEST

*Are you our next rising star?*

This contest is designed exclusively for the unpublished women's fiction writer. It offers the chance for priceless feedback from three published authors, plus the opportunity to break out of the slush pile and land on the desk of three final round judges, a combination of acquiring agents and editors.

The Rising Star Contest has NO categories. It's open to all women's fiction, from contemporary to historical, mainstream to literary, realistic to paranormal, and everything in between, as long as the story's focus is on the woman's emotional journey.

The Rising Star Contest is limited to the first 75 entries. Detailed score sheets with comments will be provided to all entrants, and the top five (5) finalists will advance to the final round with one week to update entries based on first round judges' score sheets and comments.

## **Important Dates**

Contest Opens: May 1, 2014  
Entry Deadline: June 27, 2014  
Finalists Announced: August 13, 2014  
Edited Finalist Entries Due: August 20, 2014  
Winners Announced: October 10, 2014

## **Entry Submission Details**

Submit the first thirty-five (35) pages of a completed manuscript (60k words or over), plus a 2-3 page synopsis. The synopsis is not judged.

## **Entry Fee**

\$30 WFWA Members / \$35 non-WFWA Members

## **Registration**

Registration is COMING SOON

## **Rules and FAQs**

Visit the WFWA Contests page at <https://womensfictionwriters.org/contests/rising-star-contest/>

**GOOD LUCK!**



**WOMEN'S FICTION**  
**WRITERS ASSOCIATION**