

SPRING 2026

WriteOn!

The Quarterly Magazine of the Women's Fiction Writers Association

A Career For The Long Haul

- Writing is a Marathon, Not a Sprint
- Surviving Submission
- Sustainable Book Marketing

+ **Author Profile:**
Lorraine Norwood

Guiding Scribe:
Welcome Laura Drake



SPRING 2026 Contents

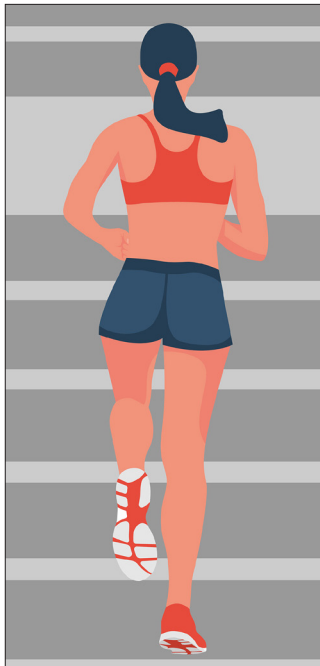
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Book Marketing
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Check out our calendar of events, workshops, and webinar information on our website.

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 read. 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.



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instagram.com/womensfictionwriters/

Join the closed WFWA Facebook group by sending an email to:
membership@womensfictionwriters.org

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Lorraine Norwood

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Courtney Shosh

IF YOU LIKE WHAT YOU'VE READ ...

Send us a letter! We'd love to hear your feedback and reactions on the stories and features. Email them to writeon@womensfictionwriters.org.

Submitted letters are considered for publication and may be edited for clarity or space.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Sustaining a New Year

A new year brings new opportunities. For many of us—myself included—there's something energizing about a fresh calendar. Even if every challenge from the prior year hasn't been neatly resolved, the act of turning the metaphorical page can offer a reset: a moment to breathe, reassess, and begin again.

That said, new beginnings rarely arrive quietly. Drafts and ideas buzz in our heads or linger in open files, asking to be finished or revised at moments when our energy feels thin. Layered on top of that are the realities of the wider world—shifting publishing landscapes, social media noise, and the continued encroachment, confusion, and application of AI—all of which can pull our attention outward just when we're trying to focus inward.

But the year is just beginning. And as cliché as it sounds, writing—like life—is a marathon, not a sprint. Sustaining a writing practice means pacing yourself, not running flat-out until burnout. It means choosing habits, goals, and commitments that you can return to consistently, even when the work is hard or the momentum slows.

Keeping up the pace also depends on an energizing community. Build the community you actually need, not the one you think you're supposed to have. Connection should support your work, not drain it. That might look like a trusted critique partner, a small group that checks in regularly, or simply knowing where to show up when you need encouragement, information, or accountability.

Just as important, don't forget to sustain yourself beyond the page. Writing draws from a deep well, and that well needs refilling. Curiosity, rest, laughter, and full lives outside of writing are not distractions from the work; they're what give it texture, depth, and vitality. Protect the parts of your life that nourish you, even when deadlines or ambitions feel loud.

At WFWA, I hope we lean into the idea that community thrives on visibility, communication, and participation—but never obligation. WFWA is here to support you this year and beyond. Ask for what you need—from us, from your critique partners, from the community at large. Tell us when something works and when it doesn't. This organization was built by writers, for writers, and it grows stronger when we learn from one another. Here's to a year of steady progress, meaningful connection, and writing lives built to last.



Sustaining a writing practice means pacing yourself, not running flat-out until burnout. It means choosing habits, goals, and commitments that you can return to consistently, even when the work is hard or the momentum slows.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ginger Haggerty". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping "G" and "H".

Ginger Haggerty



Stories Sustain Us

When our team started to brainstorm and map out content for this issue, we adopted a broad, inclusive approach toward our chosen theme of sustainability. In the pages to come, you will have the opportunity to learn how to sustain yourself as an author, a professional, a creative, and a human.

You may also read between the lines about the significance of community and literary citizenship in sustaining the lonely work of writing. Our contributors to this issue—some familiar names and some new voices—have much to teach us about how to maintain the writing life and how to support yourself in it.

Before diving into that, though, I wanted to take a moment to reflect on the fact that stories and writing also sustain us. Profoundly.

In his ambitious book *Sapiens*, Yuval Noah Harari devotes an entire chapter to the power of stories because they've been so vital to human civilization. "Humans think in stories," he writes, "and we try to make sense of the world by telling stories."

When we're overwhelmed with our careers, or our lives, or what's going on in our world, stories support us. They push us past plateaus, draw us together, and give us hope. They teach us and challenge us.

Through stories we can escape, answer questions, find ourselves—reinvent.

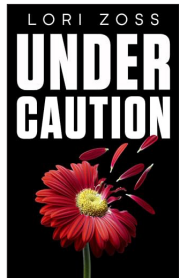
I invite you to soak up the advice in this issue—and enact what speaks to you. I also invite you, especially in moments of doubt, to remember how central storytelling is to all our lives, in ways both big and small. And in being here, you're part of that tradition.

At *WriteOn!*, our same stellar masthead is returning, and I couldn't be more thrilled to announce two new members joining as staff writers, Monica Cox and Eileen Cook (writing as Kate MacIntosh), plus Christy Matheson's new column, *The Next Chapter: Transitioning From Dream to Career*.

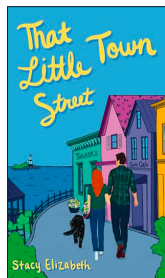
Alongside these additions, we're continuing our *Inside the Industry* column, where experts across publishing weigh in on recent developments, and our *Crowdsourced* segment, featuring member voices. We'll also hear from our new *Guiding Scribe*, Laura Drake; our new president, Ginger Haggerty; plus a rotating cast of contributors in a craft-centered column called *The Prompt*. Our shared passion for stories unites and drives our community—and will continue to be the beating heartbeat of this magazine.

MEMBER RELEASES

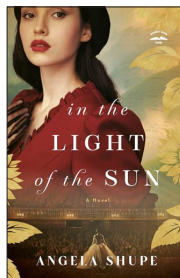
As WFWA continues to grow, so have our members' accomplishments. To be fair to everyone, all new women's fiction releases featured in the magazine must have been published within the past one year. If you are a new member with an older title(s), please still submit your books to be included on the WFWA Goodreads shelf and continue to take advantage of other opportunities to share your work with the membership, including the weekly newsletter and *TBR*.



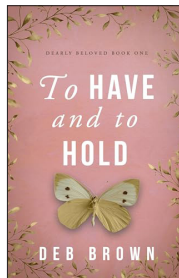
Lori Zoss
Under Caution
6/17/25



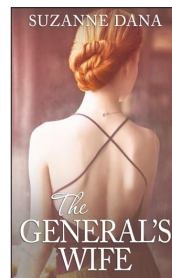
Stacy Johnson
That Little
Town Street
8/14/25



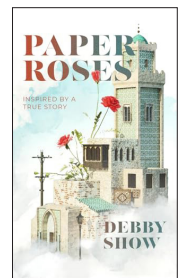
Angela Shupe
In the Light
of the Sun
10/7/25



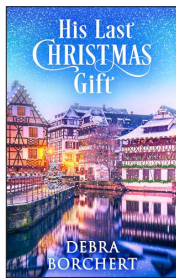
Deb Brown
To Have and to Hold
10/13/25



Suzanne Dana
The General's Wife
10/30/25



Debby Show
Paper Roses
11/4/25



Debra Borchert
His Last Christmas Gift
11/7/25



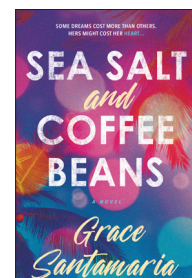
Heidi M. Thomas
Saving Her Prairie
11/12/25



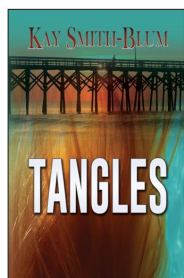
Eliana Megerman
Together On Our Own
11/20/25



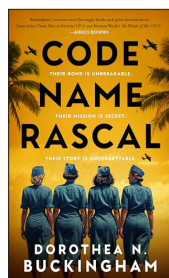
Marcy Lane
Her Final Toast
11/25/25



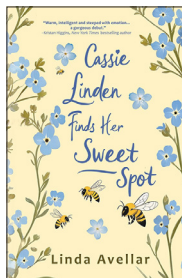
Grace Santamaria
Sea Salt and
Coffee Beans
12/2/25



Kay Smith-Blum
Tangles
12/3/25



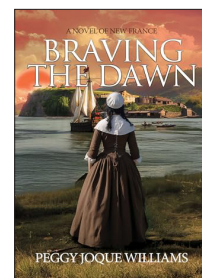
**Dorothea
Buckingham**
Code Name Rascal
12/7/25



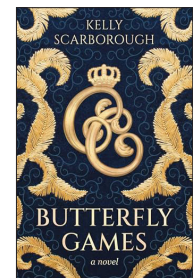
Linda Avellar
Cassie Linden Finds
Her Sweet Spot
12/30/25



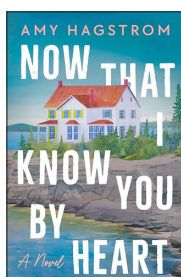
Julie Snider
Chapel Bay Secrets
1/13/26



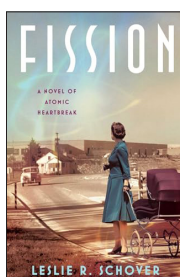
**Peggy Joque
Williams**
Braving the Dawn:
A Novel of New France
1/15/26



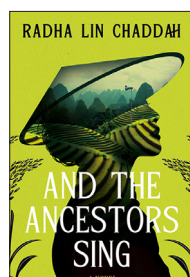
Kelly Scarborough
Butterfly Games
1/20/26



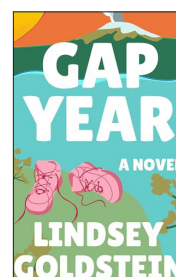
Amy Hagstrom
Now That I Know
You By Heart
1/20/26



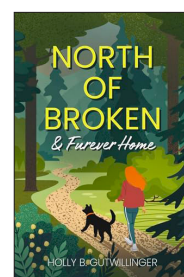
Leslie Schover
Fission: A Novel of
Atomic Heartbreak
1/27/26



Radha Lin Chaddah
And The
Ancestors Sing
2/3/26



Lindsey Goldstein
Gap Year
2/6/26



Holly Gutwillinger
North of Broke
& Forever Home
2/14/26

CROWDSOURCED

Welcome to Crowdsourced, *WriteOn!*'s newest regular feature! Each segment will showcase member responses to a question framed around that issue's theme. Whether it be funny, serious, pragmatic, or something else altogether, every question will be crafted as a quick way to commiserate, laugh, and share our stories. We can't wait to hear from you! For this issue, we wanted to know:

I said "no" to delaying my retirement and stopped working on December 24, 2025. I've written every day since December 26 and have never felt more connected to or focused on my writing. I'm excited to see where 2026 takes me and my writing.

— Carolyn Nicholson

I said no to a volunteer opportunity with an organization I love. Honestly, I felt a bit guilty. That "should" feeling is strong. But most of all, I felt empowered for prioritizing my writing career.

— Courtney Shosh

Recently, I started booking appointments only in the afternoon to protect my morning writing time. It's not foolproof, but it does a good job of making me consider: Is this worth sacrificing my writing time? Usually, my answer is no!

— Kathi Jenkins

I said "no" to doing all the housework and cleaning, and my husband shocked me by picking up a lot of the slack. Alas, he started a novel of his own in the new year, so things could get messy (again).

— Stacy Prince

“What's the last thing you said "no" to to protect your writing time, and how did it work out?”

I said "no" to serving on the board of a nonprofit. I am passionate about what they do, but since I'm at the beginning of writing a new novel, I need to channel my passion (at least for now) to my writing.

— Beth Dotson Brown

Last year I joined my first-ever book club. In January, I was only 43k words into my new book, which I needed to send to my online critique group on February 1st, so I had to buckle down and finish. I had to say NO to finishing the book club's January selection (*The Stolen Life of Colette Marceau*) and NO to attending the monthly meeting. Fortunately, that group of women is super supportive of me and my writing and were cheering me on from the sidelines. Oh, and I made my deadline.

— Sheri Taylor-Emery

Two women in my writing group texted me late Sunday morning that they were reading excerpts from their stories at a Sisters in Crime meeting later that day. Could I make it? I told them that if I'd known earlier, I would have rearranged my weekend schedule, but at that moment, I couldn't forgo my afternoon writing time. They completely understood, but it was hard for me to say "no." I love supporting my writing partners, but I couldn't abandon my pages that day.

— Leslie Peterson

I write best in the morning, so I protect those hours as much as possible by not scheduling appointments during my writing block. I used to consider my writing time the expendable thing in my schedule. Once I treated that time as just as important as anything else on the calendar, I made more progress and felt more confident about my writing.

— Monica Cox

I've limited my social media and the habit of doom-scrolling. While it is important to stay involved in world events, having a buffer between the real world and my imaginary one is important to keep the magic going.

— Kate MacIntosh

In the next issue, we'll be exploring ways to cultivate creativity, and we want to know:

What's your favorite way to clear writer's block?

Send your one- to two-sentence responses to writeon@womensfictionwriters.org for a chance to be featured in the magazine. Please use "Crowdsourced-Business" in the subject line and include your full name along with your one- to two-sentence response in the body of the email. If you prefer anonymity in the magazine, please indicate this as well.

Sustainability = Willingness to Change

I've been writing for over 30 years. When I began, winning an agent and selling to a publisher was the only way to get your book in print. Lots of changes since then, and it seems they're coming faster all the time. I'm not a huge fan of change. (Is anyone?) I'm stubborn. Kind people call it motivation, drive, or ambition, but I endured 417 rejections before I sold, so trust me, what drives me is stubbornness. I figured if I kept improving and didn't quit, I'd *have* to get published eventually—it's science!

Stubbornness is an important skill, but it won't sustain you in a rapidly changing industry such as ours. In fact, it becomes a liability, because while you're standing with your feet in cement, the industry passes you by. I'll bet everyone knows at least one writer who threw up their hands and gave up on their writing dream. I was almost one of them before I learned: **sustainability = adaptability.**

Sixteen books later, I've come to understand that this is *the* most important skill every writer needs on this journey.

GUIDING SCRIBE

The past few years, the buzz word has been “pivot.” It’s a pretty word that brings to mind a ballerina pirouetting across a stage. That’s not me. I’m more like a mechanic, banging a wrench on heavy machinery. Everyone handles change differently, and that’s fine. The only wrong way to handle it is to ignore it, hoping it will go away.

The writer road is a rough one, and many sections are unpaved. You have to adapt to survive. That may mean learning yet one more new piece of software or negotiating a complicated upgrade. It may be “pivoting” from traditional publishing to indie publishing and all the learning that goes along with that. It may be an entirely new concept/tool, like AI, that comes with upsides and downsides we may not have considered yet.

And more changes will be here before we’ve digested those.

But if you’re reading this, you have a huge advantage—you have a tribe right here at WFWA. When we founders planned a “wish list” for the organization, at the top was to be a safe, nurturing place for writers of women’s fiction. In other words, we have one another. We all have experience and skills that can help another.

Need information on courtroom procedure? We have members who are lawyers. Need formatting advice? We have a lot of indies who will help. Need to vent after a rejection or a disappointing book signing? We will lend a shoulder and send virtual hugs because we’ve all been there. Our families love us, but they don’t understand that our characters are real people who talk to us. We live in a separate world much of the time.

WFWA isn’t exempt from changes. Growth comes with its own set of challenges. We will stumble. We will make mistakes. We will move on. We will grow.



It is my distinct honor to serve as your Guiding Scribe in the coming year. I think of the role as being the head cheerleader. (I won’t wear that skirt—no one wants to see that.) Think of me as a hand held out to help you climb the next step. As one of WFWA’s founders, I’m so proud that our first wish for the organization has come true: creating a supportive, safe, helpful place for writers of women’s fiction.

We are in the midst of planning for the coming year, so keep an eye out—it’s going to be exciting!

This organization will remain sustainable as long as there are writers of women’s fiction who need a nurturing place—and are willing to reach out a hand to help others.

And isn’t that *the* most important thing?

When we founders planned a “wish list” for the organization, at the top was to be a safe, nurturing place for writers of women’s fiction. In other words, we have one another. We all have experience and skills that can help another.



Laura Drake was raised in snowy Michigan but got out west as soon as she could. She was a corporate CFO for 25 years. She fell in love with a crazy motorcyclist and rode behind him for over 100,000 miles, propping a book on his back and reading on the boring stretches. Riding in central California, they came around a corner to see an old Victorian house on a hill like a shoddy queen surveying her territory. It captured Laura’s imagination and she began writing. After 417 rejections, she secured an agent and sold in 2013. Her debut, *The Sweet Spot*, won the 2014 Romance Writers of America® RITA® award for Best First Book. She’s since published 10 romances, 4 women’s fiction titles, and in 2025 she indie-published a domestic thriller. Though she’s genre-hopped, at their core every one of her stories is a woman’s journey of becoming. Laura now lives outside Fort Worth, TX, and is working on her next novel.



How to Create Sustainable (and Tolerable) Book Marketing

“Nope.”

This was the initial reaction I received from a colleague when I mentioned the concept of building an author platform as a way to sustain an audience for her upcoming book release. Truth be told, she knew it was what she had to do, but the daunting task of self-promotion made her cringe, and I’m sure you all understand the sentiment.

In an age where people are driving their own celebrity status by being content creators and influencers, the thought of competing with that could make anyone question why an author’s job can’t just be writing.

Working for major publishers—on both adult and children’s titles—I definitely know the importance of having a strong launch campaign for a book. However, that is only the start of a book’s journey. If you think about it, books don’t really “expire.” They become relevant at different times to different people. That’s the reason why so much effort is put into backlist marketing strategies. A book can have many opportunities to sell beyond the book launch!

This is where sustaining your presence as an author and your book content come into play. Here I share some inside secrets used by publishing houses that you can deploy for your book and employ to destroy the imposter syndrome that might be holding you back.

INSIDE THE INDUSTRY

Find a Platform That Feels Like “You”

If you ever study or practice marketing, you’ll learn that there are three core ways to promote products or services:

- Paid media—think advertising.
- Earned media—think publicity and getting in the “news.”
- Owned media—think media you or your brand fully control. (For example, Target’s owned “media” are its physical stores, website, and customer email list.)

ANYONE can have an “owned media” or platform, but it is up to you to decide what that looks like.

Many authors have found success by building their platform on social media. With the growth of BookTok, many YA authors choose TikTok to reach a younger audience. However, depending on the content of your book, you may choose an outlet that you (and your readers) feel more comfortable using and where you have existing friends and contacts. There’s no need to go dramatically outside of your own comfort zone when engaging on social media.

Lean into your own strengths. For example, if your passion is your writing, release a short, weekly newsletter with a new writing tip in each one to help other emerging authors. Share your expertise and your empathy.

If you love to chat, take a stab at creating a podcast. These days you don’t need any fancy equipment, as computers come with decent built-in microphones and apps that allow you to make all the enhancements you need. My personal favorite to use is [Spotify for Creators via Riverside](#). It is free and similar to YouTube and allows you to post on the platform itself.

Craft Some “Recyclable” Content

When you think of the word “sustainability,” one of the practices that comes to mind is recycling. Your time is your greatest resource, so use it effectively by reusing existing content in multiple outlets that will help people discover your book.

Where do you find this “content” and how can you repurpose it to sell your book?

The first step is to dive into some of the passages of your book. There might be a powerful quote or a clever piece of dialogue. Is there an illustration or a visual from your book cover? Or a “bonus” chapter you deleted but could release to subscribers?

The key to recycling content is timing—make sure what you are sharing relates to what people want to read at the moment.

Perhaps you share your acknowledgments section or dedication page of your book on World Gratitude Day (Sept. 21) and then on Thanksgiving in November—but maybe add in a piece of pumpkin pie to get into the spirit. If your book is a memoir, celebrate yourself by taking a photo of you and your book on your own birthday. Notice that you aren’t creating anything totally new. You are using the assets you already have!

Which brings me to my final recommendation—planning.



ANYONE can have an “owned media” or platform, but it is up to you to decide what that looks like.

Mark Your Calendar

With the start of the new year, it’s time to get out a brand-new calendar! Go through every day of the year and research both standard holidays and those quirky dates that are more social-media derived. The United Nations maintains [an international calendar](#) filled with everything from awareness causes (World Mental Health Day on October 10) to hobbies (World Chess Day on July 20 and International Day of Yoga on June 21). Whatever the topic, theme, or components of your book, I can guarantee plenty of “days and weeks” that share a connection to your book’s story. A quick Google search can get you access to other national events. Simply identify a few themes or topics most connected to your story and add on the phrase “national day of.” You may be surprised to see your book already has a “holiday” attached to it!

Why is this important? Thanks to social media, we tend to like to engage in posts and conversations that show recency and relevancy. Think National Puppy Day on March 23. If you have a new puppy, you want to celebrate that and show the cuteness of your little one. Now, let’s say the picture book you published a year ago has some adorable puppies on the cover or your story involves a new puppy—I think you get the point.

You want to find the appropriate and fun moments where you can comfortably celebrate your book. By adding #NationalPuppyDay to that social media post, you’ll automatically be part of a larger community of people who love their puppies—and hopefully discover the sentiment you are sharing around your book.

Remember, sustaining your book doesn’t necessarily mean doing more. It is about doing less consistently. Keep your social media content focused, honest, and designed to reflect who you are and what your book is.

The more you respect your own time, the more you will see promotion is actually being respectful of your reader’s time, and it will take away that cringey feel of self-promotion. When you market with a sustainable mindset, you’ll see it as simply a way to extend the conversation you started with your own book.



Mindy Stockfield's expertise in youth content, entertainment media, and publishing have afforded her true dream jobs and leadership roles, including working for The Walt Disney Company, Cartoon Network, MTV, and Scholastic. Her work has earned her an Emmy, Promax, and numerous digital awards. Her career has allowed her to work on the launch of and sustaining iconic brands such as Disney’s High School Musical, MTV’s VMAs, and Harry Potter. She is currently a professor at Marist University and also teaches for the S. I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University and NYU’s M.A. in Publishing program.

Writing is a Marathon, Not a Sprint: Training Tips to Last the Long Haul

By Monica Cox

A runner spends months, sometimes years, training, slowly accumulating skills and building endurance to prepare for the 26.2 miles of a marathon. They change their diet to fuel their runs. Many add weight training and cross-training to improve overall strength and stability. Finally, they add yoga, ice baths, and good sleep to their routines for recovery.

Writers, however, often jump into a writing project with perhaps some craft study, a workshop under their belt, and a good idea, but little thought to the toll the writing may take on their mind, body, and spirit for the next several months, or even years.

Since writing a novel is often compared to a marathon, how can a writer be better prepared for the long haul ahead without burning out mentally or physically? A little mental training and stretching (yes, stretching!) can go a long way.

Training the Mind

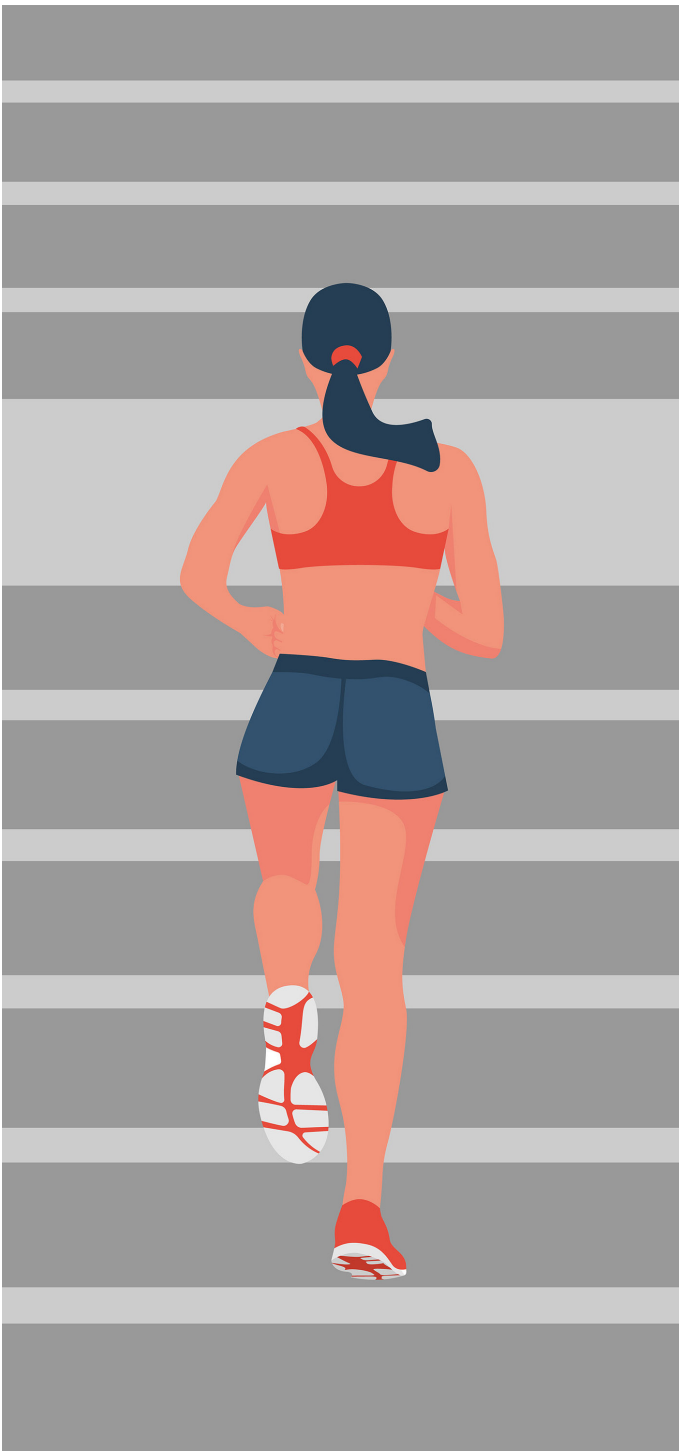
According to *The New York Times*, 82 percent of American adults claim to want to write a novel, but only 1 percent actually sit down, do the work, and finish. That's an impressive disparity. But anyone who has spent time staring at a blank page can attest to the big fears—embarrassment, imposter syndrome, rejection—that rear their ugly heads, stymie progress, and tempt us to return to the majority in not finishing our creative projects.

Fear is nothing but the gift from our evolutionary ancestors who needed to stay safe in order to survive. Physical safety was paramount, and remaining part of the clan was one of the first orders of business, since surviving alone was much more difficult.

Unfortunately, our prehistoric brains haven't caught up with our modern world.

"You are not in danger when you're sitting at your laptop and you're trying to write," says licensed clinical psychologist Stephanie Best, PhD. "There's no saber-toothed tigers coming at you. Even if you have to send [your writing] off to be evaluated for publication, it's not going to be life or death."

The problem, however, is that reasoning with our fear-based emotions doesn't work either.



Feature

“The more you fight it,” Best says, “the more important you feel it is for you not to have it.”

Best recommends inviting fear along for the ride, much like Elizabeth Gilbert does in her letter to fear in *Big Magic*. The key is not to let fear—or imposter syndrome or whatever emotion is trying to hijack your writing session—take control of the wheel.

Instead, acknowledge the feeling, and then lean into your values for writing—like prioritizing creativity, your reason for telling this specific story, or using your authentic voice—to keep you focused on your ultimate goal.

A short-hand trick Best recommends is to consider what your 80-year-old-self would care about.

Best advises asking yourself, “What really matters to me here or in this situation? What do I want to be about? What would the person that I most want to be do right now? And can I be willing to literally move my hands and feet in that direction?”

Looking back on your life from this imaginary perspective to evaluate what you are proud of or regret can be a powerful tool. This exercise can also direct you to the things you actually consider most important today, even if the big work makes you uncomfortable emotionally.

“You are willing to make space for the uncomfortable because it’s in the service of stuff that matters way more to you, big picture,” Best says.

Best recommends a few tips to calm your nervous system when evolutionary responses threaten to derail a writing session:

- Practice mindfulness (she recommends the free Healthy Minds app as an excellent place to start).
- Ground yourself in the present moment through body scans or physical movement.
- Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings, name them, and remember they are not facts.

Writing can also bring up powerful emotions as we sit in our character’s experiences, which can cause discomfort. Best recommends prioritizing what she calls the four cornerstones of wellness: physical movement, nutrition and hydration, rest and recharge, and social connection.

“When you really prioritize those things, it makes it a whole lot easier to do the work of what we call being psychologically flexible.”

Being psychologically flexible allows us to be witnesses to our thoughts and feelings, gain perspective, and recognize when the emotional burden of the writing gets to be too much, in order to implement some self-care strategies to recharge.

The key is to recognize when your mind or inner critic is activating your fear centers and keeping you from the work you truly value. Becoming mindful and learning to trust your inner compass directed by your values will keep you motivated and aware of burnout before it happens.



Monica Cox is a writer and Author Accelerator Certified book coach who loves helping writers through the thorny process of revision to find the rose of their story. Monica is a former public and media relations executive and a graduate of the Hussman School of Journalism and Media at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is represented by Hailey Stephens at Rosecliff Literary.

Training the Body

“Butt in chair” is the standard advice for a regular writing routine, but at some point you could be doing harm to your body by sitting too much.

“Sitting in a rounded-back posture tucks the pelvis under and compresses the abdominal cavity. Over time, this can increase pressure on the pelvic floor, limit diaphragm movement, and contribute to pelvic floor overactivity or tension,” says physical therapist Kaitlyn Bachman, who specializes in pelvic floor therapy. “Our poor hip flexors also get incredibly tight after prolonged time spent sitting. Tightness in these muscles tends to squeeze on the pelvic floor and create a funnel downward of pressure. The effects of all of the above can be pelvic pain, aggravation of pelvic organ prolapse, and bowel and bladder concerns.”

Certainly exercise is an important part of any healthy routine, but how can you make sure you’re taking care of your body *while* typing away on your manuscripts? Pay attention to your posture and desk setup. Bachman recommends:

- Spend as much time as you can at an actual desk.
- Face your work station directly. Adjust your chair to a height that your shoulders are relaxed and your hips are at a 90-degree angle.
- If being at the correct chair height for your upper body means your legs don’t reach the floor, place a step stool under your feet.
- Use a lumbar support cushion, or appropriately sized small pillow, behind your back. If you’re working on a soft surface, such as in bed or on the couch, support pillows are your friend.
- Get up and walk around the room every hour, if possible, especially if you’re working from a soft surface.

Warning signs that you aren’t supporting your body properly include increased bladder urgency or frequency after writing sessions, back and hip pain, and changes in breath patterns.

“With forward flexed sitting, [belly breathing] gets much harder and we start to breathe more into our chests and shoulders. The result is less diaphragm movement, less pelvic floor movement, and breathlessness much sooner when we go to walk the dog after our writing session,” Bachman says. “You love your craft, so let’s protect your ability to sit and write! Take time away from the computer to strengthen your body through a full range of motion.”

Bachman emphasizes stretching as key to long-term health. When stretching, focus on hip flexors, hamstrings, inner thighs, back of the hip, and lower back.

“Glute and core strengthening can also be a great preventive strategy for most individuals in fighting off the effects of sitting,” Bachman advises. “Guided breath work can be helpful and you can find some great guided breathing exercises online.”

If those tips don’t alleviate your issues, Bachman recommends considering physical therapy as a next step for a more personalized approach.

Whether you’re stretching your mind or your body, prepare yourself for the long journey ahead so you can build a sustainable writing career for years to come and take your manuscripts to the finish line.

THE NEXT CHAPTER:

Transitioning From Dream to Career By Christy Matheson

HOW TO SURVIVE ON SUB

So you've made it through the query trenches. You have an agent—or you've decided to apply to publishers directly—and your manuscript is finally on submission. Congratulations!

... And welcome to the next hurdle.

The statistical likelihood is *still* that this manuscript isn't going to be published. (Sorry, but I'm not here to sugarcoat things!) The reality is that only 10 to 50 percent of manuscripts on sub get picked up, but if you're going to be a professional author, you've got to figure out how to keep building your career, whether this first book sells or not.

I just spent a year on sub and ended up with a four-book deal with Dragonblade, a small press focused on historical romance. Though it was a long road packed with rejections—and a destination I hadn't considered at the beginning—I'm actually very pleased with the place my career is in now. Not only do I have a publisher behind me, but I am a more focused writer with skills to promote my own books. Here are the recommendations I would have given myself two years ago.



Clarify Your Author Goals

Your publishing journey is going to be full of choices, and from the start you need to decide what is important to you. Once that's established, **focus on getting balanced, up-to-date information about things you can control.**

For instance, where do small presses, digital-only, or hybrid publishers fit into your publishing goals? The answer will depend on whether you're looking for a long-term career, need to put food on the table with your writing, or if you yearn to see your grandmother's story in print.

At this stage, you're also getting new information about your particular journey. Your agent has advice, editors have feedback. You have more clarity about your particular options than you did before going on submission, so keep analyzing your choices and make sure the place they lead to fits in with your goals.

Write Something New

We've all heard it before—instead of obsessing over your book on sub, write something new. However, I'm going to add:

Make it *new* new, but not genre-changing new.

Friends, this part is critical: Don't switch genres with your new manuscript. Write a book your agent or publisher could sell to the same readers. This could turn into your option book, or it might be the first one to sell and your original book could get a publishing deal five years from now—but only if you stay in your lane and make a clear brand for yourself.

THE NEXT CHAPTER: Transitioning From Dream to Career

Also, don't write your sequel. Don't use the same characters. Don't put any more energy into the world surrounding a book that is completely out of your hands for now. The more energy you put into it, the harder it is to make rational decisions about it, and you're only doubling down on whatever might be making your first book a hard sell.

The key to remember is that if your book gets picked up and they want a sequel, they'll give you time to write it after you have a contract. (Promise.)

Sell Some Books

"But Christy," you protest, "that's what I'm trying to do!"

I mean go direct. Climb down from that ivory writing tower and engage in some activities that involve interacting with real-life human beings who must give up their real-life money in order to read for fun. When you engage directly with readers, you notice patterns, keep your pulse on current trends, and also learn how to talk about writing.

Per my suggestions in the sidebar, you don't have to write the books you're trying to sell, but interacting with fiction readers is a whole skill on its own, and this is the perfect time to level up! Tasks like writing headlines for a literary magazine, selecting among stories after a call for submissions, or running an ad campaign will all clarify what makes fiction resonate. Even if you are working with someone else's writing, you will gain clarity about how to make your own work resonate with readers.

If you know how to connect with readers, you will be not only a better writer but also an author who is getting paid to write.

Personally, I chose to self-publish a series of novellas in a related genre (Irish fairy tale retellings), as well as continue to work as an editor of an anthology of short stories. Learning about the publishing process from beginning to end, and learning to design and market my own books, has put me in a much more confident position now that I am working with a publisher. However, self-publishing isn't the right choice for every subgenre or author, so check in with your goals and your agent.

In conclusion: You're on sub. Your manuscript might not sell. But you can continue to build your author career. When the next decision is in front of you, you will be in a stronger position if you:

- Know what you want
- Have more books available
- Can position your books clearly and appeal to your audience

There you have it—an action plan to keep your author career growing while you wait! Good luck!



When **Christy Matheson** is not throwing ordinary characters into fairy tales, she is busy raising five children. (Very busy.) She writes character-driven historical fiction with and without fantasy elements, and her "fresh, smart, and totally charming" stories have won multiple awards.



Ways to Sell Stories While You're Waiting to Sell Your Book:

- Self-publish a different story, possibly using a different name
- Volunteer as a reader for a literary magazine
- Volunteer to help market a literary magazine
- Help publish an ongoing anthology (many writers' groups have annual anthologies)
- If you have marketing experience, offer to run marketing or social media for an author friend or a nonprofit (don't charge for it until you have significant experience in the field)
- If you have good computer sense, help an older friend or neighbor self-publish and do basic marketing for their memoir
- Write a fiction Substack or Patreon (not a newsletter)—it could be for yourself or a group of writers
- Publish fanfic or on subscription services (these tend to be a terrible way to make money, but a good way to learn what engages readers)
- Work on publishing a significant body of short stories or poetry, such as in literary magazines or a chapbook

Resources for learning about reader and market connections:

- K-lytics reports for your subgenre
- Theodora Taylor's "universal fantasy" theory: see her Substack, website, and book *7 Figure Fiction*



SETTING:

Capturing the Extraordinary to Make Your Story Stand Out

Back in my youth, an amiable American teenager said to me, “Oh, you’re Canadian! Do you live in an igloo?”

Having grown up watching *Saved by the Bell* and reading every *Babysitter’s Club* book, I’d presumed she’d know my house was wood-framed, shingle-roofed North American averageness. Likely she’d not consumed the same amount of Canadian content as I had American.

As I later delved into rural Ontario life through the eyes of Alice Munro and Margaret Atwood, my love for Canadian culture intensified, provoking me to contemplate how to best convey the differences and similarities of “my setting” to the world.

This year I became an editorial assistant at The Rights Factory literary agency. As I prepare to become a literary agent, my job is to review queries and manuscripts and provide analysis to the CEO. I don’t have to tell many of you that the bar is high to get an agent, and as a setting aficionado, I’m saddened by how often this critical story element is underdeveloped in the submissions I read.

As I learned in WFWA’s *Grabbing the Reader* workshop, a strong setting description in the first 500 words grounds the reader. The first glimpse of setting in a story often denotes the extent of its influence on the story’s conception and skill in line-level execution. More often than not, a sentence or two displays the writer’s intent:

- To treat setting as a necessary stage backdrop for their character’s actions.
- To treat setting as a milieu that characters interact with, a force that carries, reflects, and steers them.

Setting Can Drive Plot and Character

I love a good crime thriller, as often a challenging, intricate setting becomes an antagonist to the main character.

While reading WFWA member Lidija Hilje’s debut *Slanting Towards the Sea*, her subtle employment of setting as an antagonist in the height of literary fiction enthralled me. In the story, the newly democratic Croatia impacts protagonist Ivona’s career prospects, living conditions, interpersonal dynamics, and most tragically, her marriage.

THE PROMPT

At the conception level, setting can be so much more than a place where your character launches into dialogue. As much as we may not notice it, our environment and the people within it impact every decision of our every day—and not just as an antagonist.

In *The French Effect* by Patricia Sands, interaction with French culture, food, and architecture heals protagonist Nora, giving her distance from grief and creative inspiration. The world of your story need not be determined by international borders; it can be “set” within a burgeoning subgenre of the music industry, a theological seminary, or within a single family’s household.

Key questions for each world will shape the plot and characterizations:

- Who holds the power balance in this world and how?
- What are the social mores and why?
- What outside influences affect the stability of this world?
- Is it on a downward or upward trajectory, and what does this mean for the characters?

Your story’s setting can provide a simmering undercurrent—just enough to make a life feel authentic—or you may turn the setting volume to max, where it’s the protagonist’s primary concern.

Suffice to say, a story set in an intriguing world, unique with intrinsic richness, won’t come to life without line-level craft. To improve your skill, try asking this question of each scene:

Is your character surrounded by their setting or are they interacting with it?

Setting Is More Than What You See

Writing with the senses may not sound like anything new, but most submissions I see prioritize visual perception, with only a smattering of sounds or the odd smell here or there. While keeping pacing in mind, try to deliver the complete experience of a character interacting with their environment.

When they walk, is their balance affected by an uneven surface? Do their calf muscles strain due to a hill?

When they enter a room, is it cavernous and echoing, or cramped and claustrophobic? How is the room lit, and does the light cast shadows or provide sheen? Does this place have an intrinsic scent or humidity level?

When interacting with an object, what is its texture, its temperature, its pliability?

When something moves, does your character perceive a sound of note? If something enters their mouth, how does it taste—and don’t limit yourself to food.

Before going further, though, I caution to ensure we’re all on the same page, so to speak, because above all, setting needs to adhere to genre expectations.

Every time I mention enjoying a classic novel to my neighbor, she launches into a lament about reading Thomas Hardy in high school, and the page upon page upon page he took to describe a simple sitting room. Readers of commercial prose have different expectations than those devouring the Booker Prize shortlist.

So know your subgenre and observe the range of setting word choices, word counts, and locations to entice your ideal reader. No matter your subgenre, to ensure settings aren’t clichéd backdrops or boring extraneities, try examining each scene with the following questions:



The world of your story need not be determined by international borders; it can be “set” within a burgeoning subgenre of the music industry, a theological seminary, or within a single family’s household.

- Can this setting inclusion deepen the characterization?
- Can this setting choice further the plot?
- Does my character use all the senses where the setting and story demand it?
- Are enough setting details indicative of a specific location and the era in which the story takes place?
- Am I narrowing the focus to small details as well as showing the expanse of my character’s environment?
- Am I bringing the setting description to life through strong verbs?
- Do my word choices and details of the setting reflect the story tone and the character’s mood?

Next time you attempt to describe suburban averageness, I hope you’ll see it as unique as an igloo. And if life in an igloo sounds pretty interesting to you, check out Canadian Esi Edugyan’s *Washington Black*. Her descriptions are so vivid, you’ll shiver!



Krista White is a former executive recruiter who fell so hard for writing that stories soon consumed her every idle thought. Her short stories have appeared in the *Agape Review*, and she’s the author of *The Birdcage*, published by The Bombay Circle Press. On her journey to becoming a literary agent, she is currently agency assistant to Sam Hiyate, CEO of The Rights Factory, and will begin building her list in the summer of 2026. She’s an avid volunteer with WFWA, currently serving as Vice President of Membership. She lives north of Toronto in a quiet hamlet, where she obsessively reads everything from creative nonfiction to book club romance to Giller prize winners amid the chirp of birdsong and flush of farmland breeze.

Author Profile: Lorraine Norwood

By Brittany Clair

In this issue we hear from Lorraine Norwood, whose book *The Solitary Sparrow* won the 2025 STAR Award. Lorraine volunteers with WriteOn!'s masthead as a proofreader. I've been working with her for more than two years and have to admit I was floored (so impressed!) to learn more about her background, writing career, and perseverance. Talking with her reminded me of the importance of this community as a pillar of support, and her story is a case study in sustainability.

Please join me in congratulating Lorraine, and I hope you enjoy our conversation as much as I did.

WO: Tell us about your writing journey—how did this book come into the world?

Lorraine: Well, it's been a long and winding road. One hot summer afternoon in the 1980s a girl from the 14th century named Meg jumped into my head, took hold of my imagination, and wouldn't let go. By the time I reached a pencil and paper, she was embedded in my heart. So I started doing research. Lots of it. I took as many writing classes as possible, but I was working full time, so I wrote on the weekends. It was on-the-job training. I changed POV from third to first. Changed back to third. Changed past tense to present tense. Changed back to past tense. Added characters. Like a magical loaf of bread dough, the book got bigger and bigger.

And then I made a HUGE pivot in my life. Newly divorced with teenage children, I left the U.S. for graduate school in medieval archaeology in York, England, with my daughter reluctantly in tow. I participated in excavations and continued to write and research. All the while, Meg was blooming in all her fierceness.

After returning to the U.S., I submitted hundreds of queries, attended conferences, was accepted by an agent (hooray!), rejected by the Big 5, submitted to smaller houses, got turned down, suffered the death of my biggest fan—my mother—got COVID, was released by my agent after five years, cried hot tears of humiliation, took an expensive class on self-publishing, pivoted to a hybrid publisher, worked with a brilliant development editor, hit "delete" on 40,000 words, revised one last time, then hit "send," and voila! My book reached the world on Feb. 27, 2024. It took me only 38 years. And I'm not finished yet.

WO: You've had a fascinating career, including two decades of experience as a journalist, and multiple degrees in English, anthropology, and medieval archaeology (!). How have these experiences influenced your writing process?

Lorraine: I couldn't call myself a writer until I was 45-years-old, even though I worked at a newspaper where one of my jobs was writing. To me, a writer was someone who had published a book. When I finally worked up the courage to call myself a writer, I felt like I had dropped the cloak of invisibility. I wasn't hiding anymore.



In my research I read a variety of new works by feminist historians who brought to life women forgotten by history or women known only as "anonymous." As I read original works translated from Latin or Middle English and written by misogynistic authors, the influencers of their time, I grew angrier and angrier. Reaching back to the past, identifying and celebrating women who remained anonymous by virtue of their gender, is a way to celebrate women today. We stand on the shoulders of our sisters.

WO: Tell us about your methods for writing a series, *The Margaret Chronicles*. Did you plan them out? (All at once?) What's it like to live with your characters for more than one book? What's the most frustrating thing about working in a series?

Lorraine: My methods? I haven't a clue. I'll let you know when I find the answer. Until then, I'm winging it.

I'm working on book two at the moment and I'm finding backstory to be one of the most frustrating aspects of working in a series. How much is too much? Is a paragraph enough or can I ask Meg to muse about a past event for a couple of pages? Are the facts in book one correct in book two? Could book two be read as a standalone?

Sometimes I ask myself why the hell I'm doing this. Why couldn't I have picked something simple? The answer: I'm an over-thinker, over-researcher, over-planner, perfectionistic worrywart. I am what I am. I just have to do it and Trust the Process.

I know where I'm going and I know how to get there, but some days I wish I had a magic wand to get me there faster.

As to living with my characters, I love them! We're stuck with each other.

WO: This issue, we're thinking about what "sustainability" means to authors. What do you do to sustain your own creative process?

Lorraine: Lots of coffee and diet Coke!

Sustaining the willpower, not to mention the passion and the fun (yes, there should be fun) that comes with writing is not easy. There are days when I fall down the rabbit hole where there's no energy, no promise, no hope, and definitely no cuddly rabbits. Instead, there's old Miss McGillicuddy, my Inner Critic who fills my brain with spite, self-loathing, darkness, and doubts. Why not quit? Nobody reads anymore. Books are dead.

Thanks to years of therapy and Cymbalta, wise writer friends, and a healthy part of my brain that eventually kicks in, I pull myself out of the hole and pay attention to what my brain and body are telling me.

The message is this: Mix it up. Get away from the computer and keyboard. Go back to old-school pen and paper for a while. Go sit outside in the sunshine. Hug a tree. Go to a coffee shop or the library. Walk the dog. Do something that sparks joy. Yes, it's a meme for a reason. It works. Above all, be kind to yourself.

WO: You've been volunteering with WriteOn! for years. What first drew you to WFWA, and how has your relationship with the organization evolved?

Lorraine: I can't remember how I found WFWA, but I'm so glad I did. During COVID I discovered WFWA's Writing Dates, a daily group that meets via Zoom. We log in, set our goals, and write alongside members from all over the world. It's invigorating and fun. With WFWA and the virtual writing group, I have found my people who understand what it means to be in pursuit of an idea that exists only in your head and that vaults you to the top of Everest on good days and then slams you down with a colossal face plant on your bad ones— and how those days sometimes happen simultaneously.

I can say with absolute certainty that I would not have finished or published *The Solitary Sparrow* without WFWA. It's inspiring to be around kind, smart writers who work hard at their craft, and who freely admit they talk to their imaginary friends, so I volunteer to give back.

WO: Do you have any writing resolutions for 2026?

Lorraine: No, but I have intentions.

- Practice persistence.
- Be kind to myself. Sleep well. Eat wisely. Be grateful for each day. Hug more trees.
- Reopen my book coaching practice.
- Spread my mantra: Better to be a late bloomer than never to have bloomed at all.



Chapter 1

THE FACE OF A BEAST

Warwickshire, England

Have mercy on me, O God.

All of Warwickshire knows the story of my birth, for it set in motion a shift in the wheel of Fate which I was powerless to stop.

I was born in the year 1308, during the reign of King Edward II in the village of St. Michael's Mead. My mother writhed in agony for three days and when finally my head appeared between her legs, even Mother Alice, the village healer and midwife, turned away in horror. My face was grotesquely misshapen, as if a giant hand had forced its way inside my mother's womb and pushed my countenance upwards until my chin was crushed into my cheekbones and my nose was simply no nose at all. No human nose. It was a snout.

Lorraine Norwood is the author of *The Solitary Sparrow*, book one of a series set in 14th-century England and France, and winner of the 2025 STAR Award from the Women's Fiction Writers Association. Lorraine lives in western North Carolina but would rather live in England in the 14th century, as long as she can bring a suitcase full of antibiotics. She is a writer of short stories, memoirs, and nonfiction articles. She was a journalist for 20 years before earning a degree in medieval archaeology. She has participated in digs in the U.S. and U.K., most notably in York, England, where she excavated a dog skeleton from the Victorian era that she named Vicky. She is also a certified book coach and developmental editor. She is a member of the Historical Novel Society and the Women's Fiction Writers Association.

Elizabeth Gillman Uses Love of Retreats to Guide New Role



When Elizabeth Gillman learned WFWA was looking for new Retreat Event Team Leaders, saying yes was a no-brainer—despite the fact she was moving between states and actively writing her fourth manuscript.

“Attending my first retreat in 2022 with my heart in my hand is the single most important step I’ve taken in my fiction writing career so far,” Elizabeth said. “It led me to community, a wealth of resources, and most importantly, solidified my faith that this path of creativity, torment, and euphoria is the right one for me.”

From captivating content to poolside brainstorming and late-night therapy sessions, Elizabeth was hooked.

“I found my people,” she said.

To help prepare for her new role, Elizabeth served as a co-chair of the 2025 Albuquerque retreat, where she proved she was ready for more than just administrative oversight. During that event, the hotel fire alarm went off (twice!), and Elizabeth immediately moved the group next door to a rooftop bar to keep them safe while firefighters extinguished a fire in the banquet kitchen.

Overseeing the Albuquerque event won’t be her only new role, though. Elizabeth also plans to add a brand-new retreat to WFWA’s calendar. This one will be focused on the individual needs of each attendee—and getting words on the page—and less on seminars. More information about this new, third retreat will be released soon.

Elizabeth joined WFWA in 2020 by a circuitous route starting with an agent recommending she look for a critique partner. That led Elizabeth to find the Author Mentor Match program leader, who then introduced Elizabeth to Hadley Leggett. Shortly after, Hadley became Elizabeth’s first critique partner and encouraged Elizabeth to join WFWA.

When she’s not busy writing (her first novel comes out this fall!) or planning retreats, Elizabeth knows how to keep herself busy. She is a mother of four who spends as much time as possible in or on water, especially paddleboarding or rowing. She spends every free minute beyond that in her garden, growing her own fruits, vegetables, and herbs primarily from seed. Her husband calls her a crazy cat lady, only with plants, but she has cats, too.

As you can imagine, it takes a dedicated team of volunteers to execute a retreat after the retreat chairs spend months planning each tiny detail. Fourteen volunteers helped execute the 2025 event. We wish we were able to highlight them all, but here are a few that went above and beyond.



Each afternoon, attending members led mini-sessions that included slide presentations and interactive exercises. Catherine Matthews led “Anatomy of Author Fraud” and “What Every Writer Should Know About Going Indie,” Deb Liebhart spoke about “Yes, Indies Sell Books and So Can You!,” Lisa MacDonald presented “Creative Rituals to Keep You in Flow,” and Sara LaFontain taught “Query Letter Speed Dating.”

We also had several off-property outings led by volunteers. Amy Dressler coordinated the Old Town Albuquerque Ghost Tour where brave members learned about the spooky side of this historic town. Carmen Jackie Williams shared her artistic side in a visit to the nearby Botanic Garden by conducting a “Drawing Class at the Garden” where nature, art, and writing all came together. Lisa Binsfeld took a group for a “New Mexican Wine Tasting & Dinner,” and Robyn Thomas led a “Dress as Your Character/Novel Era” night out to the local restaurant and saloon, followed by nightcap drinks.

FINAL THOUGHT



“Listen, Stephen King used to write in the washroom of his trailer after his kids went to sleep. Harlan Ellison wrote in the stall of a bathroom of his barracks during boot camp. Elmore Leonard got up at 5 AM every morning to write before work.

Every time my alarm goes off at 5 AM and I don't want to get up, or I would rather sit down after work and play a videogame, I think about those guys. Take care of your family. They need you and love you. Make time for them. Then stop screwing around and finish your damn book.”

– BERNARD SCHAFFER