

SUMMER 2022



The Quarterly Magazine of the Women's Fiction Writers Association

WRITEON!



L A Y E R S

**SECONDARY
CHARACTERS
NEED LAYERS TOO**

**SHOW US YOUR
SUMMERTIME JOY!**

**AUTHOR
INTERVIEW:
GRACE SAMMON**



**LET'S FIX THIS!
ADDING LAYERS
TO YOUR STORY**

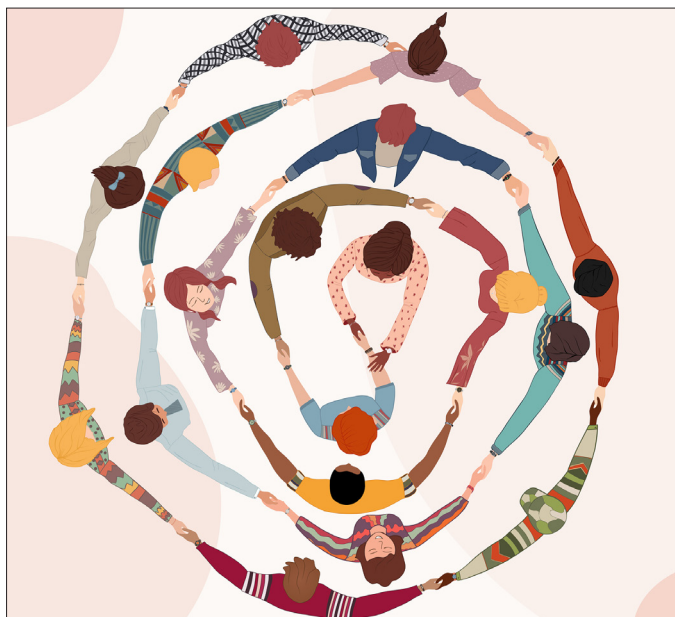
**GUIDING SCRIBE:
HOW TO BE
OPTIMISTIC**

SUMMER 2022

CONTENTS

FEATURES

- 6** Spotlight on
Diversity and Inclusion
by Cassandra Hill
- 11** Secondary Characters
Need Layers Too
by Brooke Williams
- 125** Author Interview:
Grace Sammon
by Kay Arthur
- 17** WFWA Expands
Scholarship Program
by Sharon Ritchey



COLUMNS

- Guiding Scribe:
How to Be Optimistic by Camille Pagán **9**
- Let's Fix This! by Leslie Lehr **13**

DEPARTMENTS

- President's Letter **4**
- Letter from the Editor **5**
- Member Releases **7**
- Shoot and Share Contest **8**
- Volunteer Spotlight **18**
- Final Thought **19**



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.



facebook.com/WFWritersAssociation



twitter.com/WF_Writers



instagram.com/womensfictionwriters/

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

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Kathy Dodson
Vice President, Finance/Treasurer

Camille Pagán
Guiding Scribe

Jacki Kelly
President

Sophie Krich-Brinton
Director of Technology

Kristi Leonard
Vice President, Programs

Maggie Marr
WFWA Legal Counsel

Michele Montgomery
Secretary

Micki Morency
Vice President of
Diversity and Inclusion

Wendi Rossi
Membership Director

Sharon Ritchey
Vice President,
Communications

THE WFWA FOUNDING TEAM

Orly Konig
www.orlykonig.com

Kerry Lonsdale
www.kerrylonsdale.com

Laura Drake
www.lauradrakebooks.com

Linda Avellar
www.lindaavellar.com

Marilyn Brant
www.marilynbrant.com

Maggie Marr
www.maggiemarr.com



WriteOn! is published quarterly by the
Women's Fiction Writers Association
www.womensfictionwriters.org

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.

STAFF

KAY ARTHUR Managing Editor

Kay is now retired after working 30 years in Healthcare Administration. She splits her time between Phoenix and a cabin in the mountains of Prescott, Arizona, where she loves to write, paint, and enjoy the great outdoors. Of course, spending time with her husband, two dogs, and family is the best part of her life. She is fully engrained in the writing community and has three novels in various stages of creation. Her website is www.kdarthur.com.



SHERI TAYLOR-EMERY Art Director

Sheri is an art director at a parenting publication who longs to be a novelist. She rejoices in seeing her son and daughter turn into amazing young adults, working at a dog rescue once a week, and corralling two dogs and three cats at home. She lives with her husband outside of Atlanta.



CASEY DEMBOWSKI Copy Editor

Casey is a contemporary romance and women's fiction author. Her debut novel *When We're Thirty* was released in April 2021 from Red Adept Publishing. Casey earned her MFA from Adelphi University and has over ten years of professional experience in corporate communications. She lives in New Jersey with her husband, daughter, and their two cats.



BROOKE WILLIAMS Staff Writer

Brooke is a novelist, childcare provider, fitness instructor, and Girl Scout leader. When she isn't writing or devouring stacks of good books, she's helping out at the local elementary school, working on her MFA, or haunting her favorite local taco joint. She lives in Ohio with her husband and four children.



CAMILLE PAGÁN Guiding Scribe

Camille Pagán is the #1 Amazon Charts bestselling author of 10 books, a certified coach for aspiring to established authors, and a journalist who has written for Forbes, the New York Times, O: The Oprah Magazine, Real Simple, Time, and many others. She lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, with her family.



My Writing Joy

I dreamed of writing books long before I knew anything about the publishing business. Writing was the fun thing I did—letting my imagination play—making up stuff. What I didn't expect about writing is that you write alone.

The hours I spend thinking about my story, plotting my story, and building characters sketches are done alone in front of a computer or on paper. And even after hours of character sketches and plotting, I'm still a long way from a finished manuscript. Writing stories was simpler in grade school when I could fill two pages of a composition notebook within minutes.

I watched a movie recently about a woman who wanted to be a famous playwright. A line in the film stuck with me and lifted me. The character said, "as long as you get to do what you like, every day, that's all that really matters."

That line held so much truth. It was as if someone tapped me on the shoulder and told me to pay attention. I may spend hours alone, but I'm never lonely because I'm doing what I like.

I have days when I must remind myself of this mantra. I can write anything I want, and that brings me immeasurable happiness. Even if there is no pot of gold at the end of my next manuscript, I will rise every day and write. My joy in writing isn't based on what someone will say about the story or how many people will read it or leave a review. (Now, in full transparency, all those things would be fantastic and welcomed) but it's about the pleasure of putting my imagination on paper. It also explains why I have so many half-finished manuscripts in my drawer. Of course, I hope one day all of those scribbles will reach a reader, but it's not the only reason I do what I do.

Writing doesn't have to be lonely any day of the year. WFWA is your community, and as a virtual organization, with members around the globe, someone is always online in front of their computer and eager to connect.

Over the years, I've found connected with like-minded people who enjoy writing, talking about writing, and being with writers. They listen to my ideas, help keep me abreast of what's new in the industry, and help hype me and my books. But most of all, these people have become friends. I can reach out to them when I need a lift or someone to share my accomplishments.

So, I've already won, haven't I?

Tactix



MY JOY IN WRITING ISN'T BASED ON WHAT SOMEONE WILL SAY ABOUT THE STORY OR HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL READ IT OR LEAVE A REVIEW. ... BUT IT'S ABOUT THE PLEASURE OF PUTTING MY IMAGINATION ON PAPER.



Believe in Magic

Total honesty here – this year I’ve been struggling to write.

I’ve settled into my permanent home in the mountains, and life is rolling along the way it should. All is well in mind, body, and soul, and I’m doing everything I really want to do... except write.

I realize I’m not alone in this struggle. As the weeks and months go by, it’s not for naught. I’m reading and re-reading my finished manuscript. I’m making lists and spreadsheets of agents to query. And I have a golden nugget resonating in my head that is begging to be put on paper. But something is keeping me from sitting in front of my computer. I’ve been hesitant to put a name on it because I, damn well, couldn’t define it.

Writer’s block? Nah, I don’t think so.

Fear? Never been afraid of much in my life.

Lazy? The word is not in my vocabulary.

But then it came to me like a taser jolt after my interview with our featured author, Grace Sammon.

One of my scribbled notes was highlighted in bright yellow and underlined twice in heavy dark lines. “Why do you write and what is your definition of success?”

That questions has poked inside my head and maybe even my heart.

Why do actors act, singers sing, doctors heal, or clergy minister? The list goes on.

For most, the answer is complex and involves multiple layers, needs, and desires. But can we strip it to the basic driving force that makes us want to do it? Could it be as simple as... we want to make a difference?

With that “aha moment” as my motivator, I started to write again. The idea nugget has landed on the page, and the magic has begun. Some people are placed in your life at the exact moment they’re needed. Perhaps that is what Grace was for me. And maybe this, right here, will be it for you.

Story layering is the theme for this issue of *WriteOn!* Leslie Lehr, our talented consulting editor, guides us through this challenging skill with a sampling from one of our member’s WIPs. Thank you, Sue Reynolds, who is also one of our BookTrib editors, for being brave and gracious to put your sample out there for us to learn from.

Our new Guiding Scribe, Camille Pagán, gives us an optimistic pep talk, Brooke brings a look into secondary characters, we highlight the Scholarship Program and its team, and as always, we include fun, words, photos, and wisdom.

Cheers to you, writers, and to your own nuggets landing on the page.

Let the magic begin,

Kay

WELCOME TO “SPOTLIGHT ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION”
THE D&I COMMITTEE INVITES OUR GENERAL MEMBERSHIP TO SHARE STORIES THAT IMPACT
THEM IN THE AREA OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION. WE WANT TO HEAR ALL VOICES.
PLEASE SEND YOUR SUBMISSION TO DI@WOMENSFICHTIONWRITERS.ORG



SHARE YOUR DIVERSITY EXPERIENCES

by Cassandra Hill
D&I Committee Member

When we tell a story, we create characters through the lens of our own knowledge and experiences. But what if our view is distorted, incomplete, or skewed? How do we ensure we merge reality with fiction and bring authenticity to each page? Do we even believe it's important to do so?

As writers, we have a responsibility to create characters who are not developed, described, or shown in any negative or stereotypical way or repeating a historical trope that could be offensive to any group

Here's your chance to be part of this important change and to be published in *WriteOn!*

The D&I Committee is seeking

submissions of your experience with diversity to be featured in future Spotlight on Diversity sections.

What are your experiences? Are you involved in community events or activities that show support to DEI? Why do you believe diversity in literature matters? Are you reading women's fiction books by diverse authors you'd like to share?

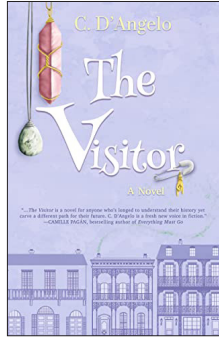
For some, just hearing the word diversity makes them uncomfortable. As writers, we can tear down myths and stereotypes and build positive representation of our diverse characters by learning more ourselves.

Please take the time to share your stories and ideas and send your submissions to: di@womensfictionwriters.org or reach out with any questions.

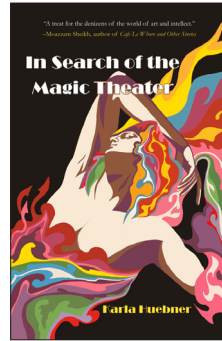
MEMBER RELEASES



E.D. HACKETT
Reinventing Amara Leventis
6/1/22



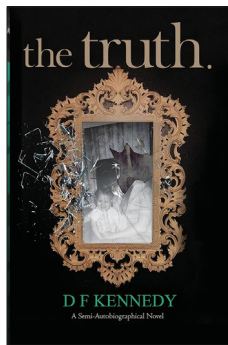
C. D'ANGELO
The Visitor
6/1/22



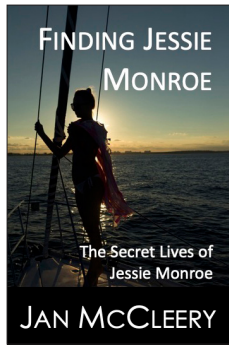
KARLA HUEBNER
In Search of the Magic Theater
6/1/22



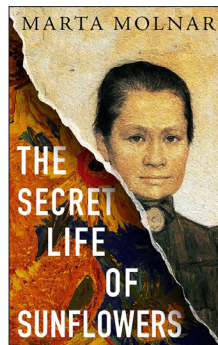
E.J. TANDA
Queen of Secrets
6/2/22



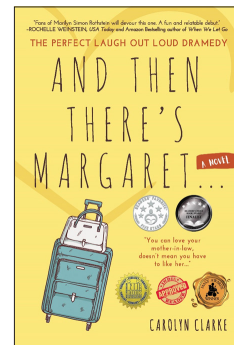
DONNA KENNEDY
The Truth
6/23/22



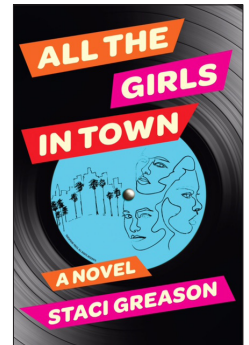
JAN MCCLEERY
Finding Jessie Monroe
7/1/22



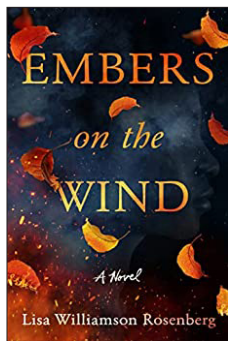
MARTA MOLNAR
The Secret Life of Sunflowers
7/19/22



CAROLYN CLARKE
And Then There's Margaret
7/21/22



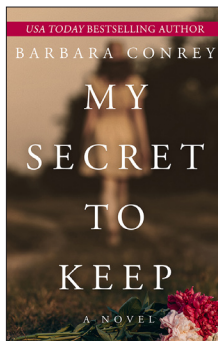
STACI GREASON
All the Girls in Town
7/26/22



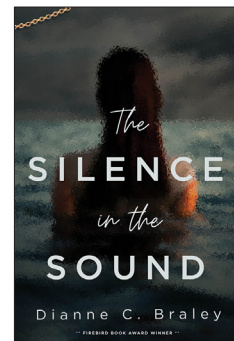
LISA WILLIAMSON ROSENBERG
Embers on the Wind
8/1/22



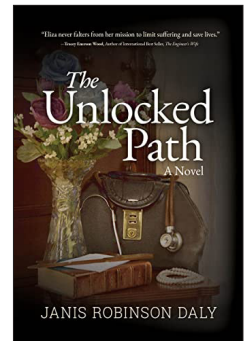
ADELE HOLMES
Winter's Reckoning
8/9/22



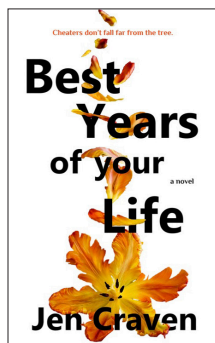
BARBARA CONREY
My Secret to Keep
8/23/22



DIANNE C. BRALEY
The Silence in the Sound
8/23/22



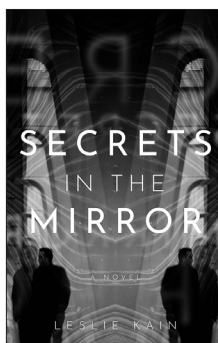
JANIS ROBINSON DALY
The Unlocked Path
8/25/22



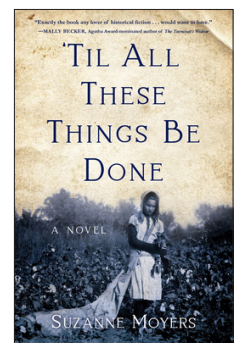
JEN CRAVEN
Best Years of Your Life
8/29/22



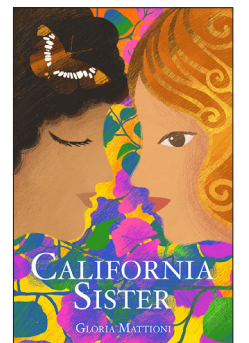
JUDITH TURNER-YAMAMOTO
Loving the Dead and Gone
9/9/22



LESLIE KAIN
Secrets in the Mirror
9/13/22



SUZANNE MOYERS
Til All These Things Be Done
9/13/22



GLORIA MATTIONI
California Sister
9/15/22

SHOOT AND SHARE CONTEST: SUMMERTIME JOY

Summer takes us outdoors, basking in the sun and fresh air—a sense of frolic, freedom, and joy. It shows on the smiling faces of our members in these photos.

The random winner of \$25.00 is Naveen Sridhar. Congratulations and thanks to all who participated!



Naveen Sridhar



Marsea Nelson



Krista White



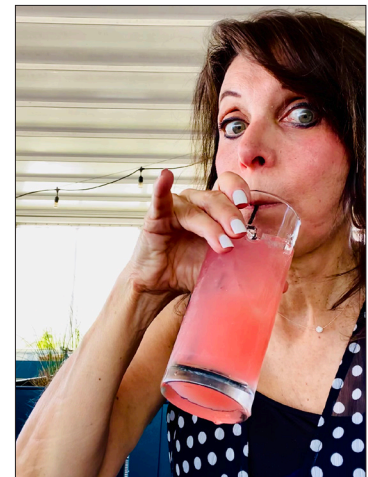
Amy Barker



Jennifer Craven



Kristi Leonard, Sheila Athens, Tammy Harris, Jen Sinclair



Clare Lowell



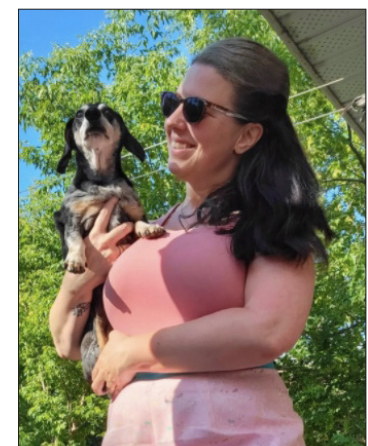
Sheryl Stein



Michelle Spinei



Debra Borchert



Meghan Redmile

HOW TO BE OPTIMISTIC

A FEW SMALL SHIFTS IN YOUR PERSPECTIVE CAN REV YOUR WRITING AMBITIONS— AND YOUR CAREER.

*Publishing houses just aren't buying
women's fiction right now.*

*Agents don't want to rep fiction that's too witty/
dark/written by anyone older than 35.*

Six-figure deals are for celebrities and influencers.

*Want to pay the mortgage?
Don't plan on quitting your day job.*

These are just a few of the statements writers have shared with me over the past few months. They're not pulling these comments out of a hat; they're hearing them from other writers and industry insiders. One coaching client told me she'd watched a panel where a well-known agent at a major literary agency announced that authors have no control over their careers. (You won't be surprised to learn that this made my client feel incredibly discouraged.) Another attended a virtual pitch event where she was repeatedly told that even if her book did sell, she'd never make a living as a novelist.



GUIDING SCRIBE

Let me be frank: that's all a load of crap. Or to be more diplomatic, those are opinions, not facts. How do I know? Because I read *Publishers Marketplace* (specifically, the deals reports) religiously. And every week, writers of all stripes are selling women's fiction. And fiction that's dark/witty/not on-trend. Ninety-nine percent of those deals are not for influencers or Hollywood insiders. A good number of them are salary-sized, too—you know, the kind you might call making a living. I've made the bulk of my income from fiction over the past decade, despite the fact I've been dropped by a major publisher, had books that didn't sell well, and have experienced significant career setbacks (like the time a prominent trade publication called my writing "clunky and stale." I truly thought I'd never recover!). I know it's possible because I'm doing it. And so can you.

Listen, I'm not saying you should quit your job when you're halfway through writing the first draft of your debut novel. But stop tuning in to the sad trombones and start looking for proof that you're going to succeed.

This is essentially using confirmation bias (which is a type of cognitive bias) to your advantage. The human brain is remarkably good at looking for evidence of what it believes to be true—and what it has been told is true. If I tell you that there are more purple cars in your town than in most other places, guess what you're going to start seeing while you're out driving? A whole bunch of violet vehicles. So, when you think or listen to stories that affirm that your dreams are out of reach, you're giving your brain a green light to look for signs that's so—and those signs will prompt you to think and act in ways that don't serve your goals.

And that's the real issue: buying into these tired tales about how hard it is to make it is going to make you feel pessimistic, discouraged, and/or unmotivated. Those emotions up the odds you'll take all kinds of seemingly-minor actions—think scheduling appointments during your writing time, drinking too much and waking up too hungover to focus, or not fully developing your story before you start writing because you'll "just have to edit it anyway"—that reduce your odds of success. The negative story becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

So, what's a writer with big dreams to do? First, focus on your thoughts before you jump into action. When you focus on *when* and *how*, your brain tries to protect you from failure with a litany of reasons why you can't (*I've never done it before. No one else is writing this kind of story*). Choosing your thoughts on purpose (*I'm the perfect person to do this. It may be hard, but I've done hard things before, and this will be no different*) helps you approach your next steps (that is, the *when* and *how*) with confidence.

Then, once you've homed in on at least one positive belief about your career and abilities, it's time to get to work. Write a killer manuscript. Hire someone to edit it for you. Get help with your query letter. Take feedback. Query agents. Take more feedback. Build your platform. Take risks. No matter what the outcome, you must keep going ... and going, and going. That's how you create the writing career of your dreams.

Your homework: go find three to five authors who are already succeeding at what you want to do and use them as proof that it's possible to reach your goals. Then start telling better stories about what's up ahead for *you*. Your future self will thank you.



ONCE YOU'VE HOMED IN ON AT LEAST ONE POSITIVE BELIEF ABOUT YOUR CAREER AND ABILITIES, IT'S TIME TO GET TO WORK. WRITE A KILLER MANUSCRIPT. HIRE SOMEONE TO EDIT IT FOR YOU. GET HELP WITH YOUR QUERY LETTER. TAKE FEEDBACK. QUERY AGENTS. TAKE MORE FEEDBACK. BUILD YOUR PLATFORM. TAKE RISKS. NO MATTER WHAT THE OUTCOME, YOU MUST KEEP GOING ... AND GOING, AND GOING. THAT'S HOW YOU CREATE THE WRITING CAREER OF YOUR DREAMS.

Camille Pagán is the #1 Amazon Charts bestselling author of 9 novels, a certified coach to aspiring to established authors, and a journalist who has written for *Forbes*, *The New York Times*, *O: The Oprah Magazine*, *Real Simple*, *Time*, and many others. She is the WFWA Guiding Scribe through 2023.



SECONDARY CHARACTERS NEED LAYERS TOO

by Brooke Williams

Of all the elements in your story, it's the characters who have the unique ability to make readers care. But in order to do so, the characters need to be compelling and multidimensional—in other words, they need layers.

Layering is important for main characters and secondary characters. Secondary characters contribute to the story world, making it more realistic and well-developed, but only if the characters themselves feel real.

HERE ARE FIVE WAYS TO GIVE SECONDARY CHARACTERS THE LAYERS THEY NEED:

1 MAKE THEM DISTINCT

Set secondary characters apart immediately with unique characteristics so readers don't forget who they are. While you can make them more nuanced as the story develops, they need something to make them stick in readers' brains when they're first introduced. It could be a job, personality trait, habit, or interest. Physical description is also a great way to introduce them quickly. Just a couple of sentences about what they wear, what their body language is like, and any interesting features they have can help create a clear image in readers' minds.

Continued on page 12

2 **GIVE THEM GOALS**

Your story isn't about the secondary character's inner world and journey, but they should have one. Their lives should be as complex and interesting off the page as the protagonist is on the page. Give them goals outside the story. It's what makes them feel three-dimensional. A side character doesn't enter the story because the plot needs them to. They enter the story because they need to. Otherwise, they can feel like plot devices rather than well-rounded characters.

3 **INTRODUCE THEM WITH ACTION**

Rather than explaining their personality and the dynamic they have with the protagonist, demonstrate it when they appear on the page by showing how they interact with the protagonist. Some exposition is alright, but without any demonstration, the side characters won't feel authentic.

4 **MAKE THEM IMPACT THE MAIN CHARACTER**

The only reason for readers to care about secondary characters is because they are important to the protagonist. So let them interact with the main character. Better yet, explore the contrast between them and the protagonist and give their relationship an interesting dynamic. One of the most impactful ways to do this is to introduce conflict or tension into their relationship. Highlight the things they're hiding from each other, the things they don't understand about each other, the ways they disagree, the ways their goals differ from or even conflict with one another.

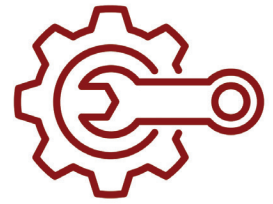
5 **GIVE THEM PURPOSE**

Secondary characters can singlehandedly carry a theme through your story that's relevant to the main theme of the protagonist. This adds extra layers of depth and dimension that are satisfying to the reader. Ask yourself: What lesson do I want this secondary character to inadvertently teach the protagonist? If they have no effect on how the story ends or on the ultimate realization the protagonist comes to, then they don't belong in the story.

Be choosy about which characters you populate your story with. If you have too many secondary characters, there won't be the space to properly develop all of them, and that will hurt the story overall. Save those extraneous characters for another story, and spend your pages giving secondary characters the layers they deserve.



THE ONLY REASON FOR READERS TO CARE ABOUT SECONDARY CHARACTERS IS BECAUSE THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO THE PROTAGONIST. SO LET THEM INTERACT WITH THE MAIN CHARACTER. BETTER YET, EXPLORE THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THEM AND THE PROTAGONIST AND GIVE THEIR RELATIONSHIP AN INTERESTING DYNAMIC.



ADDING LAYERS TO YOUR STORY

Layering is not the first thing that comes to mind when developing a story. Nor should it be. The immediate goal is to engage your reader. That means introducing the character, the conflict, and the story world quickly. What are the secret ingredients that help build a story as rich as a layer cake? Delicious details.

Sue Reynold's *Clay Wife* has a beautifully written opening during a hospital visit that has high stakes for the main character. Yet there is more description of other characters in the waiting room than about those the reader needs to care about. More importantly, the reader needs a proper introduction. This is tricky from the main character's POV, so let's apply the technique of newspaper journalists. Consider the four W's: who, what, where, and when.

Who: What is Libby's full name? Her age? Is she Australian, or are they there visiting? More personal details, including income and education, can be expressed by her attitude, actions, clothing, dialogue, and how others react to her. As you add characters, be sure the description is proportionate to their importance in the story.

What: What brought them here? Did her husband get in an accident? Get sick? Have a heart attack? What are his symptoms?

Where: We are told this is an emergency at a hospital, but the metal chairs and bright lights don't make the waiting room unique. Are they in the suburbs or the country? Is the room crowded or empty, large or small, clean or dirty? A few telling details will help the reader envision it.

When: We know the year from the time stamp, but what day is it? A work day or weekend? Dinnertime or the middle of the night? What month? We know Libby has a cardigan sweater, but is it cashmere or cotton, or handknit for a holiday? Is it spring or fall? Does the weather add tension or ease?

The author must layer in the details with specific words that reflect the main character's emotions, observations, and her place in the world. This allows opportunity for foreshadowing character opposition and subplots that will create a layered story.

ORIGINAL SUBMISSION BY SUE REYNOLDS

1
1973
Parramatta, Sydney,
Australia

Libby

The hospital emergency lights bounced off the metal chairs, highlighting the satin vest of a man with a bloodied towel around his hand. Libby pushed past him and unwound her husband Paul's arm from around her shoulders to let him collapse onto a seat, tucking her cardigan under his head. He stretched his legs along the chairs and closed his eyes. She plied her baby, Dion, from her chest and put him on the floor. Tamsin, her six-year-old daughter, began sifting through the magazines on one of the chairs. Libby sat with Paul's feet on her lap, watching Dion crawl into the next aisle, willing him to reach the nurses' station to prompt them to move Paul up the queue.

Paul slept on. She rubbed his legs. Softly at first and then she was digging in, feeling bone. 'Oh, God. Paul. Tell me what to do.' 'Mummy, don't cry.' Tamsin handed her a magazine.

It was full of happy families and models advertising Oil of Ulan cream, 4711 perfume, wedge shoes, and red lips. A psychologist, obviously spoon-fed good thoughts from birth, smiled from the caption, 'Daily Gratitude'. Libby used a pen to slash the glossy face, flipping the pages over, looking for blank spaces. She focused on controlling her swirling lines, only stopping briefly to tend the children or nudge Paul again. She sketched the woman opposite, turning her wheelchair upside down, her arms dangling bereft amongst the strands of a model's hair. The hours ticked away as her pen lines formed backs of heads, running children, the drunk under the chairs two rows across, putting the sharp-tongued nurse, who'd checked them in, on the floor beside him. Each person tucked into the magazine, all pleased with their rescue from the room's bright lights.

LET'S FIX THIS!

When I asked the author for her premise line, I learned that Libby is a housewife whose husband handles everything. Her desire line and how she struggles against opposition to achieve it were unclear. This is the third Fix-it column I have contributed to *WriteOn!*: query letter, synopsis, and now layering. Always, the best opportunities to strengthen the submissions begin with the premise line. In women's fiction, there is often a very clear weakness/need driving the hero as well as a brilliant self-revelation at the end. The challenge is to build the hero's struggle to achieve a specific goal against great opposition. With this in mind, it will be easier to identify potential for layering.

Here, if the Libby is mainly a mom at the beginning, wouldn't she have far more concern for her children and more of a sense of panic? If she is crying, she might not even notice other patients. She might get hysterical or be demanding with the nurse. She might be stoic, then break down or call family or friends for help—revealing more opponents and allies. Perhaps she goes from frantic to exhausted and runs out of money to buy the cranky children snacks.

The unique names of the children raise other questions. Answers could reveal details that add more layers. If Paul, Libby, and his children have different skin tones, is prejudice part of the delay getting help? Or is the hospital busy due to a bus crash, or understaffed due to the local economics?

Libby is introduced as a skilled illustrator, which foreshadows her options later. Why does she have a quality ink pen with her now? What kind of purse does she pull it from? Perhaps she draws an image that becomes symbolic of the theme.

My revision takes liberties in ways that may not match the author's intent. I've also added a few extra lines to set up the narrative drive. My goal is to show how specific details can help hook the reader with clarity, complexity, and meaning. These are the first ingredients of a layered story.

Final note: don't worry. Most writers revise the first page more than any other. It's that important—and that difficult. Good luck!

REVISED SUBMISSION

1973

Parramatta, Sydney,
Australia

Libby

The fluorescent glare made twenty-two-year-old Libby Harris squint across the hospital waiting room to find empty chairs. She shifted baby Dion in her arms and braced under the weight of her husband's arm, then led him and six year old Tamsin past other moaning and bloodied patients. Libby eased all 200 pounds of Paul down until he dropped into the metal seat, then tucked her cardigan behind his matted curls. She set the baby on the muddy carpet. A little dirt wouldn't kill him, but not having a daddy might.

The fever spiked so quickly that Paul had fallen beard first into his dinner. She felt his slick forehead again now, then spied Dion crawling through a pile of wet leaves. If he got to the nurse's station, maybe they'd have a heart and move his daddy up the list. At twenty-five, Paul was too young to die. When the nurse was nearby helping a frail woman in a wheelchair, Libby smoothed her blonde hair behind her ears and waved.

"Excuse me?"

The nurse ignored her. Libby retrieved the baby and shushed his startled cry. Then she rubbed Paul's leg, softly at first, then pressing into the muscle made hard from construction work for proof he was still solid, still with them. A man in a shiny vest swore as he hung up the payphone on the cinderblock wall. Libby dug into her overalls for change to call Paul's brother, then thought better of it. He was the last person who would help, even with the rent. But who else was there?

Tamsin returned with a torn magazine open to a family smiling in their Easter best. The lipsticked mom held a jar of skin cream beneath the caption, Daily Gratitude.

Libby snorted.

"Mama, I'm hungry," Tamsin said.

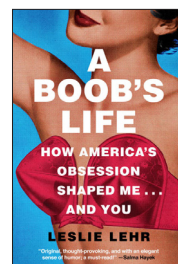
Libby foraged for crackers in the worn diaper bag and found a red crayon. The nurse called another name, not Paul's. While Tamsin snacked, Libby slashed the glossy magazine image. As the hours ticked away, the children slept. Libby colored to keep from crying. Her red wax captured the bloodied man, the lady in the wheelchair, and the ugly nurse who ignored them.

"Paul Harris?"

Libby helped him up. She was flush with gratitude, the real kind.



Leslie Lehr is the Novel Consultant for Truby Writers Studio and the author of seven books, including *A Boob's Life: How America's Obsession Shaped You and Me*, a People magazine "must-read" in development with producer Salma Hayek for HBOMax.



AND SHE THOUGHT SHE WAS DONE

By Kay Arthur

Grace Sammon had reached that point in her life where she was wondering what she would do after retirement. If she wasn't working as an educator, and her role as mother and daughter had changed, who was she and what did the rest of her life look like?

"I thought that after I retired, I would be done," she said with a laugh.

But, for her, done wasn't in the cards.

Grace and I had a wonderful conversation about life, books, transitions, and what it all means. I related strongly to what she had been feeling, how to act on those feelings, how to look at doors as open not closed, and following new paths without fear.



Grace is a Long Island, New York native who moved down the East Coast, spending most of her years in the Washington, DC area before settling in Florida. She was an educator for over 20 years, championing high school reform and career academies. She had written a few non-fiction books but the thought of writing a novel had not been in her life plan. But then, Grace has never shied away from an entrepreneurial seed.

"Maybe you should write a book," sounded like an idea she could lean into. She accepted the challenge and expected she'd write the book and be done. But then her entrepreneurial spirit took hold and grew.

Her independently published debut novel, *The Eves*, is a multigenerational story about lives in transition, lives well

lived, and the identity challenges we face at every age. The novel tells the story of so many of us as we embark on our life journey roles.

She said, "I wrote the prologue and knew the ending." However, it was her freedom of creativity that carried her through the rest of the book. And what a success that has been for her, in immeasurable ways.

It was all that came *after* the novel was published that changed the course of her writing journey. Thinking she was *done* was a gross misjudgment of her perception of life after retirement.

The Eves has opened doors for Grace. "I didn't know anything about social media, or even how to edit a post," she said. And, now, she is the queen of media.

"MAYBE YOU SHOULD WRITE A BOOK," SOUNDED LIKE AN IDEA SHE COULD LEAN INTO. SHE ACCEPTED THE CHALLENGE AND EXPECTED SHE'D WRITE THE BOOK AND BE DONE. BUT THEN HER ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT TOOK HOLD AND GREW.

Continued on page 16

FEATURE

Additionally, giving back to the writing community has become her focus. She's the founder of Author Talk Network (www.AuthorTalkNetwork.com) and has her own radio show, "The Storytellers" (airing on Authors on the Air Global Radio and where most people get their podcasts.). The show is where authors tell their personal stories about creating their art. She also hosts "Launch Pad", a radio show that celebrates authors and their new releases.

"Life isn't over after you think it is," was her message to me, that I took to heart. And exactly what I needed to hear.

Thank you, Grace, for not being done and for your contribution to the writing world and our members.

You can find Grace at <http://www.gracesammon.net>

GRACE'S MARKETING AND WRITING WISDOM :

■ **Marketing goals** - have a plan for where you want your book to take you; identify and engage actively in writing and reading communities.

■ **Marketing tool** - create a two-minute video trailer of your book, it builds engagement and provides credibility to the press.

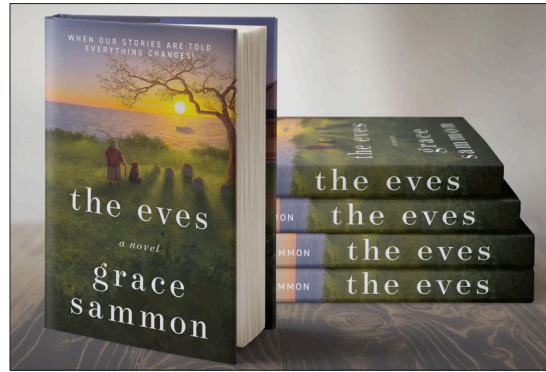
WORDS OF ADVICE:

■ Find your networking home. WFWA has provided an anchor for her - a community where she can always learn and share with the author community. Interviewing our communications team to promote Women's Fiction Day, the importance of a writing community, and the focus on women's voices in stories is just one example of "giving back" to our members.

■ Know why you want to write a book. Answer that question before you sit down and write.

■ Define your definition of success. What does it mean - to you?

■ And, never say you're done.



Eighteen Hundred Square Feet and a Cat

As soon as I open the door, the heat from the waist-high, silver-painted radiator hits me. Gabler raises her head just long enough to acknowledge me before she curls back up on the shelf over the radiator. She is 12 pounds of cat, and nearly 14 years of age. She's a beautiful Tabby, but Gabler now pales in comparison to her theatrically-strong, Hedda Gabler namesake.

Roy, my general contractor, has a soft spot for cats. He has not only built her the shelf to perch on but also a rather attractive little flight of stairs to help her get to the warmth of the radiator. Like everything Roy does, it is methodical and done with great attention to detail. The little staircase matches my main staircase exactly, complete with banister and newel posts. The fact that these two pieces sit "kitty corner" from each other isn't lost on me. It was a sweet gesture.

I peel off my sweatshirt and toss it on to the bicycle parked at the foot of the staircase. There, it joins an array of clothes that don't ever quite make it upstairs. I toss the house keys into the bicycle basket, where they sink to the bottom of an olio of odds and ends. As I head down the hallway towards the kitchen, I almost realize that the place is in more disarray than I'd like. I'd also admit, but only to myself, that there's probably something wrong with my being in the house less than a minute and the fact that I am already in the kitchen pouring vodka into a crystal tumbler. Neat, no ice, just the biting warmth of a double shot of vodka on which to mull the day and Sonia's comment. As I turn and lean against the cabinets on the east wall of the kitchen, relaxing into the safety of this space, I see the note taped to the counter. Roy does this daily as he leaves. It will outline what he's done and where we need to go next with the renovation. Most days, I read them.

"Jes," it says. He's the only one who calls me that. To everyone else I am, and have always been, Jessica. Unless, of course, you add the - always a warning that you are in trouble - middle name. "Jessica Marie" coming out of either parent's mouth was enough to make me stop what I was doing and coil with guilt, justified or otherwise.

To Roy, however, I was, immediately, just "Jes," not even with the second "s." He must think I am a lot more uncomplicated and straightforward than I feel.

"Jes, the plastering on the wall in the hall is done, his note reads. I've got the new kitchen door in - I also installed the up-dated humidity gadget for the space over the windows in the dining room - I'm glad we found a better home for the orchids than the floor of the bathtub. You've probably noticed that already."

I hadn't.

WFWA FORMALIZES AND EXPANDS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

As WFWA moves into our tenth year, we have grown to support one of our earliest dreams—to provide scholarships for our programs and help members engage with the community.

We believe that women's fiction heightens human connection, engenders empathy, and illuminates new perspectives. By consciously supporting all voices and providing tools and resources to rigorously develop craft, the Women's Fiction Writers Association fosters successful careers, meaningful relationships, and the creation of resonant, diverse stories.

Thanks to member financial generosity, and with the guidance of the volunteer Scholarship Committee, we are pleased to announce an expansion to the scholarship program.

THE WOMEN'S FICTION WRITERS ASSOCIATION PROVIDES SCHOLARSHIPS FOR MEMBERS:

- With financial need.
- Who identify as BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and/or those with a disability who have been underrepresented in the publishing industry.

NEW SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES COMING SOON

■ **Retreat scholarships:** WFWA retreats are our signature annual events. One scholarship in each category listed above is available for each WFWA retreat and conference. In 2023, each retreat scholarship winner will be granted a maximum award of \$1,900. This amount will be used to reimburse scholarship winners for registration fees, hotel, and qualifying travel expenses.

■ **Workshop scholarships:** WFWA recognizes that not everyone can take time away from work or family to attend an in-person retreat. Therefore, the organization will offer one scholarship in each category listed above for each WFWA online workshop.

■ **Technology scholarships:** WFWA offers technology scholarships for writing-related hardware or software of up to \$300 for members in the categories listed above. The number of scholarships awarded per year is based on funding availability.

We invite all eligible members to take advantage of this important program. Our scholarships help connect our community, open doors, and support our vision to bring diverse stories to the world. For more information or for questions about this program visit the WFWA website scholarship page or contact us directly.

“

I am so grateful for the scholarship to attend the Just Write retreat in Asheville because it gave me the opportunity to meet fellow writers, swap business—and craft-related tips, and most of all, focus on writing. I flew to North Carolina with just a seed of an idea for my second novel, and now I am well into the first draft. The scholarship helped pay my way, and the time to just write was a precious gift because I so rarely have it at home. As soon as I returned home, I was thrown right back into “real life” with an overflowing litter box and debris from my child’s weekend playdate strewn about the house. There’s no way I could have been able to afford the luxury of this retreat without the help of the scholarship and the generous leaders at WFWA. I know for a fact I would not have started my book if it weren’t for the retreat.

– Amanda Johnson

I want to see disabled stories hit the bookshelves and more disabled protagonists in books.

I want to help give them the voice they deserve. I would also love to see more disabled writer representation within the writing community. Being disabled is no easy task. Many people, like me, struggle in their daily lives. However, I am lucky to be alive, and I cherish every moment of that time—pain and all. Without that, I wouldn’t be here to watch my children grow.

Without scholarships like the one WFWA is offering, there is *literally* no way I could attend [the Just Write Retreat]. When I applied, I was so happy about the opportunity. I didn’t care who got the scholarship—I was just so excited that one was offered. When I received the email saying that I’d been offered the scholarship, I was floored! I have never been lucky, but perhaps my luck has changed. I am honored to be chosen. I am humbled that out of all the essays, mine was picked. I cannot wait to bring more disabled representation to the publishing world. I cannot wait to help other disabled writers.

– Carmen DaVinleam

”

WFWA is a volunteer-run organization. Every position is filled by a member of our community and we are committed to acknowledging our volunteers' generosity of time, thought, and energy.



OUR FEATURED VOLUNTEERS: THE SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE

HERE IS WHAT THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE PROGRAM.



TARA BAISDEN

"Every single member of WFWA is a priceless human being. We are all important and have a voice. By volunteering on the Scholarship Committee, I feel as if I am one tiny piece of this huge effort in making sure every voice is heard and recognized, regardless of race, financial status, and/or hardships. If our efforts help one person succeed and reach their goal of authorship, then we all succeed. We rise by lifting others!"



STEPHANIE CLAYPOOL

"The members of WFWA have done so much to help me (and many others) in my writing endeavors. If we can give a chance to someone who otherwise might not be able to take part in all we have to offer, then I am happy to do whatever I can to make it happen."



LYN DIENER

"I am grateful to be part of an organization, and this committee, that is finding ways to include writers who might otherwise get left out. The voices of the writers applying for these scholarships need to be heard, too."

KATHY DODSON

"I'm thrilled WFWA is expanding the scholarship program and wanted to be a part of this change. Scholarships give more people a chance to improve their writing and have their voices heard."



JANET RUNDQUIST

"A writing community is only as strong as its provision for any individual member. Scholarships provide one small way to support WFWA's members. I volunteer to help reach the goal of providing for every member."



KAY SMITH-BLUM

"WFWA inclusive community offers multiple ways for writers to improve their craft all year long. Offering scholarships to support deserving emerging writers is a natural extension of the WFWA philosophy."

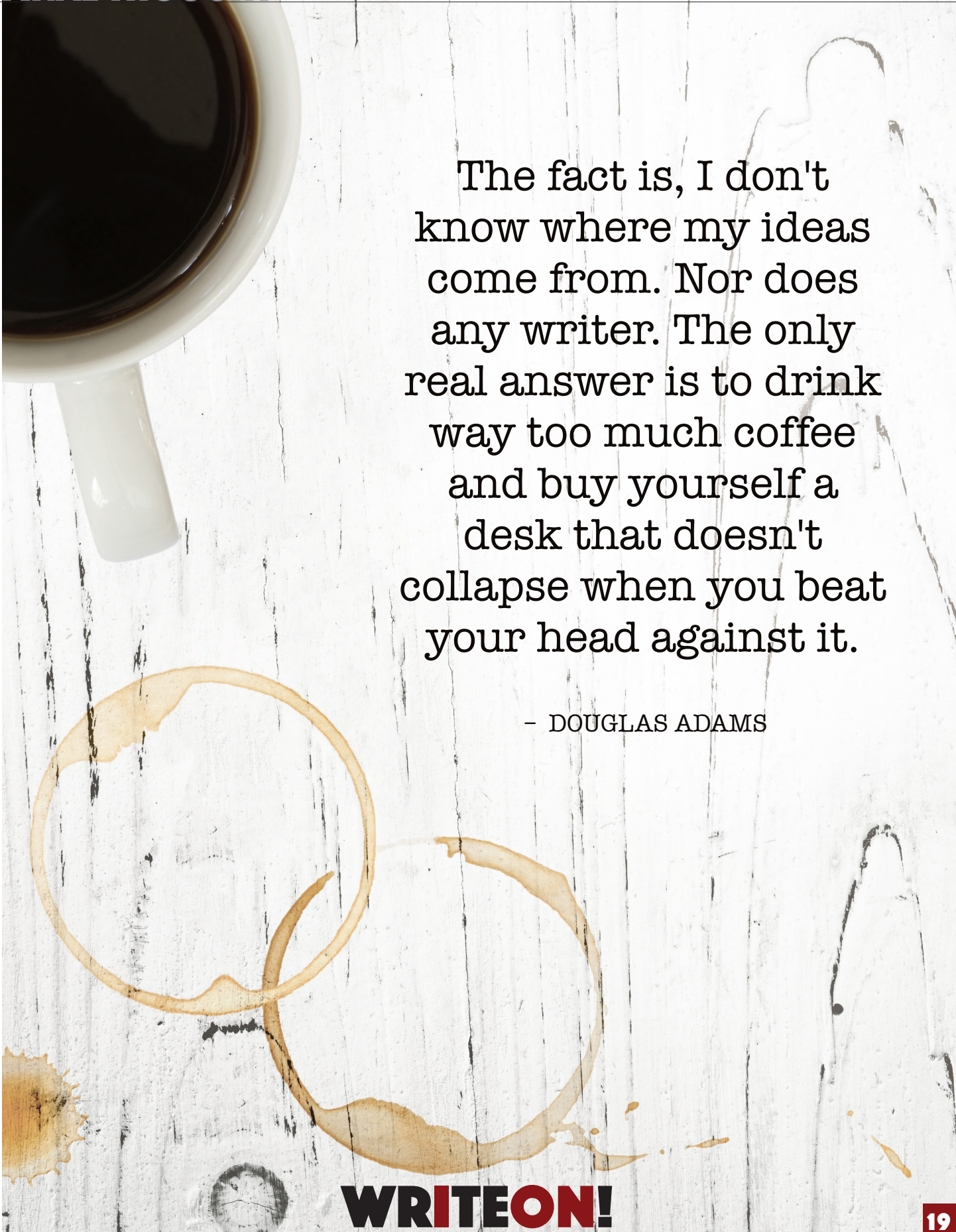


LEANNE TREESE

"I was looking for a way to give back to WFWA and volunteered to serve on the Scholarship Committee last year. It has been a great experience. I'm very excited that, due in part to the success of last year's auction, we are able to expand offerings this year to include financial assistance for retreats, technology needs, and workshops."



Thank you, everyone, for volunteering for this great program. We appreciate all of you!



The fact is, I don't know where my ideas come from. Nor does any writer. The only real answer is to drink way too much coffee and buy yourself a desk that doesn't collapse when you beat your head against it.

- DOUGLAS ADAMS