



Issue 32

Arizona Authors Association

June/July 2024

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Editor's Note

I feel fortunate to have a cadre of skilled authors writing regular articles for this newsletter. What a pleasure to receive thoughtfully conceived, expertly crafted pieces I can easily incorporate into my template.

Much of my previous editing involved nearly a decade of struggling to make sense of dozens of Ph.D. candidates' incomprehensible scribbles for psychology dissertations. As the years plodded on, I remained astonished over the pervasive inability of allegedly erudite, native-English-speaking individuals to compose a coherent sentence.

Foreign students, on the other hand, demonstrated some difficulty with syntax, idioms, and the irregular spelling of English. But their proficiency with composition was far superior to my U.S.-educated clients.

When I was in high school in the 60s, one didn't graduate until one had successfully passed 11th grade English Composition class. You had to prove you could write an essay composed of lucid paragraphs, offering an introduction of a topic, the development of said topic, and a reasoned conclusion. Most of my Ph.D. clients had no clue as to how to accomplish this. WTF, man?

In addition to charging the most seriously inept of these an exorbitant hourly fee, I assigned my victims the reading of Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*—an estimable little book that outlines the basic rules of English composition. I highly recommend it, and still consult it from time to time.

Association Leadership

Board of Directors

President/Webmaster	Kathleen Cook
Vice Pres/Treas/Contest Chair	Jane Ruby
Secretary/Editor-in-Chief	Penny Orloff
Board Member at Large	Mark Walker
President Emeritus/Historian	Toby Heathcotte

Additional Staff

Forum Administrator	Kyle Patton
Social Media/Blog Admin	Vijaya Schartz

A Reminder: Our new address is
Arizona Authors Association
Box 538
428 E. Thunderbird Rd.
Phoenix AZ 85022

Please send all checks, money orders, and any other correspondence to the new address.

Unless expressly stated, Arizona Authors Association, including its newsletter staff, neither endorses nor takes responsibility for the opinions expressed in this publication. Send editorial correspondence and newsletter submissions to pennyorloff@me.com

President's Message

By Kathleen Cook

Hello, everyone!

The new Board of Directors, elected in January, has had a busy four months. We've held two board meetings and voted on some changes that will enable us to serve our membership more successfully. We've created new bylaws, added credit cards to our payment options, discussed ways to increase events (both in-person and online), and opted to create new features for the website, which will be coming soon. All of this was accomplished while holding the line on membership prices, which have not increased in nearly a decade.

We've also added to our membership since January, and launched the 2024 Literary Contest with even more prizes than ever before. We also have more, larger cash prizes than last year. We will be paying out nearly two grand in prizes, thanks in large part to a special grant from Penny Orloff's Chaspen Foundation for the Arts (www.chaspenarts.org). It's never been this exciting to be a member of the Arizona Authors Association!

There are so many things that you can do to help us be even better. If you haven't created your web page yet, please do so. It helps you tremendously to increase your prestige as a writer, and it helps us to gain an even bigger presence on the world wide web.

It's easy to add your web page; just send me a "portrait sized" (taller rather than wider) picture of yourself, preferably a head shot, and a short biography (200-400 words is ideal, but it can be longer or shorter as you wish). Include links to your books on Amazon or elsewhere, if any, or links to any articles you've written and published over the years, even if they are only published on your website. Let us know which or your books, if any, you'd like to feature on your page, as well as whether or not you wish for your email to be published. That's it! Easy peasy ... I'll do all the rest and have your web page up within a few days.

Some of our members are receiving multiple hits per day on their member pages ... those potential patrons could be looking for you, as well.

If you haven't yet entered the Arizona Authors Literary Contest, please consider doing so by the June 1 deadline. Do you have a published fiction or nonfiction book languishing in a corner, one that never received the recognition it deserved? Give it a new lease on life by entering it in the Oldie but Goldie category. No worries on when it was published ... any time within the past fifty years is fine. If it deserves another chance, then give it one!

With all of you helping us to make Arizona Authors a premier literary association, I have no doubt that we're going to get better and better as time passes. Thank you for the privilege of your membership!

Peace, Katy



Kathleen Cook joined the Arizona Authors Association in 2009 and served as its proofreader from 2014-2016. Katy edited the *Arizona Authors Association Digest* from 2019-2023 and joined the Board of Directors in 2020. She currently serves as the Association's President, web administrator, and assistant contest administrator.

Show up, show up, show up, and after a while the muse shows up, too. —Isabel Allende

Arizona Authors Association

Membership Benefits and Digest Submission Guidelines

Please send your news and articles in Word, Notepad, or Wordpad. Pictures may be gif, png, or jpeg. Pictures smaller than 2"x4" cannot be enlarged without deterioration. All submissions are subject to light editing/proofreading. You will be informed in advance of publication if extensive edits are needed. The deadline for all features, articles, news, and submissions is **July 10**. Late submissions will be held for a future issue. Please send submissions to: pennyorloff@me.com.

Membership Benefits

Annual Literary Contest – An opportunity to showcase your work, and the possibility of earning awards that will enhance your reputation as an author. Contest is open to fiction, nonfiction, short stories, poetry, Young Adult books, and children's picture books. Do you have an older book that never got the recognition it deserved? Relaunch and renew interest in it through our "Oldie but Goldie" category. **DEADLINE: JUNE 1 !!**

Online Workshops/Book Fairs/Other Events through AAA Zoom account at no cost to members.

The Digest – A bimonthly newsletter and guide to workshops, events, and activities - many of them free or low cost - designed to hone your skills as a writer. In addition, both our Digest and our blog offer articles, advice, and insight to reinforce your expertise.

Book Releases – Books released within the previous six months (or about to be released) receive a free, color ad. Promote your work and increase your visibility with a minimum of expense and effort. We'd love to advertise your new work in our next issue.

Free Digest Advertising under the Arizona Authors Association banner. One of the greatest benefits of Arizona Authors Association membership is the opportunity to reach others with your advertisements. At present, members may submit a quarter-page ad for author-related services without cost.

Our Congratulations Page is designed to report your accomplishments, to applaud your efforts, and to inspire other members. Let us know what you've been up to!

Submissions to the Digest

Features – We welcome original, previously unpublished articles between 800-1200 words to motivate, educate, and inspire writers, enhance their skills, assist in publishing/promoting their works, etc. (longer or shorter submissions will be considered).

What Are You Reading? – Share your current reading adventure in 200 words or less. Or submit an article highlighting a book and its author. Tell us what you like or dislike about a book written by someone other than yourself, to help other members in their quest for new reading material.

Road to Imagination – Submit your finished original stories of 800 words or less based upon the previous issue's story prompt. This ongoing exercise is a fine way to practice your craft. Try it!

New Book Releases– Send a pdf or jpg of your book's cover, and a short blurb. Include some info about you.

Arizona Landscape Photos – We are always on the lookout for inspiring space fillers for our Digest. If you send a photo, please be sure to credit the photographer and state that you have obtained permission to use the photo.

Writing Related Events – We are delighted to list any upcoming writing-related events, meetings, workshops, book sales, book signings, etc., across the state or in nearby regions as space permits.

Professional Services Ads – If you offer editing, proofreading, coaching, or other literary services, submit a print-ready, quarter-page jpg or pdf ad. This benefit is provided at no cost to members in good standing.

You can only write regularly if you're willing to write badly... Accept bad writing as a way of priming the pump, a warm-up exercise that allows you to write well. – Jennifer Egan

Recent Events

The April **Scottsdale Society of Women Writers** meeting hosted publications marketing expert Courtney Schwauben Haik, a ghost writer and freelance writer, who works in public relations. The May meeting featured SSWW member Betty Webb, mystery writer and novelist of many award-winning books. For information about the SSWW, contact Patricia through text at 480-250-5556, by email at patricia@plbrooks.com, or through her website www.brooksgoldmannpublishing.com.

On April 23, Bob Nelson of Mesa-based publisher Brick Cave Media introduced the company's newly signed author, AAA member **Adrienne Bengtson** (writing as **Adrienne Miles**) in a virtual Meet and Greet. Adrienne is retired from the US Air Force and a former librarian, whose debut novel, *Spider's Wyrld*, is scheduled for release in late 2024/early 2025. <https://adriennemiles.com>

On April 21, Arizona Authors Association and PEN America's Arizona chapter, led by AAA member **Michelle Beaver**, co-hosted "Shameless Plug"—a mixer for local members of both groups to mingle and share drinks, pastries, and lively conversation at Cultivate Coffee in Phoenix. Attendees each took a few minutes to plug a book, article, upcoming project, website, social media handle, or current work.



Summer morning. Photo by Janet Crum. Permission granted.

And so with the sunshine and the great bursts of leaves growing on the trees, just as things grow in fast movies, I had that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

Upcoming Events

June 1, 1-2 pm: Multi-award-winning writer Marilyn June Janson will conduct a free Short Story Writing Workshop: Fiction, Creative Nonfiction, and Memoirs, at the Red Mountain Library, 635 N. Power Rd, Mesa. Contact: 480-644-3100. Info: events.mesalibrary.org

From **June 6 – 16**, author/playwright Diana Grillo's 10-minute play, *The Package*, will be featured in the Theatre Summer Shorts production at The Artists Studio, 4848 Cactus Rd., Scottsdale. Tickets: www.thestudiophx.org

June 8, 10-noon, MST, Patricia Brooks presents "Write a Memoir to Remember," a free Zoom workshop. Patricia shows you how to find your voice and give yourself permission to write your truth. For information or to register, email patricia@plbrooks.com or text her at 480-250-5556 to information and to register.

The upcoming Scottsdale Society of Women Writers speakers are:

June 26: published poet Christy White, a member of Arizona Poetry Society.

July 31: Darlene Ziebell, published author and business growth expert (for authors, too).

For more information regarding SSWW, please see www.brooksgoldmannpublishing.com

Tell Me Your Story is **Donis Casey's** monthly series of author essays (<https://doniscasey.com>).

Her **June 20-30** guest is bestselling historical mystery author, Laura Joh Rowland. A former aerospace scientist, a painter, and a cartoonist, Laura's newest series is set in Victorian London and features photographer Miss Sarah Bain. A previous series, featuring medieval Japanese samurai detective Sano Ichirohas, has been published in 21 countries and nominated for major prizes. Laura has also written a historical suspense series featuring Charlotte Bronte. More at www.laurajohrowland.com/.

From **July 20-31**, Donis hosts **Alexander Marriott** (<https://historymystery.blog>), whose debut mystery novel, *The School of Homer*, has just been released. A trained historian and amateur world traveler, Alex writes on American intellectual and political history, and contemporary culture and society. He also publishes detective novels featuring Chicago sleuth, Virgil Colvin, transplanted for life's second act in Greece. Alex teaches history at a Houston area Community College.

Scottsdale's 3rd annual Desert Foothills Book Festival, scheduled for **October 19**, 2024, is taking author registrations now until August 31. For information and to register, go to www.desertfoothillsbookfestival.com.

A Glance Back

by Toby Heathcotte, AAA Historian

When AAA and Desert Foothills Library Co-Hosted Author Events

The Desert Foothills Book Festival began in 2008, co-sponsored with Arizona Authors Association as a series of salons in the home of two Cave Creek members, Melanie Lee and Louis Michaelski. These morning events provided refreshments and discussions featuring a different topic each month, including Home, The Seasons, Journeys, Animals, etc. Over the years, the salons morphed into workshops.

In 2009 the co-hosted salon format moved to the Desert Foothills Library's bookshelf-lined conference room. One of the topics that year was Food in Literature. Participants brought their own writing and books by others.

By 2010 we offered our members the opportunity for co-sponsorship in their hometowns if they could secure the cooperation of a local library or bookstore. The salons continued at Desert Foothills in Cave Creek, with another beginning at Barnes & Noble, Val Vista, Mesa.

In 2013, Desert Foothills Library renamed the event "Writers Connection" and sponsored a workshop on The Art of Writing Memoirs. These events continue to this day. It's wonderful they have had so much success with this series, and I'm proud of the role AAA played.

* * *



Saturday, October 19, 2024
from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The Holland Center
34250 N 60th Street, Scottsdale, AZ

Author Registration deadline:
August 31, 2024.

Presented by the Holland Center and the Desert Foothills Library, the Desert Foothills Book Festival is a celebration of the importance of reading in our community. Offered free to the public, the festival exists to promote literacy and a love of reading among adults and children by creating an interactive venue for readers and authors to connect. Net proceeds support local literacy programs. More: desertfoothillsbookfestival.com

*I cannot remember the books I've read any more than the meals I have eaten;
even so, they have made me. — Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Welcome, New Members



Author of mainstream, political thriller, mystery, western, and paranormal non-fiction, **Dan Baldwin** has won or placed in Best Book, National Indie Excellence, Book Excellence, Society of Southwestern Authors, and New-Mexico-Arizona Book Awards competitions. For more info, see www.fourknightspress.com and www.danbaldwin.com



Attorney **Connie J. Mableson** routinely prepares and negotiates book publishing contracts and performs pre-publication legal reviews of non-fiction manuscripts. She is familiar with self-publishing, hybrid, and traditional publishing. She self-published her first 2 books; one was subsequently published by the American Bar Assn. More at www.literaryattorney.com.



Dick Waters began writing late—he discovered James Patterson's early novels when cancer forced him to read for enjoyment. He self-published the 5-novel Scott Tucker serial killer mystery series, set in 1960s New England. Dick loves to write flash fiction stories and has self-published two anthologies. His latest work is a self-help book focused on workplace behaviors.



Author of the award-winning short story collection, *Chola Salvation* (Arte Público Press, 2021) and the novel, *Huizache Women* (Arte Público Press, 2023), **Estella González** was a finalist for Texas Institute of Letters' Jesse H. Jones Best Book of Fiction Award. She won Cornell University's Philip Freund Creative Writing Prize, and gold medals at the International Latino Book Awards.



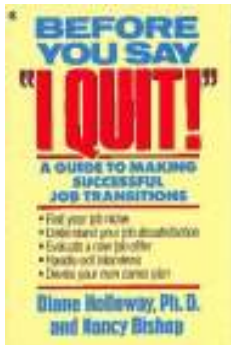
Sam Sterk, Ph.D., is a sport psychologist, psychoanalyst, and a certified master clinical hypnotherapist. He teaches medical hypnosis and is the immediate past president of the Arizona Society of Professional Hypnosis. Sam's published works include his memoir, *Sammy's Journey*, and *Win! Get the Mental Edge Skills in Martial Arts*, a sport psychology manual for martial artists.



Distinguished author, speaker, trainer, and mentor **Dr. Linda Sandel Pettit** is renowned for her insightful work, including a recent memoir, *Leaning into Curves: Trusting the Wild, Intuitive Way of Love*. She holds a doctorate in counseling psychology, a master's in counselor education, and a bachelor's degree in journalism.

*If you write what you yourself sincerely think and feel and are interested in...
you will interest other people. — Rachel Carson*

Congratulations!



Dr. Diane Holloway Cheney has been accepted as a member of The Authors' Guild, a national organization for writers who have been published by a traditional publishing company (*I Quit*, Macmillan, 1990) "Having released a single book through a traditional publisher qualifies you for this prestigious roster," she says. "Traditionally published AAA writers will probably find great value in their services and discussions of various problems."

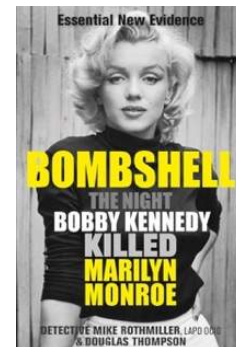
"Panic Mode," an essay by multi-award-winning writer **Marilyn June Janson**, owner of Janson Literary Services, Inc., appears in Persimmon Tree Journal's Spring 2024 edition. See persimmontree.org/spring-2024/visions-for-america

Arizona based publisher Brick Cave Media has acquired the rights to *Spider's Wyrd*, the debut novel from author **Adrienne Miles**. Her science fantasy tale takes the reader into a new universe of Starfighter Ulla Thorsdaughter, shot down in the backcountry of the planet her ship was deployed to protect. Ulla wants only to get back into the sky. The Fates have other plans, and the mid-career starfighter must embrace newfound psi skills and become an integral part of a community she knows almost nothing about.



Vali Benson's novel, *Blood and Silver*, has won the Grand Prize at the 2024 Great Southwest Book Festival. Published in April, 2020, the novel won 1st prize for fiction at the 2021 Arizona Literary Awards and top honors in the History and YA categories at the 2021 San Francisco Book Festival. *Blood and Silver* also won the NY Book Festival, Paris Book Festival, Moonbeam Book Awards, Royal Dragonfly Book Awards, 2021 American Fiction Awards, and 2022 International Book Awards.

A celebrated actress and her management company have combined forces to option the TV/Movie rights to *Bombshell: The Night Bobby Kennedy Killed Marilyn Monroe*, by **Mike Rothmiller** and his writing partner, Douglas Thompson. As a detective of the Organized Crime Intelligence Division (OCID) of the LAPD, Rothmiller had direct personal access to hundreds of restricted LAPD files on exactly what happened at Marilyn Monroe's Californian home on August 5, 1962. Available in four formats at Amazon.com.



Linda Sandel Pettit has won the 2024 Best Inspirational and Self-Help Maxy Award for her recent book, *Leaning Into Curves: Trusting the Wild, Intuitive Way of Love*.

*You are never given a dream without also being given the power to make it true.
You may have to work for it, however. – Richard Bach*

Free Ink from Story Monsters



"My life's mission is to get excellent books in the hands of as many kids as possible. Story Monsters Ink is an incredible resource for teachers and librarians and parents—anyone at all—who shares that mission. Through feature stories about talented children's book authors and illustrators and kid-friendly book-inspired activities, Story Monsters Ink does a wonderful job of bringing books to life and introducing kids to the joys of reading for fun. I urge you to pick up this magazine. You'll love it!"

— Judy Newman,
Chief Impact
Officer, Scholastic

Would you like *Story Monsters Ink* to review your book? We accept Picture Books up to Young Adult and family-friendly adult titles from Small Presses, Traditional Publishers, and Self-Published authors, and our reviews are published in *Story Monsters Ink* magazine. We charge no fees for reviews and we have no publication date restrictions.

For book submission guidelines, email cristy@storymonsters.com.

About *Story Monsters Ink*: Through our partnerships with the National Education Association (NEA) and Gale/Cengage, our digital content is available to teachers, librarians, and students in 88 percent of public libraries and 93 percent of public schools in the US! *Story Monsters Ink* is now a part of the EBSCO Subscription Services Division (SSD) and Flipster for public and university libraries, which is a research database that receives over 500 million searches per day.

www.StoryMonstersInk.com Selected as one of the 5 Best Book Marketing Companies in the United States!

Linda F. Radke
Monster-in-Chief
Story Monsters Ink
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Parents
(480) 940-8182 [Story Monsters Ink](http://StoryMonstersInk.com)
Little Green Library
A Free Book Place for Story Monsters®





Patricia is president/founder of Brooks Goldmann Publishing Company, LLC and Scottsdale Society of Women Writers. *Sick as My Secrets* covers her 35-years of recovery. *Three Husbands and a Thousand Boyfriends* addresses love addiction. *Gifts of Sisterhood* is a tribute to her sister who passed away from lung cancer. Find out more about Patricia on her website:

brooksgoldmannpublishing.com



One of Patricia's award-winning memoirs, *Sick as My Secrets*, is on sale now.

Write A Memoir to Remember

Free Online Zoom Workshop Available to all Members
Presented by Award-Winning Author Patricia L. Brooks
Saturday, June 8th, 2024 10am-Noon MST.

Email [Patricia L. Brooks](mailto:patricia@plbrooks.com) or [Vice President Jane Ruby](mailto:jane@plbrooks.com) to participate.

We are experiencing an unprecedented time in our history. Our lives have changed in so many ways. In an encouraging and insightful presentation, Patricia will help you capture your untold story. Through her highly regarded presentation, she will share with you how to produce this memoir to your own satisfaction, face your fears and conquer your story's emotional essence.

With tips and techniques from her own daring memoirs, (*Gifts of Sisterhood*, *Three Husbands and a Thousand Boyfriends*, and *Sick as My Secrets*), Patricia will inspire you to take the necessary steps to complete your manuscript. She will also discuss why you should: keep a writing journal, do the necessary research, write goals and make no excuses about your writing.

In this workshop, Patricia stimulates your creative talents by showing you how to break through your silence to find your voice and give yourself permission to write your truth. Considering what has been happening in the world, now is a great time to record your stories for posterity.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the real Theme of your memoir
- Learn to dig deep to get to the Soul of the story
- Discover the Depth and Challenge of your memoir
- Realize you can Speak your Truth

Contact Patricia at patricia@plbrooks.com or text her at 480-250-5556 for more information on this free Zoom workshop.



On April 21, Arizona Authors Association and PEN America’s Arizona chapter, founded and led by AAA member **Michelle Beaver**, co-hosted “Shameless Plug”—a mixer for local members of both groups to mingle and share beverages, pastries, and conversation at Cultivate Coffee in Phoenix. Many of the 30 or so attendees each took a few minutes to plug their books, upcoming projects, websites, or other works. **Andrew White** (*below*), Senior Manager of PEN Across America in New York, addressed the group regarding PEN America’s ongoing efforts to support the free expression of widely disparate points of view.



Founded in 1922, PEN America stands at the intersection of literature and human rights to support free expression worldwide. PEN members have included Maya Angelou, Langston Hughes, John Steinbeck, Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison, and others. Launched by **Michelle Beaver** in 2022, the Arizona chapter has hosted events at Changing Hands Bookstore, Grassrootz Bookstore, Palabras Bilingual Bookstore, downtown Phoenix restaurants, and other locations. The coming year will include more great panels as well as social events featuring complementary appetizers and drinks. PEN membership is not mandatory for attendance. For more information regarding membership and upcoming events, contact Michelle at: Michelle.L.Beaver@gmail.com.

What is freedom of expression? Without the freedom to offend, it ceases to exist.
—Salman Rushdie

Poets' Corner

Sumer is icumen in – Anon., 13th Century

Sumer is icumen in,
Lhude sing cuccu!
Groweþ sed and bloweþ med
And springþ þe wde nu,
Sing cuccu!

Awe bleteþ after lomb,
Lhouþ after calue cu.
Bulluc sterteþ, bucke uerteþ,
Murie sing cuccu!
Cuccu, cuccu, wel singes þu cuccu;
Ne swik þu nauer nu.

Sing cuccu nu. Sing cuccu.
Sing cuccu. Sing cuccu nu!

Summer has come in,
Loudly sing, Cuckoo!
Groweth seed and bloometh meadow
And springeth alive the wood now,
Sing, Cuckoo!

Ewe bleateth after lamb
Cow loweth after calf.
Bullock starteth, buck cavorteth,
Merrily sing, Cuckoo!
Cuckoo, cuckoo, well singest thou, cuckoo;
Never thou stop now,
Sing, Cuckoo. Sing cuckoo now!

The Tempest – William Shakespeare:

Where the bee sucks, there suck I:
In a cowslip's bell I lie;
There I couch when owls do cry.

On the bat's back I do fly
After summer merrily:
Merrily, merrily, shall I live now,
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.

Summer Stars – Carl Sandburg

Bend low again, night of summer stars.
So near you are, sky of summer stars,
So near, a long arm man can pick off stars,
Pick off what he wants in the sky bowl,
So near you are, summer stars,
So near, strumming, strumming,
So lazy and hum-strumming.

Summer Mornings – Mary Oliver

Summer mornings, with their golden light and gentle
breeze,
Awakening the world with a whispered promise of joy.
Grasses adorned with dew-kissed diamonds,
As birdsong dances upon the fragrant air.
The sun's warm embrace on dewy skin,
A symphony of colors in fields of wildflowers.
With each breath, a sweet intoxication fills the soul,
As summer's magic unfolds.

I decided that it was not wisdom that enabled poets to write their poetry, but a kind of instinct or inspiration, such as you find in seers and prophets who deliver all their sublime messages without knowing in the least what they mean. – Socrates

Poetry lovers!!

We invite you to share your favorite seasonal poems with the members of Arizona Authors Association.
The deadline for submissions to the August/September *Digest* is **July 10**.

Looking for Comp Titles Catching Up with a Whole Genre

by Adrienne Miles

When it comes time to submit a manuscript for representation or publication, agents and publishers need to know where it fits among all the books that are currently being published. One bit of shorthand for this is a list of comparison titles, or “comps.”

Fair enough. That said, filling a box on a query form labeled “List some books that are similar to yours. (500 characters or less)” can be daunting to the uninitiated. Speculative fiction is only part of what I read, and for most of my adult life, my reading hours have been limited by, well, life.

What to do? I thought hard, perused *Writer’s Digest’s* gargantuan array of information and instruction, thumbed through several books, researched online, and pored over awards lists. I consulted the most recent *Locus Recommended Reading List* (<https://locusmag.com/2024/02/2023-recommended-reading-list/>)—which is awesome, by the way, for finding reading material. I found a zillion new favorite authors but no comps—at least nothing matchy-matchy, which is probably a good thing. But what was I supposed to type in that dratted rectangle on the query forms?

I started making headway at answering this question when I found the podcast, *The Shit No One Tells You About Writing*, whose delightful presenters critique real query letters submitted by listeners and often feature a guest speaker once the critiques are done. They have a *Substack*, too.

Then I discovered more agents who are actively demystifying the publishing process. I almost tripped over the *Short Fuse Guides* from Fuse Literary when researching agents to query. I sprang for the paid version of Kate McKean’s *Substack*, *Agents and Books*, when I read her post, “Don’t Be Dr. Frankenstein,” about comp titles because not only did that post answer my questions about comps, I learn something new every time she posts.

I learned some more at the *Las Vegas Writers Conference* in April 2023. They had an entire track on what to do with a finished manuscript.

One common thread running through almost all the advice I read or listened to was the recommendation to ask for help from a librarian to build a list of potential comparison titles. Then start reading. You want to make sure that the titles that look like comps actually are.

Duh. I’m a retired librarian; I have done reader advisory interviews by the bucketful. The tools for finding “read-alikes” have not changed much since I retired, so I dug in.

First I did the lazy thing. I went to *Goodreads*, selected books that came close, and went to the “Readers Also Enjoyed” display at the foot of the screen. This can be tricky because that list appears to be a list of other books that people who clicked on your target book also clicked on. I’m not the only person in the universe with eclectic taste in literature. But once you’re in the ballpark, eliminating the obvious duds is pretty simple. Amazon and Overdrive have similar services; the same caveats apply. I also had a great time on *fantasticfiction.com*, looking for books my favorite authors recommend.

As I plowed through the lists, it occurred to me that looking for comp titles is a little like networking. The best networking is rarely focused; it happens when you live your life and pay attention to the people around you. With that in mind, I added titles to my to-be-read list that may or may not be comps but I think I’ll enjoy reading.

Then I went into librarian mode and dived into some databases my local public library makes available: *Books and Authors*, *Literature Resource Center*, *Novelist*, and *WorldCat*. Most aren’t free, but many public libraries offer free access for library card holders.

The gold standard for reader advisory, though, is finding somebody who knows the genre inside and out. Somebody like the sweet, motherly children’s librarian where I used to work. She was our resident authority on true crime books.

Continued on next page

But wait! My local library lists a resource called *Your Next Great Read* in alphabetical order on its web page, right after *WorldCat*. It's their own form. Fill it out with the names of books and authors close to what you seek, give them your email address and library card number, press *submit*, and it'll be in the librarians' inbox.

You bet I filled that form out. Sure enough, a living, breathing librarian sent me a list of authors to try. While some on the list are familiar, many are new to me and I can't wait to read their work.

If you are looking for me, I'll have my nose in a book. I am re-learning the genre inside and out.



Adrienne Bengtson, who writes science fantasy as **Adrienne Miles**, picked back up her lifelong interest in writing after retiring from the U.S. Air Force and a 25-year career as a librarian. She is getting ready to publish her debut novel, *Spider's Wyrd*, with Brick Cave Media later this year. In addition to reading and writing, she enjoys travel, hiking, fiber arts, and doting on her daughters, sons-in-law, and grandchildren. She plays Celtic traditional music on the penny whistle and keyless flute, and sometimes plays the great Highland bagpipes in public. She lives in Mesa with her husband and their cats. For more: <https://adriennemiles.com>

Character and Conflict and Plot

by Dan Baldwin

When asked, "Where do I start my novel? How do I get things moving?" I respond with, "Start with character and you'll find the conflict."

Character and conflict are the key elements in beginning a work and in keeping the reader's interest piqued all the way through to "The End." Everything flows from character. Conflict keeps that motion moving forward.

The Bad Guy. In the first of my Ashley Hayes thrillers, the villain is Clovis Bassett, a white guy who thinks he is a Caddo Indian god. One of the joys of writing that novel was entering into an insane mind. (I have been told that I have a good grasp of the criminal mind. I think that was a compliment.) Bassett is more than nuts; he's a serial killer.

His *Conflict* is his inability to remember "The Place of Crying." This is a real place in Arkansas where Caddo lore says the tribe emerged from the Earth's interior. It's a hill overlooking the Red River. Bassett believes he has to enter the earth at this place, become reborn, and return to rule as an angry god. He can't "remember" this location, which sends him on a bloody quest to find it.

The Good Guy. Detective Herbert Eugene "Bummer" LaSalle is a cop looking for the serial killer. Bummer is an overweight, aging, nearly-burnt-out cop. His *Conflict* is, obviously, finding the bad guy. A secondary conflict is with himself, primarily focused on his aging.

The Heroine. Ashley Maud "Ash" Hayes is an archaeology professor and an expert on the Caddo Indians. Additionally, she is an expert in wilderness survival. She studies survivalist techniques as a teaching aid. "Learn about ancient man by learning how he lived," she says.

Her *Conflict*. Ash studies and espouses European contact throughout the Americas prior to Columbus. This is the initial conflict the reader encounters. When LaSalle brings her in to help find Bassett because he believes she can "think Indian," the detective's conflict becomes her conflict, too.

That's how I begin a novel. The characters grab my attention. They tell me about their lives and their conflicts. Trust me, their lives and conflicts are far more interesting than anything I could make up on my own. When they start talking, I start writing. That's it.

"Er, Dan?"

"Yes?"

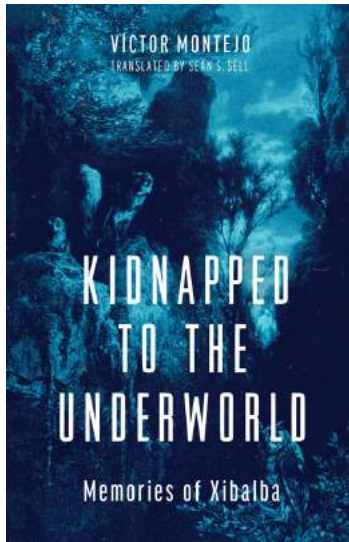
"What about plot?"

"If you have characters and conflict, you don't need a plot. Just listen to those characters and follow their lead."

For inspiration and more tips, go to www.fourknightspress.com and www.danbaldwin.com

I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work the more I have of it. — Thomas Jefferson

The Million Mile Walker Review: What We're Reading and Why By Mark D. Walker



Kidnapped to the Underworld, by Victor Montejo, defies conventional categorizations, transcending the boundaries of a family history, a religious testimony, a political allegory, and a work of sacred literature. Regardless of the genre one may assign, the book is a testament to the enduring power of storytelling among Indigenous peoples. It seems appropriate that it was published on the 500th anniversary of Spaniard Pedro Alvarado's conquest of the Maya in 1524—making this a time to reflect on its impact on one of the great civilizations of the Hemisphere.

The Spaniards viewed indigenous peoples as barbarians who needed control and civilization. Despite their relentless efforts to alter and eradicate Maya traditions and values, a significant number endure to this day. As a staunch defender of Mayan values, Montejo has chosen to resurrect his own grandfather's near-death experience as a poetic recreation of stories his mother told him. This modern act of preservation, itself, is a testament to the unwavering resilience of the Maya culture.

As a student, Montejo drew inspiration from the Popol Vuh, the sacred religious narrative of the Mayan K'iche people. His reading of Dante's *Divine Comedy* informed his poetic re-creation of a journey through the underworld.

In Montejo's narrative, two guides and protectors take his grandfather, Antonyo Esteban, to witness the suffering of the underworld—similar to Virgil leading Dante from the Valley of Pain to the eternal realms of suffering and saved souls. According to Montejo, his grandfather's vision reflected changes in the abstract conceptions that Indigenous people have about eternal values, and an afterlife. However, the story also reflects the worldview and certain concepts that have special meaning for the Maya community.

Montejo tells the story in first person, making the journey through Xiwb'alb'a, the dwelling place of the lords, even more personal. One of the stops during the trip is characterized by raucous music where drunks beat each other violently "like crazed, furious madmen. All were unrecognizable, as their faces and bodies were swollen from so much abuse. They fell and got back up, brutalized by the liquor they consumed without ceasing." To this day, alcoholism takes a tremendous toll on the health of Mayan communities.

Similar stories of suffering along the way included women who were unfaithful to their husbands, prostitutes, those who mistreated their horses, and those who beat their dogs. In a revealing encounter during his journey, Antonyo meets his own father, who reveals the sorrow he has experienced in his life of privation. "He worried that his children would continue to be enslaved by the forced labor that the governments ordered in those decades, keeping the Indigenous people in poverty."

The differences between Western and Indigenous worldviews are revealed in the choices of villains and representations of evil. In *Inferno*, Dante chooses Judas Iscariot, Brutus, and Cassius for the cruelest punishment—to be chewed in the three mouths of Lucifer—because they committed the most grievous sin: their betrayal of the finest of men out of sheer malevolence (Judas betrayed Jesus, the son of God; Brutus and Cassius betrayed Julius Caesar, the greatest of leaders).

For Montejo, this selection for unending torment went to the disgraced Catholic Priest Diego de Landa, who "came from the other side of the sea, not long ago, and burned and destroyed all the writings, histories, and literature of our people. He is the one who left our people orphans of wisdom when we could no longer use our way of writing... Instead of turning away from his true mission as a friar and bishop recognizing the knowledge and values of our peoples, he discredited and rejected them, destroying the wisdom of our ancestors..."

Not surprisingly, the individual boiling in blood in the depths of Xiwb'alb'a is Pedro Alvarado, the conquistador of much of Central America. "This was the conqueror who made thousands suffer and endure the war of conquest. His cruelty was that of a man possessed, and he caused intense pain and misery to the people he slaughtered; this was now the cause of his bloody ordeal. Here, then, were the most violent and hateful conquerors and genocides of all time..."

Continued on next page

The end of the book provides several reasons for its current relevance: "It shows us the deep religiosity of the Indigenous peoples of Guatemala...In addition, we can affirm that there are many similarities between the Catholic religion and Maya spirituality..."

I'd add another reason. In March of 2024, the first hearing of the Oral and Public Debate was held against former General Benedicto Lucas García for the crimes of genocide, sexual violence, and crimes against humanity committed during the dictatorship of his brother, Romeo Lucas García (1978-1982). The former President of Guatemala, General Rios Montt, already convicted of genocide and given 80 years in prison, died before the sentence could be carried out. Over 200,000 Guatemalans lost their lives during the ten-year Civil War, the majority at the hands of the Guatemalan armed forces, trained and supported by the United States. A vivid reminder of the racism which has plagued Maya communities for centuries.

I was introduced to Montejo over twenty years ago when I read his humorous, satirical story, "The Adventures of Mr. Puttison," about a North American adventurer mistakenly identified as the new Catholic priest by the local population of a small village in the highlands of Guatemala. I've reviewed seven of his twenty-plus books over the years and got to know him while researching a documentary I collaborated on about the impact of migration on Mayan communities, "Guatemala: Trouble in the Highlands."

Our production team was interested in Professor Montejo because we felt Mayan intellectuals like him would tell the story of the challenges that impact the Mayan community best, particularly endemic racism, political and economic inequalities, and historical realities that have changed little in over 500 years. My respect and appreciation for his writing and activism grew, and eventually, I profiled him as one of my "Extraordinary Lives" in my forthcoming book, *The Guatemala Reader*.



About the Author

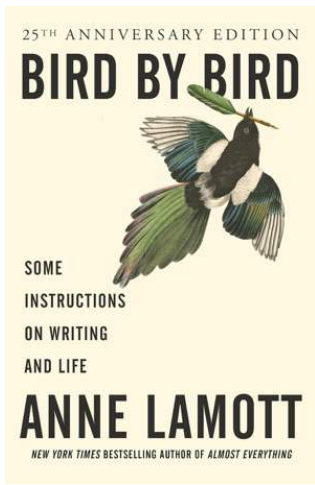
Victor Montejo is a professor emeritus of Native American studies at UC, Davis, and a respected Mayan intellectual and activist. He believes that racism in Guatemala is best understood as a system originating in the inequality established by the Spanish conquest. His previous books include *Popol Vuh: A Sacred Book of the Maya*; *Maya Intellectual Renaissance: Identity, Representation, and Leadership*; *El Q'anil: Man of Lightning*; *Voices from Exile: Violence and Survival in Modern Maya*.

Mark Walker was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Guatemala, managed programs abroad with CARE and Plan International and, for 30 years, raised funds for organizations such as Food for the Hungry, MAP International, Global Brigades, and Make-A-Wish International. His memoir, *Different Latitudes: My Life in the Peace Corps and Beyond*, was recognized by the Arizona Literary Association. His next book, *My Saddest Pleasures: 50 Years on the Road*, is part of his Yin & Yang of Travel Series. Mark is a contributing writer for *Revue Magazine*, *The Authors Show*, *The Wanderlust Journal*, and the *Literary Traveler*. More at <https://millionmilewalker.com>

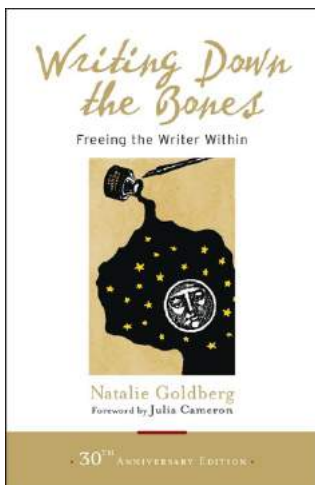


Writers serve as the memory of a people. They chew over our public past. —
Annie Dillard

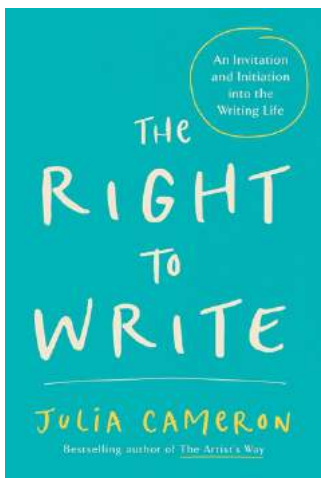
Penny's Picks: Recommended Reading



“For a quarter century, more than a million readers—scribes and scribblers of all ages and abilities—have been inspired by Anne Lamott’s hilarious, big-hearted, homespun advice. Advice that begins with the simple words of wisdom passed down from Anne’s father—also a writer—in the iconic passage that gives the book its title: ‘Thirty years ago my older brother, who was ten years old at the time, was trying to get a report on birds written that he’d had three months to write. It was due the next day. We were out at our family cabin in Bolinas, and he was at the kitchen table close to tears, surrounded by binder paper and pencils and unopened books on birds, immobilized by the hugeness of the task ahead. Then my father sat down beside him, put his arm around my brother’s shoulder, and said, ‘Bird by bird, buddy. Just take it bird by bird.’”



“With insight, humor, and practicality, Natalie Goldberg inspires writers and would-be writers to take the leap into writing skillfully and creatively. She offers suggestions, encouragement, and solid advice on many aspects of the writer's craft: on writing from "first thoughts" (keep your hand moving, don't cross out, just get it on paper), on listening (writing is ninety percent listening; the deeper you listen, the better you write), on using verbs (verbs provide the energy of the sentence), on overcoming doubts (doubt is torture; don't listen to it)—even on choosing a restaurant in which to write. Goldberg sees writing as a practice that helps writers comprehend the value of their lives. The advice in her book, provided in short, easy-to-read chapters with titles that reflect the author's witty approach ("Writing Is Not a McDonald's Hamburger," "Man Eats Car," "Be an Animal"), will inspire anyone who writes—or who longs to.”



“What if everything we have been taught about learning to write was wrong? In *The Right to Write*, Julia Cameron's most revolutionary book, the author of the bestselling self-help guide, *The Artist's Way*, asserts that conventional writing wisdom would have you believe in a false doctrine that stifles creativity. With the techniques and anecdotes in *The Right to Write*, readers learn to make writing a natural, intensely personal part of life. Cameron's instruction and examples include the details of the writing processes she uses to create her own bestselling books. She makes writing a playful and realistic as well as a reflective event. Anyone jumping into the writing life for the first time and those already living it will discover the art of writing is never the same after reading *The Right to Write*.”

Writer Joy on the Pickle Ball Court

By Robert Ronning

Along about midday I crave escaping from my desk, acutely aware that a static writing life could lead to a shorter life. I've tried aerobics and weights, golf, cycling, and just plain walking, all in quiet desperation to complete another novel or two before I drift off to join carefree writers in the great beyond. I've tried alternative writing stations: standing desk, treadmill, a laptop actually on my lap in an easy chair ... alas, all roads lead back to a standard chair and desk.

Yet the writer body cries out for movement, which drew me to pickleball. If you're from Planet Wack-ado and you haven't heard about pickleball, here are a few words about this fastest growing sport, with courts sprouting in converted mall space, abandoned tennis courts, and HOAs. They are popping up everywhere to accommodate a tidal wave of retired boomers, including those nursing old sports injuries and looking for less demanding exercise. (Warning: Pickleball is demanding; urgent care clinics are treating eager older players suffering a variety of court injuries—I've got a drawerful of ACE wraps for securing a limb or a hinge during play.)

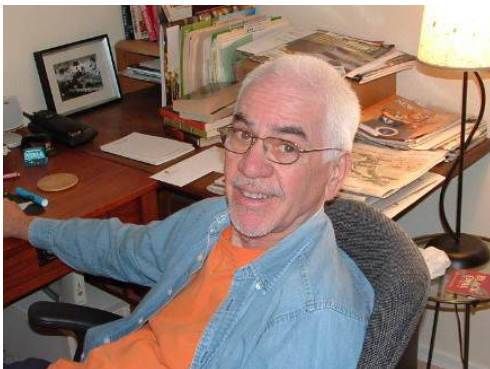
Once I was a jaded golfer carrying a heavy handicap, begrudging the time spent hitting a little white ball until I found a new passion in pickleball. In only half the time I spent on golf, I could duck away from my desk for a few rounds of hitting a plastic ball with a paddle.

As writers are wont, I imagine pickleball as an action-filled venue with compelling characters, my chosen site being the Y's basketball court. Action unfolds through a variety of plot lines; dramatic faceoffs easily stray into comedy or slapstick. As for characters, the game has its usual suspects—think of childhood back on the school playground at recess. Now, it's bickering and clowning adults, player cliques, and much laughter. As the sport has flourished, the only real drawback is the waiting time between games. Still, idleness offers a chance to socialize—the buzz of voices trading gossip and backstories is usually worth the time.

I've cautioned newbies to the game that pickleball is quite addictive. There's always a core group of intense competitors who get an extra high on the sport. At a game's end, panting foursomes usually walk off the court with smiley faces, win or lose, as if they've just returned from a ticket to paradise. Gathering together to play a few times a week, there's mostly an aura of joy and camaraderie.

Crucially, I don't think the game would be half as much fun without the gender mix. An agile or athletic woman will play the game at a high level against a macho man who just hates being scorched by the opposite sex.

Enough said. Now I'm off to play a few more games and escape the paralyzing stasis of the deskbound.



Robert Ronning writes about wildlife and conservation, and published his adventure novel, *Wild Call to Boulder Field* in 2023. He and wife Kathleen live in Tucson and summer in a cabin in Arizona's White Mountains, a few minutes daily dog walk from National Forest and wildlife. He considers his proudest achievements rescuing and assisting the rescue of lost dogs. A recovering golfer, now an avid Pickleball player, he likes to unwind with a crossword puzzle. See www.RobertRonningAuthor.com.

Physical fitness is not only one of the most important keys to a healthy body, it is the basis of dynamic and creative intellectual activity.—John F. Kennedy

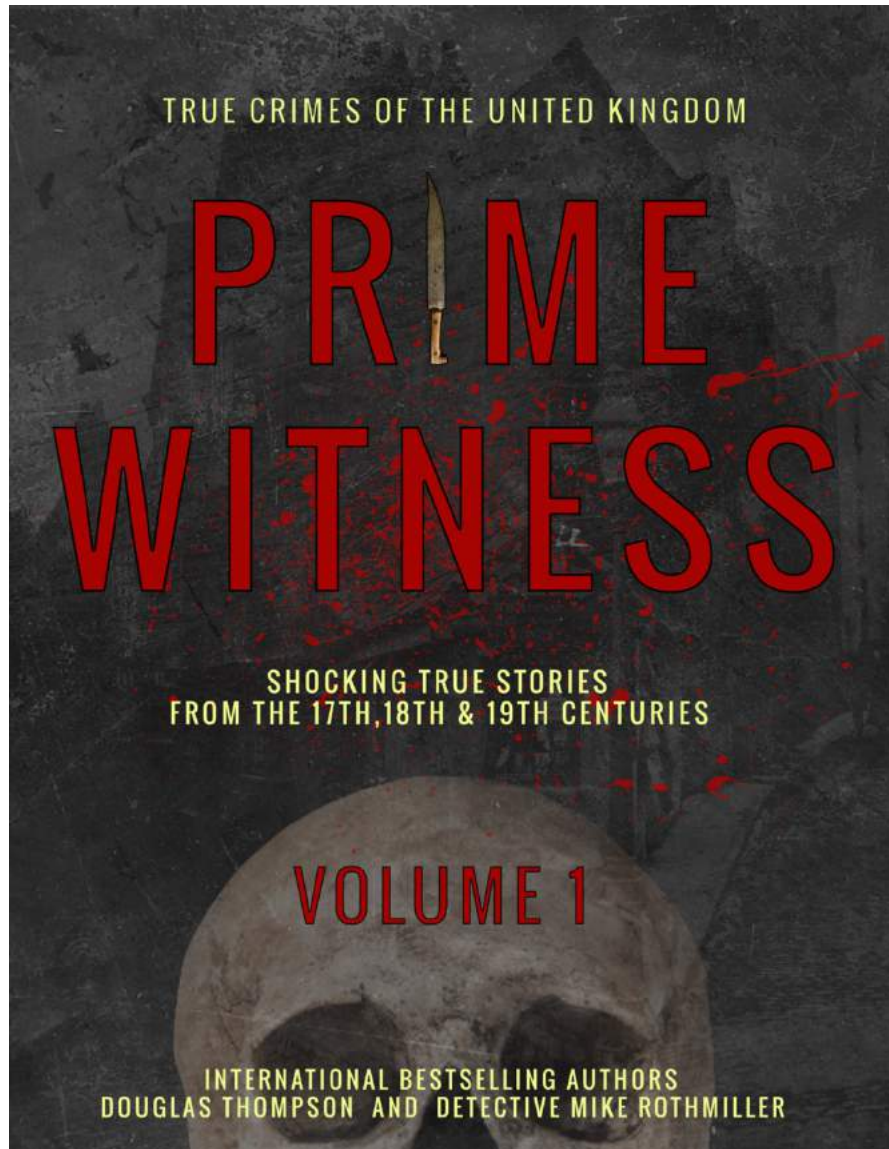
New Releases



An Amazon Best Seller and a bilingual historical non-fiction picture book written in English and Spanish, released March, 2024, this book is the first of a new series, *Isabella & Chloe*. Author María Retana's inspiration was her collection of dolls. She and illustrator Salva Ferrando recount the tale of slavery in the South during the 1800s from a seven-year-old's perspective. The second book of the series, *Pele's Domains/Los dominios de Pele*, is scheduled for a Fall 2024 release. Recommended for ages 9-12.

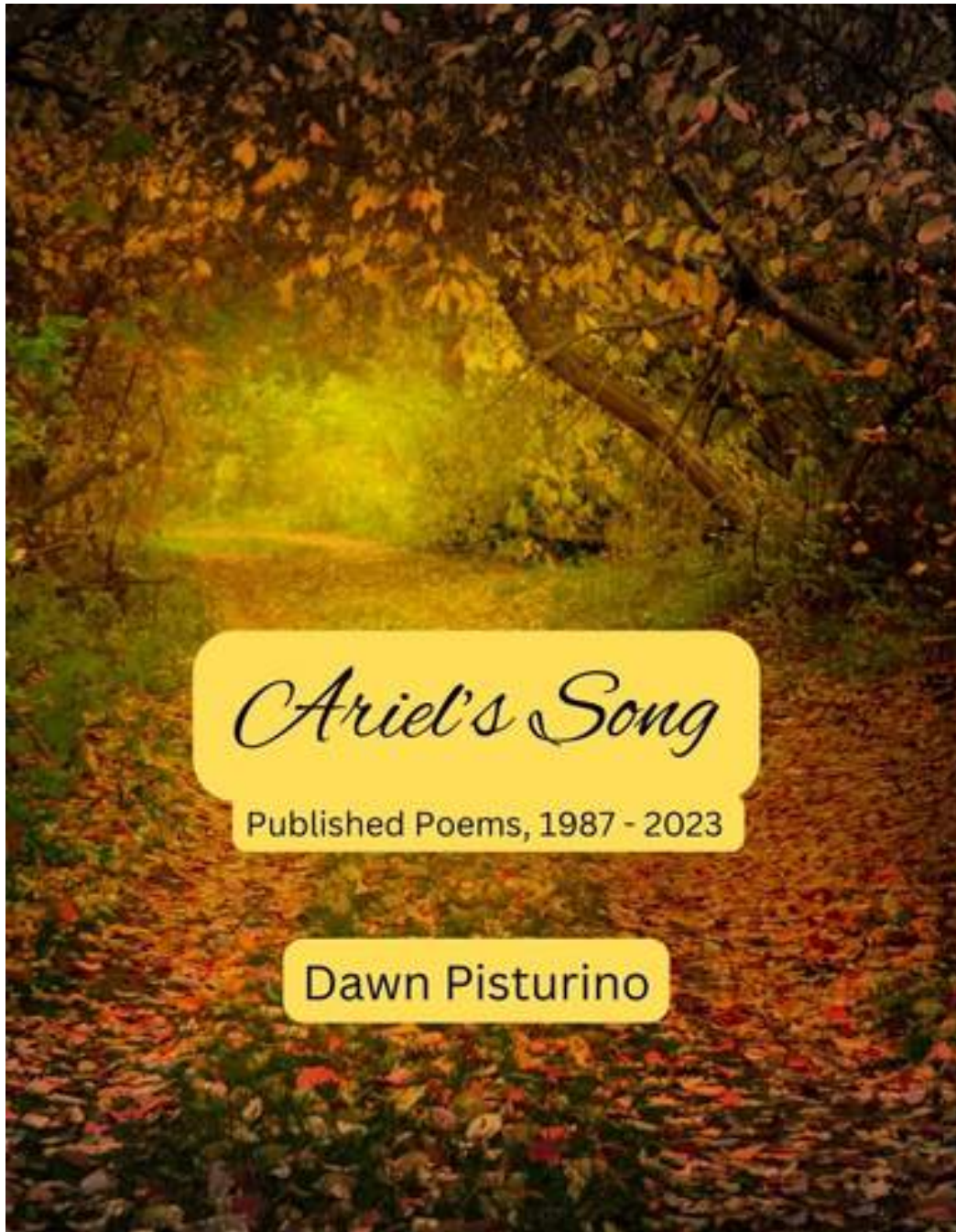
Cuban native María Retana has a B.A. in Spanish and Comparative Literature from UC, Riverside. The author of more than 20 published bilingual children's books, she has published picture books, chapter books, and two graphic novels. With her 12-year-old grandson, Miles Last, she wrote and published the graphic novel, *Miles & Lee and the Ghosts from the Lighthouse/ Miles & Lee y los fantasmas del faro*, in March, 2023. Mrs. Retana lives with her husband, Guillermo, in Tucson.

Another...



New York Times Bestselling Author **Mike Rothmiller** is a nominee for the Pulitzer Prize, historian, and former cop and Army medic. He has served as a TV reporter, an award-winning documentary producer, and television host for ESPN, PBS, and other international television markets. Mike has authored 23 books; his recent *Secrets, Lies and Deception and Other Amazing Pieces of History* was featured on Fox News and over 40 Television News Stations across America. His nonfiction book, *My Hero. Military Kids Write About Their Moms and Dads* (St. Martin's Press) received international acclaim and is the only book in history to have forwards written by three living Presidents and General Norman Schwarzkopf. Readers of his books include three Presidents, former First Lady Laura Bush, the late Charlton Heston, and the late Queen Elizabeth II. Released in May, *Prime Witness* has just been optioned for television.

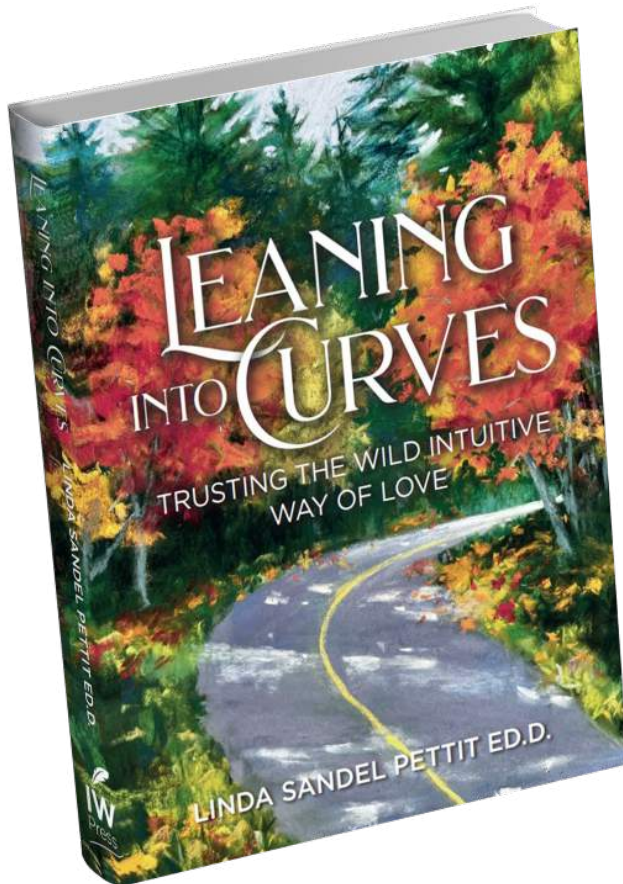
One More ...



Dawn Pisturino's first poetry book, *Ariel's Song*, was recently released to positive reviews in paperback and Ebook on Amazon, B & N, Lulu, and other sites. This collection of intensely personal poems written between 1987 and 2023 features various styles and themes: from humorous, twisted limericks to traditional sonnets, poems of love, nature, death and grief, abuse and heartache to children's poems and experimental works.

Available at: <https://a.co/d/i8OoaWP>

And ...



International Speaker, author, and mentor, Dr. Linda Sandel Pettit has written a compelling tale of an intuitive intelligence that guides us through life—mystical, magical, and practical.

LEANING INTO CURVES is a story of hope that our journeys through life can be sure-footed when we listen from and follow the way of the heart, the beingness of love.

LEANING INTO CURVES is, first, a love story. It is a poignant tale of forbidden love between a 24-year-old woman and a Catholic missionary priest twice her age; of two souls who crossed the boundaries of religious beliefs and dogma to honor their hearts. It is a tale of crushing loss when a tragic car accident on Christmas Eve ends their earthly relationship. It is a tale of one woman's trust in the spiritual wisdom unfolding from her soul to guide her through suffering and death to a new love. Available at <https://a.co/d/1D1bjgn>

LEANING INTO CURVES is one woman's search for the sacred feminine, divine female power. It is a candid, insightful and lyrical story of transformation that explores:

judgment and forgiveness,
separation and connection,
desire and surrender,
mystery and miracles,
intuition and synchronicity, and
faith and love.

With over five decades dedicated to writing, four decades immersed in counseling psychology, and two decades serving as a spiritual mentor, Dr. Linda brings a wealth of experience and expertise to her writing, speaking and client work. She holds a doctorate in counseling psychology, a master's degree in counselor education and a bachelor's degree in journalism. More at www.lindasandelpettit.com




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The Road to Imagination

by Cherie Lee

Do you ever need a prompt to get you started? Try Cherie Lee's story starter to spur your imagination and get the sentences flowing. An award-winning author, Cherie wrote the following paragraph as a guide:



"This fictional teaser can be used by teachers or by anyone (recommend sixth grade and up through adult) who wants a creative writing exercise or to jump start a new work. This idea is not meant to be genre specific but left to the writer's imagination. There are no specific rules to follow. All the listed questions do not need answers. There is no order for preferred reading."

If you would like to share a story (800 words or less) you have created with this prompt, please send it no later than **July 10** to pennyorloff@me.com and, as space permits, we'll publish it to inspire other members to try their hand.

A Bell Rang

It clanged harshly. Dust blew in the air as my classmates ran inside to safety. I stayed outside, hiding behind the rubble pile. My teacher called my name and searched for me in the playground. A glint of silver sparkled in the air and she ran inside the stone building. I covered my eyes and waited for the danger to pass.

Questions:

Was it a regular school bell or a church bell? Why was it dusty? Why did everyone run inside except one?

Were these young children or older students? How many were there? What were they studying? Where is this taking place?

What did the silver glint in the sky really mean? What made that pile of rubble? How far from the school yard was it?

Was that child the only one in danger or was the whole building in danger or was danger coming to harm all of them?

Could this be a mystery or a memoir or a horror story?

Why did the teacher quit searching for the missing child? Had that happened before?

Describe this place. Is it a real place or something imaginary?

Who will survive the danger, all or none? If none, who is telling this story, someone reincarnated? How many twists can this story have?

A Brief Example with some small changes:

Rusty ignored the bell and slid into the dark corner of the old stone school. He hated being inside on beautiful summer days. He checked his pockets for his fishing hook and string. Found them and headed for the pond as his teacher called his name. Dust swirled and something silver glinted in the air. Rusty crouched close to the ground and watched the object in the sky. He ignored his classmates as they sped into the school right behind the teacher. Rusty intended to see what that object was. He wasn't afraid of anything.

Now it's your turn. Go forth and write!

The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne. — Geoffrey Chaucer

The 4th Be With You!



“Patriotism is supporting your country all the time, and your government when it deserves it.” —Mark Twain

Building a Galaxy

by Daniel Dickinson

PART 3: Dickinson's Domains

Having compared two approaches to building a fictional multi-verse or microcosm, we can see strengths and weaknesses between them. Tolkien was focused, drawn down, and stylish, with painstaking attention to details of individual objects as his characters discovered them in a scene. Gaimen allows the alternate worlds and their accompanying distortions of time not only to become integral parts of the story but, sometimes, to dictate the narrative. When I began writing the world my characters would one day inhabit, I made the conscious effort to create a domain that could live and breathe without the interference of my characters.

I set off on my journey into that world when I was twelve years old, typing away on the family computer. The atmosphere generated in the monochrome, Lotus 1-2-3 lighting began to fill with character descriptions—their likes and dislikes materialized next to height, weight, and weapon of choice. I wrote their names for the first time, solidifying them in a reality all their own. A cosmos born from a single spark of my young imagination flowered into a galaxy-spanning universe full of diverse life, waiting to be discovered. My willingness to write down every detail gave me freedom to explore the crevices of the universe I had germinated and gave me license to move about unhindered by research of histories, religions, governments, and cultures.

With each new layer I was compelled to ask a greater scope of questions. How had this world come into being? Who or what did the denizens worship, where had their gods come from, how did time work? Did it matter if I answered those questions? Absolutely not! Should it matter to you? Your call.

There is no wrong way to accomplish world-building. For example, in my alternate world are gods and goddesses, as well as eldritch gods—gods beyond the perception of time and space. Here is an illustration from Chapter 52 of my upcoming novel, *The Apostate Jester*:

“Her mind focused on the missing piece of her soul that was dedicated to the goddess; and, with stark realization she knew that above all else, this was the one thing she needed. She was taught in the seminary that there were gods of good, pure light—kind, giving. And there were gods of darkness—vile, corrupt. But to have them come together in truce while facing something foreign, like a malignant tumor in the void of some distant, forgotten space, was something new. It was hard for her to comprehend. It made her question the balance of everything, her faith in the divine order of things, good versus evil, right versus wrong.”

At the beginning of this series, I offered the likeliest issue most fiction writers grapple with: “Where do I start?” If size seems daunting, start small: As Tolkien did, focus in on the characters and unfold the world around them as they, themselves, discover it for the first time. Or go Gaimen-wild: Build a galaxy of information inhabited by dozens of worlds, each waiting to be written about. Or begin with your own experience, expand on it, use the knowledge you gain every day to build a fictional realm within the tangible world you live in.

But start with a question. Any question. You can focus on a grain of sand: What color is it? Is it coarse or smooth? Does it belong on a beach somewhere or a desert? Does that beach have rocks? Are there cliffs nearby? Then ask the next question: Is this where your character starts his journey, or might it be the beginning of a world that suddenly blossoms into something greater? Eventually, you may find yourself in an enigmatic realm like the Space Between:

“It was hard to let his guard down anymore. Leo wondered if he would ever be able to let go, should they finally make it out of this situation. Everything he had ever known about the world seemed somehow insignificant while they traversed the Space Between. Every shadow held dangers; and since entering the monstrous tower, he felt even more on edge—as if millions of eyes were watching them” (Chapter 52 - *The Apostate Jester*).

There were no epiphanies during the process; however, I experienced an overwhelming sense of accomplishment as I added layer upon layer into the world I began to craft. I felt eager to jump in and cultivate that domain. Land masses shifted to make room for more islands and continents. Peoples, monsters, magics, gods, bloomed into entire gardens of lore and resources I could pull from.

Of course there were setbacks: hard drives fail, files become corrupted, whole sections are lost. But each time, I found it easier and easier to replace the missing portions because the world had already come alive—it could even mend itself whenever my meddling grew too destructive.

Continued on next page

The process was not effortless. There were times when I had to step away to contemplate a particular need for a section of lore. And sometimes I forgot the brilliant idea by the time I sat down to type it out. Don't let the frustrations of the process overwhelm you. Every step forward is an accomplishment.

As a rule, I would never suggest taking notes—it interrupts the creative flow. But it can be very useful during world building. Keep a small note pad with you and jot down ideas as they come to you, to be fleshed out later. Create a wiki page, or a compendium of your world.

Making manifestly untrue things believable and deep is a process that involves burrowing into your imagination. Be aware of your daydreams and use them to develop and expand the invented world you're building. By expanding or contracting the boundaries of the cosmos your characters inhabit, you can choose the right size for yourself and your narrative. Let mistakes happen. Don't be afraid to tear a world down and start over, keeping what you like. Imagination has no limits. Ask your own questions, expand on those I've provided. And in a galaxy that has no constant, realize that time is relative, there is no end.

Relax and enjoy the journey.

World Architects

Building Fantasy Worlds Workshop

Presented by Daniel Dickinson
Zoom Workshop

Saturday, August 17, 2024
10:00 AM MST

Contact arizonaauthorsassociation@gmail.com to Register

Take a captivating journey of creativity and imagination in the Arizona Author's Association Workshop on world-building, designed for writers, storytellers, and enthusiasts eager to craft rich and detailed fictional worlds. Throughout the workshop, participants will delve into the fundamental elements of world-building, exploring intricate aspects such as geography, cultures, history, politics, and magic systems.

Engaging discussions and hands-on exercises will guide attendees in shaping unique and believable realms, fostering a deep understanding of the interconnected elements that breathe life into a fictional universe. Join us and unlock the building blocks to creating immersive and unforgettable fictional spaces.



Beginning at the age of ten, Arizona native **Daniel Dickinson** has spent a lifetime inventing realistic realms for his fictional characters. His fantasy world, Xonthian—created during his teen years—is an entire domain that allows his characters' journeys to unfold in a diverse setting. He enjoys giving educational presentations about world-building and fantasy genres, in general. Daniel's published works include the short story, *Escape from Ogre Island*; a two-story horror book, *Don't Close Your Eyes: Two Thrilling Tales of Terror*; *Aggression Factor*; and *Gathering Tide*. Upcoming: *The Apostate Jester*.

<https://www.tigerforce.net/>

<https://www.amazon.com/author/ddickinson>

Write to Daniel at: danield@tigerforce.net

Where in Arizona? by Janet Alcorn



Each issue we'll add a photograph taken somewhere in Arizona, along with a list of ten possible locations, one of which is correct. If you think you know the answer, please send it to pennyorloff@me.com no later than **July 10**. If you are the first person to guess the correct answer, you will win a \$5 Starbucks card and have your name published on this page of the next issue of the *Digest*, when we reveal the location of this photo. We had no winner for the last Where in Arizona? The answer was Patagonia.

Possible locations:

Phoenix, Mesa, Gilbert, Tucson, Wickenburg, Marana, Apache Junction, Surprise, Glendale, Chandler, Florence.



Janet is a librarian, published short story author, and aspiring novelist. She writes mostly suspense and horror with the occasional foray into other genres. She won Best of Category for her poem, *Mourning Doves*, in the 2023 Arizona Authors Association literary contest; and 2nd place in the Arizona Mystery Writers' 2023 Jim Martin Memorial Short Story Contest. Learn more about Janet and her writing at <http://janetalcorn.com>.

Puzzle it!

by Kevin Gundlach

It's summer and we're lazy, so this time, we're going with only three books that reflect the heat of midsummer and the great desert landscape and climate. (Yeah, it really is a dry heat!)

You know the drill: match each of the three books with its author, the main character, and the year it was first published. Put an "X" in any box that cannot match and an "O" in a box where two correct answers align. Good luck!

If you complete the puzzle within 30 minutes without Googling, let us know and we'll publish your name in the next issue! Happy Puzzling!

Books: Desert Noir, Mohave Crossing, Desert Royal

Authors: Jean Sasson, Betty Webb, Louie L'Amour

Main Character: William Tell Sackett, Princess Sultana, Lena Jones

First Published: 1999, 2001, 1964

Clues:

1. Lena Jones is either the main character of *Desert Royal*, or the main character of the book published in 2001.

2. *Mohave Crossing* is either the book written by Louie L'Amour, or it is the book published in 1999.

3. The book by Jean Sasson was published before the one featuring Lena Jones as the main character.

4. *Mohave Crossing* was published before the one with Princess Sultana as the main character.

		D.Noir	M.Cross	D.Royal	J. Sasson	B. Webb	L'Amour	Sackett	Princess	L. Jones	1999	2001	1964
Title	Desert Noir	O	X	X									
	Mohave Cross'g	X	O	X									
	Desert Royal	X	X	O									
Author	Jean Sasson				O	X	X						
	Betty Webb				X	O	X						
	L. L'Amour				X	X	O						
Main Char:	W.T. Sackett							O	X	X			
	Princess Sultana							X	O	X			
	Lena Jones							X	X	O			
First Pub.	1999										O	X	X
	2001										X	O	X
	1964										X	X	O



Kevin Gundlach was a senior software developer who, unlike most, undertook the flight between industry and academia in reverse order. He is now a senior tutor for college students taking computer science and math subjects. For more about Kevin, please see www.arizonaauthors.org/members/kevin-gundlach

Penny's Two Cents



As artists, successful or not, some of us sense ourselves compelled to put one foot in front of the other for as long as it takes—or forever. Abandoning the pursuit is not an option. Many of us feel we have no choice. It's life or death.

Some truly talented people, disheartened by rejection, have the astonishing capacity to live another life. They're lucky. Or are they?

By the age of twenty-eight, my mother had been married for six years and had four children. She had left college to drive trucks for the Army in World War II. The War had been a good excuse—she was having a rough time of Pre-Med. My grandpa dreamed his only child would become a doctor. But she dreamed of being a dancer.

She headed west from Ohio to Los Angeles to stay with her grandparents and work in her uncle Georgie's store near the Army base. She took ballet lessons four nights a week, and on weekends she poured punch and coffee at the USO club. And she danced. All the soldiers wanted to dance with my graceful, beautiful mother.

She didn't waste any time—armed with glowing endorsements of renowned dance luminaries, she finagled an audition for Earl Carroll's Vanities. The audition notice specified "Showgirls, minimum height 5-feet-seven." Mom was barely five feet tall, but she knew she couldn't miss. She looked like Hedy Lamar and danced like Rita Hayworth. She spent a week's pay on a new outfit, had her nails done in a swanky salon, got her hair and makeup just right. She floated off the bus in Hollywood and glided into the dance studio right on time.

"Too short. NEXT!"

She never went on another audition.

I remember watching Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movies with her on TV. I was still learning to feed and dress myself when I knew I would squander my life on Busby Berkeley's vision of Heaven. Like Ruby Keeler in 42nd STREET, I was a little trouper. I would never give up. No sacrifice was too great if, at the end of everything, I could be up there in the light when the curtain opened.

Broadway audiences would fall at my feet. . . As I blazed up the Great White Way, my True Love would materialize, and we would dance in each other's arms . . . Music up. Curtain. Thunderous applause.

I should have paid more attention to those scenes in Stage Door, where aging actresses live alone in boarding houses and the girl who doesn't get the part throws herself out the window... Oh, we'll get back to that...

Fast forward: At twenty-three I left Los Angeles and moved into my New York City apartment to go to Juilliard. A bathtub squatted against the wall of the one room at the top of a five-floor walk-up near the East River. A steam radiator hissed in the corner. The toilet gurgled in a closet under a cracked tank that dripped orange-brown water stains down the peeling wall. Under the 100-year-old roof, the ceiling leaked filthy rainwater all over my stuff whenever the precipitation lasted more than an hour. But the monthly rent was \$44.16. It meant I never had to wait tables or work in an office. You wait tables, you're a waiter. You work in an office, you're a clerk. You sing on street corners, you're a singer.

Gradually my natural shyness evaporated and I began to have confidence in my ability to kick the shit out of the smaller muggers. Confidence is a good thing to have if you're an actor.

"NEXT!"

But I was a little trouper. I would hang in there and give it all I had. I decided if nothing had come of it by the time I was thirty-five I would do something else.

Continued on next page

Years passed. One evening, it all came crashing down. It had rained all day and the roof was leaking pretty badly. I had placed pots and pans around the room to catch the water and draped a tarp over my bed. I was rehearsing in front of the full-length mirror for yet-another humiliating audition for yet-another stupendous part I wasn't going to get. Dirty rainwater dripped on my head. All of a sudden, I couldn't kid myself anymore—it was hopeless. I had promised myself I would hang in there until I was thirty-five. I was only twenty-eight. I had seven more years of this.

I phoned my parents' house. "I can't do this anymore, Mom."

"This was your dream."

"Please, Mom, please tell me to come home."

There was a long moment of silence.

"No." And she hung up.

Seven more years...

The apartment building was only five floors—forget throwing myself out the window. I would slit my wrists. I lit some candles in a memorial to the career that would never be, took a last look in the mirror at the face that would never play the Palace. A trick of light from the burning candles, and a silent movie seemed to flicker...

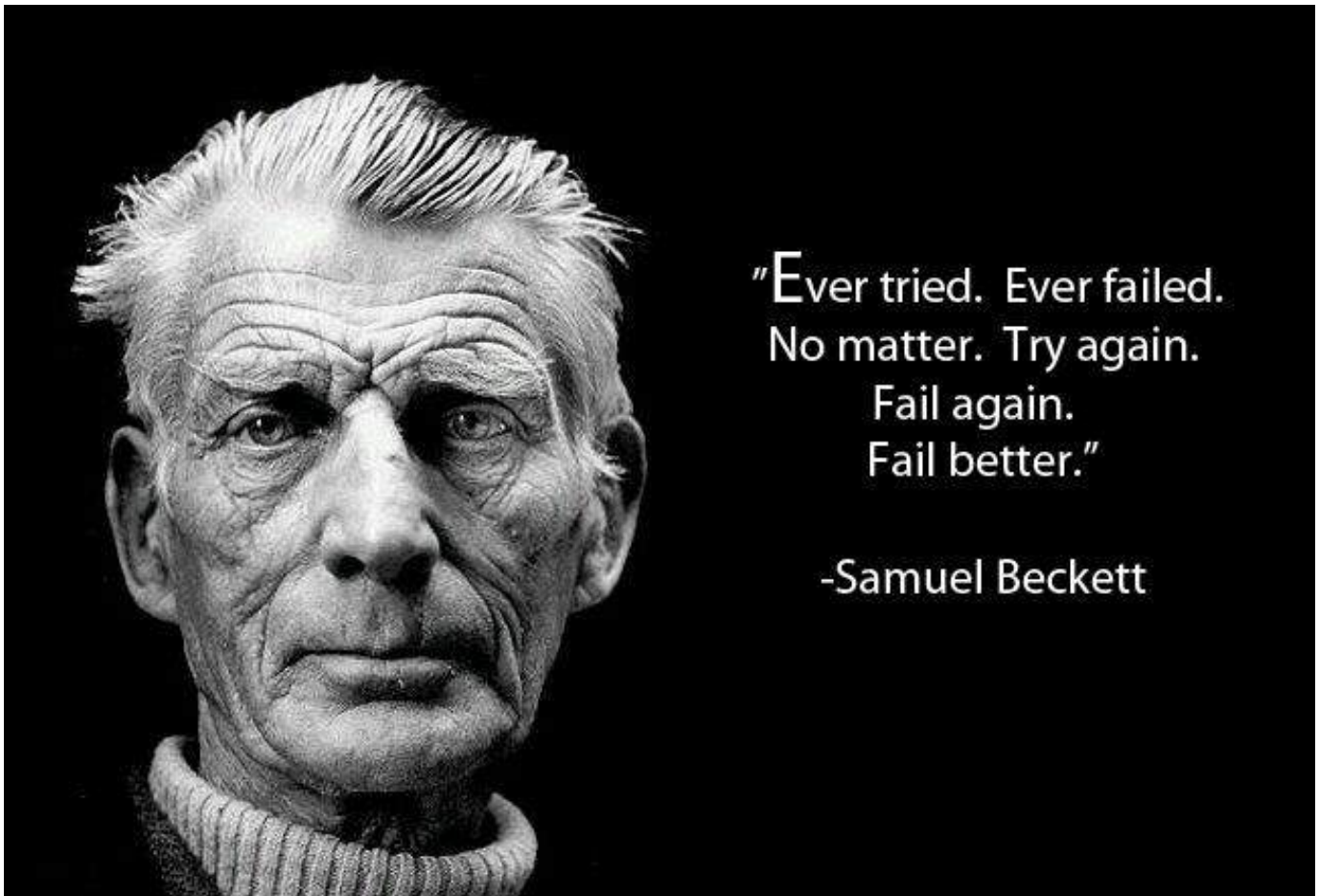
Broadway audiences fell at my feet. . . As I blazed up the Great White Way, my True Love materialized, and we danced in each other's arms . . . Music up. Curtain. Thunderous applause.

I had promised myself I would hang in there and, by God, I would!

Six more months passed while I continued to take acting classes and singing lessons and went on audition after audition. And by the time I was twenty-nine, I was singing principal soprano roles at New York City Opera and playing leads off-Broadway.

When I made my Broadway debut, my mother sat next to my dad, eighth row center. I stopped the show with my big song. Over the cheers, I could hear her screaming, "Bravo!! Bravo!!!" In my dressing room afterwards, I saw her pride. And something else: regret.

To try, and fail, is to know that at least you tried. To fail to try is never to know what might have been.



"Ever tried. Ever failed.
No matter. Try again.
Fail again.
Fail better."

-Samuel Beckett

2024 Arizona Authors Literary Contest



Categories:

Unpublished

1. Poetry
2. Short Stories
3. Essays/Reviews
4. Novels/Novellas

Published Books

1. Fiction
2. Nonfiction
3. Oldie But Goldie Fiction
4. Oldie But Goldie Nonfiction

Published Youth

1. Children (under 12)
2. Teen/Young Adult
3. Oldie But Goldie Youth

Contest begins:

January 1, 2024

Contest ends:

11:59 pm MST

June 1, 2024

MORE CASH PRIZES! MORE CATEGORIES!

GRAND PRIZE (Best Overall):

\$500 & Featured in the *Arizona Literary Magazine*

THREE FIRST PRIZES:

\$200 & Featured in the *Arizona Literary Magazine*

THREE SECOND PRIZES:

\$100 & Featured in the *Arizona Literary Magazine*

THREE THIRD PRIZES:

\$75 & Featured in the *Arizona Literary Magazine*

THREE FOURTH PRIZES:

\$50 & Featured in the *Arizona Literary Magazine*

ELEVEN BEST OF CATEGORY PRIZES:

\$25 & Featured in the *Arizona Literary Magazine*

Winners in each main category (Unpublished, Published Books, Published Youth) will be awarded a First, Second, Third and Fourth prize. Best of Category prizes will be chosen from remaining entries after all other prizes are awarded. One prize per title; 24 total prizes available.



New!

**2-page evaluations
available for
unpublished works
and self-published
novels and memoirs!**

INVITATION TO JOIN
ARIZONA AUTHORS ASSOCIATION



Arizona Authors Association is a 501-c-3 nonprofit organization. Its mission: To foster literary achievement; advance the art of writing; and serve the writers, authors, editors, publishers, and allied professionals of Arizona and the nation.

Membership Benefits

Attend workshops, events, and activities designed to hone your skills as a writer—many of them free or low cost. In addition, both our Forum and our bi-monthly *Digest* offer advice, suggestions, and insight to reinforce your expertise.

The annual Literary Contest provides an opportunity to showcase your work and the chance to earn cash prizes, enhancing your reputation as an author. We also offer online book fairs through our Zoom account.

Books you have released within the previous six months (or are about to release) receive a full-page ad in the *Digest* at no cost. Likewise, members may submit a quarter-page ad for author-related services to the *Digest* free of charge.

[Application for Membership](#)

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TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP ☐ Writer ☐ Professional Membership

PUBLICATIONS/CURRENT PROJECTS:

Membership Fees

Writers Published or Unpublished:	One year - \$45	Two years - \$80
Members' Spouses/Children:	One year - \$25	Two years - \$40
Professional Membership (Related Services such as Publishers, Agents, and Editors):	One year - \$60	Two years - \$110

Send Checks/Money Orders To: **Arizona Authors Association** 428 East Thunderbird Road, #538, Phoenix, AZ 85022

Or pay with PayPal: arizonaauthorsassociation@gmail.com

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The Last Word

