

# WAG Digest

## Volume 16—

### Angela V. Woodhull's 7 Book-Writing Tips

June 8, 2:30 pm - 4:00 pm

Millhopper Library, 3145 NW 43 St., Gainesville, FL 32606

Inside this issue:

Angela V. Woodhull talk

Dr. Rik Stevenson

BACOPA MAGA- ZINE

HogTowne Quill

WAG BRAGS

6

QUERY LETTER 13  
NON-FICTION AND  
MEMOIR

CLASSES & CONFER- ENCES

23

CONTESTS

24

Calls for Submissions

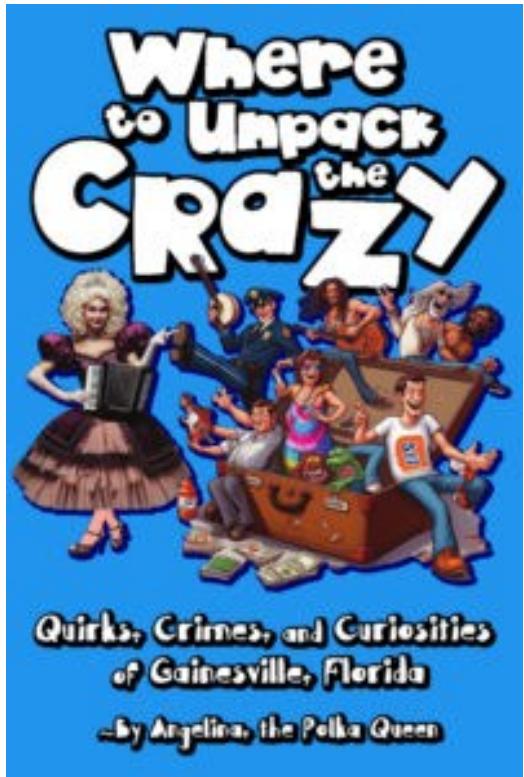
28



Angela V. Woodhull, PhD, is a published author, a licensed private investigator, and a comedy accordion player!

She has resided in Gainesville, Florida, off and on since 1985, and her latest book is *Where to Unpack the Crazy: Quirks, Crimes, and Curiosities of Gainesville, Florida*. Her talks are light and entertaining like her books. In her presentation at 2:30 p.m. on June 8, 2025, at the Millhopper Library, she will use excerpts from her books to illustrate these seven writing tips:

- 1. Show, Don't Tell:** Rather than telling readers how characters feel, she will show how to reveal their emotions through actions and dialogue.
- 2. Strong Voice and Tone:** She will demonstrate how establishing a unique voice can draw readers in and create a distinct atmosphere.
- 3. Use of Dialogue:** Dialogue can reveal character, advance the plot, and create tension. She will emphasize this with dialog-heavy excerpts that demonstrate how characters interact and how their conversations reflect the culture of the time.



## Angela V. Woodhull's 7 Book-Writing Tips, cont.

June 8, 2:30 pm - 4:00 pm

Millhopper Branch Library

### Seven writing tips cont.:

**4. Setting as Character:** A well-developed setting can enhance the story and serve as a backdrop for character development. Woodhull will share a passage that vividly describes Gainesville, making it feel alive and integral to the narrative.

**5. Pacing and Structure:** Varying sentence length and structure can control the story's pace and keep readers engaged. She will read aloud a short excerpt where the pacing shifts during a high-energy event to show how to build suspense or excitement.

**6. Humor and Wit:** She will share a scenario to illustrate how humor can be woven into storytelling to make the read more enjoyable and relatable.

**7. Editing and Revision:** She will discuss a passage in her book that underwent significant changes from her first draft to the final version, highlighting what she improved to enhance clarity and impact.

Woodhull previously worked as a motivational speaker for Dun and Bradstreet Business Education Services and Fred Pryor Seminars. She currently works as an online teacher and still performs music shows as Angelina, the Polka Queen.

In addition to her most recent book (shown above), she is also the author of these five: 1) *Police Communication in Traffic Stops*; 2) *The New Time Manager*; 3) *Coping with Difficult Teachers*; 4) *Easy Words: An Easy Way to Learn New Words*; and 5) *It's Raining Lawsuits in my Life and I Just Wanna Be Angelina, the Polka Queen*.





## **U.S. History that All Writers Should Know – by Dr. Rik Stevenson**

**July 13, 2:30 pm - 4:00 pm**

**Millhopper Library**

**3145 NW 43 St., Gainesville, FL 32606**

WAG's Sunday, July 13, program with Dr. Rik Stevenson is the perfect follow-up to our historical Fannie Lou Hamer presentation by Pamela D. Marshall and the WAG/GFAA "Hidden Histories" exhibit at the Gainesville Fine Art Association's gallery.

Stevenson's presentation will discuss the concept of the "Other Book," an underrepresented historical knowledge that, when surfaced, allows writers to engage in expanded and deeper research, creating more accurate storytelling and writing.

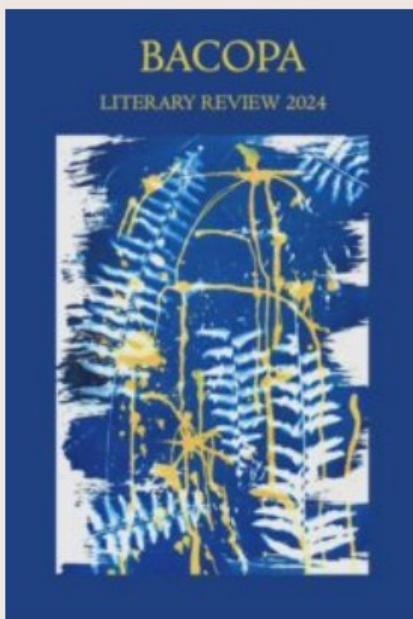
Before schools were integrated, Black teachers taught from two books: the official book sanctioned by the government and the "other book," which taught the truth about Black experiences and other untold accurate histories. Sometimes, one must dig deeper and go to the source material to learn the truth of our shared pasts to make our writing stronger and more accurate.

Without accurate and accessible history, our writing may lack the depth and authenticity that attracts a broader audience. Dr. Stevenson's presentation will provide a few of his favorite research techniques and community engagement strategies for securing greater and more accurate historical and contemporary knowledge and awareness—methods that can create deeper understandings and compassion, and thus more story depth, for writers who envision building highly believable characters and plots with whom wide audiences want to engage.

Stevenson's presentation will also provide a platform for writers, authors, and aspiring authors to raise questions about the awareness and interconnectedness of history, culture, and economics, and how such awareness can bring greater depth to our characters, character arcs, plots, etc. When writers leave this experience, they will likely see a familiar world with new eyes, awareness, and understanding that can help them more deeply create and bring richer stories into shared futures.

Stevenson is a historian. He holds a Ph.D. from Michigan State University in African American and African Studies. His research focus is the Middle Passage, suicide, and West and West Central African Cosmologies. He holds two Master's degrees from Fuller Theological Seminary, and a Doctorate of Divinity in African American Church History. As a speaker, he is highly sought after for his cultural competency, knowledge, and skills. He teaches courses in Black Theology and African American Church History. He's an Assistant Instructional Professor at the University of Florida. As a certified scuba diver, he has worked with *Diving With A Purpose*, seeking insight on the Slave Ship Guerrero.

## Bacopa Literary Review



LAST CALL—DEADLINE For submissions to the  
Bacopa Literary Review has been extended to  
June 1, 2025. **Hurry!**

*Bacopa Literary Review* is an annual international print journal published by the Writers Alliance of Gainesville (WAG),\* located in Gainesville, Florida.

This year's annual *Bacopa Literary Review* writing contest will feature five categories: Fiction, Creative Nonfiction, Free Verse Poetry, Formal Poetry, and Visual Poetry.

Our *Bacopa Literary Review* Editors' blog shows the quality of writing we seek by highlighting work we respect from previous *Bacopa* issues as well as other sources.

When submitting, please be sure to note which of our genre categories you are submitting to (Fiction, Creative Nonfiction, Free Verse Poetry, Formal Poetry, or Visual Poetry) in your cover letter.

For all the Rules: Click on [Guidelines page](https://writersallianceofgainesville.submittable.com/submit) (<https://writersallianceofgainesville.submittable.com/submit>)

**W\*R\*I\*T\*E\***

## Want to be published? Write for the Hogtown Quill!

<https://writersalliance.org/blog/wag-blogging-guidelines/>

If you have an idea for a blog post, read the guidelines below and email your idea to the [Blog Editor](mailto:BlogEditor@writersalliance.org) / [blogeditor@writersalliance.org](mailto:blogeditor@writersalliance.org)

### Guidelines:

**1 – Content:** Want to write an article but need ideas? Check out all of the WAG “Blog Topics” at the bottom of this page, this [blog post](#), this list of [ideas](#), and this post from Writers Write called [“30 Inspiring Blog Post Ideas for Writers.”](#) A previously published article *will* be considered if you freshen it with new information and include a footnote linking to the original article.

**2 – Length:** 500 to 1,000 words for all blog topics except for “Story of My Life: Self-Portraits” and “Flash Friday,” which are 500 words or less.

**3 – Submitting:** Email your work as a Word document to [BlogEditor@writersalliance.org](mailto:BlogEditor@writersalliance.org). Double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-point is preferred, but the formatting and font aren’t dealbreakers. (Unless you submit using Blackadder ITC. Or Broadway. Then we’ll know you’re just messing with us.)

**4 – Links:** Feel free to include links to website pages that will give your reader additional information on your topic. There is no need to make the links yourself; just include URLs.

(cont. on next page)

## Write for the Hogtown Quill! (Guidelines Cont.)

**5 – Images:** Try to include at least one high-quality image (jpg or gif) that relates to your post. Credit the photographer or give the source. ([Unsplash](#) and [Pixabay](#) are two good sources of free, high-quality images and photos.) If you include an image to which you do not own rights, please have the creator of the image send an email giving WAG permission to use the work. YouTube videos do not require permission and may be included without attribution.

**6 – Hints to increase traffic to your post:** Choose a catchy title using key words. Repeat the key words in the first sentence and again within the first paragraph. Use numbers in the title (e.g., “Best 8 Ways to Promote Your Book”).

**7 – Self-Promotion?** You may reference your own publications if they are related to your topic. However, you should not use WAG’s blog just to promote yourself or your works. Note that all WAG members may promote their publications on the [Books](#) page of WAG’s website by completing the [Get Listed](#) form.

**8 – Bio and photo of yourself:** For your first post, include a bio (up to 50 words) and a high-quality photo of yourself. If you have a website, include the URL. For bio examples, look at previous posts.

**9 – Response time:** ALL submissions will be read and receive a response. If you haven’t heard from the blog editor after 2 weeks, please see the “Alert” above (not all email apps play well together!) and try submitting again.

**10 – Rights:** In submitting your blog post, *you retain copyright, but you give the Writers Alliance of Gainesville one-time, non-exclusive digital rights to publish the content.*

**11 – Editing:** Your piece will be edited for appropriateness, length, clarity, proper English, and use of language. The blog editor may also add illustrations and links.

**12 – Publication:** The blog editor will send you a preview link for the layout of your post before publication. One new blog post is published each month, and all subscribers receive an email notification of the new post.

**13 – Post-publication:** Check periodically to see if viewers have left comments, and please take a moment to respond to them.

**14 – Have Fun and Happy Writing!**

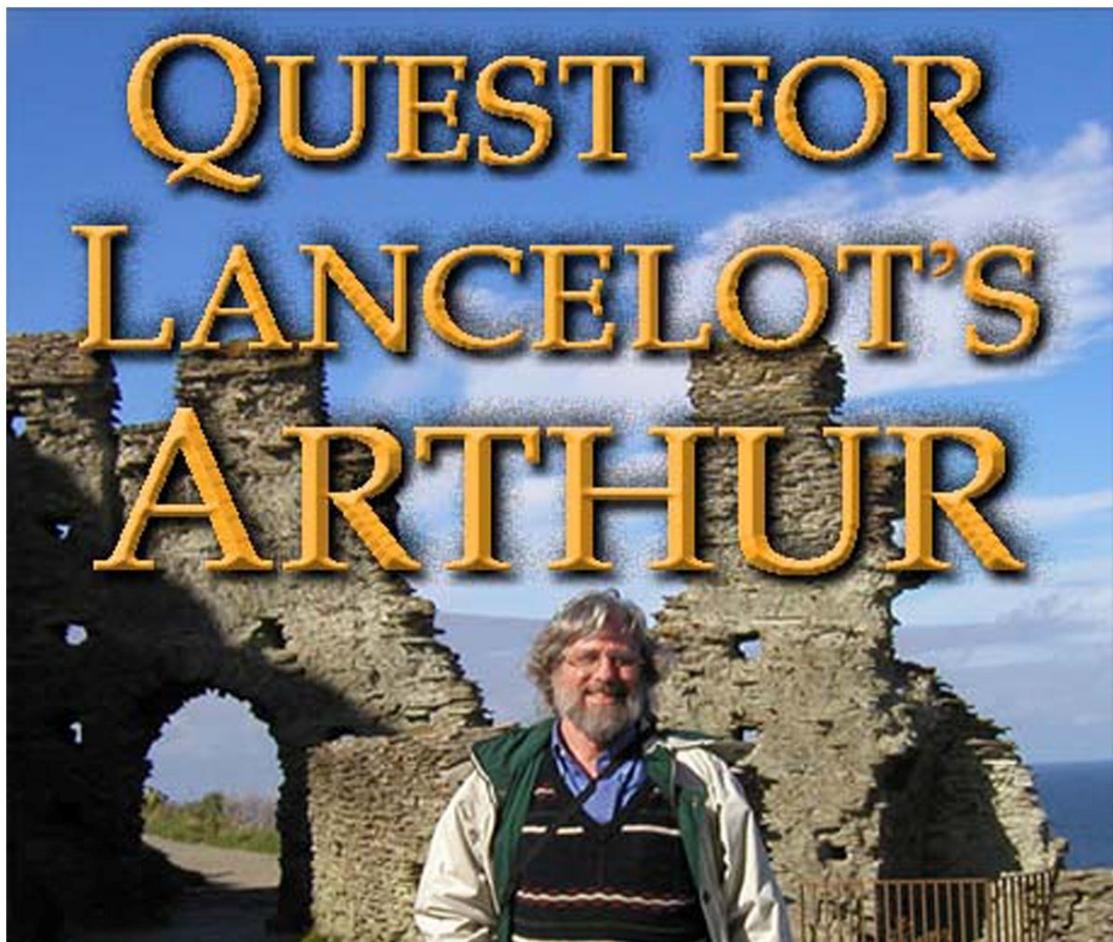
Hogtown Quill



Writers Alliance of Gainesville blog

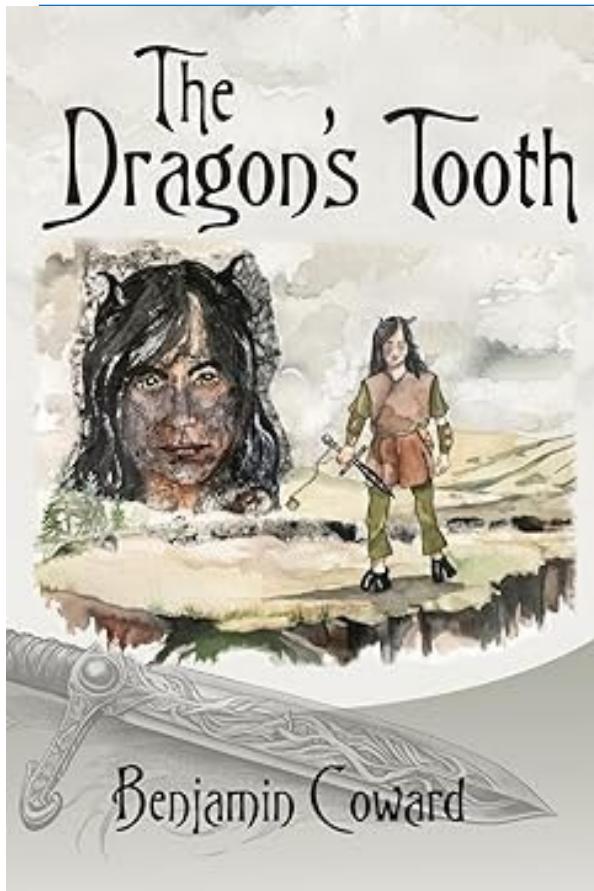
## **WAG BRAGS**

Join local author Richard Gartee for his latest book release, *Quest for Lancelot's Arthur*, Sunday, June 1 at 2:30 pm at the Millhopper Library, 3145 NW 43 St., Gainesville, FL 32606. Congratulations, Richard!



**Multi-media presentation about  
King Arthur & his Britain  
by award-winning author Richard Gartee**

**Sunday, June 1, 2025  
2:30 – 4:00 p.m. Millhopper Branch Library**



## WAG BRAGS

### DRAGON'S TOOTH by Benjamin Coward

OUT NOW

Congratulations to Benjamin Coward for publication of his new book, *The Dragon's Tooth*. Here's the synopsis:

Dark forces are trying to overthrow the Seven Kingdoms. Can Calderon, the orphaned Kusarku prince, master a powerful magical weapon—and learn to trust his own abilities—in time to save his race and others?

After the devastating Grey War and the death of their beloved king and queen, the Kusarkus, descendants of minotaurs, reluctantly relinquished their independence and accepted the "generous protection" of the elves. Since then, Calderon, the only heir to the Kusarku throne, has had to hide his true identity.

But when the Seven Kingdoms come under attack by unknown forces and the Kusarku are blamed, the young prince must journey to the human capital of Alezadria to defend his race and accept the responsibility of his birthright. If not the Kusarku, though, then who is leading the hordes of goblins, trolls, and other monsters against innocent citizens? And who can Calderon trust, even within his own kingdom?

To aid in his struggle against evil, Calderon's adoptive father, Bard, presents him with one half of his father's powerful magical sword - The Dragon's Tooth. Working together with his friends, can Calderon master the legendary obsidian weapon and his own magical abilities in time to save the Seven Kingdoms?

**About the Author:** Growing up in the heartland of Missouri, author Benjamin Coward first discovered the thrill of world-building through role-playing games like Dungeons and Dragons and books in The Inheritance Cycle series by Christopher Paolini. In his debut YA fantasy novel, Benjamin masterfully creates a realm where relatable characters fight evil opponents and overcome struggles through teamwork and self-trust. With a bachelor's degree in environmental science and now living and working in north central Florida, Benjamin's love of nature and history often seep into his storytelling, enriching the fantastical worlds he creates.

The book is available on Amazon ([https://www.amazon.com/stores/Benjamin-Coward/author/B0DDCM58KQ?ref=ap\\_rdr&isDramIntegrated=true&shoppingPortalEnabled=true&ccs\\_id=db216281-ac9e-4e32-b0dc-c6a54304287c](https://www.amazon.com/stores/Benjamin-Coward/author/B0DDCM58KQ?ref=ap_rdr&isDramIntegrated=true&shoppingPortalEnabled=true&ccs_id=db216281-ac9e-4e32-b0dc-c6a54304287c)),

and locally at Barnes and Noble, Butler Plaza, 2728 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608.

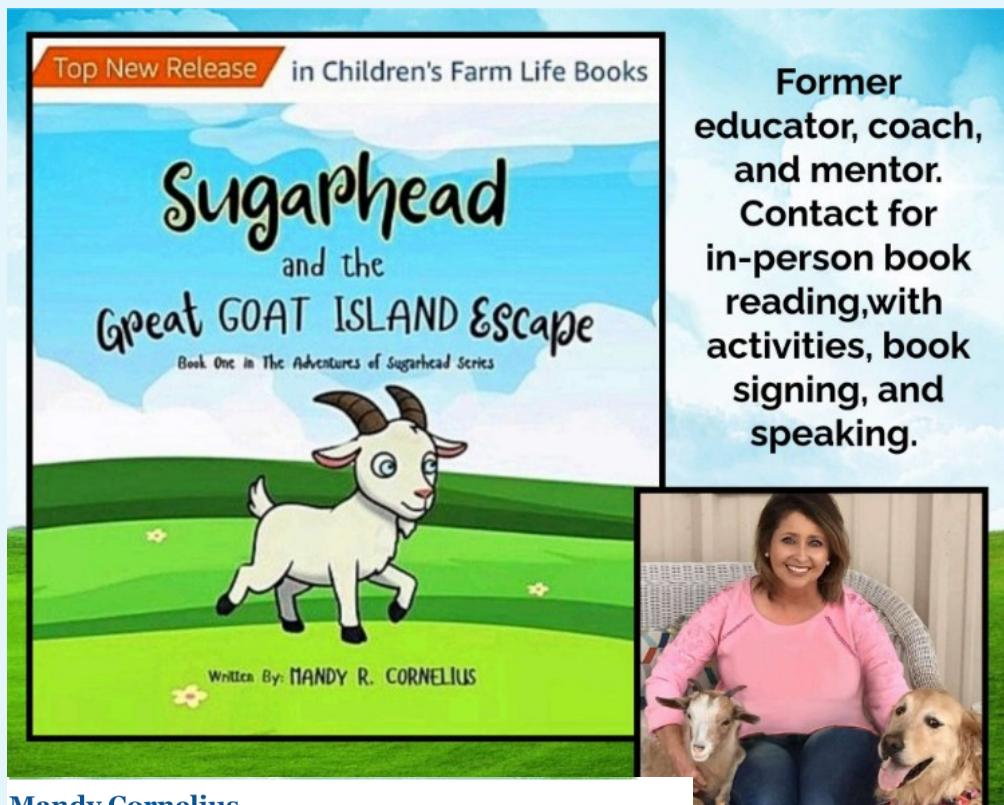
## WAG BRAGS

Congratulations to Charlotte M. Porter for publications of her poem, "Passed Over" in the "Modern poetry magazine" *Free the Verse*, Issue 13.



And congratulations also to Charlotte for being on the top longlist for the 2024 Mslexia Poetry Pamphlet Contest. Look for her work in the forthcoming issue of *Gleam*.

## W\*R\*I\*T\*E



### Mandy Cornelius

Author of The Adventures of Sugarhead Series  
Amazon's #1 New Release in Children's Farm Life Books



Congratulations to new WAG Member Mandy Cornelius on publication of her book *Sugarhead and the Great Goat Island Escape*. We'll report about any upcoming talks and book signings soon.

### Local Author - Mandy Cornelius

Based on the adventures of her own herd of goats at the farm she shares with her husband in Keystone Heights, Mandy captures the heart of her beloved blind goat, Sugarhead, in a story of inspiration for children of all ages to enjoy.

[adventuresofsugarhead@gmail.com](mailto:adventuresofsugarhead@gmail.com) / [@mc2.ranch](https://www.instagram.com/@mc2.ranch) on Instagram

## WAG BRAGS

Congratulations to WAG Member Debbie Miller for her interview on the podcast about Down Syndrome:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/202-reflections-from-an-adult-sibling/id602494060?i=1000709410571>

Raising Ricky: A Sister's Lifetime Promise to Protect Her Brother with Down Syndrome



2D AGO · 21 MIN

### #202 - Reflections From An Adult Sibling Down Syndrome Center Podcast

Play

Author Debbie Miller joined the podcast today to discuss her life experiences with her sibling Rick. Debbie has written a memoir called Raising Ricky which can be found at:

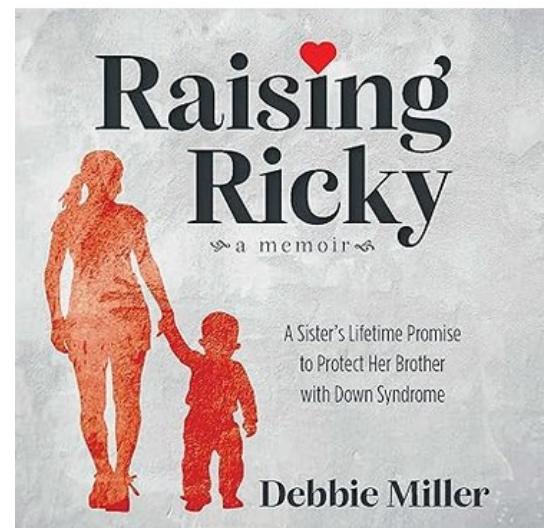
<https://a.co/d/4ILqLyD> (book and audiobook)

A Memoir of Love, Resilience, and Unbreakable Family Bonds

In the fall of 1961, a young girl eagerly anticipates the arrival of her baby brother, Ricky. But when he's born, the joy she expected is overshadowed by the unexpected tension that fills their home.

Her mother, once lively and full of warmth, becomes distant, struggling to care for two children—especially a newborn with special needs.

Raising Ricky is the poignant story of a family transformed, as a sister steps into a role far beyond her years to protect and care for her brother. It's dedicated to anyone who has faced personal hardship, cared for a loved one through difficult times, or has experienced the unbreakable bond unique to siblings. And it's to remind you, that even in life's darkest moments, love will always prevail.



# WAG BRAGS

## Sunshine State Book Festival Authors Donated to Low- Income Health Clinic in Niagara Falls

By Michelle Marcotte

At the Sunshine State Book Festival I approached every author of books for kids and teens offering to review their book for free on my YouTube channel, if they would give me a copy of their book. I said I would mail the book back to them or if they agreed, I would give the books to a low-income health clinic in Niagara Falls New York, near where I live.

Every single author of books for kids and teens gave me a book for the clinic; about 25 books were collected. Sister Nora Sweeney, pictured here, a social worker and local saint, at the Mount St. Mary's Neighborhood Health Clinic in Niagara Falls happily accepted the books. She gives books to kids after vaccinations, and through her Beds for Kids Program. Last year working with donors and donations, she gave 150 kids who were previously sleeping on the floor where they live, bed frames, mattress, sheets, pillow, comforter, pajamas and a book to read.

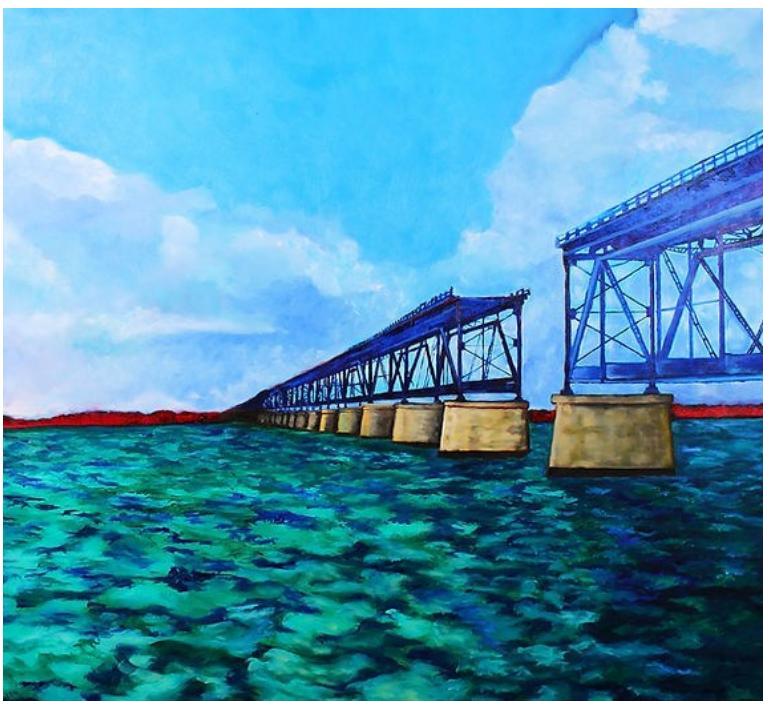
Mount St Mary's Neighborhood Health Clinic serves about 15,000 low- and very low-income persons of all ages. They see 87 – 90 patients a day at the medical clinic. Sister Nora sees to their myriad of non-medical needs.

The books were all reviewed on my YouTube channel Great Books for Kids Reviewed by Michelle Marcotte, where I review books for kids and teens for free to help authors find readers (please subscribe!). New book donations to Sister Nora Sweeney can be mailed to the Mount St Mary's Neighborhood Health Clinic 3101, 9<sup>th</sup> St., Niagara Falls. 14305-1929.

Michelle Marcotte is a member of the Writer's Alliance of Gainesville. She lives and writes books for kids and teens in Archer for five months each year.



# WAG BRAGS



## HIDDEN HISTORIES

An Integrative Exhibition with  
The Writers Alliance of Gainesville



This project is funded in part by Visit Gainesville,  
Alachua County and in part by a grant from the  
City of Gainesville Parks, Recreation and Cultural  
Affairs Department.

IMAGE DETAIL: Old Bridge at Bahia Honda by Glenn McInee

APR 23 - MAY 23, 2025

ARTWALK RECEPTION  
APR 25, 7 -10 PM

Exhibition online & in gallery  
1314 S Main Street  
gainesvillefinearts.org



Thank you to all the  
Writers Alliance authors who  
participated in this year's  
Integrative Exhibition with the  
Gainesville Fine Arts Gallery.  
Thirty artists local artists  
created pieces of art with the  
theme Hidden Histories, and  
then thirty WAG writers  
wrote pieces to go with the  
artwork. This exhibition has  
been going on for many years,  
and means a lot to all of us.  
Thank you for your great  
entries!

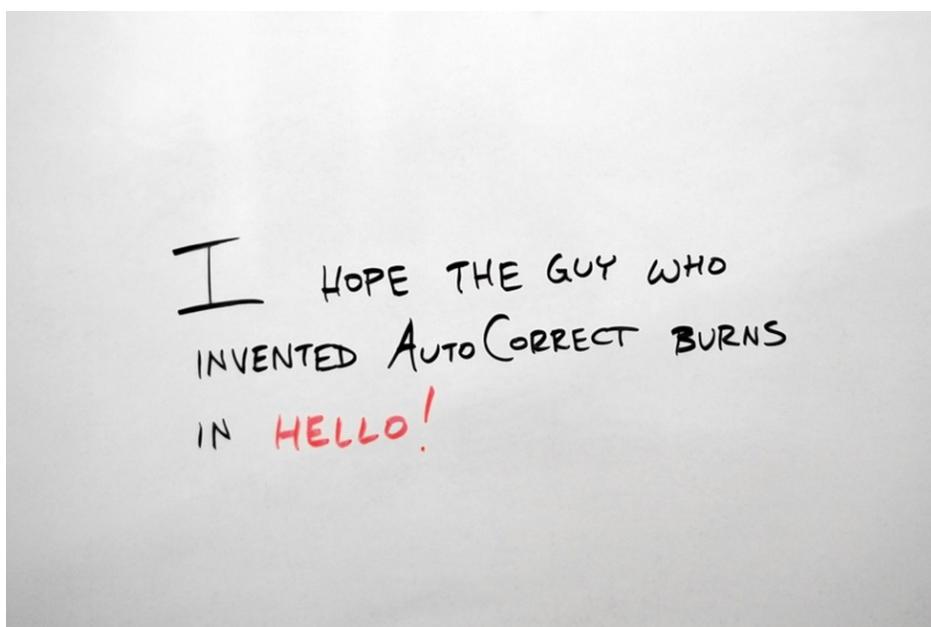
# WAG BRAGS

Congratulations to WAG Member Ginny Brinkley for Honorable Mention in the Jax Poetry Fest 2025



She even got a \$25 prize for her haiku! Nice work, Ginny!

W\*R\*I\*T\*E\*



# How to Write a Query Letter: Nonfiction and Memoir

April 29, 2025 by Jane Friedman

<https://janefriedman.com/query-letters-nonfiction-memoir/>



Note from Jane: On July 2, I'm teaching a class on writing nonfiction queries. [Learn more.](https://janefriedman.com/write-a-compelling-query-for-your-nonfiction-book/) [https://janefriedman.com/write-a-compelling-query-for-your-nonfiction-book/] {SEE information below under classes}

For years, I've offered a lengthy guide on [how to write a query letter for a novel](#). When you're pitching fiction to an agent or publisher through a query letter, your ultimate goal is to get your manuscript read. Therefore, the query is a sales piece, and it's all about the art of seduction.

A query letter for a nonfiction book isn't all that different from a fiction query: you're still trying to get an agent or editor interested in looking at your work, but that may mean a book proposal and sample chapters, rather than the full manuscript. ([Nonfiction is often sold on the basis of a proposal.](#))

Unfortunately, there's a bit of complication when querying a nonfiction project; it's not as straightforward and formula-driven as querying a novel. With a novel, you're always trying to craft the perfect hook that encapsulates the essence of your protagonist and the conflict—and it doesn't matter what type of novel it is. All novels are narratives with character, plot, setting, conflict, and resolutions (of some kind).

(cont. on next page)

WAG Digest

## How to Write a Query Letter: Nonfiction and Memoir (cont.)

With nonfiction, you may be pitching:

- a narrative about yourself (memoir)
- a narrative about someone else (biography)
- a narrative about something (broadly called narrative nonfiction; think *Seabiscuit*)
- a prescriptive book (a book that helps the reader learn or do something better, such as a how-to, self-help or business book)
- a reference book

an illustrated book

... and so on.

There isn't a single formula that can cover all these categories or types of books. But for our purposes, to provide some kind of roadmap, we'll split up nonfiction queries into two types:

1. Narrative-driven nonfiction (including memoir, biography, and narrative nonfiction)
2. Information-driven nonfiction

**Before you begin the query process:** you should have a finished and polished book proposal ready to go, [<https://janefriedman.com/start-here-how-to-write-a-book-proposal/>] which should include at least one sample chapter, if not more. It should be the best you can make it.

It's also important that prospective authors give some thought to their author platform, or their ability to market and promote their book to an existing audience they can reach, without the publisher's help, through online or offline activities. I discuss platform here [<https://janefriedman.com/author-platform-definition/>]. Your query and book proposal not only have to present an effective argument for why your book should exist, but also should reflect your authority and platform as a book author. (This is *not* the case for novelists.)

### Query Letter Elements: Narrative-Driven Nonfiction

The query for this type of nonfiction may end up looking very similar to a novel query, especially if you're writing a memoir. Include these elements, in no particular order (except the closing):

(Cont. on next page)

## How to Write a Query Letter: Nonfiction and Memoir (cont.)

- Personalization: where you customize the letter for the recipient
- What you're selling: genre/category, anticipated word count, title/subtitle
- Hook: a compelling description of the narrative
- Target readership: who will buy this book and why? (it *cannot* be everyone and anyone)
- Your bio, platform and credentials to write the book

Thank you and closing.

### Query Letter Elements: Information-Driven Nonfiction

If you've written a book proposal (and you probably should), then your query letter is often a more condensed version of your book proposal's overview or summary—those first 500 words (or first one to three proposal pages) should summarize the most important and salable qualities of your book. Your query and your proposal overview should both answer three questions: **(1) So what?** Why is this book unique, special or needed in the current marketplace? **(2) Who cares?** Who is the identifiable and specific audience who will spend \$20 on this book? And **(3) Who are you?** Why are you the best author for this book—what are your platform and credentials? It's okay if your query and proposal include the same or similar language.

Whether or not you're starting from scratch, include these elements, in no particular order (except the closing):

- Personalization: where you customize the letter for the recipient
- What you're selling: genre/category, anticipated word count, title/subtitle
- What makes your book unique—or its unique selling proposition
- Target readership: who will buy this book and why? (it *cannot* be everyone and anyone)
- Your bio, platform and credentials to write the book

Thank you and closing.

## How to Write a Query Letter: Nonfiction and Memoir (cont.)

### What's in the very first paragraph of the query?

Put your best foot forward—lead with your strongest selling point. Examples:

- **Personalization.** Let's say you've been vouched for or referred by an existing client of the agent's—or if you're querying a publisher, you might be referred by one of their authors. Put that first! Or maybe you heard the agent/editor speak at a conference or you read something they wrote that indicates they're a good fit for your work. Mention it.
- **Hook.** If you have confidence about the compelling nature of your narrative, start with that. Example: "When I was eighteen years old, I moved from my hometown in Oregon (population: 7,500) to live with the most powerful man in Hollywood and be a nanny to his three children."
- **Platform or credentials.** If your blog receives 100,000 visits a month, if you have an email newsletter of 20,000 readers who can't wait to receive your updates, or if you're a YouTube star, then you mention your powerful reach up-front. If you're a previously published author, experienced professional, or highly regarded authority in your field, you can start with that. Example: "As the former CEO of three successful startups ..."

**Target readership.** If your book will address a timely or emerging demographic, or if it solves the problems of a specific audience, then you can open by discussing the compelling market for the book: "Between 2000 and 2013, births by women ages 50 to 54 rose by more than 165 percent. This book tells the story of [or tackles the problems of] ..."

### The Most Difficult Challenge for Narrative Nonfiction: Pitching a High-Quality Story for a Big Enough Target Audience

For most narrative-driven nonfiction, the writing and storytelling matters as much as it would for a novel, and your hook plays an important role in conveying the quality of the story. But the publisher has to envision a sizable audience for that story, too. It's instructive to look at [the rejections that Rebecca Skloot collected](https://janefriedman.tumblr.com/image/132171805415) [https://janefriedman.tumblr.com/image/132171805415] for [The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks](#), now an award-winning work of narrative nonfiction. Skloot had trouble convincing editors that her story was marketable to a wide audience. Here's what those rejection letters said: (see next page)

(Cont. on next page)

## How to Write a Query Letter: Nonfiction and Memoir (cont.)

- “She has done a wonderful job presenting the personal and scientific dimensions of this unusual and often eerie story. Unfortunately in the end I really see this as an extended magazine article, and not a full book.”
- “Skloot is a first rate stylist and explainer, so I’m sorry to say I can’t make an offer. I believe her story, though it throws a bright light on issues of race and science, is better suited to an article than book length.”
- “I’m sorry to say that I’m not entirely confident that the approach taken here to tell us the story is the kind of treatment which will reach the broad nonfiction readership that we’re looking for.”
- “Though the proposal breaches a timely and interesting topic in light of renewed interest in genetic research, it does not seem to be right for [our] list.”
- “She’s a graceful writer with a real talent for presenting scientific material in a lucid and very human way. That said, though, I have to admit I can’t quite imagine how a book on this chapter in science might reach more than a very limited audience. To me, the real heart of the story is somehow too short-lived to create a strong sense of narrative tension, and its repercussions, I think, may not spark the interest of a wide enough readership for [our] list.”

“I think this is an amazing story and perhaps an important one to be told. What I’m less certain about is the eventual angle that Skloot will be telling it from. It is entirely clear that she is passionate about her subject matter; however, until more of the story unfolds, I remain uncertain of the power of the narrative.”

Some of the more common rejections you’ll encounter: this book should be a magazine article, the book’s audience is too small, or the story or approach is not distinctive or unique enough.

### I Writing a Narrative-Driven Hook That’s Not a Tired Storyline

Whether you’re writing memoir or nonfiction narrative, you need to boil down your story to these three key elements:

1. Protagonist and her conflict
2. The choices the protagonist has to make (the stakes)
3. The sizzle

(cont. on next page)

## How to Write a Query Letter: Nonfiction and Memoir (cont.)

If you're writing a memoir, then write the hook in first person—meaning you are the protagonist.

What does sizzle mean? It's that thing that sets your work apart from all others in the genre, that makes your story stand out, that makes it uniquely yours. Sizzle means: this idea isn't tired and hasn't been done a million times before. When it comes to memoir, there are a lot of tired storylines out there. In this agent roundtable on memoir in Writer's Digest in 2010, you can get a feel for what makes agents' eyes glaze over:

- “On some days it seems as though every therapist in the country who is dealing with addicts of one kind or another has told them to journal their recovery and then turn it into a book. Quitting booze or drugs is a good thing to do, but it isn't the triumph of the human spirit.”
- “I'm sick of dysfunctional family stories, but I'm a big fan of memoirs by people who have lived lives the rest of us only dream of.”
- “Though books by cancer and disease survivors are prevalent, I find them very tough to sell to publishers unless the survivor has some kind of name recognition.”

“I try to steer [writers] away from, ‘I was born in a big/small town, and I liked listening to punk music, and I hated my mother and blahdee blahda blah blah.’”

Sometimes great hooks can be botched because there is no life, voice, or personality in them. Sometimes so-so hooks can be taken to the next level because they convey a liveliness or personality that is seductive. You want to be one of those seductive writers, of course.

### The Most Difficult Challenge for Information-Based Nonfiction:

#### Having a Sufficient Platform

You may have a killer concept or method to share with the world, but for information-based nonfiction, unless you have platform muscle, it's unlikely that New York publishers will be interested in your book. Platform basically equates to visibility, or the ability to sell books.

You should have visibility to the specific target audience you expect to buy your book. And it's not enough to say you have visibility—you have to be able to point to it, quantify it, and show how you're ready to lift off into the stratosphere of book sales.

**A secondary challenge is having a unique enough selling proposition to set your book apart from the competition.** You're likely entering a crowded field, and especially if your platform is on the weaker side, you need to nail the concept and make it irresistible.

## How to Write a Query Letter: Nonfiction and Memoir (cont.)

It's very powerful to claim that your book will be the first and only book to do X. Or you could discuss how your book offers a compelling solution to a problem faced by your target audience. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What special features or content does your book offer?
- What special research or investigation does your book include that can be found nowhere else?
- What proven systems, methods, secrets, or lessons do you share?

How will readers benefit from your book? How will their lives change for the better?

### How to Describe a Meaningful Target Audience

Most authors have trouble identifying their target audience—and the most common sin is to go way too broad. Here are two examples that miss the point entirely:

• “Anyone who has children will be interested in this parenting book.” Really? Will parents of two-year-olds and parents of twenty-year-olds both be interested? Will rich parents and lower-class parents both be interested? Will urban and rural parents both be interested?

“Anyone who’s had a friend or family member with cancer will be interested in this book.” That probably describes nearly every person in the United States—this is not a meaningful target audience.

You should also avoid citing meaningless statistics, such as “Google returns more than 152 million search results for the term *climate change*” or “Amazon lists more than 10,000 titles in the environmental science category.” Neither of these figures indicate or describe the target audience for your work.

Here are examples of a meaningful target audience:

- This book targets the 2 million corporate employees who quit their jobs every month.
- This book targets degree-seeking students in the more than 500 creative writing programs in the United States, as well as those who have graduated within the last five years.

If you’re wondering if this is like a case of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, yes. Even inside publishing houses, there’s always disagreement about the ideal target audience for a book and its size.

Sometimes it can be helpful to point to other titles similar to your own, or competitive titles, to give an idea of the target audience you’re after. Just be careful:

(Cont. on next page)

## How to Write a Query Letter: Nonfiction and Memoir (cont.)

Mentioning the latest *New York Times* bestseller or the latest book to be made into a movie won't be very helpful. Agents quickly tire of memoirs being pitched as the next *Eat, Pray, Love* or *Wild*.)

### What You Should Mention in Your Bio

- Publication credits or publishing history—especially if you've previously published any part of the work at a major website, magazine, or literary journal. (Your own site does not count unless traffic is in the six figures.) Be specific about your credits for this to be meaningful. Don't say you've been published "in a variety of journals." You might as well be unpublished if you don't want to name them.
- Any professional background or experience that's relevant to the content of the book and your authority to write it
- Any professional recognition or awards you've received—or positions that you hold—that give you visibility to influencers or to your readership
- Relevant national or mainstream media attention you've received.
- Any ongoing gigs that put you in front of the target audience (columns, podcasts, radio/TV shows, and so on).
- The size of your current audience through online or offline media.
- Any major personalities or influencers who have agreed to write a foreword or blurb your book.

Many authors ask if they should mention any previously self-published work in the query. That's totally up to you. Sooner or later this information will have to come out, so it's usually just a matter of timing. Lots of people have done it, and it doesn't hurt your chances. If you do mention it, it's best if you're proud of your efforts and are ready to discuss your success (or failure) in doing it. If you consider it a mistake or irrelevant to the project at hand, leave it out, and understand it may come up later.

Do not make the mistake of thinking your self-publishing credits make you somehow more desirable as an author—unless you have really incredible sales success, in which case, mention the sales numbers of your book and how long it's been on sale.



## How to Write a Query Letter: Nonfiction and Memoir (cont.)

### Other Tips for Your Query Letter

1. The appropriate length for a nonfiction query is somewhere between 1 and 1.5 pages, single spaced. Usually the shorter, the better. If you can send the book proposal along with the query, you should. In such cases, the query really ends up being a cover letter and doesn't have to be labored over that much. (The good news: just about every agent/editor will flip through a book proposal if it's in front of them.)
2. If your book's estimated word count is much higher than 100,000, you may be courting rejection before an agent has read a word of your proposal or manuscript. Eighty thousand words is the industry standard for a narrative nonfiction work. Information-based nonfiction varies tremendously, but still, high word counts will raise a red flag for most publishers and agents.
3. You don't have to state that you are simultaneously querying. In today's environment, everyone assumes this. I do not recommend exclusive queries; send queries out in batches of three to five—or more, if you're confident in your query quality.
4. Don't mention your "history" with the work (e.g., how many agents you've queried, or how many near misses you've suffered, or how many compliments you've received on the work from others).
5. Resist the temptation to editorialize. Don't directly comment on the quality of your work. Your query should show what a good writer you are, rather than telling or emphasizing what a good writer you are. Editorializing is whenever you proclaim how much the agent will love the work, or how exciting it is, or how it's going to be a bestseller if only someone would give it a chance, or how much your kids enjoy it, or how much the world needs this work. On the flip side: don't criticize yourself, or the quality of the work, in the letter.
6. There's no need to go into great detail about when and how you're available. Simply put at the bottom of your query (unless using letterhead) your phone number and e-mail address. Include a self-addressed stamped envelope for snail mail queries.
7. Do not introduce the idea of an in-person meeting with the agent or editor. Don't say you'll be visiting their city soon, and ask if they'd like to meet for coffee. The only possible exception to this is if you know you'll hear them speak at an upcoming conference—but don't ask for a meeting. Just say you look forward to hearing them speak. Use the conference's official channels to set up an appointment if any are available.

## How to Write a Query Letter: Nonfiction and Memoir (cont.)

8. Writers often complain that they never receive a response to their queries. Sometimes silence is the new rejection. This is a phenomenon that (regrettably) must be accepted. Send one follow-up to inquire if you must, but don't keep sending emails to ascertain if your emailed query was received.

While you should list your website as part of your contact info, there's almost never any need to tell agents in the body of the query to visit your website for more info. Most of them will Google you anyway and check out your online presence to get a sense of how you might be to work with and if you have a meaningful platform.

### Looking for query letter examples?

I keep a list of example query letters at my book-related site, [The Business of Being a Writer](https://businessofwriting.org/supplemental-resources/). [<https://businessofwriting.org/supplemental-resources/>]

### How to identify agents to query

I also have guidance on [finding literary agents](https://janefriedman.com/find-literary-agent/). [<https://janefriedman.com/find-literary-agent/>]

### Looking for hands-on help?

Jessica Strawser, the former editor of Writer's Digest, offers a [Gut Check Package](#) that helps you perfect your submissions materials.



[Jane Friedman](#)

Jane Friedman has spent 25+ years working in the publishing industry, with a focus on business reporting and author education. Established in 2015, her newsletter [The Bottom Line](#) provides nuanced market intelligence to thousands of authors and industry professionals; in 2023, she was named Publishing Commentator of the Year by Digital Book World.

Jane's expertise regularly features in major media outlets such as The New York Times, The Atlantic, NPR, The Today Show, Wired, The Guardian, Fox News, and BBC. Her book, [The Business of Being a Writer, Second Edition](#) (The University of Chicago Press), is used as a classroom text by many writing and publishing degree programs. She reaches thousands through [speaking engagements](#) and workshops at diverse venues worldwide, including NYU's Advanced Publishing Institute, Frankfurt Book Fair, and numerous MFA programs.



# Classes and Conferences



## Write a Compelling Query for Your Nonfiction Book

Learn the best practices of nonfiction query writing whether you plan to pitch literary agents or book publishers

<https://janefriedman.com/write-a-compelling-query-for-your-nonfiction-book/>

[Register now \(\\$25\)](#)

**INSTRUCTOR** Jane Friedman

**DATE & TIME** Wednesday, July 2, 2025, at 1 p.m.–2:30 p.m. EDT

**IDEAL FOR** Anyone pitching their first nonfiction book

**ACCESSIBILITY** Closed captions by Otter; transcript provided with recording

**Important: This query letter class is not for those writing memoir or hybrid memoir.** (To learn why, see below.)

The query letter has one purpose: to compel the agent or editor to request your book proposal or open up a conversation about your project. A powerful query letter establishes your book's unique selling proposition and clearly identifies your target readership—even before you've completed your manuscript. This has to be accomplished in about 500 words or less, while conveying your authority and platform to write the book.

This class shows you how to craft a query that stands out in a crowded field. You'll learn to articulate what makes your book necessary, identify your specific audience, and present your credentials and platform effectively.

### How do I attend the live class?

This class uses Zoom webinar technology. You will join through your Internet-connected computer or mobile device. When you register, you will receive information via email on how to join the class. **If you don't receive it within 1 hour of registering, please [contact us](#).**

- When: Wednesday, July 2, 2025
- Time: 1:00–2:30 p.m. Eastern Time / 10:00 a.m.–11:30 a.m. Pacific Time

The webinar is broadcasted via the internet with live audio delivered through your computer or mobile device speakers. The visual presentation is displayed directly from the presenter's computer to your computer screen. The Q&A is managed through a chat-style submission system with questions read and answered by the presenter for the entire class to hear.

**Closed captions are provided during the live class.** We use Zoom's automated closed caption service (powered by Otter), which is about 80%+ accurate.

[Register now \(\\$25\)](#) <https://janefriedman.com/registration-write-a-compelling-query-for-your-nonfiction-book/>

# Classes and Conferences



## Killer Nashville International Writers' Conference

AUGUST 21—24, 2025 NASHVILLE, TN

Contact: <https://www.killernashville.com/contact-us>

At the conference, we try diligently to ensure that the weekend has something for every writer and lover of literature, and our sessions are structured to assist writers on multiple career levels. Our learning tracks tackle the craft of writing, business of writing, marketing, and forensics.

Genres Offered: **Fiction, Creative Nonfiction, Poetry, Live Storytelling**

**\*W\*R\*I\*T\*E\***



**New York Pitch Conference—**[\*\*https://newyorkwritetopitch.com/\*\*](https://newyorkwritetopitch.com/)

JUNE 26—29, 2025

NEW YORK, NY (IN PERSON & ONLINE)

The New York Pitch Conference and writers' workshop is held four times a year and features publishing house editors from major houses such as Penguin, Random House, St. Martins, HarperCollins, Tor and Del Rey, Kensington Books, and many more that are looking for new novels in a variety of genres, as well as narrative nonfiction.

Genres Offered: Fiction, Upmarket, Crime, Chick Lit, Nonfiction, Young Adult

Contact: [info@algonkianconferences.com](mailto:info@algonkianconferences.com)

# Contests



a literary press  
**focused on the life of the spirit**  
from a broad range of perspectives

## The Best Spiritual Literature Awards 2025

**Deadline:** August 1, 2025

The 2025 *Best Spiritual Literature Awards* in Poetry, Fiction, & Nonfiction will award \$500 and publication in Orison Books' annual *Best Spiritual Literature* anthology for a single work in each genre. Judges: Yehoshua November (poetry), Athena Dixon (nonfiction), TBD (fiction). Entry fee: \$12. Submission period: May 1–August 1. [duotrope.com/duosuma/submit/best-spiritual-literature-awards-ldqfx](http://duotrope.com/duosuma/submit/best-spiritual-literature-awards-ldqfx)

**\*W\*R\*I\*T\*E\***

## University of Akron Press

### Akron Poetry Prize

**Deadline:** June 15, 2025

**Entry Fee:** \$25

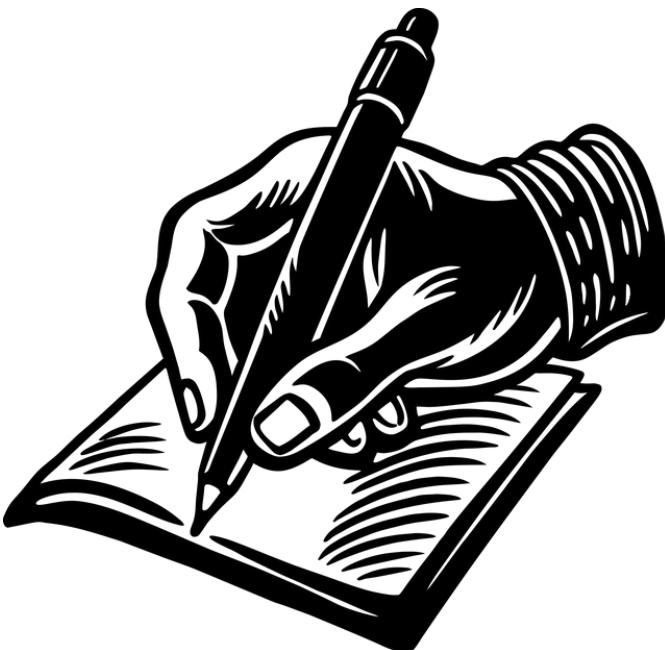
**Cash Prize:** \$1,500

**E-mail address:** [uapress@uakron.edu](mailto:uapress@uakron.edu)

**Website:** <http://uakron.edu/uapress/akron-poetry-prize>

A prize of \$1,500 and publication by University of Akron Press is given annually for a poetry collection. Eduardo C. Corral will judge. Using only the online submission system, submit a manuscript of 48 to 90 pages with a \$25 entry fee by June 15. Visit the website for complete guidelines.

University of Akron Press, Akron Poetry Prize, 185 E. Mill Street, Akron, OH 44325. Mary Biddinger, Series Editor.



# CONTESTS



## Swan Scythe Press Announces its 2025 Poetry Chapbook Contest!

**Deadline:** June 15, 2025

Swan Scythe Press announces its 2025 poetry chapbook contest. Entry fee: \$18. We are accepting submissions from March 1 to June 15 (postmark deadline). Winner receives \$200 and 25 perfect-bound chapbooks. The 2024 winner is Aida Zilelian for *Dissonance*. For full guidelines, visit [www.swanscythepress.com](http://www.swanscythepress.com) and [swanscythepress.submittable.com/submit](http://swanscythepress.submittable.com/submit).

\*W\*R\*I\*T\*E\*

NOW ACCEPTING SUBMISSIONS FOR THE  
**2025 HOUSATONIC BOOK AWARDS**

Open to Fiction, Nonfiction, and Poetry books published in 2024  
 Winners receive \$1,500 ★ Deadline: July 18, 2025



**ENTER NOW!**



## Submissions Open for 2025 Housatonic Book Awards

**Deadline:** July 18, 2025

The Housatonic Book Awards are now accepting submissions of all books published in 2024. Authors or agents are welcome to submit poetry, fiction, and nonfiction manuscripts for consideration in the HBAs.

All manuscripts will be reviewed by a committee and the winners will be notified in October 2025. Each award carries a \$1,000 honorarium and \$500 travel stipend in exchange for the author appearing at either WCSU's fall or summer writing residency. Entering a title implies the author's willingness to attend the WCSU MFA residency to host a 2-hour workshop. We look forward to considering your work! [housatonicbookawards.wordpress.com](http://housatonicbookawards.wordpress.com)

**Create:** *verb.* The act of banging your head on the desk until something interesting pops out.

-wDm

# Contests

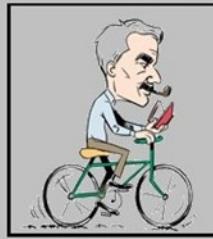


## William Faulkner Literary Competition

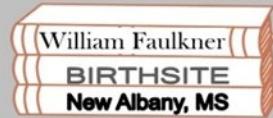
**2025**

In its 28th Year

**\$6,000 IN  
PRIZE \$\$\$**



**Cash Prizes for  
Novel  
Short Story  
Poetry  
One-Act Play**  
*Enter online*



### Union County Heritage Museum

Enter Here:

<https://williamfaulknerliterarycompetition.com/>

**\*W\*R\*I\*T\*E\***

**[Driftwood Press Fiction & Poetry Contests Judged by Kelly Link & Matthew Olzmann!](#)**



## ADRIFT CONTEST GUEST JUDGES



Matthew Olzmann  
Poetry Chapbook Contest



Kelly Link  
Short Story Contest

**SUBMISSIONS OPEN NOW!**

**Incoming Deadline:** July 15, 2025 (Adrift contests); Year-round (general submissions)

Driftwood Press's Adrift Short Fiction & Poetry Chapbook Contests, in which every work submitted is considered for publication as winner or runner-up, is open! Our guest judges this year are Matthew Olzmann (poetry) & Kelly Link (fiction)! For our yearly print anthology, we are looking for poems, short stories, comics, and visual art that will wow our readers, accepted as both contest and normal submissions. We are a paying market, and our published writers also get to take part in bespoke interviews about their work! Driftwood is also on the hunt for amazing book-length titles to grow our catalogue. We encourage you to follow us on social media (@driftwoodpress) to learn about even more submission opportunities! [driftwoodpress.submittable.com/](https://driftwoodpress.submittable.com/)



The Blue Mountain Review

# CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

NOW ACCEPTING SUBMISSIONS FOR  
Poetry | Microfiction | Fiction | Essays

A photograph of a person's hands typing on a laptop keyboard.

## Our Doors are Open

**Deadline:** Year-round

*The Blue Mountain Review* launched from Athens, Georgia in 2015 with the mantra, "We're all south of somewhere." As a journal of culture, the BMR strives to represent all life through its stories. Stories are vital to our survival. What we sing saves the soul. Our goal is to preserve and promote lives told well through prose, poetry, music, and the visual arts. We've published work from and interviews with Jericho Brown, Kelli Russell Agodon, Robert Pinsky, Rising Appalachia, TurkuaZ, Michel Stone, Michael Flohr, Lee Herrick, Chen Chen, Michael Cudlitz, Pat Metheny, Melissa Studdard, Lyrics Born, Terry Kay, and Christopher Moore.

[bluemountainreview.submittable.com/submit](http://bluemountainreview.submittable.com/submit)

*\*W\*R\*I\*T\*E\**

## bioStories

*a literary magazine: sharing the extraordinary in ordinary lives*

### bioStories call for creative nonfiction

**Deadline:** Year-round

*bioStories* is eager to read your CNF. We publish a new essay every week online. We publish only nonfiction and value presenting an eclectic variety of work by writers of exceptional talent. *bioStories* offers portraits of the people surrounding us, including the strangers we pass on the street unnoticed and those intimate to us who have been most influential and most familiar. We look for work that offers slices of a life that help the reader imagine the whole of that life; work that demonstrates that ordinary people's experiences often contain extraordinary moments, visionary ideas, and inspirational acts. Please follow guidelines on the submissions tab of our webpage: [www.biostories.com](http://www.biostories.com).



## Calls for Submissions

### Philly Chapbook Review is Open for Original Poetry



**Deadline:** June 15, 2025

*Philly Poetry Chapbook Review* is looking for serious poetry that has something important to say. This can mean poems about topics important to you, poems telling us about who you are or what you think, or an unusual or clever creative style. Poems don't need to deal with weighty subjects, but should be meaningful. We prefer thought-provoking free verse. Exceptions can be made, but common forms of metered verse, end-rhyme, haiku/tanka, and other well-worn forms should be avoided entirely. We also like to feature a poet rather than a poem, so submissions must include at least three poems.

Click here for full guidelines and submission form  
[phillychapbookreview.org/call-for-summer-poetry-submissions/](http://phillychapbookreview.org/call-for-summer-poetry-submissions/).

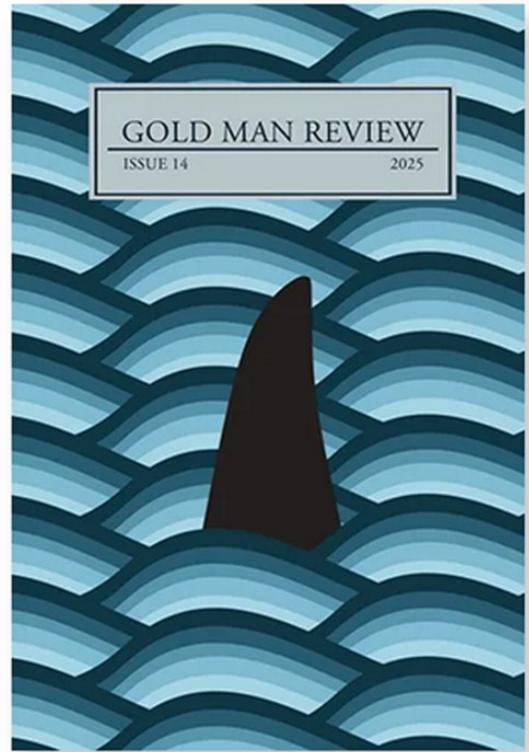
\*W\*R\*I\*T\*E\*

### Gold Man Review Open for Submissions

**Deadline:** June 15, 2025

*Gold Man Review*, a West Coast Journal, is currently looking for submissions in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction for Issue 15. We are open to all topics and themes and love writing that pushes boundaries. If your work is on the unusual side, then we're probably the journal for you.

If you're interested in submitting to *Gold Man Review*, [please see our website](http://goldmanpublishing.com/submission-guidelines-2/) [<https://goldmanpublishing.com/submission-guidelines-2/>] for full submission guidelines. Please also note that we only accept submissions from writers in Oregon, Alaska, Hawaii, California, and Washington.



# Calls for Submissions

## TheNewVerse.News

Today's News . . . Today's Poem

### *The New Verse News*

presents politically progressive poetry on current events and topical issues.

### The New Verse News Seeks Current Events Poetry

**Deadline:** Year-round

Since 2005, [The New Verse News](#) has covered the news of the day with poems on issues, large and small, international and local. It relies on the submission of poems (especially those of a politically progressive bent) by writers from all over the world. The editors update the website every day with a poetic take on a current and specific headline. See the website for guidelines and examples. Then paste your non-simultaneous submission and a brief bio in the text of an email (no attachments, please) to [vneditor\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:vneditor(at)gmail.com). Write “Verse News Submission” in the subject line of your email.





**Writer's Alliance of Gainesville**

*A not-for-profit Florida corporation*

P.O. Box 358396

**Gainesville/Florida/32635-8396**

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer  
Services: License #: CH66096.

The Writers Alliance of Gainesville (**WAG**) promotes, encourages and supports aspiring and experienced regional writers. This goal is accomplished via **WAG** monthly meetings, public readings, ongoing small critique groups, a literary journal, writers' contests, and collaborations with schools and civic organizations to foster creative expression through the written word.

Writers Alliance—[www.writersalliance.org](http://www.writersalliance.org)

## Why I Write

Because kidnapping people  
and forcing them to act out  
your interesting make-believe  
worlds is technically illegal.

What type of blood does a  
proofreader have? Type O.

Why are writers always cold?  
They're surrounded by drafts.

What do working in publishing  
and parenting a toddler have in  
common? Reading the same  
damn book over and over and  
over.

[https://www.melinamorry.com/  
blog/funny-jokes-about-writing](https://www.melinamorry.com/blog/funny-jokes-about-writing)

What do you get when you cross a writer with a deadline?

A really clean house.

[https://brevity.wordpress.com/2018/06/13/classic-  
jokes-for-writers/](https://brevity.wordpress.com/2018/06/13/classic-jokes-for-writers/)

## WAG on Social Media

