



THE WRITER'S CENTER MAGAZINE

FALL 2025

- 05 New books
& old friends!**
- 12 Writing classes
& free events**
- 29 Highlights from
Viet Thanh Nguyen,
Melissa Febos &
Keetje Kuipers**

FREE



upcoming retreats

JUST 1 HOUR FROM DC & BALTIMORE,
IN MARYLAND'S CATOCTIN MOUNTAINS

2025

Sept. 7-12: The Inspired Writer Retreat with Eugenia Kim

Oct. 23: ZigBone Writers Step Up to the Mic @ Old Town Books

Nov. 3-7: Using Poetry & Yoga to Come to Our Best Selves,
with Ann Quinn & Sharon Neubauer

2026

Jan. 9-14: Winter-on-the-Farm Creative Writing w/ Diana Friedman

Feb. 6-9: Book Club Retreat with Old Town Books

Feb. 20-24: You Write, We Cook Writer's Hive Getaway

April 12-17: Spring-on-the-Farm Creative Writing with Diana Friedman

More to come!



More Info:

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The Writer's Center hosts a series of workshops for you to **complete book-length projects**, generate new work for publication, or master the elements of craft within a specific genre. **You'll work with an acclaimed author**, guiding you through 4-12 months of lessons, workshops, and revisions. **Learn more online!** And check back often for new offerings.

writer.org/bookfarm

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THE WRITER'S CENTER MAGAZINE FALL 2025

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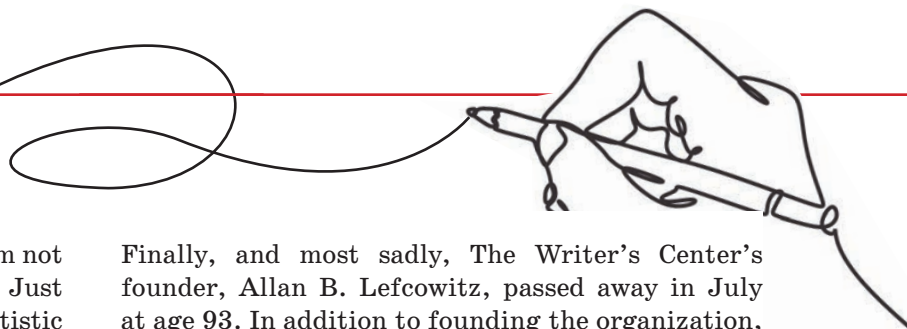
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This is a time to say goodbye. Don't worry, I'm not going anywhere! Quite the opposite, in fact. Just a few weeks ago, I took over as Executive & Artistic Director at The Writer's Center. It looks like you're stuck with me for a while.

But if I'm taking over, that means we're saying goodbye to my predecessor, Margaret Meleney, who retired after 7-plus years in her role, as well as several more on the board before that. Margaret leaves a legacy of growth and vibrancy, and a lot of the programs you love exist because of her hard work. We'll miss you, Margaret, and we hope to make you proud!

Over the last year, we've also seen several long-time and beloved board members leave after years of outstanding service. I can't overstate the importance of a supportive board for an organization like ours. So thank you to all of those who've volunteered their time and shared their skills in support of the Center and its mission.

Finally, and most sadly, The Writer's Center's founder, Allan B. Lefcowitz, passed away in July at age 93. In addition to founding the organization, Al served as the first Chairman of the Board, Director, and Artistic Director. He retired from the Center in 2002.

I met Al twice, most recently on a random Sunday when I happened to be in the building for an event. Al and former director Jane Fox stopped by when they were in the area, and we ended up chatting by the front desk for most of an hour. A writer in the truest sense, Al had endless engaging stories to tell. We could have chatted for hours more. Thank you, Al. We literally wouldn't be here without you.

So, instead of *goodbye*, it seems I'm saying *thanks*. To everyone I work with now, everyone I've worked with in the past, and everyone who came before. I hope I live up to the precedent.

—Zach Powers, Executive & Artistic Director



ABOUT THE COVER

DELNA DASTUR

Cross Pollination, 2023, Acrylic, woodblocks and texture gels on oil paper, 30 x 22 in.

I grew up in Bombay, India. Life there is loud and crowded, teeming with humanity filling the air with the sound and aroma of constant flux. These memories are embedded in my subconscious and infiltrate my work through a palette that reflects bright, intense color and through patterns decorating the surfaces. My compositions also investigate the fraught relationship between Humanity and Nature.

Upon completing her BA in India, Dastur came to the United States and majored in Art History at Wellesley College, followed by an MFA in oil painting at American University. In addition to exhibiting in the U.S. and India, she teaches for the Smithsonian and the Art League in Alexandria, VA, has also curated exhibitions, and lectured at the Museum in Mumbai on contemporary American artists. Recent exhibitions include solo shows at the District Arts in Fredericksburg, MD and at Fred Schnider Gallery in Arlington, VA, and group exhibits at Mary Washington University and Delaware Contemporary Art Museum. Dastur has been a Resident Fellow at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts three times. View more of Delna's work at delnadastur.com.

See *Cross Pollination* this fall at American University's Museum, Katzen Arts Center, in the upcoming *Women Artists of the DMV* exhibition!



Unexpected Origins

**CHET'LA SEBREE DISCUSSES
HER FORTHCOMING POETRY
COLLECTION *BLUE OPENING***

By Emily Holland

In Chet'la Sebree's forthcoming collection, *Blue Opening* (Tin House, September 2025), readers move through intimate and expansive poems of origin, illness, loss, and love. *Blue Opening*, Sebree's third book, challenges our understanding of beginnings and endings and untangles complicated emotions around parenthood. Sebree chatted with Emily Holland, writer and executive editor of *Poet Lore* about the collection's origins, its ambitious forms, and her own early influences.

EH: First, congratulations on the upcoming publication of *Blue Opening*! It is such a beautiful collection of poems. Let's start at the beginning, which feels apt for this collection in particular! What was the creation process like for this book, which is your third book, in comparison to your first two?

CS: For the first two books, I had a sense of what the projects were early on. For *Mistress*, I wanted to write about Sally Hemings, Black women's experiences, and the problematic usage of the word "mistress"—a term, outside of its definition as extramarital partner, which is often imbued with agency and power—to describe an enslaved woman. With *Field Study*, I knew within the first few weeks of writing that I was going to frame the book as an anthropological study with questions surrounding interracial desire at its center. But with *Blue Opening*, I had no plan.

Blue Opening is a true collection of poems, most written within a silo without consideration for the

works alongside it might fall. Over the past ten years, I wrote *Blue Opening*'s poems for different manuscripts that didn't come into fruition, to "clear the decks," or to shift my attention elsewhere while I wrote the two aforementioned books with clearer arcs. For example, the title poem, albeit in a different format, was originally written in 2015; whereas I was still tinkering with "Genesis"—perhaps one of only three or four poems written with a book in mind—until earlier this year. This is to say, I didn't realize I was writing about origins, creation, loss, illness, and the night sky until I printed out the body of loner poems I'd written in the past ten years; once I had them in hand, I started to see the constellation of the conversations, saw how I might bring the threads together with the longer sequences—"Genesis" and "Five Facts about Lupus," specifically.

One of my favorite forms in the book is the series of "Root Logic" poems, which begin each section. They explore etymology and definitions while providing openings for the other recurring themes and ideas of the collection. They also showcase some of the creative wordplay (and soundplay) we see throughout the other poems. What was your goal with this form and how did you embrace the associative expansiveness of language in these poems?

Thank you! "Root Logic" actually started as a series of poems for a manuscript I've since abandoned that looks at different tumor types in three different women in my family; it explored the etymology

of the names of the tumors, the locations of them in the body, and the women whose bodies housed them—temporarily, permanently, and terminally. The poem, at that time, was called “Trinity.” And although I loved much of what that poem was doing, I realized I was writing through a grief that no longer belonged on the page.

The poem, then, became the “Root Logic” series—focused exclusively on the etymologies of the different parts of the body: womb, breast, brain. Like much of this collection, though, it wasn’t written with the other poems in mind. In fact, I didn’t add the series in as section markers until after the book was selected for publication, as I was still struggling to determine how to order the manuscript. “Root Logic” seemed like such a natural fit in a project, a way of grounding and organizing a collection where I was interrogating the body and its capacity, where I was asking questions of origins, where I was investigating language.

The form, however, is born of my love of definitions, and my love of definitions comes from a deep desire for knowledge. The reality is, though, knowledge is so pliable, despite our human desire for absolutes and clarity. So, I think the wordplay is in conversation with how language augments and transforms, and I used a definition-style format for its accessibility. I wanted to invite readers into a space that felt familiar before I—too, like language and knowledge—transformed my relationship to it.

In the heroic crown sequence, “Genesis,” we are introduced to a new way of seeing this sonnet form in prose. How did you approach this poem at the start and what led you to transform the sonnet into these prose blocks?

I am a sonneteer at heart. So many of the poems in my first book, *Mistress*, were or started as sonnets, and I got away from them when I wrote *Field Study*—a book-length prose poem in sections that blurs the line between poetry and lyric memoir. Anyway, for a long time after finishing *Field Study*, I felt I couldn’t find my way back to the line or the line break, which I love as much as a sonnet; I was frustrated and worried I’d lost my ability to engage with the forms and craft elements that I understood to be core tenets of my poetics.

When *Blue Opening* started to emerge as a collection, I decided I needed a long poem to hem, as I mentioned previously, the conversational threads

together. I told myself that I’d write a sonnet sequence where each section directly addressed a future child, mentioned at least one member of my family, and made a reference to the Bible. I gave myself these formal and content-related constraints because I needed a container in which to grapple with my fears and desires around potential parenthood. Originally, the sonnets, or at least the first three or four sections, were lineated, in couplets like “Phosphene.” But as I wrote, I kept thinking about the King James Version of the Bible I was raised on, how each chapter had a slightly larger number, how there were explanatory or expansionary footnotes at the bottom of the pages.

I was called, again, to the prose form, thought about how I could bring prose poems and sonnets into conversation with each other if I applied sonnet principles to a prose poem sequence. And so, I introduced the interlocking tenets of a sonnet crown (though I did clip the 15th sonnet, which would repeat all of the interlocked lines, in the final round of edits), the fourteen lines, and a 140-syllabic count to mimic the traditional sonnet. It took me about two years to write “Genesis,” and even though it was one of the most emotionally and formally challenging poems I’ve written, it was also one of the most rewarding.



“

The reality is, though,
knowledge is so pliable,
despite our human desire
for absolutes and clarity.

—Chet’la Sebree

”

Blue Opening orients the reader with an initial poem called “Phosphene.” In many ways, this poem teaches the reader how to move through the collection itself. It felt similar to how the reader is able to move through your previous book, *Field Study* through its opening sequence as well. In a book that has a unique focus on beginnings, what is the role of the opening poem? What do you hope for it to provide for the reader?

I really wrestled with whether or not to have “Phosphene” or “Hiraeth” as the opening poem. Both are lineated sonnets, and it felt important to start there because of how the sonnet evolves over the duration of the manuscript into something unlike what I’d traditionally associated with the form.

The book, in so many ways, is, yes, about origins and creation of life, language, and the universe, but it is also a book about the creation of poems, about how they evolve, about how my relationship to them has. But, ultimately, I went with “Phosphene” because it felt like it captured so many of the book’s conversation: etymologies, procreation, light, the night sky, gardens. There is also a little bit of teetering, of leaving readers on a precipice not only in the poem’s dénouement but in the line breaks, that I thought was a good at the start for a collection that ultimately asks: what are my desires, and can I make them manifest?

I do think the opening poem acts like a primer, as an invitation, as a way of setting the tone for the manuscript. In this way, “Phosphene” and its portals felt like a way to welcome readers into the passageways of this project.

You were a Guest Editor for *Poet Lore* with our Winter/Spring 2023 issue and your folio was themed around “Home & Hiraeth” so I was excited to see the poem “Hiraeth” in this book now! How

did the editing process of that folio influence your work with these poems?

Funnily enough, even though I’d already written the poem “Hiraeth,” I was thinking more about my forthcoming essay collection—*turn where: a geography of home*—than *Blue Opening* when I worked on that folio. In my essay collection, there are three fundamental questions: where are you from; where do you call home; and where, if anywhere, do you belong? As I contemplated those questions, I wanted to engage with other people’s relationships to home, to longing, to that kind of searching when I worked on the folio for *Poet Lore*. And I absolutely loved how the breadth of poems explored everything from the specific textures of a familiar store to philosophical meditations on place.

As mentioned briefly earlier, this book works through intimate and complex thoughts around “beginnings.” I wonder if you could talk about your own beginnings as a writer—who were those early influences? Who do you still carry with you on the page?

I have been writing since I was in the second or third grade, so I’ve always been drawn to the page. As a child, I liked reading fantasy novels and Arthurian sagas. As a teen, I loved YA but also started to get into the canon like Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. Back then, I thought I would become a fiction writer; I spent my afternoons and evenings after homework building worlds for short stories and novels. I only came to poems in college when there was another student who wrote a poem that shook me to my core. In a piece that was less than two pages, I felt I’d come to intimately know her uncle, who died by suicide. I teared up as she read it aloud in class. I didn’t know, then, I’d be a poet, but I knew I wanted to be invested in the short form, in work that had the capacity to change someone in that way.

As I finally rounded the corner to poems in my early twenties, the works of Natasha Trethewey and Shara McCallum shaped me for their investments in form and their embodiments of women’s experiences in poems. Their works gave me so much permission; they still do. I also think Barbara Guest, Alice Notley, Harryette Mullen, Frank O’Hara, and Lucille Clifton first ushered me into the worlds of poems; I don’t necessarily write like any of them, but their works first demonstrated to me what was possible in language.

A LANDMARK 50 YEARS FOR WASHINGTON WRITERS' PUBLISHING HOUSE

By Lindsey Leary

This year, Washington Writers' Publishing House celebrates its 50th anniversary. As the longest continuously operating nonprofit, cooperative, literary small press in the United States, reaching 50 years was no small feat. WWPB did so only by remaining dedicated to publishing and celebrating the richness of the literary arts in Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia, with the help of incredibly dedicated leaders, volunteers, and press-mates.

Since its founding, Washington Writers' Publishing House has been stewarded by a steady stream of committed creatives—what Kathleen Wheaton, former president and current vice president of fiction, says is “the culture of literary citizenship that’s in the DNA of the cooperative.” From the 2000s to 2010s, the presidents, Martin Galvin, Sid Gold, Bernie Jankowski, Moira Egan, and Patric Pepper, kept the press alive through ingenuity and restructuring, despite financial pressure. Through leadership transfers and press reorganization, a devotion to literature remained. Patric Pepper, president from 2008 to 2013, notes, “those members who stayed on after their commitment had been fulfilled have been instrumental in moving WWPB forward through the years.”

Washington Writers' Publishing House would not be where it is today without the active support of its press-members, who, once published by the press, commit to at least two years of service, though many have stayed on for years. Generosity is an attribute that unites all those whose spirit, voice, and hands play a role in the growth and success of Washington Writers' Publishing House. From the press-mates who review incoming manuscripts to the volunteers who sell books at local events, WWPB is driven by an abundance of care and love. Wheaton remarks, “This kind of generosity begets generosity.” Pepper shares a similar sentiment, “The word willing stands for the WWPB authors who appreciate the opportunity

to work side by side with other fine writers, and who have gone the extra mile to help WWPB not only stay afloat as a literary publisher, but to move forward and grow into an expanding future through the power of community. Kudos to the makers who are also doers.”

Current co-presidents, Caroline Bock and Jona Colson, empowered by the generosity and willingness of their press-mates, have spearheaded initiatives to grow Washington Writers' Publishing House's reach in the DMV. They have launched an online literary journal, *WWPB Writes*, organized literary salons throughout the DMV, and expanded the press's annual manuscript contests to include biennial awards in creative nonfiction and works in translation, along with the yearly fiction and Jean Feldman Poetry Awards for poetry collections.

In celebration of the press's anniversary this September, WWPB is releasing its most ambitious, expansive anthology. *AMERICA'S FUTURE: poetry & prose in response to tomorrow* features 164 bold, thought-provoking writers, with strong representation from writers across the press's DMV footprint. The anthology features writers from Baltimore to Roanoke, and writers with connections to the DMV from as far as California and Washington state. The anthology arrives at an urgent moment in our nation's history, when many are anxiously questioning: *What are the possibilities for the future?* Some pieces turn to our past, reckoning with the wounds we still carry in today's scars before questioning the future. Others turn their gaze forward, imagining the ways hope and reinvention can carve new paths.

The anthology opens with the first publication of a speech by U.S. Representative Jamie Raskin (MD-8), “Remarks As Delivered At The Hands Off Rally On The National Mall,” given in April of

2025. The prose sends a powerful reminder to the “authoritarian despots...that the people *always* have and *always* will be the ones with the power.” He adds, “Our Founders wrote a Constitution that does not begin with, ‘We the Dictators.’ The Preamble says, ‘We The People.’”

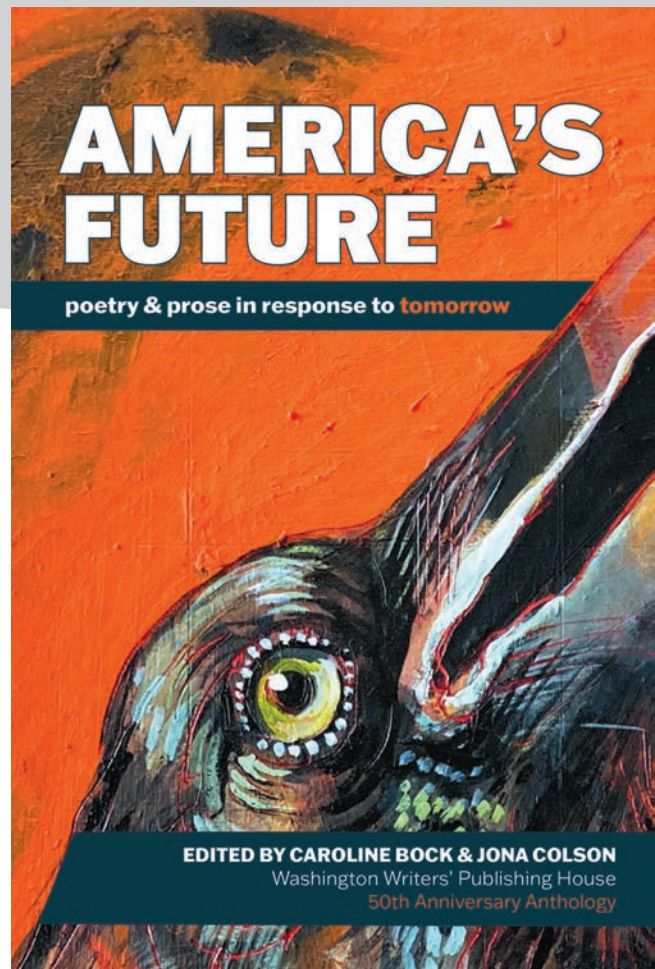
The first poem in this 500-page-plus collection is a collaborative poem by Miho Kinoshita and E. Ethelbert Miller, “To Write Is To Flower,” noting in the last two lines, “The future sticks to our fingers/calling us to write and flower.”

Co-editors of *AMERICA'S FUTURE* and co-presidents of Washington Writers' Publishing House, Caroline Bock and Jona Colson, share in their short foreword, “This anthology is a meditation on tomorrow—it challenges us to confront the struggles we’ve inherited, question the uncertainties of our present, and create possibilities for a future we dare to imagine.” *AMERICA'S FUTURE* is a testament to the power our art and our words hold in shaping our future.

AMERICA'S FUTURE festivities/readings will kick off with a virtual (Zoom) reading on September 10th at 7-8 pm, ET, hosted by The Writer's Center in Bethesda, Maryland, and led by Bock and Colson. The reading will be free and open to all.

This nationwide virtual reading will be followed by a 50th anniversary celebration for the Washington Writers' Publishing House on Sunday, September 14th, from 3:00-6:00 p.m., featuring master poets Grace Cavalieri and E. Ethelbert Miller, along with prose writers Kathleen Wheaton and Erika Raskin, and poet/performance artist Jacob Budenz. Notably, Grace Cavalieri is one of the founders of the Washington Writers' Publishing House and remains involved with the press to this day. The Washington Writers' Publishing House will take over The Writer's Center in Bethesda with readings, literary celebrations, a light buffet, and libations (please note this is a ticketed event: \$50.00 for 50 years, or \$40 if you are a Writer's Center member). A limited number of tickets remain at writer.org/wwph50.

A series of free, in-person readings and discussions probing the literary and creative state of our union today and tomorrow is also planned across DC, Maryland, and Virginia. Highlights include Busboys & Poets in Takoma Park, Maryland, on September 20th at 5 p.m., at the Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore on September 27th at 3 p.m., at Reston



Used Bookstore in Reston, Virginia, on November 16th at 5:30 p.m., and MoCo Underground at Sandy Spring Museum on December 11th at 7 p.m.

This will not be the last you hear about Washington Writers' Publishing House. The press has created an organization with a built-in blueprint for continued success through its cooperative structure. Patric Pepper describes it best: “My advice for WWPH’s future is to build on the people we publish—those who are willing.” The Washington Writers' Publishing House is ready for that challenge—and the next fifty years.

Lindsey Leary recently completed her undergraduate studies in English and political science at The George Washington University in DC. She is currently working as a paid WWPH Fellow and as an editorial intern at *Leader's Edge Magazine*.



An Autobiography of Place

By Tamar Shapiro

Years ago, when I first began to dream more seriously about being a writer, I wrote a short story about a woman who left her family because she wanted to relocate to a different city. A friend of mine was horrified. How could my character care more about place than people? I put the story away in a drawer (or more accurately, a computer folder) and have not looked at it since.

Still, I have always been drawn to place. That fascination is a large part of the reason I spent decades working on community development policy. The more directly I could draw the line between the policies I advocated for and a particular place—in other words, the more visible and touchable the results—the more energized I was. I thrive in the details—the sights, sounds, and smells that mark the places I love.

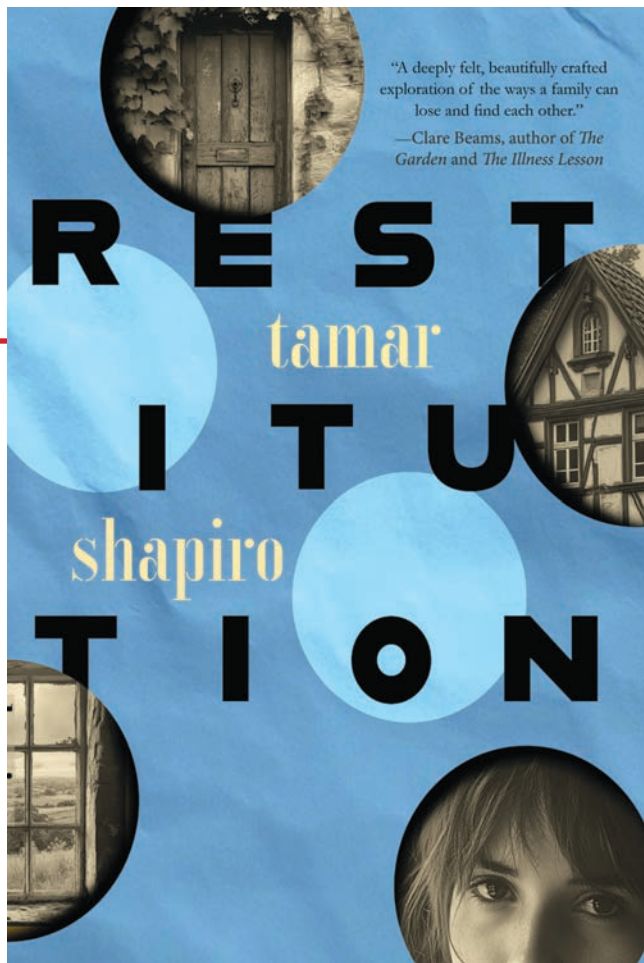
Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that my debut novel, *Restitution*, was inspired by my memories of the key places in my life. *Restitution* tells the story of siblings who were raised by a German mother in Central Illinois. Decades later, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, they are faced with a difficult question: should they try to reclaim the house in East Germany from which their grandparents fled in the 1950s? When I share this broad outline of the book with people, their first question is always: Is it autobiographical? After all, I was raised in Central Illinois by a German mother. But the answer is still no. The story is not my family's story. And yet the places are my family's places.

Most of my childhood was spent in Central Illinois. As a teenager, I wanted to escape, to go anywhere else. Now, on the rare occasions I have reason to

go back, I giggle in the car as I drive toward my childhood home. I do an extra loop out past the round barns and the cornfields that fringe that edge of town. When I reach the dairy farm I used to visit with my parents, I pull over onto the gravel-strewn shoulder, get out of the car, and take a deep breath—letting the earthy smell of manure and endless skies fill my lungs.

While my school years were all about Illinois, my summers were spent at Lake Constance, a lake in southern Germany (called the *Bodensee* in German). We lived in the converted laundry house of the small inn my aunt ran, three simple rooms that were absolute perfection. At the start of each summer, I couldn't wait for the moment when I first glimpsed the lake from the train windows, and I always cried at that same view on the day we left. Blue-green slices shimmering between trees.

In the 1990s, years after I'd left home, my parents moved to Leipzig in former East Germany—a place none of us knew. Over the next decades, I explored the city first, then branched out to nearby towns and landscapes, strolling along the river in Grimma, hiking in the Erzgebirge. At the beginning, my visits were simple adventures. I felt the same joy I've always felt when discovering a new place, but with a certain distance. It was my parents' home, not mine. Then, over the years, the pit in my stomach grew larger with each visit. Biking along cobblestone streets through the shape-shifting patterns cast by sun and trees, I would breathe in the must of dried leaves and have to stop myself from crying. How was it possible, I began to wonder, that I would never have the chance to live in this city I'd grown to love so much? Until I finally did. I moved to Leipzig with



my husband and kids in 2017. It was temporary, just for a few years, but it was a chance to bike those same streets, breathe in the comforting scent of those leaves daily.

These are the places I've captured in *Restitution*. Not just places I know, but places I hear and smell and feel deep in my bones. As I drafted, I called upon these physical sensations. The uneven, cracked stones of my aunt's patio under my toes, barely warm in the morning sun at the Bodensee. The way the water moved languidly around me when I swam in the lake. Silky and soothing and sinuous, the tactile equivalent of surround sound. Or the roughness of the cement on my thighs when I sat, in shorts, on the front steps of our Illinois home. The feeling of lying in a patch of prairie grasses on a brilliant day in early spring, cooled from below, heated from above. The way the unrenovated East German buildings of the early 1990s transformed in the sun, soot gray turning the warm golden color of a paper bag. The smell of the wild garlic in the woods in Leipzig, a smell I loved so publicly and adamantly that a friend in Germany still sends me weekly updates

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I'm creating a kind of lexicon of the senses, a training manual that teaches me to pay closer attention to the world ...

—Tamar Shapiro

”

each spring, announcing the first signs of green, the first faint scent pushing through the trees, the first white blossoms.

Hidden behind these sensory descriptions in the book are hundreds of others that did not or could not find their place in this particular story. An accumulation of sensations that formed the root system for my settings, mostly invisible but broad and deep.

I've never been a journal-keeper but as I wrote this novel, I began jotting down descriptions. Each time I noticed (or remembered) a smell or the way something felt under my fingertips or a particular sound, I asked myself: How could I write this? How could I capture it in words? Was there an apt metaphor? Or could I evoke the sensation with clinical precision? I wrote these down using the note function of my phone, an endless scrolling list of my attempts to capture the world.

There is nothing new in this goal, of course. All writers seek to capture the world in some way. But my process has changed. No longer do I limit this work to my actual writing—crafting descriptions *after* I've decided they belong in my story. Instead, I like to think I'm creating a kind of lexicon of the senses, a training manual that teaches me to pay closer attention to the world as I move through it, and a daily habit that nurtures my endless curiosity about place.

Tamar Shapiro's debut novel, *Restitution*, is being released on September 30, 2025. A former housing attorney and non-profit leader, she is currently an MFA candidate in fiction at Randolph College.



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In the case of a workshop cancellation, participants can receive either a full refund or a credit toward a future workshop(s). Workshop participants can withdraw (at least 48 hours before the first workshop session) for a full credit valid for one year. No refunds are offered for withdrawals. For our full refund policy, visit writer.org/withdraw.

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**FALL 2025
WORKSHOPS ARE
ON SITE & VIRTUAL**

LIVE VIDEO CONFERENCE workshops will be held via **Zoom**. You can view brief tutorials on using the platform at support.zoom.us.

ASYNCHRONOUS workshops will take place over **Wet Ink**, an online learning forum and discussion board.

Register now at writer.org!

FALL 2025 WORKSHOPS

KID LIT

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10/16/25 – 10/30/25 • 3 Thursdays • 7:00 PM – 9:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner • \$150

Learn the basics—from story structure to marketing—of writing picture books for children.

WRITING PICTURE BOOKS II with Mary Quattlebaum and Joan Waites

11/20/25 • Thursday • 6:30 PM – 9:30 PM

The Writer's Center • Intermediate/Advanced • \$60

Learn how to polish your picture book manuscript before submitting to an agent or editor.

Bring your questions and two double-spaced copies of your picture-book manuscript.

FICTION

INTRO TO THE NOVEL with Tammy Greenwood

9/5/25 – 10/24/25 • 8 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • Beginner/Intermediate • \$395

The workshop will focus on everything from generating ideas to developing characters to establishing point of view. Participants will discuss many elements of fiction (dialogue, scene, etc.) but the emphasis will be on discovering the writing process that works best for each writer.

DIY NOVEL REVISION with Tammy Greenwood

9/5/25 – 9/26/25 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • All Levels • \$215

Do you have a finished draft of a novel but don't know what to do next? This workshop will take you through the revision and editing process step-by-step. From large-picture issues like plot and structure, characterization, etc... to line editing, we will look at what it takes to revise your own novel without the assistance of a professional editor.

NOVEL 101: HOW TO CRAFT THE STORY with Camille Cabrera

9/8/25 – 9/29/25 • 4 Mondays • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner • \$215

Beginners have the opportunity to share their works with the class while also building confidence in their craft. Students will leave with an evolved sense of fiction and the tools necessary to continue writing their own story.

THE ART OF DESCRIPTION with Afabwaje Kurian

9/15/25 – 10/20/25 • 6 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • All Levels • \$295

This six-week interactive class is designed to give you the skills to write rich descriptive sentences and paragraphs that infuse life into your characters and worlds.

WRITING COMPELLING HISTORICAL FICTION with Dave Tevelin

9/20/25 – 10/11/25 • 4 Saturdays • 10:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$215

The D.C. area is rich with history, and the resources to explore it. This four-week course will teach participants a variety of techniques to find what they're looking for and work it into a gripping and informative novel.

CREATING NOVEL CHARACTERS with Tammy Greenwood

10/3/25 – 10/24/25 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • All Levels • \$215

Participants will examine character within the context of the other novelistic elements, and the challenge of integrating these various elements into a cohesive and credible whole. Participants will explore the main character(s) in their novels-in-progress.

YOUR FIRST (OR NEXT) NOVEL with Kathryn Johnson

10/4/25 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • \$60

Learn how to generate a handful of plots to choose from, methods for effectively planning your story, and simple hacks for fine tuning your basic fiction skills.

REVIVE & REVISE: A WRITING WORKSHOP with Nick Rees Gardner

10/7/25 – 11/18/25 • 7 Tuesdays • 7:00 PM – 9:30 PM

The Writer's Center • Intermediate/Advanced • \$350

This workshop will focus on the pacing, intrigue, cause & effect, and general appeal of your story and rework it into the story it always wanted to be. Before the class starts, you should have a short story or novel anywhere from 10-20 pages (double spaced) ready to submit.

CRAFTING FICTION, ELEMENT BY ELEMENT with Elizabeth Poliner

10/8/25 – 11/19/25 • 7 Wednesdays • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner • \$350

By studying basic craft elements, participants will build a strong foundation for their writing—be it stories or novels. This workshop will explore elements (characterization, setting, scene, etc.) one at a time and ask participants to practice them through exercises.

HOW TO CRAFT A SHORT MYSTERY with Camille Cabrera

10/9/25 • Thursday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner • \$60

Fans of mystery have the chance to build their own condensed caper using helpful tips and tools by a popular published mystery author.

WRITING LONG FICTION with Clarisse Baleja Saidi

10/13/25 – 12/1/25 • 8 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • Intermediate/Advanced • \$395

This course is designed to help you launch and advance an outline and rough draft of a novel in 8 weeks.

PLOT LIKE A PRO with Kathryn Johnson

10/18/25 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Understanding how to structure a well-conceived story around a main character and central conflict, while paying attention to pacing, can make the difference between a finished, publishable manuscript and an abandoned work-in-progress.

POINT OF VIEW AND NARRATIVE VOICE with Tammy Greenwood

10/31/25 – 11/21/25 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • All Levels • \$215

This workshop will look at everything from the first person point of view to the editorial omniscient, as well as some of the less traditional points of view, to help you choose the best voice to tell your story.

INTERMEDIATE NOVEL WRITING: THE 8 CS with Tammy Greenwood

10/31/25 – 12/19/25 • 8 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • Intermediate • \$395

This course will examine the eight fundamental elements of the novel to help you find the strengths and weaknesses of your work-in-progress. From Concept to Conclusion, we will study the key components of a novel, with generative and evaluative exercises along the way.

CRAFTING THE SHORT STORY with Ariel Katz

11/17/25 – 12/15/25 • 5 Mondays • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$250

Each week, we'll zoom in on a different aspect of the form such as plot, character, dialogue, place, or point of view. Together, we'll explore the vast and varied potential of the short story, reading across eras and styles to expand the horizons of our own work. Participants will submit at least one short story for peer and instructor feedback during the workshop.

CREATING BACKSTORY & FLASHBACK SCENES with Kathryn Johnson

11/22/25 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • Intermediate/Advanced • \$60

Add to your fiction-skill toolbox by learning how to create scenes from multiple time frames through flashback scenes.

PLOTTING YOUR NOVEL with Tammy Greenwood

11/28/25 – 12/19/25 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • All Levels • \$215

In this workshop, participants will study the architecture of a novel and devise plans for plotting their novels. Using the three-act structure as a map, we will explore the basic components of a novel's plot.

MIXED GENRE

FINDING YOUR AUTHENTIC VOICE with Lindsey Van Wagner

9/15/25 – 10/6/25 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous

Wet Ink • All Levels • \$215

Look beyond your inner critic and tap into the flow of your limitless creativity, as you discover the powerful impact of your authentic voice.

BUILDING YOUR STORY FROM THE GROUND UP with Nikki Frias

9/16/25 • Tuesday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Through interactive exercises and creative techniques, we'll explore how to tap into your imagination, develop characters, and build narratives that captivate any audience.

WRITING BORDERS & IDENTITY with Ofelia Montelongo

9/20/25 – 10/4/25 • 3 Saturdays • 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$150

The workshop will blend group discussion, generative prompts, and peer feedback. By the end of the course, participants will have crafted a small portfolio of original pieces reflecting on borders—both real and metaphorical—and the identities that shape their voice.

MAPPING STRATEGIES FOR STORY STRUCTURE with Lynn Auld Schwartz

9/20/25 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • \$60

Explore questions, mapping exercises, tools, and techniques to discover your story's destination and how to get there.

HOW TO WRITE A LOT with Kathryn Johnson

9/20/25 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Find the tools and time you need to complete your novel, memoir, or book-length creative nonfiction project.

FALL EQUINOX WRITING WORKSHOP with Lindsey Van Wagner

9/20/25 • Saturday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$60

Through intentional prompts, gentle ritual, and intuitive journaling, you'll harvest the lessons of the past season and plant seeds for what's next—on the page and in your life.

HIGH OCTANE GRAMMAR with Kenneth D. Ackerman

9/25/25 • Thursday • 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

This workshop includes a refresher on grammar essentials, strong verbs, and sharp sentences to make your writing sing.

WRITE THE DAY with Indran Amirthanayagam

9/27/25 • Saturday • 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Transform your day into poetry and fiction! You will read and write poems and stories from everyday details of your life.

READING YOUR WORK OUT LOUD with Jennifer Hamady

9/29/25 • Monday • 7:00 PM – 10:00 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$60

Practice sharing your story and yourself! Please have on hand a number of pieces you'd be comfortable sharing during the meeting.

LYRIC A TO Z: EXPLORING ABECEDARIAN FORMS IN POETRY AND CREATIVE NONFICTION with Sandra Beasley

10/11/25 • Saturday • 1:00 PM – 3:30 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$60

In an "abecedarian," consecutive lines, sentences, or paragraphs lead with consecutive letters of the alphabet, posing unique opportunities and challenges. We'll look at examples and participants will experiment with designing their own abecedarian structures for poems and essays.

WRITER'S BLOCK UNBLOCKED with Jenn Koiter

10/11/25 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$60

We'll start by discussing some of the causes of creative blocks, before moving on to exercises that will help you melt back into your writing. You'll leave with tactics you can implement whenever you start to feel stuck, so you can finally do the writing you want to do!

CRAFT A WINNING ARTIST STATEMENT! with Lyzette Wanzer

10/14/25 – 11/4/25 • 4 Tuesdays • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • Intermediate/Advanced • \$215

In this class, you'll learn how to cast your work in its strongest, most evocative light. Writers will finish class with a statement that's ready to impress.

BOOT CAMP FOR WRITERS with Beth Kanter

10/16/25 – 11/20/25 • 6 Thursdays • 10:30 AM – 1:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$295

Each session will begin with a prompt followed by writing time. Participants will have the opportunity to share and discuss their work as well as receive in-class feedback. The workshops is designed so that participants will have the start of six new pieces by the end of class.

EVOKING READER EMPATHY with Lynn Auld Schwartz

10/25/25 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • \$60

Through reading examples and participating in short exercises, you will have the opportunity to practice and refine your ability to evoke empathy on the page.

UNCLOGGING YOUR BRAIN with Lisa Jan Sherman

10/27/25 • Monday • 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$60

Prompts will spark memories, characters, and places, turning them into poems, scenes, dialogues, and stories. You will likely come up with an 'idea' that you feel compelled to expand on, or perhaps be re-inspired to continue an unfinished work later. Find new perspective and confidence!

LET'S WRITE! A GENERATIVE WORKSHOP with Melissa Webster

11/5/25 – 12/3/25 • 5 Wednesdays • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$250

Each week we will use writing prompts to generate fresh authentic work and invite participants to share their new work for immediate encouraging feedback. In week 2 we will discuss editing strategies that enhance the craft of narrative fiction and nonfiction. Additionally, for weeks 3, 4, and 5 participants are invited to submit one polished piece to the group for more comprehensive feedback!

CREATING CONFLICT & TENSION with Kathryn Johnson

11/8/25 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Creating conflict, emotion and tension in any story is crucial for its success; find out how to include them in any story you write!

INTRODUCTION TO ART JOURNALING with Joan Waites

11/10/25 – 11/24/25 • 3 Mondays • 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$150

Learn how to combine words and art to create personal artistic journals.

*No previous art experience necessary.

WRITING THE BRAIDED STORY with Laura J. Oliver

11/15/25 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Explore the structure, technique, and emotional resonance of braided narratives in both fiction and nonfiction.

WRITING TO HEAL with John DeDakis

12/3/25 • Wednesday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

In this session, we'll look at strategies—including journaling and storytelling—to help you move forward, through and beyond the pain and into a future that can once again be filled with hope—and even joy. The session includes short writing exercises.

THE MUDDLE IN THE MIDDLE with Kathryn Johnson

12/6/25 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Discover all the stuff you didn't realize could speed you through the middle of your story!

SHOW AND TELL INTENSIVE with Laura J. Oliver

12/13/25 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Develop the most critical skill a writer can possess in order to create compelling prose and make flat work sing.

NONFICTION

MICRO MEMOIRS: YOUR LIFE IN LESS THAN 250 WORDS with Melanie Figg

9/4/25 – 10/9/25 • 6 Thursdays • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$295

We'll read and discuss Micro Memoirs, also called Flash Memoir, (50-250 words) to inspire your own writing and enhance your storytelling skills. Each week, with provided prompts, you'll write about a variety of incidents, stories, or memories while building specific craft skills (image, metaphor, point of view, rhetorical strategies to address memory "gaps," and more).

RESEARCHING AND WRITING YOUR FAMILY HISTORY with Kenneth D. Ackerman

9/16/25 • Tuesday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

This class is perfect for memoirists, biographers, or people just interested to learn where they came from or how to organize their family knowledge for children or grandchildren.

PUBLISHING YOUR OPED with James Alexander

9/17/25 – 10/8/25 • 4 Wednesdays • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

The Writer's Center • Beginner/Intermediate • \$215

This workshop is designed for beginner and intermediate writers who want to learn how to translate their writing skills to writing publishable op-eds.

THE ART, SCIENCE, PRACTICE OF REVISION with Beth Kanter and Anna Kahoe

9/18/25 – 10/9/25 • 3 Thursdays • 7:00 PM – 9:30 PM

The Writer's Center • Intermediate • \$150

The first session will focus on germinating new ideas through prompts and discussion. The second is finding joy and harnessing the power of revision. The third and final session focuses on next steps and sharing your work. Writers will leave the class with a start of a new piece of creative nonfiction, memoir, or hybrid work. Note: No meeting on October 2.

TEN PRO TIPS FOR WRITING LIFE STORIES with Laura J. Oliver

9/20/25 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Learn ten solid tips for the writing of your life story for both a personal and public readership.

WRITING THE TRUTH: LESSONS IN NONFICTION NARRATIVE WRITING with Eric Lichtblau

9/29/25 – 10/27/25 • 5 Mondays • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

The Writer's Center • Beginner • \$250

The workshop will allow beginning writers to learn the building blocks of researching and writing non-fiction works in different formats and lengths, from first-person writing to essays and magazine-style pieces.

FOOD MEMOIR WRITING with Annette Nielsen

10/1/25 – 10/15/25 • 3 Wednesdays • 7:00 PM – 9:30 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$150

In this workshop, we will draw on personal experience or food memories, and explore ways food provides the basis for a personal essay or even a memoir.

NONFICTION

WRITING MICRO MEMOIR with Laura J. Oliver

10/18/25 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Zoom • Intermediate • \$60

We will examine inspiring published examples to learn exactly how the writer moved and entertained us. Using the same tools with which we craft fiction, this workshop is an excellent learning environment for both genres. We'll conclude with a review of where to publish.

TURNING MEMORIES INTO TRANSFORMATIONAL STORIES with GG Renee Hill

10/19/25 • Sunday • 3:00 PM – 6:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • \$60

We will explore the dynamics of character development and narrative arc, and learn techniques to capture universal meaning through personal experiences. You will come away with a timeline technique to uncover life themes and storylines, a bank of memories to serve as writing prompts, and tips for starting a memoir journaling practice.

INTERMEDIATE NONFICTION with Eric Lichtblau

11/3/25 – 12/1/25 • 5 Mondays • 7:00 PM – 9:30 PM

The Writer's Center • Intermediate/Advanced • \$250

The workshop will allow participants to write non-fiction works in different formats and lengths, from first-person writing to essays and magazine-style pieces.

WRITING PERSONAL ESSAYS with Christine Koubek

11/4/25 – 12/9/25 • 5 Tuesdays • 7:00 PM – 9:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner • \$250

In this beginner workshop we'll examine essays from magazines, literary journals, and newspapers to illuminate the ways imagery, dialogue, scene, and crafting an "I" narrator transform a personal experience into a compelling story. You'll generate new material each week through in-class exercises, plus receive in-class feedback on your draft. Note: No meeting November 25.

BUILDING A WRITING PROCESS with GG Renee Hill

12/7/25 – 12/21/25 • 3 Sundays • 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • \$150

This workshop offers a variety of techniques that help writers develop their ideas and break down barriers to writing. Whether you are a plotter or a pantsier, neurotypical or neurodivergent, you will come away understanding your creative process on a deeper level so you can work with it and not against it.

POETRY

ELEMENTS OF POETRY WRITING WORKSHOP with Donald Illich

9/9/25 – 10/14/25 • 6 Tuesdays • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • \$295

This class aims to describe and explain a different poetry element each week. It also will allow students to workshop their poems throughout the class. At the end of the class each participant should have 2-3 poem drafts written that are on their way toward revision.

VILLANELLE CRASH COURSE with Claudia Gary

9/20/25 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • Intermediate/Advanced • \$60

You'll leave this class with at least one new (draft) or improved villanelle, as well as insights about how writing poetry in form can unlock deeper meaning and enhance everything you write.

GETTING YOUR POETRY PUBLISHED with Michele Wolf

9/27/25 • Saturday • 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

This intensive one-day workshop will offer all poets—whether they have yet to submit their first poem to a literary journal or are ready to present a publisher with a book-length manuscript—hands-on advice on how to achieve their publishing goals.

THERE'S NO PLANET B: WRITING ECOPOETRY with Courtney LeBlanc

9/29 /25 • Monday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

This workshop explores the complex connections between humans and the natural world, including issues such as climate change, pollution, and environmental justice. We'll read poems that address the concerns for our planet and our relationship with nature, then discuss them and write our own ecopoems.

ENRICH YOUR POEMS WITH METAPHOR AND SIMILE with AI Basile

9/30/25 – 11/4/25 • 6 Tuesdays • 8:00 PM – 10:00 PM

Zoom • Intermediate/Advanced • \$295

In the first two weeks we'll run exercises in class and for homework on generating metaphor/simile pairs. For the next two weeks, metaphor and simile will be either added to a previously written poem, or a new one generated using them. Finally, we'll work on extending metaphor and building a new poem around such an extended metaphor.

WRITING INSPIRATIONAL POEMS with Allison deFreese

10/2/25 – 10/30/25 • 5 Thursdays • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$250

Use your words, ideas, and verse to share messages of peace, inspiration, and hope. In this five-part, generative workshop, we'll explore the power of poetry to inspire, heal, and build community. Participants will create—then share—five poems (or more) during this fun and interactive workshop.

POETRY VS. TRAUMA with Claudia Gary

10/4 /25 – 10/18/25 • 3 Saturdays • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$150

This workshop includes reading and discussion of time-honored poems, close attention to emotional and sensory aspects of poetry, several class writing exercises, and feedback on poems for those who wish to share them. (NOTE: All sharing is optional. This workshop is not a substitute for therapy.)

FINDING YOUR POETIC VOICE with Ann Quinn

10/9/25 – 11/20/25 • 6 Thursdays • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • Beginner • \$295

Using Mary Oliver's book as a jumping off point for exploration and discussion, the class includes one workshop session, and lots of chances to write and share. Note: No meeting November 6.

WRITING BLACKOUT POEMS with Courtney LeBlanc

10/18/25 • Saturday • 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$60

We'll review examples which use different source texts—novels, emails, even the poet's own original poems—to write blackout poems. Bring your creativity to this generative workshop!

POETRY

YES, YOU CAN...WRITE A POEM! with Patricia Gray

11/1/25 • Saturday • 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • \$60

This workshop jump-starts your creativity with fun exercises. You can expect to take home three of your own original poems.

PUNCTUATION: A POET'S DILEMMA with Sue Ellen Thompson

11/2/25 • Sunday • 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

We will explore in depth the role played by the period and the comma, and we'll take a look at some of the more unusual punctuation marks that poets have invented to suit their own purposes.

ORGANIZING A COLLECTION OF POETRY with Courtney LeBlanc

11/4/25 • Tuesday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • Intermediate/Advanced • \$60

This workshop will walk you through how to organize your collection of poetry, offering multiple examples and different techniques to ensure your manuscript is as cohesive and organized as it can be!

INTRODUCTION TO THE CRAFT AND BEAUTY OF POETRY with Melanie Figg

11/10/25 – 12/15/25 • 6 Mondays • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner • \$295

Each session is devoted to one aspect of craft—imagery, line, form, voice, etc.—and begins with a chance to share your work aloud (not workshop). Participants learn by discussing great poems, reading short, engaging chapters, and doing fun weekly assignments. Please bring a copy of *The Poet's Companion* by Addonizio and Laux to the first class.

NATURAL METER CRASH COURSE with Claudia Gary

12/6/25 • Saturday • 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Here's an opportunity to improve your ear for meter—a major element of poetic prosody—and to fine-tune your understanding of how it works.

DICTION FOR POETS: CHOOSING THE RIGHT WORD with Sue Ellen Thompson

12/7/25 • Sunday • 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Diction, or word choice, is crucial to poetry, where every word matters. In this workshop, we will examine what diction is “appropriate” in a poem and why understanding where certain words come from is essential to using them effectively.

SONNET CRASH COURSE with Claudia Gary

12/14/25 • Sunday • 11:00 AM – 1:30 PM

Zoom • Intermediate/Advanced • \$60

You'll first read time-honored sonnets to see how and why they work. Next the class will write a group sonnet, and then—with or without shortcuts—you'll start one of your own. You'll leave with at least one new (draft) or improved sonnet, as well as insights about how writing poems in form can unlock deeper meaning and enhance everything you write.

TRANSLATION

POETRY TRANSLATION with Yvette Neisser

9/11/25 – 10/23/25 • 6 Thursdays • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

The Writer's Center • All Levels • \$295

This workshop is an opportunity to develop, practice, or hone your skills in translating poetry from any language into English. By the end of the workshop, you will have developed your own approach to poetry translation, as well as produced 2-3 strong drafts of translated poems. Note: No meeting October 2.

LITERARY TRANSLATION BASECAMP with Allison deFreese

11/12/25 • Wednesday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

This informative presentation will provide tips for getting started as a literary translator and include time for questions at the end.

PROFESSIONAL
WRITING**HOW TO WRITE EFFECTIVE SPEECHES****with James Alexander**

10/21/25 – 11/11/25 • 4 Tuesdays • 7:00 PM – 9:30 PM

The Writer's Center • Beginner/Intermediate • \$215

This workshop will help you learn and apply the fundamentals of message-focused speechwriting, whether you are writing for someone else or for yourself. Having a writing background helps but is not required.

WRITE LIKE THE NEWS with Hank Wallace

12/10/25 • Wednesday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

Become concise as news, precise as law.

STAGE &
SCREEN**COMEDY & HUMOR WRITING with Sheila Wenz**

9/17/25 – 10/15/25 • 5 Wednesdays • 7:00 – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$250

We will create and share a humorous personal or short story, try our hands at some one-liners and jokes, study the works of comedians, and learn some tricks of the comedy trade that you can incorporate into your writing.

CONTRACTS AND COPYRIGHTS FOR WRITERS with Kenneth D. Ackerman

9/30/25 • Tuesday • 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

In this one-session workshop, author/lawyer Ken Ackerman covers the basic legal framework of how writers interact with publishers, what copyrights are, why they matter, and how publishing contracts work—all with an eye toward defending your work in a rough and tumble world.

IS SELF-PUBLISHING RIGHT FOR YOU? with Katherine Pickett

10/2/25 • Thursday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

In this class we will explore self-publishing, hybrid, and alternative routes to publication: collaborating with a nonprofit and work-for-hire. We will set goals and evaluate the assets we bring to the publishing process to see how those affect available options for publishing.

30 WAYS TO MARKET YOUR BOOK ON A BUDGET with Rob Jolles

10/16/25 – 10/23/25 • 2 Thursdays • 9:30 AM – 11:00 AM

Zoom • All Levels • \$115

In this workshop you'll discover over 30 practical, budget-friendly book marketing strategies, from building a book launch to leveraging social media, blogs, podcasts, Amazon tools, press releases, and more.

KNOW YOUR COMPETITION! with Katherine Pickett

11/13/25 • Thursday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • \$60

For your book to succeed, you must know which books you are competing against. In this workshop, we will look at resources for locating comparable and competing titles and look at how to use that information to inform your writing as well as your proposal or query letter.

PUBLISHING WELL: HANDS-ON ADVICE with Nancy Naomi Carlson

11/22/25 • Saturday • 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

In this workshop we'll learn about the business of submitting to editors of literary journals and presses. We'll also discuss tips for finding appropriate markets for your writing.

PROMOTING YOUR COLLECTION OF POETRY with Courtney LeBlanc

12/2/25 • Tuesday • 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

This workshop will provide ideas and suggestions for promoting your new collection of poetry.

BOOK PUBLISHING 101 with Lacey N. Dunham

12/14/25 • Sunday • 12:00 PM – 2:00 PM

Zoom • All Levels • \$60

This class pulls back the curtain on the ins and outs of publishing by walking participants through the component parts of the publishing industry. From the role of literary agents to the dreaded query letter to what an editor's job is to the different types of publishers, to how authors are paid, this jam-packed class takes a practical approach that will focus on the business side of writing with lots of time for Q&A.



FALL 2025 FREE EVENTS FOR WRITERS

OPEN MIC @ THE WRITER'S CENTER

Second and Fourth Wednesday
of every month

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT W/ NOVELIST KATHLEEN BARBER IN CONVERSATION W/ SUZANNE PARK

Wednesday, September 3, 7pm ET
Zoom

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT W/ POET HEATHER CHRISTLE

Thursday, September 4, 7pm ET
Zoom

AMERICA'S FUTURE: POETRY & PROSE IN RESPONSE TO TOMORROW - WASHINGTON WRITERS' PUBLISHING HOUSE ANTHOLOGY READING

Wednesday, September 10, 7pm ET
Zoom

WASHINGTON WRITERS' PUBLISHING HOUSE 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Sunday, September 14, 3pm ET
In Person

VIRTUAL READING W/ POETS CATHERINE ARNOLD & RICHARD SMITH

Tuesday, September 16, 7pm ET
Zoom

POET CHET'LA SEBREE IN CONVERSATION W/ LILLIAN-YVONNE BERTRAM

Saturday, September 27, 6:30pm ET
In Person

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT W/ NOVELIST JENNIFER GIVHAN

Thursday, October 2, 7pm ET
Zoom

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT W/ HANNAH GRIECO & ALINA STEFANESCU

Thursday, October 9, 7pm ET
Zoom

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT W/ POET MARY ARDERY

Thursday, October 16, 7pm ET
Zoom

AN EVENING OF TRIBUTES TO PERCIVAL EVERETT FEATURING SAMUEL ASHWORTH, MADISON SMARTT BELL & AFABWAJE KURIAN

Friday, October 17, 7pm ET
In Person

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT W/ NOVELISTS LACEY N. DUNHAM & LAURA VENITA GREEN

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Zoom

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FACING THE DREAM DEFERRED

COMING TO TERMS WITH A SHIFTING WRITING-WORK-LIFE BALANCE

By Michele Wolf

We were downtown on Lafayette Street in Manhattan, outside Basement Workshop, the Asian American cultural organization where I was taking a poetry workshop with Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, who had just published her third book, *Random Possession*. Mei-mei was a warm and generous teacher. After class that evening—I can’t remember if we were about to go to a reading or a restaurant, or if I was just planning to head to the subway—some people Mei-mei knew met up with us. I’ll never forget how she introduced me: “This is Michele Wolf. She’s a poet,” which made my heart leap. It was the first time anyone had identified me in that way. I was part of the club now—at least Mei-mei thought so—and it was a rush to receive that kind of validation. At 24, I had been living in New York for only a year, writing poems since I’d arrived, and I spent my days at the home of Fitzgerald and Hemingway, as an editorial assistant at Scribner’s. I was finding my place in the gritty and glittering city. I had fallen in love with it, and every day seemed bubbling with possibilities.

When I started out, I had simple expectations about how much time I wanted to reserve for writing poems. I tried to dedicate six to eight hours a week to it, including a four-hour block on Sundays, and I was disciplined about this. I was fortunate to be living in New York during my poetry formative years, because there were so many opportunities to study with poets I admired—at places that were mini versions of The Writer’s Center, some of them offering only one poetry workshop per semester. There was the 92nd Street Y (now 92NY), The Writers Community, and The Writer’s Voice at the West Side



Y. There were also, of course, several New York-based MFA creative-writing programs, but I was still paying off a big student loan, and the non-MFA workshops were affordable. As an added bonus, my early workshops, initially with David Ignatow and Charles Simic—I’m still mesmerized by the Simic title “Return to a Place Lit by a Glass of Milk”—introduced me to some of my best friends and gave me a poetry community. We’d pick up the monthly NYC Poetry Calendar at Gotham Book Mart or St. Mark’s Bookshop and make plans to go to readings or discussions featuring Louise Glück, Czesław Miłosz, Seamus Heaney, or Helen Vendler, for instance. There was never a lack of readings to attend.

Some of my new poet friends and I showed up in the same workshops, and once these were over, we’d take turns hosting and meet twice a month to share and critique our poems. Several of those peer-workshop poets were (and are) abundantly gifted, and I’m grateful they welcomed me in the group, because my work back then had promise but was less accomplished than theirs and because I learned almost as much in that peer workshop—about craft, about ambition with metaphor, and about what to read—as I gained in some of my workshops with established poets.

In those days, I didn’t realize I was so spoiled with time to write. I had yet to have family responsibilities. I was kind of poor, though, and my weekend budget would cover only a couple of subway fares and the Sunday *Times*. I enjoyed my job at Scribner’s, and a huge benefit was free books, especially once Atheneum moved in; the two companies had merged

in an attempt to avoid a takeover from a larger publisher. Atheneum had one of the finest poetry lists at the time, publishing W.S. Merwin, Mark Strand, Donald Justice, Mona Van Duyn, Philip Levine, James Merrill, and others. Not a diverse list, true. Still, I loved the Atheneum poetry books—they were like textbooks for me. But a person can't eat books, and my salary at Scribner's was paltry. To get by, I took on multiple freelance writing and editing gigs and said goodbye to my unsustainable schedule of six or more hours a week for poetry. Even so, I tried to set aside a block of time for writing every Sunday. Eventually I left Scribner's for staff jobs at Simon & Schuster and *Harper's Bazaar*, gladly dropping all that after-hours freelance work.

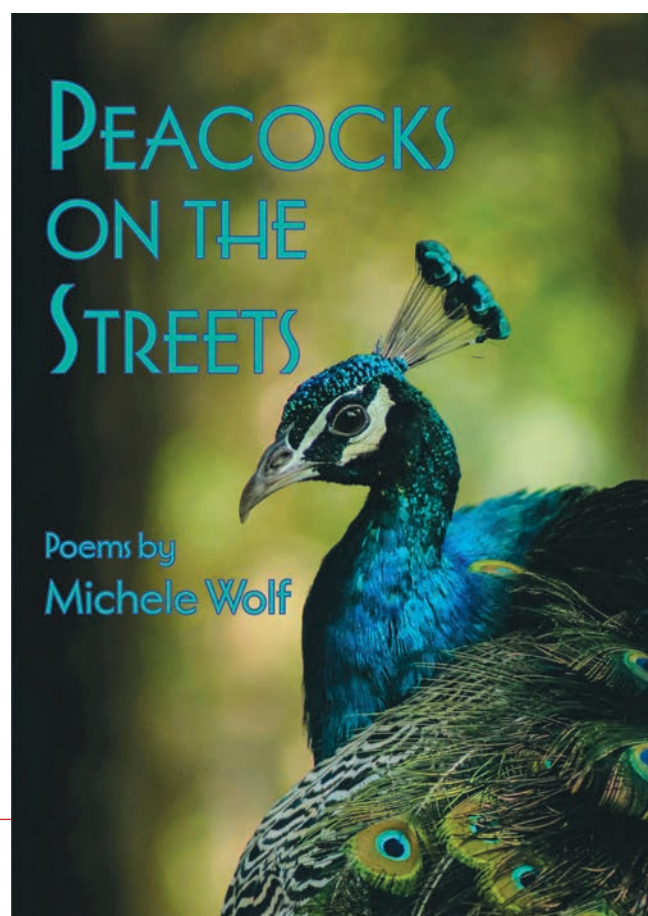
Meanwhile, when I was at Scribner's and Simon & Schuster, I spent at least two lunchtimes a week at the nearby Gotham Book Mart, a New York literary fixture established in 1920. Respectably shabby, the bookshop was my midday sanctuary. After entering beneath the black-on-white "Wise Men Fish Here" sign, you'd find an eclectic, extensive poetry section, including loads of out-of-print books; architecture, art, and dance books; literary fiction; and an iconic framed photo of a 1948 gathering at the shop, with guests such as W.H. Auden, Elizabeth Bishop, Marianne Moore, and Tennessee Williams. But surpassing these riches, way in the back room was the most comprehensive literary journal selection in North America. And it wasn't a newsstand, with new

issues bumping the older ones off the shelves. It was more of a library. You could read five years' worth of the *Bennington Review*, for example. Back then I had a particular fondness for the *Bennington Review*.

I was just beginning, in a tentative way, to ponder sending work to journals for consideration, and Gotham Book Mart provided my literary journals tutorial. I also subscribed to *Coda*, the precursor to *Poets & Writers*, which has continued to be a wonderful resource for learning how to launch poems into the world. At that stage in my poetry life, I had no stirrings—it would have seemed too fantastical—to publish a poetry book. All I was thinking, during all those hours of lunchtimes at Gotham Book Mart, was that I would like to publish pieces in a few of the journals. Of course, marketing poems would take time away from writing them, though it would still be time dedicated to poetry. Was I sufficiently productive? I would wonder. Was I sufficiently pure? I could be hard on myself, but I'd also make sure to laugh whenever I took these concerns too seriously.

Gotham Book Mart closed in 2006, a significant loss.

Harper's Bazaar was not the right fit for me, even though I was working with words. Once I heard an assistant on the fashion staff complaining about some guy she was dating: "I like Mark, but he doesn't like accessories." I also heard a heated argument between two senior staffers that went on and on about whether a particular garment was a shirt or a blouse. After two years, I did the kindest, most indulgent thing I had ever done for my well-being and my poetry: I quit *Harper's Bazaar* so I could spend weeks on end writing poems at two artists colonies—one with cows on the premises, in rural Virginia, and one in Taos, New Mexico—and so I could return to the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference in Vermont, this time as a scholar in poetry. I am indebted to Bread Loaf. Ten years earlier, right before I was about to move from Boston to New York to begin a one-year master's program in journalism at Columbia, I went to Bread Loaf on a working scholarship—I was a waiter in the dining hall—in nonfiction. The poets on the faculty that summer included Charlie Simic, Mark Strand, and Maxine Kumin. Being at Bread Loaf was the first time I was exposed to contemporary poetry, saw it valued, and heard poems read aloud by their authors. The experience was transformative for me. I was swept away. I had arrived at the conference as a nonfiction writer and walked out as a poet.



As a Bread Loaf scholar in poetry, I didn't have to work in the dining hall, although that had been fun. I would later return to the conference for three more summers, working as co-manager of the bookstore.

My path and priorities and time set aside for poetry over the years are not anything I could have predicted, ever. After that luxurious year of two artists colonies and Bread Loaf, I resumed freelancing and kept going to artists colonies. I was able to publish poems in journals and anthologies, and then a chapbook and my first full-length book, *Conversations During Sleep*. I also met my husband, a high school honors biology teacher living in Bethesda, and I relocated to Maryland. I quickly found a highly welcoming DC-area poetry community and made many friends through The Writer's Center, where I taught workshops, edited a newsletter, and ran the bookstore, which back then included a broad selection of journals. There was ample time for poems. Then my husband and I adopted our daughter, Caroline, and the love in our lives surged to a whole new level. Being new parents was head-spinning and delightful. I limited my work hours and wrote poems predominantly when Caroline was napping or asleep for the night—if I wasn't asleep myself.

I had planned to keep this lifestyle until Caroline began preschool. But when she was almost two, a friend told me that a magazine managing editor I had worked with in New York was now in DC, on the staff of the magazine that AARP sends to its membership. I wrote to him, hoping we could at least meet or that he might have some freelance projects for me. But during our first phone conversation, he offered me a full-time job, even before we set up an interview appointment. "I have a job," he told me gleefully, "and you have to take it." It came with what, at the time, was an eye-popping salary for me and my husband to contemplate, and a pension. It took time to weigh this opportunity, but the decision was yes. It helped that my husband worked near home and had largely flexible time after 2:30. A friend nicknamed me the Red Line Poet because my only time to write was during my five-day, hour-long Metro commute to and from DC. I somehow managed to publish my second book, *Immersion*, a few years later.

It was often a challenge to juggle parenting, a full-time office job, and the desire to keep writing, though I knew how lucky I had it. That was especially true once my world collapsed when my mother plunged into dementia. She was living alone in Miami, my

hometown, with no family nearby, a clearly unsafe situation. Plus, she had become cantankerous and rarely rational or cooperative. Every month I flew down to see her for a few days, to keep her company and arrange for her care: first with a home aide and meal delivery, then helping to plan her move to the Tampa area, where my sister lives. We got Mom settled in assisted living, but less than six months later, she was hospitalized with pneumonia. Although she recuperated, her dementia had advanced to the point that the assisted living facility would not allow her to return. It took 11 tries—10 nursing homes would not accept her as a resident—but my sister and I eventually found a home for her. Later, my mom contracted C. diff, an excruciating gastrointestinal infection. Despite decent care, in a matter of months she deteriorated and died. At the same time, there was upheaval at work, with a major organizational restructuring and lots of people fired. I had no poetry time or inclination to write for three years.

No one gets through life without being touched by illnesses, loss, and responsibilities. These days, I am back to being a freelancer, part-time. I have lots of hours for poetry again. My new book, *Peacocks on the Streets*, is now available from Broadstone Books. I feel such gratitude for this and for the life I have led. If I have learned anything about being a poet, it's that you define yourself not by what or when you have last written but by how you view and respond to the world. And it's important to retain a sense of humor. I remember what the late poet, translator, and editor Richard Howard once said: "Being a successful poet is a lot like being a successful mushroom."

Keep writing, if time allows and if you enjoy it. What you can say at the end of the day is you made some art and it was a thrill to do this. You wrote the best art you could.

Michele Wolf's latest book is *Peacocks on the Streets* (BroadstoneBooks.com). Her poems have appeared in *The Southern Review*, *Poetry*, *The Hudson Review*, and elsewhere. Among her honors are the Anhinga Prize for Poetry and a Maryland State Arts Council literary arts Independent Artist Award.

Please join Michele at her *Peacocks on the Streets* book-launch party and reading at The Writer's Center on Saturday, September 6, 2-4 p.m., free. Poet Margaret McCarthy, author of *In the Becoming*, will also be featured.

Highlights from The Writer's Center Virtual Craft Chat Series

KEETJE KUIPERS DISCUSSES HER NEW BOOK, *LONELY WOMEN MAKE GOOD LOVERS*



ON THE MAKINGS OF A “LOVE POEM”

I think for me, the truest love poem has to do with forgiveness.

Forgiveness of the self and forgiveness of the beloved. I think that forgiveness is the site of greatest intimacy that we can have as people. And so when I think about these poems as love poems, which I definitely do—this book was written for my wife. It's dedicated to her. And it is full of my wife, my children, my parents, many beloveds of the past, both platonic beloveds and romantic beloveds. I guess the reason that I think that forgiveness is a site of sort of greatest intimacy and forgiveness is at the heart of the truest love poems that I can write, is because forgiveness allows me to continue to love and to continue to love, not only those who are still in my life, but those who are no longer in my life either because they are not on this earth or because we are not speaking anymore.

But either way it allows the endurance of love. I was talking to somebody about this book and we were talking about marriage because I also think of it sort of as my marriage book and so many people will say “marriage is all about compromise,” right?

And it's like who's gonna sleep on the left side of the bed? Who's gonna sleep on the right side? And you know you should load the dishwasher this way, and I think you should load the dishwasher that way. I do think that marriage is all about compromise, but I don't think it's about that kind of compromise.

I don't think it's about making compromises with the



Photo by Beowulf Sheehan

other person. I think it's about making compromises with yourself. And so for me, marriage is about saying “I don't get to be that angry anymore.” Or I don't get to hold myself apart in a certain kind of pain, right? Now I have to share that pain.

Again, that all of that involves forgiveness and forgiveness of the self and forgiveness of the beloved. So I think many of these poems dwell in that place. And I think that forgiveness also has to do with humility, right?

ON SLOWING THE READER DOWN

With these poems, I sort of dared myself to let them be complicated and to not explain away the complications or hide them and obscure them. What I eventually found was that I really loved the uncomfortable places that were created in the poem, and I started thinking of those places as rumble strips in the poem.

So you're driving through the poem and the road is very smooth and it used to be that I would want to make that road as smooth as possible for the reader, and now I like to make sure that I leave in and actually accentuate those moments where you hit the rumble strip, which is like those little bumps in the road that are supposed to slow you down.

And I want the reader to be slowed down. I want the reader to pause. I want the reader to question, I want the reader to acknowledge with me how complicated we all are as people, and the incredible dualities that can exist within ourselves and the ways that those dualities can play out in our lives.

VIET THANH NGUYEN SHARES HIS CRAFT BOOK *TO SAVE AND TO DESTROY: WRITING AS AN OTHER*



ON VULNERABILITY AND THE ART OF WRITING

There was one moment when I was on the lecture circuit after *The Sympathizer* and I was standing in front of an audience of 800 people. Total strangers. And I was recounting the story that I knew very well, which was the story of my parents opening a grocery store in San Jose, California and getting shot in their store on Christmas Eve, which I knew as fact.

And to me, this has simply been a part of my life. You know this kind of stuff happens to Vietnamese refugees all the time. No big deal. But as I was telling the story, I was suddenly overcome with emotion. And it was as if a trap door had suddenly opened up beneath my feet, and I was looking into the abyss of my own past and the abyss of my own self and the abyss of my emotions.

And at that moment that I realized, even though I knew these events as facts, I had never grappled with them in terms of what they meant for me psychologically and emotionally, and obviously in terms of my own family. And that was the first clue to me that, that in fact, I was not invulnerable.

That if I felt invulnerable, it was only because I'd sealed off some vast portion of myself. And that if I was to be a better writer and a better human being and husband and father, I would have to open that trap door deliberately and go into that part that I found so overwhelming that it reduced me to being inarticulate, which never happens to me. And so that's what I mean by being vulnerable.



All of us have that trap door, I think, somewhere within us. You can get into a Freudian analysis or you can just simply acknowledge that all of us have unknown parts that we have not dealt with, or even known parts that we can know factually, but that we have not really dealt with emotionally.

And I think that these are the parts that intimidate us, even terrify us. And some people go to analysts and some people run away from these kinds of things. But I think as a writer, it seems to me that it's safe to say that it's partly our task to go into parts of ourselves that terrify us because this is where the emotions come from that we can put into our characters or our poetry.

This is where our ideas come from. This is where our motivations come from. Sometimes it actually takes a long while to realize that we have to go directly where it is, into the hurt, in order to be better writers.

MELISSA FEBOS TALKS THROUGH WRITING HER NEW MEMOIR, *THE DRY SEASON: A MEMOIR OF PLEASURE IN A YEAR WITHOUT SEX*



ON NARRATIVE DISTANCE

I have a pretty varied experience around time and distance in writing memoir, because I've written essays in the midst of their subject happening, I have written my way out of experiences, and I've written about them from a really far distance also. It just depends on the work.

The distance that I have from it really depends on what I'm trying to do in that work. With this material, you know, I really didn't plan to write about it. I didn't really think about that while I was living it. I think I would've been pretty mortified by that idea. I was just undergoing a very private experience and if I had tried to write about it, it wouldn't have been very interesting because it actually took me years to understand the meaning of that time. And this is the beautiful and amazing thing about memoir, is that *The Dry Season* is ostensibly a memoir that basically follows a chronological year in the narrator's life, but the wisdom that's in it not only draws from all of the time leading up to that year, but the almost 10 years that fall after—well now it's been nine years, so I guess when I wrote it, it was like seven years.

But through those seven years, I spent a year celibate during that year, and then afterwards I got into a relationship and got married and so much of my understanding of that year of aloneness and the work I did in that year really bloomed in my consciousness during my marriage because that's when those tools became appropriate, when I really



Photo by Beowulf Sheehan

got to use them, you know? And that's why there's a difference between sort of emotional truth and factual truth.

Everything that's in this book did not occur to me during that year. But it's not Melissa from the past who's telling the story—it's me now. The narrator of a memoir is always speaking from the future. She's never speaking from that time. Even if it's in the present tense, she's speaking from the future.

I think that's what we love about memoir, is that it has this temporal dimensionality. And I think even when you're writing from inside of an experience and you don't have a lot of perspective on it, that dimensionality has to come from somewhere. The book that I write about being on the cusp of publishing in *The Dry Season* is my second book, *Abandon Me*, which is a book that I wrote in the midst of an experience.

I really tunneled my way out of it by writing. But the book also has huge elements that come from my early childhood, my ancestral history. That dimensionality is coming from a different location, even though the present timeline is very immediate and doesn't have a lot of dimensionality. So it's an interesting thing to think about and I think like something that most folks who are writing memoir need to think about, at least in later drafts.

Where is that dimension coming from?



From Kenzie Allen's Folio on
"The More-Than-Human World"
 from *Poet Lore* Volume 119 3/4

Terri Witek

\ /

can birds speak with one beak?
 do birds drop stones in water?

will birds leave their dead?
 how do their feet find our eyes?

do clouds speak in bird?
 do eggs dream in snake?

does night bend blue beaks?
 are birds blind in one harbor?

dear warblers dear
 where are your mothers?

should I split stones for your dead?
 should I leave water?

Cindy Juyoung Ok

BY STREETLIGHT

After "The Young May Moon" by Thomas Moore

The young gray wasp is circling, love. The crowds
 of flies are lighting, love. How bent the rove through all these oak
 groves, where the languid deer are
 curled napping, love. Then bounce, the fawn's split
 leg bleeds bright, one deer. Its sibling gathers berries
 with delight, two deer. It follows their mother's
 old ways to create the bed all the day, and to
 use it together the full night, these deer.

A truck picks her up and washes the blood
 as they sleep, love. But they know where to jump
 and to watch-keep, love. And I, under stars, also watch from
 afar, parent from this window peeping, love. Then bounce,
 I walk at the rise of sun, to the deer. I only glance
 at the woodland so they won't shun, these two
 deer. Or, in following my flight and the hill's changing light,
 I might happen to lead them back to that empty brown spot, no deer.

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To Reveal Itself

ON THE PROCESS OF WRITING POETRY

By Kim Peter Kovac

ORIGIN STORY

It's easy to pinpoint my crush on poetry—reading Jorie Graham's *Of the Ever-Changing Agitation in the Air* in Robert Haas's *Poet's Choice* column, *Washington Post*, May 25, 1996. It was as if, like Paul on the road to Damascus, a bright light appeared, revealing a world I knew little about. I've always loved words, and the building blocks of theater are, of course, the words of playwrights. My voracious reading of poetry, once begun, offered in more compressed language, worlds of their own with imagery, sounds, and music.

ON THEATRE AND RULES

I started writing poetry a dozen or so years ago in the 7th inning of a career in theatre. Inevitably, if subconsciously, my approach is through the lens of theatre: a willing suspension of disbelief and the creation of specific worlds through language and story.

And then there's that magical realism thing. It is, of course, common in written literature (and used in maybe half my poems) yet almost never used when talking about theatre. I'm not sure why—perhaps because magical realism is such an intrinsic part of the DNA of theatre, we don't even talk about it. A few examples:

- Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, where angels meddle with earthly affairs during the AIDS crisis.
- Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, where stage directions include [Enter Mariners wet] and [Enter Ariel, invisible]
- Sung-through musicals such as *Hamilton*, *Rent*, *Les Mis*

I have no formal training, no degree in poetry, though I've taken many workshops with The Writers Center, The Poetry Barn, and others. Some initial fears were dispelled when I realized I needn't worry about breaking the 'rules of poetry,' since I never knew them to begin with.

My work commissioning or co-commissioning 100+ new theatre pieces for young audiences, by the time I was good at it, depended on a sharp-eyed sense of trust. I'd work with the playwright to set up the overall framework of the process and then, as much as possible, trust her/him and stay out of the way. In the same way, I had to learn to trust myself as a writer.

PEN TO PAPER

My poems start with an impulse, a germ of an idea, and come from many sources, including world history, personal history, current events, the world outside my door, international travel literature, and myths, legends, and folk tales. Often the beginning direction is blended with elements of magical realism, including:

- Time-travel (a poem putting Brueghel & Chagall in NYC on 9/11)
- Other worlds (a prose poem where the speaker is an Ethiopian goat on Saturn)
- Mixing history and fiction (factoids of Marie Curie's life mixed with her discovery of 'ghost-words' deep within neural pathways)
- Inventing behavior for real people (young Sylvia Plath's fling with Hank Williams)
- Treating fictional characters as living (Sleeping Beauty imprisoned in a modern sleep lab)

First drafts are hand-written, usually shambolic free verse with run-on sentences and too many words, left turns, unnecessary sidebars, and no real ending.

GOD CREATED REWRITES FOR A REASON

From there I noodle, trim, add, rearrange, rewrite until the poem starts to reveal itself, as Paul Muldoon has said. (This seemed odd until I realized that *create* and *creature* descend from the same root). Then it's time to explore what form the poem wants to live in, and that form influences the writing as it continues. Maybe one form doesn't work, so the words get plugged into another. Or I make one up—one piece only came together when turned into a musical theatre program. Part of my process is keeping a lookout for some 'tricks' I often overuse: parentheses, extra-long sentences, sidebars, and repetitive words/phrases. Sometimes an unfinished draft gets put away for a week/month/year, and when it comes out of mothballs, there's often a clearer path forward. (And sometimes not, so it's returned to the bottom of the metaphorical drawer). It's also helpful to play with stanza length and line breaks.

And there's often a moment when I have a kind of epiphany (non-religious), and I *know* the poem is heading down the correct path. Once a piece is in its endgame, it's useful to read it out loud which helps with the rhythm/music. As part of that, if I imagine reading to a person, it helps answer some questions:

does this thing hang together; does it flow well; does it 'work'?

ON HYBRIDITY AND STORY

Though calling myself a poet, my work might be better classified as hybrid. (CD Wright once said "if I call it a poem, it's a poem"). My book *A Bit Left of Straight Ahead* includes a range of forms: free verse; ekphrastic, epistolary, and persona poems; lineated poems; prose poems (often with dialogue or song lyrics interwoven); list poems (one a Spotify playlist); pantoum, haibun, cento, monologue with chorus, creative non-fiction; hybrid pieces with prose and poetry; standalone short tercets; rewriting the actual instructions for the censors at the notorious Robben Island prison in the style of ee cummings.

For me, writing in multiple forms is not for their own sake ("gee, look at me writing a haibun") but what's best to tell the right story. And there's the word story again. While writing poetry is not storytelling, nonetheless I consider the story (either closely or at a distance) from impulse to creation—whether it's a literal story, like a typical play or movie, or a more abstract/hidden story as a composer of instrumental music would. Once I have a sense of that story, I track it from first impulse to final poem, finding the right form, music, rhythm, and periodically pausing to let the poem reveal itself.



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A QUESTION OF TIMING

On Becoming a Writer

By Johnisha Matthews Levi

As first a lawyer, and now a nonprofit development manager, it's been my job to tell a compelling story to win over stakeholders. However, it is not until now with the release of my memoir, *Number's Up: Cracking the Code of an American Family*, that I have dared to call myself a writer.

My journey as a writer started back in third grade during creative writing classes. This is where I first learned that I really enjoyed writing poetry. I looked forward to putting pen to paper because creative writing, unlike essays, had few to no rules. It was a way for me to pour out all my doubts and uncertainties, but also express my joy and wonder about the world around me. I kept at it on and off throughout high school and, here and there, through college. But it was at The Writer's Center where my love for poetry writing was rekindled.

I had recently graduated law school and was a junior associate at a large law firm. I was learning that legal writing was a very different animal — it had its own strange vocabulary and rhythm that I had to don when drafting legal briefs and memoranda. It didn't always feel natural to me, although I had been a legal writing program teaching assistant in law school. So it should come as no surprise that I was looking for a creative outlet.

I took a chance by enrolling in a poetry workshop inspired by the music of Stevie Wonder. Right away, the catalog description caught my eye because I had grown up playing classical violin and enjoyed listening to almost all genres. The first day that I entered the classroom, I pretty quickly noticed that I was the youngest person in the room. I was more than a little intimidated. But the instructor, Reuben Jackson, put me at ease.



Photo by Dewayne Richards

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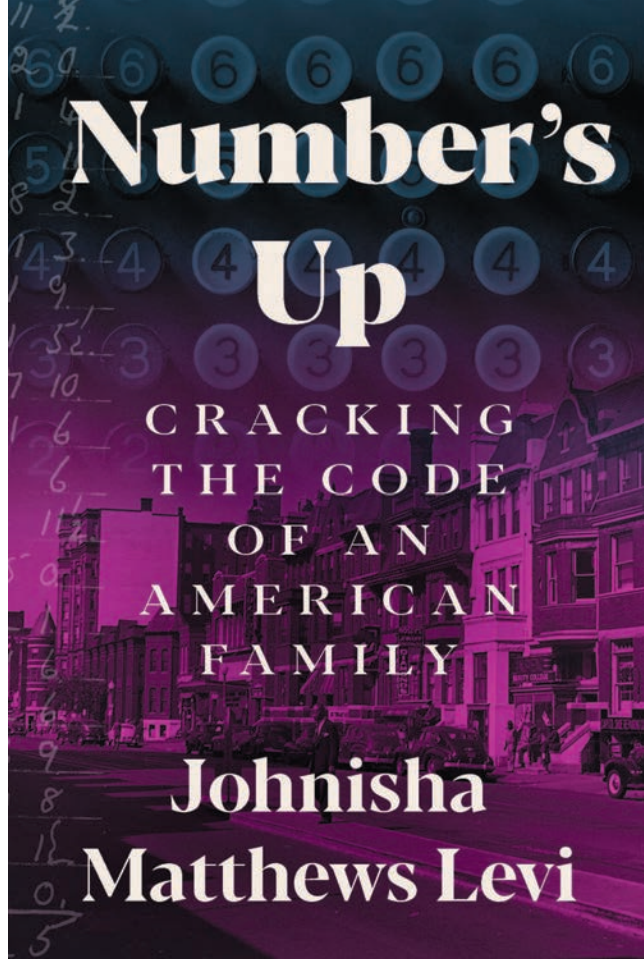
Moments in our lives, both big and small, are so frequently a question of timing.

”

— Johnisha Matthews Levi

Reuben Jackson, of the velvet baritone, taught writing with a great tenderness. Vulnerability was a plus in this environment, whereas it was most assuredly not for my day job! These were Saturday mornings I quickly began to cherish. It was here, with Reuben's encouragement and incisive critique, that I wrote and revised drafts of quite a few poems; I would take his workshop three times.

Moments in our lives, both big and small, are so frequently a question of timing. It is the same with my book. I hadn't given writing a book any serious consideration, although I had a (fleeting) reverie or two. But it took a pandemic lockdown, along with an accidental discovery, to create the necessary conditions. The book demanded to be written. I fell into the project headlong. I remember a phone call with an enthusiastic Reuben where he shared his thoughts on a very early chapter.



Five things especially helped me in spinning my family story.

- I kept a notebook by my bed. Thoughts, phrases, ideas, would come unbidden, sometimes in the early morning, or as I was drifting off to sleep. I needed to capture these as quickly as I could before they disappeared. I now have a few notebooks that bare the outlines of the project. I didn't always use everything I notated, but a lot I did.
- I constructed a timeline to use in writing the first and last sections of the book. I wanted to include sufficient information about my father's and mother's legal cases without drowning the reader in technicalities. It was helpful to map that out chronologically in one document, with the two cases color coded and the source documents included.
- I built myself a playlist full of songs that captured the mood of critical episodes in my life, as well as those that reminded me of family members. I listened to the playlist on walks or before or after writing. It helped me more easily access my emotions and channel them into the page.

“

A book is not like Athena, emerging fully-fledged from your brain. It requires painstaking dedication, revision, refashioning, and whittling.

”

— Johnisha Matthews Levi

- I revisited two of the poems that I first wrote in Reuben's workshops. I retained the copies of the drafts that my classmates notated for me in a manilla folder. Roughly fifteen years later, those poems became kernels for my family memoir. Verses of my poem punctuate my storytelling in a chapter entitled “Evidence of Things Not Seen,” about the semester I spent in law school investigating a potential basis for overturning my client's death sentence. They helped me to re-access how I experienced injustice as a twenty-something doing the hardest work of my young life, watching a mother mourn her incarcerated son. Another poem helped me to frame a chapter entitled “Two Weddings,” which traces my mom's relationship trajectory from her high school sweetheart to her belated, color-line crossing marriage to my father.
- I read everything! I learned so much from other authors — including journalists, poets, novelists (including graphic novelists), and historians. You never know where you find inspiration or insight. Reading opens your aperture, lets the light in.

A book is not like Athena, emerging fully-fledged from your brain. It requires painstaking dedication, revision, refashioning, and whittling. Too many times I had to excise what I felt were my best lines/paragraphs simply because they were pretty diversions. But a book also can't be forced — it can walk around with you for years, it can move through your circulatory system, and reside dormant in your brain and your heart. You may inhale and exhale it as you breathe. It gathers muscle every time you read, observe, and listen. And one day, it will whisper to you, “It's time to start writing!”

Breaking Through

A CONVERSATION WITH FIRST-TIME NOVELIST AND TWC ALUM JIM BEANE

By Jim Mathews

It's been said that the true mark of a "late bloomer" is a combination of resilience, self-discovery, and a sudden and profound dearth of excuses. Such would be one way to describe the recent success of long-time Writer's Center member and instructor, Jim Beane, whose debut novel, *The Deadening*, hit the literary streets late last year. But that description would also be sorely lacking, given that over the last four decades, the native Washingtonian has been quietly churning out short stories, all while wearing just about every hat in the closet of occupations, including US Coast Guardsman, laborer, dishwasher, carpenter, painter, electrician, shirt salesman, bartender, forklift driver, and teacher. Former TWC Board Member and writing instructor Jim Mathews caught up with Beane recently to talk about his writing journey and what it means to realize success as a first-time novelist at the tender age of seventy-two.

JM: As mentioned in the preamble to this interview, you've worn many hats — a lot of them *hard* hats! Tell me about that side of your life and how you managed to find time for writing.

JB: I've made my living and helped support my family working in construction. Manual labor is not for everyone, but it was a good way for me to earn. Clock in early, clock out early, start the next day where you left off the day before. Don't take it home. Don't carry it like a burden. Build. It's honest work. My father was a mechanical engineer, my uncle a builder, and my brother a steamfitter. My father wanted me to be college educated but also advised me to learn a trade. Turned out well, outside of a few aches and pains. Kept my heart strong, gave me confidence. By the time I had decided to focus on writing as my B-side, I was married with children and there was no time to be a starving artist.

But you weren't deterred from writing when you could?

Not at all. I'd been writing in one form or another since grade school. School newspapers, fictional stories, journaling. Working by the hour gave me structure and the routine I needed to establish a writing practice. Saturdays and Sundays at 5am. Two nights

a week. I found many similarities in construction and writing. Discipline. Routine. Commitment.

So you've been a member of The Writer's Center since the mid-1990s and took quite a few classes. Any experiences or instructors stand out in your mind?

After taking several largely forgotten workshops in other venues and attending a few so-called working conferences, I stumbled on The Writer's Center and began to take short fiction workshops. In one workshop with Robbie Murphy, a popular instructor at the Center, the participants read each other's stories and voiced opinions and critiques. It was a large class and everyone brought two stories to be read. That was my first experience with a group critique workshop format. I also took two workshops with Robert Bausch, smaller, more intimate workshops. He offered encouragement and gave me a sense that what I was doing was okay.

So you have been a writing instructor yourself since 2014 — at The Writer's Center as well as other venues. Your work as a writing mentor for military veterans just starting out their literary journey is especially relevant given the theme and setting of your novel. Tell me a little about that.

Yes, the Armed Services Arts Partnerships (ASAP) organization asked me to lead a workshop on creative writing with collaborative help from The Writer's Center. ASAP wanted to offer veterans an opportunity to try their hand at creative writing, and I created the workshop for Washington-area residents/veterans or any members of a veteran's family. I also volunteered to mentor veterans with manuscripts already written for The Veteran's Writing Project. Covid halted my involvement with ASAP; I opted out of presenting the class by zoom, but I still mentor for the VWP.

I've also had the pleasure of teaching veterans and military folks just breaking into the writing experience and found it incredibly rewarding, for them and, honestly, for me as well. What stands out to you about the experience?

All the veterans involved in the workshops I led or in the mentoring relationship I offered wanted one thing: for their voices to be heard, recognized and understood. They made me focus on what really matters, us. People. The characters. My emphasis in the workshops and in my mentoring focused on creating believable characters in fiction. This constant reinforcement about what is important to the stories we tell influenced the direction and content of my own writing. Stories are people and although I knew that through reading, I had failed to touch the inner self of my characters. Place is important, but it's not the most important. I'm working on it.

Speaking of place, your novel, *The Deadening*, is set in 1921 and follows the rather grim existence of returning veterans of World War I and their struggle to readjust. Where did the inspiration come from?

Many veterans I've worked with struggle with their experience and the aftermath of that experience. It's not easy to readjust. It isn't easy now and wasn't easy then. Through my own research and readings, I have found that soldiers serving in horrific combat situations likely suffer PTSD. Those same soldiers might readjust with the help of family and community. Without community, traumatized persons are left too often on their own. The VA is overworked and understaffed and always has been. The emotional difficulties faced by every soldier surviving their tours of duty is the same now as it was 100 years ago. The problems they face and their unmet needs have

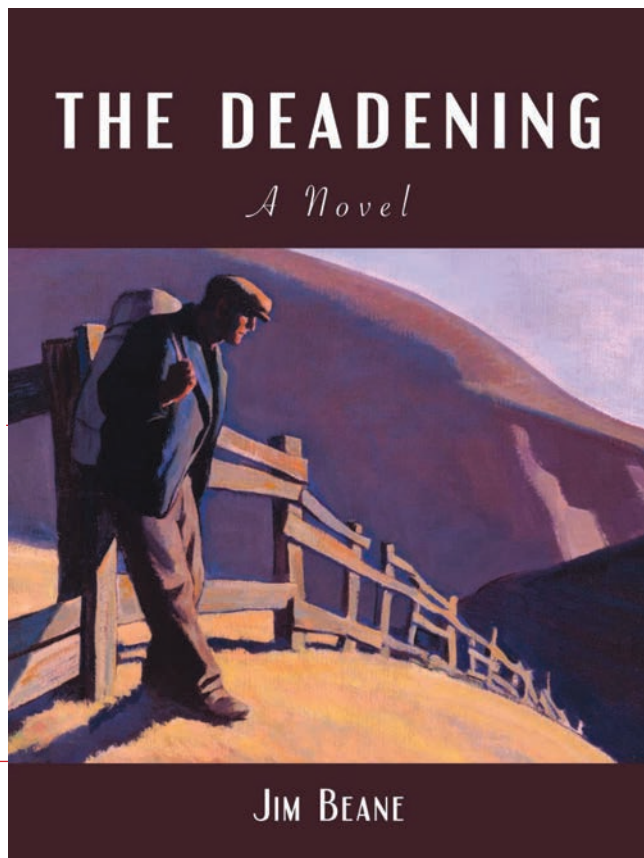
not changed. More lip service does not make up for inadequate treatments for those in desperate need. Listening to the plight of trauma victims is difficult but necessary.

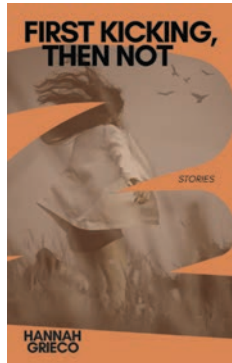
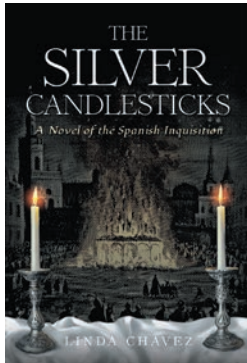
Your book is, in my opinion, worthy of comparison to *All Quiet on the Western Front*, considered the seminal novel of World War I. Do you think of *The Deadening* as a war novel?

Not really. My intent was always to explore the coming home of young men and women, who, traumatized by their experience, need help to recover. They need help from the government whose military trained them for the combat experience but did nothing to untrain them. They need help from the government to fit back into civilian life. Every war creates wounded soldiers. These soldiers are patched up and shipped home. *The Deadening* takes place during a tumultuous time in American history. The pandemic flu had ravaged the country. Prohibition shifted the sale of alcohol from legal to illegal. Creation of the FDA and regulation of patent medicines people had come to rely on. Unemployment. Migration. Racism.

Tell me about your publishing journey — specifically with the novel?

I published my first short story in *The Potomac Review* in 1995 with the help of Eli Flam, the publisher. I'm not prolific but have managed to publish a story or two every year since. I met the publisher of *The Deadening*, Merrill Leffler, at a writers' luncheon group a few years ago. During lunch, we talk about whatever we are working on and tell publishing news. Merrill asked to read what I had described during our lunch conversation. I emailed him a manuscript. He liked it and helped the book be a better book as we moved towards publication. Merrill Leffler teamed up with Robert Mandel, a non-profit independent publisher with good distribution connections. Together, with the help of book designer Sandy Rogers, *The Deadening* hit the shelves on Veteran's Day in 2024. It's a beautiful book, and I thank them for it.





NEW BOOKS FROM THE WRITER'S CENTER FAMILY!

THE SILVER CANDLESTICKS: A NOVEL OF THE SPANISH INQUISITION

Linda Chavez

lindachavezauthor.com

The Silver Candlesticks began as author Linda Chavez's quest for why her family left Spain in 1597. It is the story of a young woman who learns that her family are Converso Jews just as a new Grand Inquisitor comes to Sevilla. The revelation upends her life, preventing her from marrying the man she loves but opening a new world of faith, courage, and friendship as she navigates the treacherous waters of 16th Century Sevilla.

FIRST KICKING, THEN NOT

Hannah Grieco

hgrieco.com

A young woman transforms after an unspeakable loss. A recent divorcee discovers a new life. An aging mother fears losing everything she loves, while another abandons her children at Starbucks. The stories in *First Kicking, Then Not* introduce these women and many more, all of whom are hungry to know who they are outside the expectations of others.

THE MAGICAL ADVENTURES OF CARLY AND HER DRAGON

Jennifer Joseph

Available now from online booksellers!

Eight-year-old Carly dreams at night about visiting far-away places while a magical dragon listens to her

dreams. Carly is initially scared when the medium-sized, multicolored dragon appears in her bedroom and talks to her. Carly and her magical dragon go on adventures together to fun, real places after she does something special and important for the dragon.

THE GREAT GROWN-UP GAME OF MAKE-BELIEVE

Lauren D. Woods

laurendwoods.com

Winner of the 2024 Autumn House Fiction Prize (selected by Kristen Arnett), these lyrical, haunting stories invite us to question the stories we tell ourselves and to imagine other paths—joyful, whimsical, even absurd—through the world.

UPDATE: REPORTING FROM AN ANCIENT LAND

Gayle Young

avigayleyoung.com

An insightful and witty account of the adventures of a foreign correspondent in the Middle East and an ancient warrior queen—17 centuries apart. Young was a novice broadcast journalist when she was catapulted into the position of CNN Cairo bureau chief in the early 1990s; Zenobia was the same age when she unexpectedly seized Egypt along with a third of the Roman Empire in the 270s AD. Weaving together their life trajectories, Young explores how warfare, ambition, sexuality, and the perceptions of women in antiquity compare with the world today.

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