



wisconsin
writers
association

Creative Wisconsin Magazine

Develop your craft. Discover resources. Expand your network. Build your audience.

June 2022

Calendar of Events

Jade Ring contest open through June 5

June 1-22: Contest
Theme: Nature writing
opens for submission

June 2: screenwriting
workshop with John
Roach

July 7: Open Mic

August TBD: author
event at Books &
Company, Oconomowoc

August 15:
Submissions for the
September CW edition
due

Save the Date!
**September 30 -
October 2**
WWA Fall Conference

Check
www.wiwrite.org for
specific information
and registration details.



In this edition: News from our members and friends, upcoming events, contest news, book reviews, and your wonderful, thoughtful hard work. Have we got some exciting authors! Meet Nick Chiarkas, pg 3. Peruse poetry from our high school writers, pg 6, as well as established authors, enjoy encouraging advice (back page), purposeful nonfiction, and out-of-this-world fiction.

Founded in 1948, the Wisconsin Writers Association is a creative community dedicated to the support of writers and authors. WWA sponsors and hosts year-round workshops and events throughout Wisconsin, offering discounts and exclusive resources.

We aim to share experiences and knowledge while encouraging our members in their pursuit of this most noble art.

Images in this edition are courtesy of Pixabay.com or the authors. Thank you.

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Like what you see in the magazine? Here's a challenge: If a picture is worth a thousand words, surely you can come up with 500 of them...write 500 words about any image in this edition and send it to me by August 15. I'll pick some for publication.

From the editor

Welcome to the return of *Creative Wisconsin* back in magazine format. WWA is pleased to provide this forum to showcase the work of our fabulous midwestern community of writers.



Belonging. Belongingness.

Flocking with like-minded folks is a reciprocal, communal relationship. Belonging is more than names on a roster; it involves acknowledgement and acceptance of the others in the group. The state of Belongingness means we act in ways that are mutually supportive, encouraging, and being honest with a positive purpose.

Group members cheer each other's progress and accomplishments. We show up when we can and point out new opportunities to help others achieve.

It's a truth that will never be a cliché that we are stronger when we work together. Our voices travel further and speak to a wider audience. Writers tend to be solitary, but there are moments when we need each other. As WWA continues our Forward momentum, we've invited our writing neighbors to join us.

I'm delighted to present words and visual art from our friends in the Mississippi Valley Writers Guild, Lake Superior Writers, and the Driftless Writing Center alongside Wisconsin Writers Association members. In this edition, you'll find a bit of nostalgia, lyric poetry and fiction, food-for-thought essays, book and award news, excerpts from upcoming books and a poem written for Earth Day. You'll find updates (and we're hungry for more—send me a message with your upcoming or ongoing conferences, workshops, and events), opportunities for other places to submit your work, and most of all, lots of encouragement.

When we commit to work together, good things happen.

Lisa Lickel

From the president of WWA

Recently, I spent a weekend in Mineral Point where WWA hosted and I emcee'd a Saturday night open mic—an actual, in-person open mic. Our partner, *Shake Rag Alley Center for the Arts*, had a 3-day writers' retreat going on with a strong flock of faculty and wily writers. The open mic was held in Café 43—a downtown Mineral Point bar and coffee house in a stone building with squeaky wooden floors and high tin ceilings from the 19th century. Adult beverages were sipped and hot coffee was flowing that night, but most importantly, the poets and the writers were reading their stuff.



That is what it's all about.

Like listening to new work from poets and writers from all over. Like hearing somebody's new poem or story excerpt that seemed to have just flown in from some farm field down the road or some north side factory floor, a work of Wisconsin art so real, and so true with an image so powerful you can't forget it and the room hushes. And when she finishes her reading there are a few beats of soft silence as everyone takes it in. Sighs. Then the applause.

That's what we're talking about with *Creative Wisconsin*. A long-ago Wisconsin writerly institution that has been revived, reimagined, and restored for you—ready to publish the best of Wisconsin writing. Your writing.

Story, truth, and beauty, baby!

What will you submit?

Barry M. Wightman

Plan ahead for these Conferences and check out ongoing events

Chippewa Valley Writers Guild

June 23-26 The Priory
Writers Retreat



<http://www.cvwritersguild.org/priory>

Novel-In-Progress Bookcamp & Writing Retreat

July 31-Aug 5 Spec Fiction Camp

<http://www.novelbookcamp.org>

August 20 – **HerStry**: Art of the
Personal Essay Workshop 2 /

herstryblg.com



September 23-25 - Central Wisconsin Book Festival

<http://www.mcpl.us/cwbf>

September 30-October 1 Wisconsin Writers Association Fall Conference

<http://www.wiwrite.org>– See page 25

October 7-8 – Sheboygan Children's Book Festival

sheboyganchildrensbookfestival.org/



Write On, Door County

Sept. 15-17 -

Washington Island Lit Festival

Oct. 14-16 - Children's Literature Conference

<http://www.writeondoorcounty.org/events>

Shakerag Alley Center for the Arts



October 8 - Gathering Gold, a Poetry
Workshop/

<http://www.shakeragalley.org>

October 13-16 – Fox Cities Book Festival

foxcitiesbookfestival.org/festival/2022-fox-cities-book-festival/ & Wisconsin Book Festival, Madison

October 20-25 – Chippewa Valley Book Festival

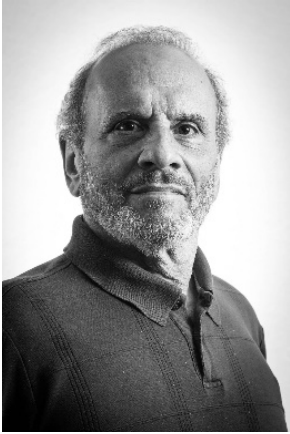
www.cvbookfest.org/

Drop-In Writing Sessions with Driftless Writing Center

www.driftlesswritingcenter.org/

Editor's Note: this is a small sample – please send your news to submit@wiwrite.org by Aug 15 for the next edition of Creative Wisconsin

Meet Nick Chiarkas



He's not just a great person and great writer, he's got encouraging words and style.

Let's start with Five Fun Facts about Nick

- **I received the Law Enforcement Commendation Medal** from the Sons of the American Revolution, and I received the Equal Justice Medal from

the Legal Aid Society. These two awards are not in conflict but in harmony. I believe that no one is above the law's enforcement nor below its protection.

- **I raised my two oldest children** mostly as a single dad—just the three of us. They taught me a lot and made me a better person.
- **I was one of a handful of NYPD cops** sent to Woodstock in 1969 to provide security—it was spectacular and enlightening.
- **While in an Army hospital** I received a very kind letter from J.D. Salinger.
- **I was in the movie *The Anderson Tapes*** (Starring Sean Connery, Dyan Cannon, and Christopher Walken)—okay, it was a minute-no-speaking part where I mistakenly smiled at a dead guy character.

Nick Chiarkas grew up in the Al Smith housing projects in the Two Bridges neighborhood on Manhattan's Lower East Side. When he was in the fourth grade his mother was told by the principal of PS-1 that, "Nick was unlikely to ever complete high school, so you must steer him toward a simple and secure vocation." Instead, Nick became a writer, with a few stops along the way: a U.S. Army Paratrooper; a New York City Police Officer; the Deputy Chief Counsel for the President's Commission on Organized Crime; and the Director of the Wisconsin State Public Defender Agency. On the way he picked up a Doctorate from Columbia University; a Law Degree from Temple University; and was a Pickett Fellow at Harvard. How many mothers are told that their children are hopeless? How many kids with potential simply surrender to

despair? That's why Nick wrote *Weepers* and *Nunzio's Way*—for them.

Nick has been a member of WWA approximately ten years and appreciates the support of, and association with, brilliant, cool, and kind writers, he says. He's one of those multi-genre adventurous writers. "I have published three law books on Alabama Criminal Trial Practice; and one law book on Wisconsin Criminal Trial Practice—all were traditionally published," he says. "I directed and authored three books/reports for the federal government: *Organized Crime*, *Money Laundering*, and *The War on Drugs*.

"In fiction, I was fortunate to land a traditional contract for my two novels: *Weepers* was published in 2015 and *Nunzio's Way* will be out in September 2022. I've had several poems published."

I asked Nick to share about his writing process and how he's benefitted from WWA.

My writing process, hmm, it's hardly a process, but here goes:

First, is finding the idea and scribbling it down (I use pen and paper for this).

Next, I do a ton of research (research will continue throughout my writing process). Instead of an outline or pants, I will make a list of implication points (moments in the story that will cause significant change).

Now I decide how (including where, when, and who) I want to open the story. What will be my first chapter, first line? In *Nunzio's Way*, the first line is: "In this city, you can have anything you want if you kill the right four people."

I start writing and writing. I will complete a couple of chapters and then I will sleep on it. Walk the dog and think about it. I will make a few changes and write on and on and so on.

I will be careful to distinguish each character from the other. And, since I write crime-thrillers, I will write one or two of the main characters into a corner that, at the moment, I don't know how they will get out of it. I will also pepper the plot with reasonable clues and red herrings.

In the end, I will make certain that I keep my promises to my reader and create an ending that is inevitable and a surprise.

Once I type, "The End," I will begin the editing and rewriting process. For me this is the art and the heart of it; this is when you begin to build castles,

and the rewrites you can share with your writing group or your initial reader.

So, that's my crazy writing process. And talking with my brothers and sisters in the WWA has helped me develop my process and improved writing.

Nick, what advice do you have for aspiring and seasoned writers? Humm, I think by understanding what not to do and what rejections could be helpful, a writer's path to publication could be made a bit less stressful. So, to that end, here is what I offer.

The heart of my advice is, as my Italian mother always said, *Affrettati lentamente* (make haste slowly). Here's the best advice I can offer. First, be patient. Put your manuscript away for a couple of weeks. I know everyone says that, but very few do it. The authors who do it are among the best out there. Think about your manuscript but don't read it for two or three weeks. Create a website and a marketing plan. Second, believe in yourself and be persistent. Do consider critical advice but know that your work's value is not diminished by someone's inability to appreciate it. The magic feather is in you. And third, secure your reputation. In the end, what matters is not what you get for what you do; it's what you become by doing it. During your publishing journey, you might be tempted to lash out in public forums, especially when you've been rejected, when you're frustrated. Don't.

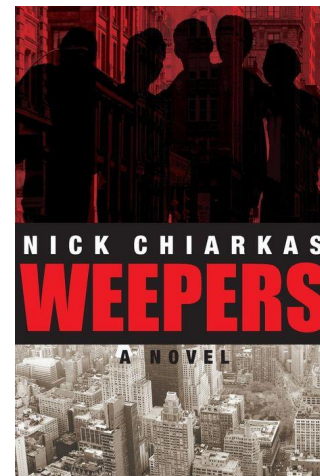
After a couple of weeks, read through your manuscript once. Then begin the rewrite and edit process. Remember the words of Shannon Hale, "*In the first draft, you're simply shoveling sand into a box so that later you can build castles.*" Do a complete self-edit, including asking yourself why you started a scene with that line and why did you end it as you did? As I said in response to a previous question, this is the art and the heart of it; this is when you start to build castles.

Shortcuts take longer. There are no real shortcuts. And agents want to hear from you, not a firm you hired. If you start down that path, you will be wasting time, and in the end, your journey will take much longer. Also, get feedback. Ideally, it's better if the critiques are not from friends and family, who might withhold needed constructive criticism because they don't want to hurt your feelings. You must do this. While you are waiting to

hear back from agents, write your next book. *Sii produttivo o sii una persona pazzo* (Be productive or be a crazy person), yes, my mother again. The irony is, if you don't rush it, you will get there sooner—Make Haste Slowly.

What would you like to see WWA do more or less of going forward? WWA is on the right track to support and help writers all over Wisconsin. We simply need to continue getting our name and information out to everyone and every writers' group.

Visit Nick's website at <https://nickchiarkas.com/>



A compelling mystery/thriller by Nick Chiarkas
*If it moves away from you, it's food;
if it moves toward you, you're food.*

The 1957 murder of an undercover cop in a New York City housing project has unexpected ties to the unsolved disappearance of a young father walking home in those same projects with his son, Angelo, on Christmas Eve six years before. The only witness to the cop killing is Angelo, now 13, while on his way to seek his own revenge in the early morning hours. The killers know he saw them.

A series of gripping events forge a union between a priest, a Mafia boss, a police detective, and Angelo, a gang member. In the end, *Weepers* shows us that the courage of the underdog—despite fear and moral ambiguity—will conquer intimidation.

***Best Mystery Novel for 2017 the John E Weaver
Excellent Reads Award by Earthshine

***Finalist for Best Crossover (Mystery & Young
Adult) Best Books Award for 2017***

News Around the Wisconsin Writing World

WWA Jade Ring Contest is open through **June 5**.

<https://wiwrite.org/Jade-Ring-2022>

WWA Nature Writing Contest open June 1-22
\$5 entry fee, one \$50 prize and publication in *Creative Wisconsin Magazine* - open to all
<https://wiwrite.org/Nature-Writing-Contest>
Questions - email submit@wiwrite.org

Creative Wisconsin Magazine is accepting short stories, poetry, essays, interviews, news, book reviews, short fill material for the September 1, 2022 electronic (only) edition. Material due August 15. Always free to submit. submit@wiwrite.org

WWA Events All writers go through ups and downs with motivation to write, particularly following a tough rejection or a day when we feel stuck, we think about giving up.

One favorite way to get unstuck is to attend a workshop or presentation by other writers, and we have SO MANY amazing, talented writers both in Wisconsin and presenting for the Wisconsin Writers Association. Now is seriously the BEST time to be a member of WWA – we have an event almost every month that is either free or discounted, and most of you can access them right from the comfort of your home.

<http://www.wiwrite.org>

Christy Wopat, Events Committee chair

Yes! I'm interested in helping Wisconsin Writers Association grow our membership

The Membership Group is looking for you. Please visit this Google docs form to register:

<https://tinyurl.com/5a3uvkuw>

If you have questions, please email Catherine Lanser Gove at: catherine.gove@yahoo.com.

Novel-In-Progress Bookcamp & Writing Retreat, Inc. still has a few openings for spec fiction camp July 31-August 5. Novel Bookcamp is a full-week immersion program at Cedar Valley Retreat Center in West Bend, Wisconsin. Join writing professionals, agents and publishers to grow your craft. www.novelbookcamp.org

Former SCBWI-Wisconsin leader Silvia Acevedo will represent Wisconsin in the upcoming horror anthology *THE HAUNTED STATES OF AMERICA* (Henry Holt/Macmillan). The book will feature 52 spooky short stories, one from each state plus Puerto Rico and DC, all written by SCBWI creators. Her story was selected for Wisconsin and highlights South Milwaukee's supposedly haunted Seven Bridges, a spot she visited often in her formative years. Visit her at silviaacevedo.com

New Resource for Event Sharing

Nan Bogue and Laureanna Raymond-Duvernell, members of SCBWI WI (Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators), came up with a resource to share Midwest events for Wisconsin writers. The spreadsheet <https://bit.ly/3sv9V4B> is a crowd-sourcing tool: if anyone knows of events /festivals /conferences that would be of interest to authors and illustrators, you are invited to add the information right in the document. It can also be used to connect with others to collaborate on a presentation, host a booth, or even share a ride or lodging.

***Bough Cutter*, Jeff Nania's** third book in his Northern Lakes Mystery series won gold for Great Lakes Best Regional Fiction in the 2022 Independent Book Publisher Awards (also known as IPPYs). In *Bough Cutter* (2021), Nania digs into drugs and gangs infiltrating rural Wisconsin communities. Midwest Book Review said, "*Bough Cutter*, the third book in the author Jeff Nania's award-winning [mystery] series and like its predecessors is a deftly written suspense thriller of a read with many an unexpected plot twist and turn. *Bough Cutter* once again showcases author Jeff Nania's genuine flair for originality and the kind of narrative driven storytelling style that keeps the reader riveted from first page to last."

Nania's first two books in the series were also award winners with *Figure Eight* (2019) taking gold in the 2020 Midwest Book Awards for mystery/thriller and *Spider Lake* (2021) taking gold for best mystery in the 2021 Independent Book Publisher Awards, winning best cover design in the Midwest Book Awards, and was a finalist for best second novel in the Next Generation Indie Book Awards. The series is published by Little Creek Press in Mineral Point, Wisconsin.

Follow him online at feetwetwriting.com.



art and poetry

by Cbunshower Yang, Middleton

There is the burly Man again
This time he comes bearing gifts
Next time I sing a song to express my
gratitude and joy
As it is indefinite in my heart

He sticks bright flags on the ground
What beautiful ornaments they are to the
entrance of my humble home

I am eager for the possibility of a new
friend
I welcome a hug from the arms of Human
with open wings
In my last experience, Man had
benevolently fed me seeds
Sharing with me his resources
Seeds that filled my stomach so much that I
was ready for the winter days

And now it is the summer days
I chirp to my other bird friends to let them
all come and gather to see
To see that our friend has returned

The burly Man carries with him a sharp
triangular thing
It must be his beak
How strange that his beak is attached to his
hand and not his nose!

And it is so shiny that I can see his
reflection and mine and all the lush trees
around me

But instead of song coming out of the beak
A harsh and a forceful sound emerges
This must be the caw of man

Away the beak of the Man strikes the bark
of the tree

Soon the cuts start to become too deep
And I see

The man is cutting away at the tree I have
built my home in

And my chirps become cries for the halting
of such

Chunshower Yang, whose passion is writing, is an 11th grader at Middleton High School. This poem strives to describe the change from how we used to treat animals to how we treat them now. It writes from the perspective of a bird, with its thoughts vocalized in the English language we can understand. The bird talks about the betrayal of man, who they wholeheartedly believed was a friend but ended up not. The poem was written on Earth Day. Her watercolor art corresponds with the poem.

Poetry Contests

Free contest from **Poetry Nation**, July 1-Dec 31
First place \$2,000. Open to ages 13 and up. Find
more here: www.poetrynation.com/contest-inforules/

The **Comstock Review** annual Poetry competition,
April 1-July 15. Small fee to mail an entry, no limit. Find
more here: comstockreview.org/annual-contest/

Dream Quest One summer poetry competition, open
to anyone, small submission fee Find more:
www.dreamquestone.com/rules

Stuck

by Marcia Marino



Here I am.
Again.
Stuck in a public restroom
alone
my partner drinking coffee outside.

Would she notice if I didn't come back for an
hour?
Fifteen minutes.
Twenty.
Finally
a woman comes in.

I'm sitting against the wall.
Ma'am, may I ask you for assistance?
Her eyes look at me with New Jersey
weariness
Is she gonna ask me for money?
Could you please open the door so I can get
out of here?
Oh my Gawd! Of course!
She held the door as
I carefully rolled my wheelchair
around her high-heeled feet
I glanced at the sign on the door
"Handicap accessible."
In your dreams.

Marcia Marino, member of the Wisconsin Writers Association and The International Women's Writers Guild, became permanently disabled in 2012. This poem is a part of her chapbook *I Can Dance Sitting Down* that will be published later this year.

Walking Through Woods on a Spring Morning

by Mary Ellen Orvis, Two Rivers

Walking through buds, fronds and bulbs,
I am forgetting winter's severe majesty,
the icy solitude, sounds of sleet.

I am forgetting your quarantined coma
lasting two seasons,
the only sounds: machines wheezing, chirping,
until you took your last breath.

Now where once wintry white and grey
covered all sounds and movements,
shades of green dot my garden plot
among tracks left by squirrel and deer.

Under melting sunshine that lightens my
heart,
so many shades of green appear!
Breezes furl over critters now unburrowed,
below a canopy of song.

That night (I can't say why)
I try to fall asleep, but cry.

Mary Ellen Orvis is retired and enjoys writing, reading and swimming. She divides her time between Two Rivers, Wisconsin and Sun City Center, Florida.

Short Fiction

My Life Lessons

by Fran Rybarik, La Crosse

No matter where we live,
our skin color,
era, religion or traditions,
we search.

Symbols span cultures and time.
Crosses signify Christians and Nazis,
erasures and additions.
Labyrinths represent traps, religious rites,
and walking meditations.
Pyramids and Nazca lines amaze.

Myths and rituals appear universal.
Ladders rise to heaven in Genesis
and in an Ecuadorian fairy tale.
Burial customs respect death.
Heroes journey everywhere.

Life is radically relational.
Hawaiians expect tsunamis after Japanese
quake.
Ecosystems, butterflies in rainforests,
and billions of bacteria on human bodies
prove interconnectedness.

The universe seeks vibrational harmony.

Everything is energy.
Intentions co-create.
Abundance teems.
Pushing against produces more of the same.
Chaos organizes complexity.

Life circles, yet transforms.

Through the eye of the needle of gratitude
everything flows.
Kindness prevails.
Forgiveness is required.
Love begets love.

And eternity is now.

Fran Rybarik became a writer as a member of Women Writers Ink, now Mississippi Valley Writers Guild, in La Crosse. With their guidance, she authored a memoir, *Travels with David*, along with numerous personal essays and poems.

Rosemary For Remembrance

by Christine Lynn Marcotte, Deer River, MN

"No, don't open that, Lottie." Emily snatched the sturdy old shoebox from her daughter and blew the dust off the top to reveal the Buster Brown insignia. She grinned. It had initially contained the first pair of new shoes she ever owned and now the few things she had of her mother.

"Goodness, tied the way it is, I wouldn't dream of it." Charlotte smiled. "I take it that goes in the keep pile?"

Emily nodded. "I'm so glad we're almost done. It's been more work than I ever dreamed it would be."

Charlotte had come for a week to help her mother move from the house where she had raised her children, to an apartment in a senior living community. When they stopped for lunch, Charlotte asked her about the box.

"Just a few things Mama Louise saved for me. It's been ages since I've opened it."

"Sounds interesting. It'd be fun to see what's inside."

"Maybe so." Emily tried to remember what all it contained.

On her last night in town, Charlotte had supper with a couple of her school friends. While she was gone, Emily brewed a pot of peppermint tea and set it on her writing table along with the shoebox. She turned on her reading lamp, adjusted the angle, and untied the knots in the string.

The first things Emily saw when she removed the lid were the brilliant colors of the hand-painted postcard. The blue sky, red-tiled roof, and cream-colored stone seemed so real that she felt like she could walk right into it. The building was immense and looked like a castle. Blooming flower gardens lined the walkways, and a water fountain sprayed skyward near the entrance. She turned it over and read the words she knew by heart. *Dear*

Emily, I do hope Papa will bring you here to visit. It is beautiful, and the doctors say I should get better. I wish I weren't so far away from you. Love Mama. It was dated September 12, 1929.

Emily sifted through the other items but left everything where it was. She inhaled the faint scent of rosemary that lay in the bottom. The words of Mama Louise were as clear as if she were sitting beside her: *rosemary for remembrance*. It was her Aunt Louise who raised her, and who by age six, she had called Mama without hesitation.

The last time Emily had opened the box was a dozen years ago. Her husband, retired and sentimental, suggested they should travel to Fergus Falls when Emily expressed a desire to see where her mother was buried. But then he had a stroke, and they could not travel. Emily wished she had gone by herself. She had longed to see her mother's headstone, to trace the letters of her name. She'd never do it now.

Emily's husband understood the empty place in her heart, but her children had not. She had told them her mother had died when she was a little girl. At age four, Emily's only memory was when she stood on the platform with her Aunt Louise waving to her parents. Her father and mother boarded a train bound for the hospital hundreds of miles away. The only time Matilda Jensen was mentioned was when one of Emily's children had a family tree project to complete for a school assignment.

Lately, though, Emily considered sharing more with them. This seemed like a good opportunity. Lottie was the oldest, and she could tell the others. Emily drank the last of her tea, left the light on for her daughter, and got ready for bed.

The only sound Charlotte heard when she entered the house was the familiar tick-tock of the antique mantle clock. She went to turn off the lamp at her mom's desk when a brightly colored picture caught her eye. Charlotte picked it up, noting it was on top of the shoebox. Good, her mom had looked through her treasures. The building on the postcard, although impressive, was not one she

recognized. The caption at the bottom read Fergus Falls State Hospital, Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

"A state hospital," she muttered, "that's where crazy people go. What's Mom doing with this old thing?" She turned the card over and read the back.

Evidently, her Grandmother Matilda had been in a hospital for the mentally ill. Charlotte sank into her mother's chair and reread it. It provided a bit more information about Charlotte's elusive grandmother. *Oh, my sisters and brothers won't know what to think of this.*

Maybe her grandmother had suffered from depression. Charlotte could empathize as she had had the baby blues after the twins were born. Today depression was commonplace, but back then, who knows. It made sense now why her mom was so selective about what she told her and her siblings. Charlotte's fingers hovered over the box—her curiosity piqued.

She pulled her hand away.

It was her mother's story to tell.

Charlotte hoped her mom would still want to share the contents with her. Recalling scenes from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Ordinary People*, she climbed the stairs to her room.

The next day, as Charlotte got dressed, she wondered if anyone else in the family had bouts of mental illness.

The aroma of freshly ground coffee and homemade blueberry muffins made Charlotte smile. It was a treat to have someone else do the cooking. She poured herself a cup of coffee and joined her mother at the kitchen table.

"Good morning, Mom."

Emily pushed a plate with a warm muffin towards her. "I didn't even hear you come in last night."

"I'm not surprised. We both worked hard yesterday. I had a great time catching up with my friends but went right to sleep." Charlotte buttered the muffin. "So, what's the plan today? I'm at your service until about three o'clock."

"I opened the shoebox last night. If you're still interested, let's look together. It's

something I should've done years ago."

Charlotte traced the floral design on the tablecloth with her finger. "Mom, I need to tell you, I read the postcard. It was—"

"I know." Emily waved her hand. "I saw you had moved it. It doesn't matter."

"So, was Grandmother suffering from mental illness? How did she die? Was it suicide?" Those were a few of the questions Charlotte had thought of as she drifted off to sleep.

Emily shook her head and took Charlotte's hand. "No, she wasn't mentally ill. She began having epileptic seizures—"

"But why was she in *that* hospital?"

Emily shrugged. "Back then, they knew very little about epilepsy. It was scary and unpredictable for the person suffering seizures, but even more so for those around them. No one knew what caused seizures, how to prevent them, or how to treat a patient. Many people with epilepsy were placed at state hospitals. It's appalling, I know."

"But so sad, for you, your mother, and your father. How long was Grandmother there? I remember you said she died at the hospital."

"Not very long. I've only a few things of hers, but I think they'll help explain."

Emily retrieved her keepsakes while Charlotte cleared the table.

"She made me this." Emily handed her daughter a child's pale blue dress. "And here's the letter that goes with it."

Charlotte laid the dress on the table, smoothed the wrinkles from the skirt, and breathed in. "What is the scent? I know I've smelled it before."

"It's rosemary. Mama Louise believed it was better than mothballs to repel bugs. And she also said rosemary was for remembrance. She grew it among her flowers and hung it to dry in the fall."

"May 1, 1930," Charlotte read aloud. "Dearest Emily, Happy Birthday! This one is special because it's your golden birthday! You were born on the fifth day of the fifth month in 1925. Aunt Louise will show you what I mean.

I hope you like the dress I made. I chose this shade of blue because I know it will match your eyes. They are the same as mine, and I bet Papa says your beautiful eyes sparkle when you laugh as he teases me! With all my heart, Love Mama."

By the time Charlotte finished reading, her eyes shimmered with unshed tears. "What tremendous love she had for you."

Emily nodded. "As a mother, I know. As a child, I didn't understand. It was almost as if she was a figment of my imagination." Emily slid a faded sepia photograph across the table.

A small girl in a dress, cuffed socks, and tidy braids stood beside a young woman. Charlotte didn't recognize the woman, but the child was her mom. "It's you, and you're wearing this dress."

"And that's Louise beside me. She got married when I was eight. We were a package deal, she told her beau."

"I remember him. They both treated you like a princess when we went to visit." She took her mother's hand. "Mom, why didn't you tell us about Grandmother?"

"I'm not sure. When you were small, it was less complicated. When you got older, no one asked."

"What about Dad?"

"Oh, your father knew. He figured I needed to handle it my way."

Charlotte hugged her. "Dad was wonderful about letting us make our own decisions." She gave Emily another squeeze. "I miss him too."

Emily took the dress and turned a loose section of hem. "It's obvious I loved this and wore it a lot. Look at how much darker the blue is here."

"It *does* match your eyes," Charlotte said. "What else is in the box?"

"There's Mama's mirror and comb and this telegram."

Charlotte unfolded the stiff paper. Dated March 9, 1931, it was addressed to Odin Jensen, her grandfather. The sender was the Fergus Falls State Hospital. "Regret to inform, Matilda Jensen died yesterday. Burial tomorrow."

“Does that mean your mom is buried in Fergus Falls?”

“Actually, at the cemetery on the hospital grounds. Your father and I planned to drive up when he retired. He had his stroke before we got a chance.”

“So, you’ve never been there, but you wanted to go. Do you still?”

“I’m too old. And besides, you kids are all too busy.”

“Mom, I’d love to take you.”

“Really? Oh, Lottie, that would be so nice.”

Emily placed everything back in the box. “I can’t tell you how much this means to me. Ever since you kids have been on your own, I’ve wished I knew more about her. When I was growing up, I didn’t see much of Papa. And Mama Louise always cried when I brought her up. She was her only sister. When she died, there was no one else.”

“It’ll be a nice trip for us. Who knows what we might learn?”

Charlotte promised to let her mom know when she could arrange time off. A week later, she called with news.

“Hello?” Emily answered.

“Hi Mom, it’s Lottie. How are you?”

“I’m fine, dear. I was coming in from the garden.”

“I’ve great news about our trip.”

“Oh, good! The more I think about it, the more thrilled I am that we’re going.”

“This’ll really thrill you then. I found out the beautiful building on the postcard...”

“I’m looking at it right now. I put a magnet on the back of the postcard and hung it on the refrigerator.”

“Well, it’s still being used. It’s no longer a state hospital, and some parts are closed, but there are places inside we can look at, and we have permission to walk on the grounds and the cemetery.”

“Lottie, this is a dream come true. When do we go?”

“Is a week from tomorrow too soon?”

“Heavens, no.”

“Great.”

“Thank you so much. I want to place flowers on Mama’s grave and say good bye as I couldn’t do as a child.”

“I know, Mom. And let’s get some rosemary too.”



Christine Lynn

Marcotte

writes primarily historical fiction and nonfiction; she has published short

stories and essays in regional and international journals and is working on a historical mystery. Christine is a member of the Wisconsin Writers Association and is a board member for Lake Superior Writers.

In the Mouth of Robinson Creek

by Fran Rybarik, La Crosse

My paddle scoops the river
like a hand
sprinkling me cool in the August sun:
Baptism, blessings, beginnings.

I swirl in an eddy of mirrored treetops,
absorb blue sky through warm pores,
inhale cedar, pine, and old fire pits
as saturated soil seeps through sandstone
walls.

A submerged rock chafes the kayak
jeopardizing this magnificent moment,
awakening fears I’d hoped to conquer,
reminding me of life’s mystique.

To live in the moment requires
awareness of contrasts—
beauty and danger, shadow and
sunlight,
beginnings and endings.

Fran Rybarik became a writer as a member of Women Writers Ink, now Mississippi Valley Writers Guild in La Crosse. With their guidance, she authored a memoir, *Travels with David*, along with numerous personal essays and poems.

School Days

by Alice Benson

Bonnie was a happy baby. Her mother sang lullabies, walked her through the park, fed her vegetables, and Bonnie grew into a happy little girl. Every day for five years, Bonnie's mother told her she was beautiful, and Bonnie believed her. Until the first day of kindergarten when Bonnie's life changed. She discovered that her mother lied, and kids are mean.

Bonnie's front teeth crossed each other and protruded, pushing out her upper lip, a circus big top filled with twisted clowns. She had a high, horsey forehead, spotted with spinning plates of acne, and a nose too large for her face. A short haircut was neat, but not attractive, and Bonnie's chubby cheeks, combined with the teeth, gave her the unfortunate look of a chipmunk storing nuts for winter. From first through eighth grade, Bonnie ate lunch alone at school, a table in the corner. Half the kids ignored her and the other half slid by, dropping names from the sides of their mouths. Bucky Beaver and Squirrel Face landed with thuds in the middle of Bonnie's Salisbury steak. A few kids tossed chattering noises like confetti that fell into her milk and choked her. The braces in sixth grade would straighten her teeth but only added to the repertoire of the name callers.

Bonnie learned to live in her head and spent all her spare time in an old tree fort, reading; a crate full of library books filled her life with romance and adventure. Bonnie loved fairy tales, the handsome prince slipping her foot into the glass slipper or kissing her to save her from the ugly queen. Cinderella and Snow White gave way to Hazel and Gus, Cathy and Heathcliff. In the arms of her Beloved, she was beautiful, often doomed, but always beautiful. Hour after hour, she closed her eyes and dreamed.

In high school, her life changed again. The summer between sophomore and junior years, Bonnie smiled now and then when she looked in the mirror. Her braces came off, leaving straight, white teeth; the circus tent folded and left town. She chose not to cut her hair and it grew wild and curly, burnished with streaks of sunshine. Bonnie loved the feel of springy softness brushing her bare shoulders. She used her allowance to buy creamy conditioner and acne cleanser. Her forehead shrunk, her skin cleared, her face grew into her nose, and her cheekbones jutted exotically. Out of the clown car, onto the Vogue runway. She took occasional selfies that made her giggle and posted them nowhere. She grew breasts, small grapefruits of perfection jutting over her slight waist. They startled Bonnie and caused her to hunch her shoulders when she walked.

When her dad told her they were moving, Bonnie shrugged. It couldn't get much worse. So Bonnie was unprepared for her first days at Central High, a new school, new kids. Her backpack tugged her shoulders, giving the world an unobstructed view of her alien breasts. Cute boys smiled in her direction. Bonnie swiveled, looking for the girls those smiles were meant for, and was shocked to find she was the only female nearby. Boys stopped in the hall to talk to her. She felt her cheeks flame and walked on, staring at the floor. They hung out by her locker, vying for attention. Bonnie crossed her arms over her chest and stood with her head down; she knew she was still the clown, ever the joke. She waited for the boys to spit the punchline in her face. When they didn't, she smiled back, just a bit.

Cafeterias were the same the world over. At lunch, Bonnie found her usual seat, alone, at the table in the farthest corner. She watched girls, pretty girls, stroll in her direction and braced for a hailstorm of nasty names to knock the sandwich from her hand. Instead, the girls surrounded her, a swarm of bees crowning a

queen, hoping for their own taste of the nectar formed from the plethora of cute boys' attention. They pulled her up and walked her to their table, center stage, popular. They offered yogurt, cookies, and other small snacks, talked about classes, clothes, and music. Bonnie ate a pudding cup and smiled again.

At the end of the day, Bonnie sat in study hall, eyes focused on her open math book, until $X+Y=Z$ blurred into WTF. Straight teeth and boobs; her life was changing. Or was it? One good day was only one day. Still... Bonnie pulled a pencil out of her backpack and drew hearts in her notebook. Would she find her true love now? She shaded and connected each heart. Maybe everything that came before was a test. Bonnie was always good at tests. Maybe she passed.

Bonnie's days, once a torture chamber, became a reality that matched her tree house dreams. She giggled with girlfriends, posted on social media, and walked through school hallways as part of a group. And not just any group, but *the* group. Bonnie now belonged where everyone else wanted to be. She was one of the Popular.

On a Friday morning in late September, Trevor found her at her locker and walked beside her to English class. He told a story about his new puppy that made Bonnie happy to be alive, her smile blooming into little laughs, eruptions of pure joy. She knew Trevor by reputation, football quarterback, tall, curly-haired, entitled—he had all the Prince Charming credentials. And he was walking with her.

He joined her at lunch, the girls jumping up, making room for him to sit, cheeks turning pink in their efforts to please His Royal Majesty. His eyes focused only on Bonnie and stayed there; he talked and laughed until the bell ringing for fourth period separated them.

They began eating lunch together every day. Bonnie felt his interest growing, and she

knew, deep in her heart, she knew this was meant to be. He was her destiny. Her suffering led her to this point. When he asked her to Homecoming, she knew her pain was finally at an end. Everything in the world would be hers from now on, hers for the taking.

Her new friends went shopping with her to pick the special dress. She felt like a fairy princess, like Cinderella. The skirt swirled above her knees and her breasts peeked out, coyly, shy, but no longer a surprise.

On a Tuesday in October, Trevor brought her a soda and chips. His smile again was for her alone, a sign of how much she meant to him. Bonnie surfed waves of love and happiness. Until...he looked across the cafeteria, into the corner, the far dark corner of the room. He nudged Bonnie with his elbow. "See that girl over there, eating by herself? I don't think I've ever seen anyone quite as ugly. I wonder how she stands looking in the mirror." His chuckles floated through the air, just over Bonnie's head.

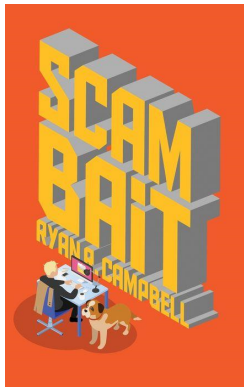
Bonnie followed his gaze through the room. And saw herself. Sitting alone, in the corner, shoulders hunched against the name-calling, the cruelty, the daily torment that was called school. Bonnie recognized the exhaustion and despair and felt the girl's pain etched on her soul like delicate crystal roses.

Trevor picked up Bonnie's hand, held it in his own. Bonnie moved her eyes slowly away from the corner and stared at their fingers, entwined, her storybook prince at last rendered real. The warmth of his touch spread through her chest, while her thoughts kaleidoscoped—new friends, shopping, laughing, music, Homecoming, happiness, two more years of high school with Trevor by her side. All of her dreams and more. So, she nodded. And she laughed.

Alice Benson lives in Wisconsin with her wife and two dogs and is a long-time and enthusiastic member of the Mississippi Valley Writers Guild. Alice's books, *Her Life is Showing* and *A Year In Her Life*, were published by Black Rose Writing. Alice's website: www.alicebensonauthor.com.

Book News

Send brief book reviews or excerpts of member's book news to submit@wiwrite.org



Scambait, Ryan R. Campbell
Contemporary Fiction / Humor
April, 2022 from Cedarbrook Books

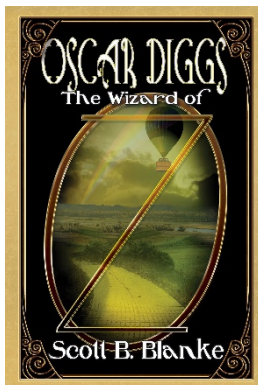
Read the entire review at wiwrite.org

Humor Me

Fast-paced and laugh out loud witty, Campbell entertains the reader with a protagonist I won't soon forget.

Eric Amundsen, an amateur vigilante, is hell-bent on avenging his grandmother, the victim of an online scam that resulted in her spending the remainder of her life in a Wisconsin nursing home instead of the idyllic warmth of Arizona.

I highly recommend this book—it's engaging enough to be difficult to put down. You might, however, want to read *Scambait* alone to avoid the quizzical glances of others as you chuckle aloud.



Oscar Diggs, The Wizard of Oz, Scott B. Blanke

Fantasy
December, 2021 from [Black Rose Writing](http://BlackRoseWriting.com)

This humorous novel blends historical fiction with Ozian fantasy, taking the reader on a thrilling ride to learn the story of Diggs's earlier life by

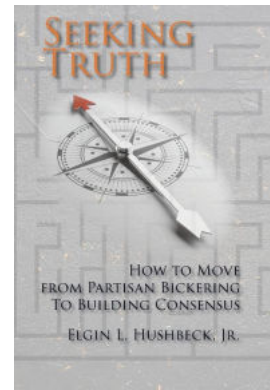
telling how he gets to Oz, how the Emerald City gets built, and especially how a conman with no magic ability can battle witches and become the Wonderful Wizard of Oz.

This novel would appeal to fans of the world of Oz, portal fantasy readers and bookworms who just enjoy adventure.

Filled with magic, battles, blood fare, and amusing seductions, the novel is appropriate to any adult reader.

Seeking Truth: How to move from partisan bickering to building consensus,

Elgin L. Hushbeck, Jr.
Inspirational,
Epistemology
April 2022 from
Energion Publications
Read the entire review at wiwrite.org

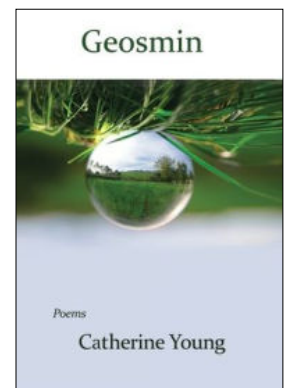


Using examples from our past in science and philosophy, politics, and communication, Hushbeck sets out to show us a more perfect way to disagree while not having to be of the same mind in his compelling book, *Seeking Truth*. It's a big topic and timely as the world has become more polarized in action and reaction.

Recommended for readers interested in learning more about applying and practicing critical thinking.

Geosmin, Catherine Young

Poetry
100 pages
February 2022 from Water's Edge Press
Read the entire review at wiwrite.org

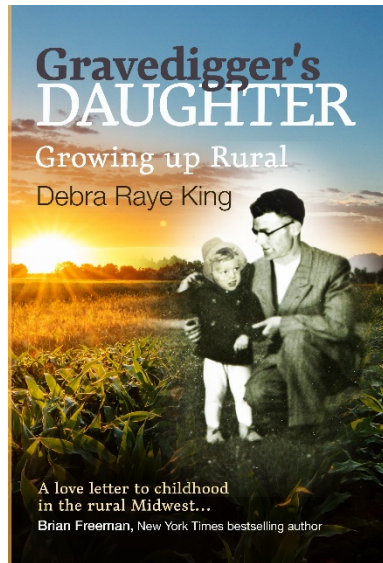


The poems in *Geosmin* by Catherine Young are complete in evoking all the senses to describe rural Wisconsin. As I read the scenes and the images she created, I was brought back to my experiences in nature. But she goes beyond nostalgia. Her choices made me pause and linger in the world she shows us with her careful word choice. In the first section of her book, she describes the natural terrain to explore our internal landscapes.

I recommend *Geosmin* to any lover of poetry. The poetry it contains reminds us that we can learn about what it means to be human through nature.

WWA Press launches book this fall

www.wiwrite.org/WWA-Press



Gravedigger's Daughter - Growing up Rural

Debra Raye King
Memoir

Due for release
Fall, 2022 from
WWA Press
Available in
hardcover,
paperback &
ebook

“A love letter to childhood in the rural Midwest, told with grace, heart, and humor.”

Brian Freeman, New York Times bestselling author of *The Deep, Deep Snow*

“Beautifully written, this memoir will awaken childhood memories for many of us and deepen our appreciation of nature and the simpler things in life.” Janet Kay, author of *Rainy Lake Rendezvous*

Gravedigger's Daughter - Growing up Rural

is a collection of short stories and essays based on actual events in the 1950-1970s in northern west-central Wisconsin. Little Elk Creek is a tightly knit community of Norwegian immigrant farm families who assist one another at harvest time and share their skills so all could succeed.

Debra Raye King shares her remembrances from an era when her father was the local gravedigger at the local church cemetery and it wasn't unusual for a daughter to help shovel. Moms were mostly homemakers, dads wage earners, and the children attended Farmers Union Camp, 4H, and the Luther League when not in school or helping with chores. In this small community, Debbi and her twin Sue were

the only students in first grade at the one-room eight-grade schoolhouse two miles away from home. Shopping was done in Menomonie where highlights of the trip included a visit to the Farmers Store, a meal out at the Dew Drop Inn, and guessing in winter when the clunker would fall through the ice.

Relish the aroma of fresh baked bread and pies, share giggles and games with the cousins and neighborhood kids, feel the wind in your hair at the top of the windmill, and the cool water of a refreshing dip in the pond.

Experience the grit, heartache, joy, and innocence of growing up rural with these tales of one family farm in Wisconsin.

We need you! Reviewers, word of mouth shoutouts, book clubs... ask for an electronic copy of *Gravedigger's Daughter* in exchange for a review. Contact Lisa, press manager, at submit@wiwrite.org
Limited to the first twenty!

Enjoy the following excerpt from Chapter 1, Shoveling Eleven Tons by Hand

When a member of our church community died, Dad received a call on our local party-line telephone. He wrote down the name of the deceased individual and asked if the family already owned a plot in the cemetery or if they needed to purchase a plot. If the family already owned a plot, he would consult the detailed cemetery map to ensure the correct location for the grave. If the family wanted to purchase a plot and lived in the area, Dad set up a meeting at the church or in our home to review the open available spaces on the cemetery map. Most out-of-town family members purchased the lot over the phone upon Dad's recommendation of location. Dad helped many choose burial spaces for both individuals and for entire families. Many bought a plot large

enough to accommodate a couple side-by-side or even a whole family.

In a day or two the family notified Dad about the date and time of the funeral. As a full-time farmer, his gravedigger duties needed to fit into his already busy daily schedule, typically beginning at 5:00 a.m. and often concluding at 8:00 p.m. or later.

When given several days' notice he could accomplish the job over a more relaxed period. With long summer days, he could do this at the end of his regular workday. Sometimes families scheduled the funeral for a day or two after notification, forcing Dad to get the grave dug within a day or two. This often happened when family members lived at a distance from our community and came to say their last good-byes to a loved one. Not a problem most summers, but a winter rush often meant digging a grave after evening chores. His daytime toils required his full attention. Dad used the headlights on his Chevy pickup truck to illuminate the burial plot as he dug the grave at night.

Graves in our community held a vault and casket. Cremation may have been available in other parts of the country but not in our rural community. My twin sister Sue and I helped Dad with the many small and large details of caring for the graveyard. We became familiar with the precision, hard work, and care needed for burying the deceased. It also required dedication, competence and quiet professionalism to serve grieving families. Most times Dad dug a single grave but sometimes he dug more than one.

...

Dad dug all the graves by hand. A typical weight of prairie or savanna soil is around 110 pounds per cubic foot. A typical grave removed about 192 cubic feet, equaling eleven tons of dry soil. Each shovelful increased when rain or ground water saturated the rich soil.



Hydration

by Maureen Adams, Viroqua

you go to the well again and again
reach down to get a cool dipper-full
from the bucket lowered
and drawn back hand over hand

sometimes the water's cloudy
bits of sediment
or stone scooped up too
sometimes it's crystal clear

impressions, thoughts
and feelings of moving
back in time are pulled
up with each bucket

you worry about infiltration
you worry about drought and draw-down
how long can this resource last?

but long as the supply remains
you know you'll return
to quench this unending thirst

Maureen Adams is a retired educator who loves family, friends, and life in beautiful WI. She is an active member of the Driftless Writing Center (Viroqua) and finds focus and appreciation in the little things.



Wisconsin Writers Association Press In pursuit of the noble literary art

The [Wisconsin Writers Association Press](#) aids WWA member authors in following through with our organization goals to help writers learn, grow, and publish in the literary field. The Wisconsin Writers Association Press exists specifically for Wisconsin Writers who tell Wisconsin-themed stories and provides a publishing platform currently unavailable to Wisconsin writers.

What We Publish

WWA Press welcomes original material of good quality that celebrates and explores all walks of life and for all ages, be it historical, fictional, nonfiction, lyrical, or speculative. Family friendly, please.

Submissions

In 2023 we are open to non-WWA members. Authors should submit samples of new, original work in English that is complete. The work should be tied to Wisconsin in some way.

Material published by the WWA Press will not be eligible for the Jade Ring or any other WWA contests.

Fiction

The Press will consider most genres or literary works. The best lengths for works in fiction is 60,000 - 100,000 words. If you have specific questions about your genre, please ask before submitting. Questions can be sent to submit@wiwrite.org.

Nonfiction

The Press will consider work in all areas that focus on promoting Wisconsin life, culture, history, biography, poetry, essays, or combinations thereof. Full-length work of 40,000 - 80,000 words is preferred. Collections of poetry and essays or children's books will be considered on a case basis.

How to Submit

Authors should submit a one-page cover letter which includes the following information and attach the first 50 pages of your manuscript.

- Author name/pen name
- 200-word author bio (third person)
- How are you involved with WWA?
- Title
- Page length
- Genre
- Audience
- 10 keywords
- 50 word summary
- 450 word sample back cover blurb
- 1000 word complete synopsis
- Sales contacts and promotional ideas (Minimum of 10)
- Endorsers or writers of foreword/afterword ideas and contact information *if applicable*
- Know that you can provide the names and contact information of at least 5 reviewers who can review your book at the time of publication or soon after.
- Previous publications (if any).

Ready to submit? Email:
submit@wiwrite.org

Population Control

by Scott B. Blanke, La Crosse

Hordes in tattered robes crowd around the mostly empty dilapidated food stalls. The meager offerings are bid on desperately. Haughty vendors ruled the populous of Xxendolous. The stench of unwashed bodies permeates the air.

Double dark blue suns beat down on the parched purple sands. Occasional wisps of green clouds float across a maroon sky.

Street urchins wearing only torn breechcloth beseech on every corner, but the customers ignore the emaciated beggars.

The crowds are so dense, one has to bull one's way up to any stall. People push and shove just to get near the vendors, where they are mostly ignored. The background hubbub is deafening. No one seems to be listening.

A richly dressed crone holds up seven fingers and points with her right hand to the only stall selling a few ripe Zagga fruit. Multiple bangles clink on her wrist as she gestures at the produce. An ornate, non-glowing headband sits just above her third eye. The vendor smiles in agreement and begins to bag the fruit. As the mild Zagga's aroma drifts over to the old woman, she eagerly sniffs the sweet odor trail. As one of her bodyguards holds an umbrella over the woman's head to block out the unrelenting sun, her other guards push away anyone who dares to approach closely. She sniffs and wrinkles her nose at the aroma of any close personages.

A beautiful, tall, young woman, dressed head to toe in filthy, loose robes stealthily pushes through the crowd to stand before the old woman. The crone's escorts ignore the non-threatening female. The youthful new arrival cradles a small rectangular tracking device in front of her which beeps when pointed at the crone's now glowing headband. Everyone in

the bazaar wears a similar headpiece, but none of the others are bright. The young woman hesitantly asks, "Are you Comma Seenza 116?" She peers intently at the old woman's gleaming headpiece.

The hag glares at the woman. "Who wants to know?" The crone holds out her hand to receive her fruit.

"My test strip turned blue today," the youthful woman proudly says. "I am sorry, but you are the first chosen on my lottery." One single green tear leaks from her most superior eye and drips onto her second nose. The young woman pulls a Drajaan blade from under her robes. Perhaps due to sweating from the heat, perhaps nervousness, it slides around in her trembling hand. After finally stabilizing it, she jabs it between the nineteenth and twentieth ribs of the crone, into her primary heart. "I am so sorry," she repeats.

"Congratulations," the crone gasps. "I understand." Her guards move to assist her, but she dismisses them. The mass of humanity is so dense that her body remains upright even as her aqua blood pools underneath her. The escorts do nothing to avenge the death. They begin to call out that their services are now available for hire.

"My name is not next on your population control lottery list, is it?" the fruit vendor whines. "If so, I will not comply without a fight. I don't have my allowed child yet with my partner. We are both only six hundred years old, mere youths. Our all-knowing Xxendolous Immortal Central Processing Unit has not allowed us to breed yet." He backs away.

The young woman looks apprehensively around the marketplace, but everyone totally ignores the killing. She wipes her blade on the crone's white tailored outfit and places it into a worn sheath hidden in the depths of her clothes.

With a trembling hand, the vendor holds up the small bag of Zagga fruit to the murdering

woman. "Very good for pregnancy," he explains. "On the house. I give them to you."

As the woman reaches for the fruit, several urchins grab for the bag. "No. it's mine, I need some food for my baby."

The vendor first screams at them and then bats them away.

The young woman's hands shudder. She is barely able to hold on to her bag of fruit. The tracking device is quiet. The woman points it at the vendor. "Don't worry. You are not my other chosen one."

"You are so lucky," said ysthe vendor. "I have lived with my Zendor for nearly five hundred years. Each year we put our names in, but the population lottery Xxendolous Immortal Central Processing Unit never blesses us. I don't even know how the process works. My headband has never glowed."

"I discovered I was pregnant this morning," says the woman. "Oh, such a joyous event." She puts her hand over her abdomen. "Our Xxendolous Immortal Central Processing Unit immediately spit out the first of two names for sacrifice. My home pregnancy kit came with the required tracking device which activated as soon as my strip showed positive. I trailed Comma Seenza 116 via her headband." The young woman put both hands up to her headband. "I pray the necessary second killing will be as easy." Another tear runs down her face. "I hated to have to take a life."

The tall woman turns to recede. She continues to shiver, but there are no more tears. "I do not know the second name yet. I haven't even had time to call my life mate and give him our good news. I am glad the first name was such an old person. It is not always so."

"One of my market mates had to sacrifice an eight-year-old child once," says the vendor. "The all-knowing, all powerful population control Xxendolous Immortal Central Processing Unit randomly chose a child. Exalted be its

name. But the parents understood and were planning to start another one immediately. That is, if the Xxendolous Immortal Central Processing Unit lottery blessed them."

"We live so long, while there is so little food. Our system must reduce our numbers." The woman clutches the bag of fruit tightly to her chest. "Everyone is starving and all must make sacrifices in order to bring one new life into this world. Two lives removed for each new one, that is our ultimate edict. The Xxendolous Immortal Central Processing Unit is never wrong." The mother stops and points. "Oh, my Xxendo! The body of the crone has been stripped of clothes and possessions." She squints and then gags. "Oh, my...there are missing parts of flesh...she was so thin." She shivers. "The bodyguards...are they?...they seem to be chewing on something."

"The urchins are also eating the flesh from the crone," mutters the vendor.

The woman genuflected by touching under each eye and then her chest over both hearts. "I pray that never should my child ever become that hungry."

She hurries back to her minute apartment, opens the triple locks on her front door, and docks the tracking device with the home Xxendolous Immortal Central Processing Unit system terminal. She gulps a single glass of water, and wishes she could afford another. It does little to quench her thirst.

She eats one of the small Zagga fruit as she waits for the second lottery quarry's name to appear. She knows one piece of succulent fruit will be her entire meal today. Now that she is pregnant, her life mate will have to help her find a new source of nutrients for their growing child.

Her handheld tracking device begins to beep faintly. The glaring suns reflect off the glass. The screen remains blank.

Finally, her tracking device beeps louder and faster and "Shasha Fremont 778" shows

up on the viewscreen. The mother bends closer to stare at the name.

As she straightens up, she notes the tracking device is intensifying in sound, frequency, and proximity of location. Could the second lottery sacrifice be one of her numerous neighbors? What luck! She wouldn't have to go far.

A hesitant knock sounds on her door. Her tracking device now pounds faster than her own heartbeats did when she determined she was pregnant. She peers again at the screen, puzzled to see her reflection show her own headband glowing.

She opens the door to a short woman holding a howling tracking device and also wearing a glowing headband.

"My pregnancy test turned blue this morning," the short woman says.

They both pull out blades.

Scott Brian Blanke is a retired Mayo Clinic surgeon, and a member of both Mississippi Valley Writers Group and La Crosse Area Writers Group. Scott has published several flash fiction, a short horror story, and a travel story with photographs.

Paper Hearts

by Adrianna McCollum, Madison

Her husband
left her years ago
and even though she
cut out pretty pink paper
hearts for her
students
every year on
Valentine's Day,
she had given
up on
love.

Adrianna McCollum is a new Wisconsinite and a proud member of the Wisconsin Writers Association. She is a published writer of poetry, fantasy fiction, and memoir essays.

Failure to Coexist

by S. Acevedo, Milwaukee

You get some cats, thinking they'll get
along with the others.
You introduce them the right way, you take
your time.

They're curious about each other,
the new ones, smaller, lighter, more
delicate underfoot.

They're girls, tiny compared to the boys,
adorable, sweet sisters to keep each other
company as the boys have.

But they're distrustful.

They hiss.

They growl.

Their chase turns into a swat, swats turn
into brawls,
the boys' home is theirs no more.

Fearfully, the boys hide.

They slink, they lose territory, they lose
confidence in their own spaces.

Humans struggle to make it work,
co-playing, bribing treats, calming scents,
every known method, hoping to make
friends.

They fail, the newcomers fail, fate fails,
peace fails.

Hearts will be broken.

No one wins when it's time to re-home.

But, NO,

all will eventually be better.

Everyone deserves to live peaceably.

And in the aftermath, the introspection:
peaceful co-existence should be easier
within all species,
no matter their histories.

Silvia Acevedo is an award-winning children's book author and co-founder of Fantasy Art Workshop's Illustration Intensive. She's worked in New York publishing at Scholastic, Inkluded Academy, and literary agency Writers House, and previously led the Wisconsin chapter of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators.

The Third Service on Sunday

by Pam Fullerton, Wausau

Usually, my entire family went to only one of the three sermons Dad preached each Sunday in his little rural churches, and we rotated from one to another each week, to provide a physical presence to each congregation in their turn. But also, every Sunday, one “lucky” child from among the thirteen or so siblings would be selected to accompany Dad to all three services. When it was my turn, as we drove between the second and third services, I would sit in Dad’s lap steering the old sedan down the shaded, twisting country roads while Dad simultaneously operated the accelerator, the brakes, and revised his sermon, one-more-time, for the next congregation.

Dad’s sermons were works of art over which he labored unceasingly. He read the classic sermons like some people consume romance novels or graphic comics. He read and reread the great theologians and preachers; Walter Farrar, Paul Tillich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Thomas Mann, even Luther and Hus, (in the original German of course). His prodigious memory could almost always recall exactly the phrase or reference he thought would most aptly convey his intended meaning. After he drafted his own sermons, he would revise them by reading them aloud as he paced back and forth across the worn squares of checkered linoleum on the dining room floor, listening for that one wrong word, that false note, any lack of clarity—that being the single most important thing he strove to achieve each and every time. He was truly a great orator and could capture and hold any audience with his smooth, low tenor voice and the dramatic sweep of his passionate delivery of “The Word.”

During that summer, when it was my turn to accompany Dad to all three services, I

discovered, quite by accident, no one would miss me if I didn’t come into the church for that third service. On that one particular June day, Dad and I arrived at the last church twenty minutes early as usual. But I was so tired (I was only eight years old and had, after all, already sat quietly through two sermons); I remained in the car to take a tiny nap before joining my soon-to-arrive family inside. The car was parked under the shady canopy of a huge elm and the open windows invited in a soft breeze to cool me.

When I awoke, startled, a half-hour later, the service was already in progress and I did not want to interrupt it by opening the big entry doors and walking the full length of the center church aisle to join my mother and other siblings in the front pew. No, that would not be a good thing to do. Discretion being the better part of valor, I wandered across the road to the high wooden fence which surrounded the pasture across the way. In my navy blue dotted-Swiss Sunday dress and little black Mary Jane’s, I climbed the wooden rails and perched on the top one. There were horses in the field, three enormous Belgians. One was an older mare while the other two were a well-matched pair of younger geldings. They were cropping the new summer grass with evident delight. One of the geldings, the one with the star on his forehead, looked up at me, nodded his head, and then resumed grazing. It was enough. I had been acknowledged.

After that, I begged to go with Dad every Sunday and while that didn’t always happen, enough of the other brothers and sisters were willing to relinquish their “privilege” of sitting through three services on a Sunday morning that I got more than the customary number of turns. I snuck out of that third service almost every single chance I got.

That summer, it seemed like there was always sunshine stippling the hedge row and grass with gold and brown shadows as I sat on

that top fence rail, swinging my legs and talking, or singing quietly to the horses, especially to my favorite, Star. If I could, I secreted apples in the car and fed them in equal shares to these magnificent animals who were soon coming to greet me before the church bell marking the start of the service had even finished ringing. I would stroke their soft, velvety noses and laugh while they nibbled softly on my apple-washed fingers. It never occurred to me to be concerned by the size of their enormous teeth. They were unfailingly gentle with me and with each other as they groomed and nuzzled one another, or stood dozing in the warmth of those Sunday mornings.

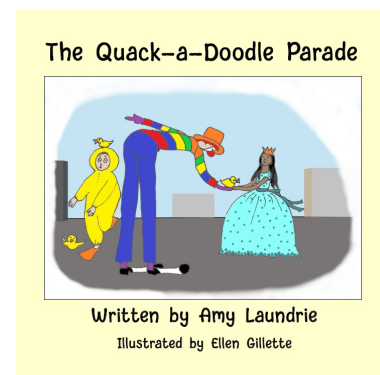
Finally, one early September Sabbath, I dared the ultimate contact. As Star stood alongside the fence I slipped over onto his spacious back. It was so very high. He cocked his head, and bent his neck around to look at me, his large, limpid, brown eyes wide and inquisitive. He took a hesitant step, then another. Then he dropped his head and began to graze. The muscles under his dappled golden coat rippled as he moved his shoulders, his sides contracted and expanded with his respiration. My legs spread wide across the broad expanse of his warm back, I lay forward onto his massive neck, laid my cheek against the soft wisps of his silvery mane, felt his slow heartbeat, and inhaled the scent of living, breathing, calm strength and acceptance.

Now this was a sermon I could live with. This was a sermon about love, about communion with nature, about joy, about thankfulness for the immense, incalculable miracle of life. And this...this was surely a sermon even my beloved perfectionist father, would never need to revise.

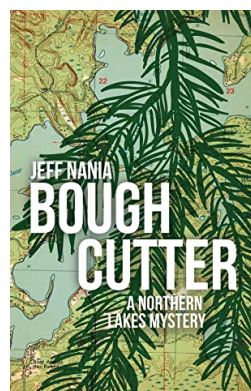
Pamela Fullerton is an author, documentarian and was one of 16 siblings, all Preacher's Kids. She lives near Wausau breeding champion race horses and writing...always writing.

The Quack-a-Doodle Parade

Amy Laundry,
Wisconsin Dells
<http://www.laundrie.com>
Picture book and text
for ages 6-8
March, 2022 from
Pen It! Publications



After moving to the country, Emily misses her best friend until she and her little brother meet Tomás and Daniela who help them prepare for the spring parade. Together they decorate a float, create silly costumes, and come up with a plan that even includes their pet rabbit and ducklings. Chaos and chuckles abound on the day of the parade when Mr. Slobbers, a rambunctious Great Dane, also sets out to make new friends. The result? A rollicking parade no one will ever forget!



Bough Cutter

Jeff Nania, Lewiston
<http://www.wetfeetwriting.com>
Northern Lakes Mystery
series, book 3
May 2021 from
Little Creek Press

When grouse hunters stumble upon a body in the backwoods, Sheriff John Cabrelli works to untangle the complex case, while stressed relationships, public outcries for justice, and pressure from the media compound the situation. As the body count rises in the expansive landscape, he soon finds his greatest resource is the community itself.



Wisconsin Writers Association 2022 Annual Fall Conference



The Craft of Writing: Celebrating Northland Diversity and Nature

If you only go to one writer’s conference this year, this is it! Gather with writers from across the state and beyond to experience Wisconsin’s stunning Northland lakes, forests, history and culture to see how they can inspire your craft. Learn from an exceptional line-up of 17 award-winning, diverse presenters and panelists in a northern Wisconsin setting that is beyond compare for beauty and creative spirit. The conference may also be attended virtually.

➤ **DATES**

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 4 – 10 p.m. Don’t miss this evening of community and two rich presentations. Hear melodic Native American pipe music; savor an expertly prepared chef’s dinner.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. The value of the day’s presentations cannot be overstated. Fifteen presenters will share their stories, tips, tactics and tools for helping you to become the writer you want to be.



➤ **LOCATION**

[BARKER’S ISLAND INN AND CONFERENCE CENTER](http://www.barkersislandinn.com) ON SCENIC LAKE SUPERIOR, SUPERIOR WISCONSIN - [WWW.BARKERSISLANDINN.COM](http://www.barkersislandinn.com)



➤ **PRESENTERS**

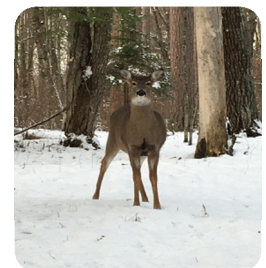
GO TO **[WWW.WIWRITE.ORG](http://www.wiwrite.org)** AND CHECK OUT OUR STELLAR ROSTER OF RESPECTED POETS, NOVELISTS, SCREENWRITERS, MEMOIRISTS, CHILDREN’S AUTHORS, NON-FICTION WRITERS AND TRADE PROFESSIONALS. SEE OVERVIEWS OF THEIR PRESENTATION TOPICS.

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Inspiring and Thought-Provoking Nonfiction

If I Could Travel Back in Time

by Victoria Lynn Smith, Superior

If I could travel back in time, I would pick a summer day in 1950 when my mother was ten and her brother was eight. They lived in Milwaukee in a middle-class neighborhood about ten blocks from A.O. Smith, a large manufacturing plant.

The sun would shine, the temperature would be 75 degrees, and the breeze would be slight.

I'd go out to play with my mother, her brother, and their friends. We'd run down the sidewalks on our way to Sherman Park or maybe Washington Park. We'd ride the bus at least one way if we went to Washington Park because it's two-and-a-half miles from their house. At the parks we'd swim, play baseball, and swing. If we saved bus fare, we could buy a treat at the concession stand.

Maybe we'd stay home and play games of tag through the front yards, up and down the block. Or games of cops and robbers or army, escaping through backyards by climbing fences or slipping through gates. Or games of hide-and-seek, hoping not to be the first one found.

We'd sit on the front stoop of someone's house and drink a cold lemonade squeezed from lemons and sweetened with sugar.

Refreshed, we'd play hopscotch or jacks or marbles. If someone ran home to grab a section of clothesline, we'd jump rope and chant, "Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear" or "I'm a Little Dutch Girl" or "I Went Downtown."

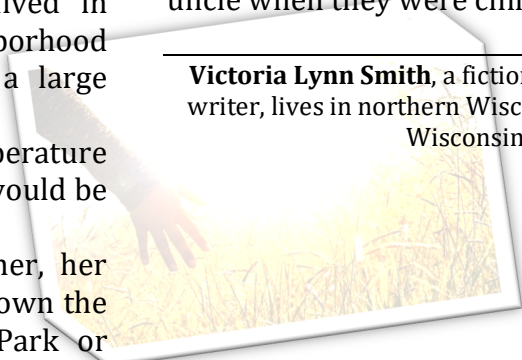
I'd know all the games and songs because an older child teaches a younger child. Ever notice that we don't learn these from our parents?

We'd call each other by our childhood nicknames, squabble about the rules of games, laugh at our silly antics.

Maybe we'd go home with skinned knees or elbows, wouldn't matter because we'd spent the day together. We'd eat our dinner and wash the dishes. We'd sit on the floor in front of the radio and listen to Jack Benny, *The Lone Ranger*, or *The Green Hornet*.

If I could travel back in time, I'd pick that warm summer day in 1950 and play with my mother and her brother because *Oh, what larks to play with your mother and your favorite uncle when they were children.*

Victoria Lynn Smith, a fiction and creative nonfiction writer, lives in northern Wisconsin. She belongs to the Wisconsin Writers Association and Lake Superior Writers.



Vespers

by Maureen Adams, Viroqua

quiet solitude
empty thoughts on paper
as if taking wallet phone keys
from pockets each evening

these lifelines keep us viable
tether to our existence
we give them stations of honor
and panic if misplaced

take time to unload the brain too
at day's end
carefully handle the items
one by one
place them down
consistently lovingly
to be remembered
and retrieved later

Maureen Adams is a retired educator who loves family, friends, and life in beautiful Wisconsin. She is an active member of the Driftless Writing Center (Viroqua) and finds focus and appreciation in the little things.

The Right Stuff

by Marcia Marino

As soon as I finished my second year of seminary I was fortunate to begin a summer internship with Milwaukee Hospice and Home Care. I worked with their supervisor of support staff.

Dick provided an orientation. He told me I'd need to be present at team meetings twice a week. During those meetings we'd talk about the patient caseload and discuss any challenges.

He then assigned me to go on home visits with one nurse. I'd be with her for a week. When I met Ruth she told me she'd been a hospice nurse for many years. I hoped I wouldn't get in her way or do something really dumb.

On the first day we saw patients who already had support staff assigned to them. Ruth told them I was a seminary student who was observing her. I asked each patient if I could observe them quietly while Ruth worked with them. Each agreed.

The next day Ruth told me I'd be meeting the first patient for whom I'd be providing support. All of a sudden I felt my heart beating fast. Ruth noticed my anxiety.

"Marcia, remember you have what you need to give to the patient and his family. You are enough." I listened to Ruth and nodded. I said a silent prayer to ask God to please help me.

We drove to Dan's house. This was Ruth's first visit there, too. She introduced both of us to Dan and his wife Betty. Dan retired a few weeks earlier. They went on a long-planned vacation to Paris. When they were there he became very sick to his stomach. He had difficulty eating during their entire trip. At the time both of them thought Dan was having problems adjusting to an unfamiliar diet.

As soon as they got home Dan's nausea worsened. They went to see his doctor who ran some tests. The doctor told them, "I'm sorry,

but I have serious news for you. You have Stage 4 stomach cancer. I suggest you get your affairs in order as soon as you can. You probably have about eight to twelve weeks to live."

I felt sadness and compassion for Dan and his wife. Both appeared calm as they shared their story. Ruth then explained what Milwaukee Home Hospice was, told them about the services we'd be offering to them, described the brief exam that she'd be performing, and asked if they had questions.

Dan asked me what a support team person did. I said, "The support team will provide emotional and spiritual support for you and your family. Some of us are social workers and some are clergy. I'm a seminary student. I want you to know you're my first hospice patient. If at any time you'd like to request a more experienced support team member, please don't hesitate to ask. It won't hurt my feelings at all."

Dan smiled and said, "Well, I'd like to kick your tires a little bit."

I responded, "My tires are ready for you."

Ruth took Dan into the bedroom for his exam.

I turned to Betty. "This must be hard for you. How are *you* doing?" Two big tears ran down her cheeks.

"I want to make the most of every minute I have left with Dan. He's a fantastic husband and father. I love him very much. I want to wait until he's gone to do my grieving."

I nodded. "I hear what you're saying. Please know if you need someone to listen to you at any point, I'm glad to do that." I gave her a card from Milwaukee Hospice on which I'd written my name and the office phone number. "Also, a support team member is on call 24/7. Please don't hesitate to call if you need one of us, okay?"

Betty nodded.

Just then Ruth came out of the bedroom. She invited me to go in and speak with Dan. He was sitting on his bed. I sat on a chair next to him.

Dan asked, "May I ask you what

denomination you are?"

"Sure, Dan, you can ask me anything you want. I'm a United Church of Christ seminary student."

"How much longer before you graduate?"

"I have one more year in seminary."

"What do you want to do after you graduate?"

"I want to be a chaplain."

"A hospice chaplain?"

"I'm not sure yet. Maybe. Or a hospital chaplain."

That was the start of a conversation that took place once or twice a week for about five weeks. Dan became seriously ill about three weeks later. He became bedridden and soon was surrounded by loving family members a couple of weeks after that.

I remember my last conversation with Dan. Ruth spent quite a while taking care of his nursing needs. I sat with Betty in the dining room. Their adult children were in the bedroom with their dad. When Ruth came out of the bedroom she said, "Marcia, Dan wants to see you."

I was surprised. I walked quietly into Dan's room, aware that this would likely be the last time I'd see him. I spoke in a soft voice, "Good morning, Dan."

He gave me a weak smile. "Hi, Marcia. I wanted to tell you something. You told me when we met that you're a brand new chaplain. I wanted to tell you I think you're good at this stuff. I didn't want anyone else." Tears came to my eyes as I thanked Dan for his kind words. I took his right hand, and asked him if he wished a prayer. He did. I asked if he wanted Betty to come in. He did. As their daughter went to get her mom, I asked what we should pray for.

"For God to open the gates for me."

After Betty came in, I prayed, "Dear God of love, please bless Dan. I give thanks for his life and the ways in which he's shared his love and yours with Betty, their family, and other friends and

colleagues. Please help us to keep Dan as comfortable as possible. And when you're ready, dear God, please open the gates of heaven for Dan. May his reunion with loved ones there be a time of joy. Please grant strength to Betty and their family. We ask all of these things in the name of our God who loves us all. Amen."

Dan squeezed my hand. "Nice job praying, seminary student Marcia." Dan's eyes held a tiny twinkle.

I thanked him.

The next morning Ruth received a call: Dan died. Ruth told Betty we'd be right there. When we arrived I went in and gave my condolences to Betty and their adult children. Ruth helped them fill out paperwork.

Then I stood in silence as the funeral home staff came and put Dan into a body bag. I'd never seen someone I cared about being placed in a body bag. I walked outside and leaned against a big tree in the front yard as they loaded Dan into a black limousine. I was trying very hard to maintain my composure.

Just then Ruth came and stood next to me. She whispered, "It's okay. Sometimes we cry, too." With that, a couple of tears escaped me. I knew I had to keep myself in check so that I could say farewell to Betty.

I did that and then quietly got into Ruth's car. I was grateful I didn't have to drive at that moment.

I still remember exactly where Dan and Betty lived. I think of them time I drive by their corner. Two people I didn't know well. Two people I cared about very much. I saw many patients that summer. Some died. Others were still being cared for by hospice staff when my summer internship ended. But I knew I'd never forget Dan. He was one of the first people who let me know I had the right stuff.

Marcia Marino, member of the Wisconsin Writers Association and The International Women's Writers Guild, is a retired hospital chaplain and interim minister. This excerpt is from her upcoming memoir.



An Encouraging Word

Don't Stop Writing

by Christy Wopat, Holmen

In 2014, I sat in a high-backed hotel chair, the kind with the cushioned seats, and listened to a literary agent speak about writing memoir.

I didn't know what a literary agent was, and although I'd always been an avid reader, I'd only recently realized that what I was writing was referred to as a memoir.

"So, I'm going to be brutally honest with you right now," the agent began, "because you deserve it."

Just a short 40 minutes later, I went back to my hotel room and called my husband, crying.

"I wasted all this money to come here and it's no use! Nobody will ever even buy it! Instead of my babies dying I should have been in a cult!"

Now I'm going to be brutally honest with you: that literary agent was mostly right. Agents know the market, they know what they're up against, and it's not necessarily because they don't believe in your story or message that they won't represent you.

However, when I tried to quit writing (because hello, when that guy from NYC just told me I had no chance to be on The Today Show, so what was even the point?), I had quite a shock. I missed it. And not just because I love to write, but because writing about my grief made me feel better.

I wondered if there was something to it. Could the writing actually be helping me work through my grief?

The answer is complicated. In the late 90s, two researchers named James Pennebaker and Joshua Smyth conducted a study that was meant to prove whether or not writing about a traumatic experience would have an impact on health. During the study, they found that the participants were stressed during the writing

about the trauma part, but after they completed (what Pennebaker and Smyth call "letting go") their stress levels not only returned to normal, but went even lower than when they started.

Building on their work, Karen Baikie and Kay Wilhelm conducted a similar study. They concluded that while it may not be for everyone, studies overall support that expressive writing helps make people feel better.

While overall the studies suggest there could be something, it will probably work for some people under certain circumstances, the message is this: try it. There's little chance it will hurt, but a good chance it will help.

I didn't stop writing. I wrote day after day, page after page. I sold a memoir (without an agent, no less!) and my third book, *After All: Pregnancy After Loss*, comes out this month from Ten16 Press.

But even if I hadn't sold a single book, one thing is for sure: expressive writing has helped me move forward. It has helped me heal.

Christy Wopat is a writer and teacher from Holmen, Wisconsin. You can find her at www.christywopat.com

After All is a follow-up to Christy's captivating memoir about infant loss, *Almost a Mother*. In this mini-memoir, you'll be back with Christy as she gives a no-holds-barred walkthrough of her experience as a bereaved mama who wanted to have a child to hold.

From the terrifying moment she found out she was pregnant again, to the feelings of shame for not instantly loving motherhood, Christy's honesty and humor will let you know you're not alone.

