

South West Sage

The Voice of South West Writers

We Wish You A Season of Great Joy!

The South West Writers Board of Directors would like to wish SWW members and their families a joyous holiday season. Though the threat of COVID seems likely to persist into 2021, the holidays provide an occasion to rekindle familiar traditions that remind us of our many reasons for giving thanks. We are grateful for all of you, our dedicated SWW members, and for your support through this challenging year.

The Christmas Letter

by Patricia Walkow

This essay was published previously: in 2017 by Corrales MainStreet News, and in 2019 by Corrales Comment.

How many have you received over the years? A handful? Dozens? Hundreds?

I am referring to Christmas letters...the kind you receive from people you haven't seen in years.

While it's nice to keep up with friends, family, and their lives, a message such as "All is well, life is good, enjoying it. Blessings to you," is the only sentiment one really needs. Maybe a photo would be nice, because the last time you may have seen some of these friends and acquaintances was when they were in their thirties and many of them are now on the north side of fifty.

Make that sixty.

Whether they are called "Christmas Greetings" or the more PC-compliant "Holiday Greetings," over the years I've endured many of them. Most of them have one thing in common: they are not about Christmas at all...or Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa, or any other holiday. They are about those who write them.

The driving force behind these screeds seems to be letting the reader know what wonderful things the writer has been up to, which life events have occurred, and what achievements they or their



cont'd on page 12

SUPPORT FOR CRITIQUE GROUPS

Introducing ROBERT SPEAKE, Critique Group Coordinator



South West Writers is developing a program to support the creation or improvement of Albuquerque-area writing critique groups. The groups will include SWW members, but will operate independently of SWW, with their own guidelines and membership. Additionally, SWW will offer sample guidelines for starting or enhancing a critique group, training sessions for groups that request them, and other assistance as needed. Returning member Robert Speake (a member in the 1990s!), has volunteered to serve as SWW Critique

Group Coordinator. He will be aided by a small team of SWW members with critique group experience. The group will work on developing the program in December-January, for February board approval, and a March startup. Robert's team is not yet fully formed, so he invites anyone wishing to join the team to email him at: macrcs@me.com.

Read Robert's thoughts about critique groups on page 9. He invites the thoughts of other members.

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SouthWest Sage

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What's Inside?

*I saw it
in the SAGE!*

We have reached the season of Hope.

This year, it's possible we need it more than ever: Hope that an end to Coronavirus is on the horizon. Hope that our country's obvious divisions will heal. Hope that we have each found new sources of strength through weathering the storms of 2020.

SWW too has had to suffer a bit—to grow, and to change—but this organization is strong. It's populated with creative, willing and supportive souls who just can't stop themselves from coming up with new ideas.

Seeing our attempts in recent months to keep members connected, and to facilitate the formation of critique groups, Robert Speake paid his membership dues, made an additional donation and volunteered to head a new board position: Critique Group Coordinator (**pages 1 and 9**). Now THAT's a man with a mission. Robert is looking for volunteers to fill out his committee. He'd also like to hear from existing critique groups seeking new members, SWW members interested in forming new critique groups, and individuals angling to join a group. Email him if the words *critique group* have ever pricked

your consciousness.

Despite (maybe because of?) Coronavirus isolation, many members managed to get their work published in 2020. Sixteen authors took advantage of the SAGE's Virtual Book Table offer. Each of them has provided a description of their book and information on how to order before the holiday gift-giving tradition begins. The scope of subjects and genres covered by these talented authors is more than enough to satisfy any reading proclivity (**pages 5-7**).

For the December Challenge, we decided that one way to cope with a pandemic is with a little humor. Several members tried their hand at our Goodbye 2020 limerick challenge; some of the resultant poetry will at least make you smile (**page 9**). If you haven't picked up the SAGE Challenge gauntlet in awhile, consider giving the January challenge a whirl (**page 8**). The prompt is derived from a game played with colored, paint chip samples.

It's the season of Hope. We hope you are all well. We hope you are all warm. We hope for a giant group hug in 2021.

Best Wishes,
Kathy Schuit, Editor

President's Corner

What a year it's been!

If every one of us cannot come up with a minimum of one good story – sad, angry, hopeful, and full of personal insights, well...we should just toss the feather pen out the window.

It is not the mundane daily tasks and experiences that make good stories. Who writes long, focused pieces about washing dishes, making the bed, or scrubbing floors? This pandemic is as painful, hateful, and as life changing as any war...and unlike the military versions, it is truly a World Wide conflict.

This event is changing lives and, for all the pain it causes, there is also a great deal of beauty and there are a million stories. I've seen on Facebook and heard from friends about reconnections with family—many families have already decorated their homes for the holidays to bring some color and light to sheltering in place. There are tales about people now working from home who are trading commute time for project time like cleaning out the garage, making

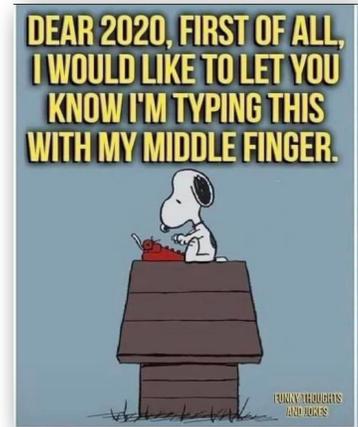


cookies, or donating time to deliver meals to the elderly.

I've taken to doing more letter writing—especially to older family members and friends who are not comfortable with email or computers in general. I've also made a conscientious effort to patronize family-run restaurants and small stores that need more consideration than the big chains during this time. These are small things that take just a little time but which mean so much to people.

This pandemic will continue to affect our lives for a significant portion of 2021. SWW is doing its best to keep us connected. Your support is integral in so many ways. Help us help you to achieve your personal goals.

Rose



Look Who
JOINED
SWW in October!
WELCOME
Gina Troisi
Sandie Giustina
Robert Speake

Special Thanks
to

Ted Karpf
Robert Speake
AND

Don DeNoon

They gave generously to
SWW in October.

Your gifts keep SWW helping writers.



MAKE A DONATION!

Your donation to SWW (a nonprofit, tax exempt 501 (c) (3) organization) is a tax deductible gift that benefits writers!

Ways to give:

- Earmark a donation for a specific cause like the scholarship fund (enable a writer who may not otherwise afford membership), or to the Bob Gassaway Student Writer Grant (give a boost to a motivated high school or college student who would like to become a member),
- leave a bequest or instructions for friends and loved ones to remember SWW in lieu of flowers when they remember you,
- donate to celebrate birthdays, holidays or for no reason at all!

Donations are accepted at the SWW office, 3200 Carlisle Blvd. NE, Suite 114, Albuquerque, NM 87110, or online through the SouthWest Writers website: www.southwestwriters.com (click the donation tab and fill out the form to process your donation).

Saturday, Dec. 5 at 10 a.m. LIVE

zoom

MEETING!

Writing Contests — from the Judges' Perspective

with panelists **Loretta Hall** and **Carolyn Carlson**, representing New Mexico Press Women's Communication Contest, AND **Robert Kidera**, representing Albuquerque Museum Writing Contest

This meeting will feature a panel of judges from two of New Mexico's premier writing contests. Hundreds of people submit wonderful stories to writing contests in hope of achieving recognition, only to be disappointed. The first question they have is, "Why didn't I win?" Frequently the stories are good, so what is it that keeps these tales from rising to the top? The members of this panel have all been on the other side of the fence as judges for writing contests. They will discuss how their organizations look at the stories — how they are scored and what is important in a winning entry.

Information needed to join this live, ZOOM meeting is available on the SWW website: southwestwriters.com
You may also contact the workshop coordinator at: programs@swwriters.com,
or call (505) 830-6034 Monday - Thursday 9 a.m. - noon.

Saturday, Dec. 5 12:30 p.m.

zoom

WORKSHOP

Submitting a Winning Entry

with **Brenda Cole** and **Rose Marie Kern**

This workshop will go over in detail how judges are required to score submissions to the SouthWest Writers Annual Contests. Participants will be provided with practice stories to score and are encouraged to submit a story of up to 500 words for the group to critique. Knowing what the gatekeepers are looking for—whether it be in a story contest, book contest, or when submitting work to publishers—gives you a leg up on the competition!

BRENDA COLE won her first writing contest at 13. Over the years she has become an award-winning author in nonfiction short stories. Brenda has been an educator for children from pre-school through high school. Her multiple life sciences degrees led to teaching biology and Western Medicine at three different institutions. Currently she splits her time between writing, art projects and genealogy.



Retired air traffic control specialist **ROSE MARIE KERN** is an award-winning author, a conference speaker, and an active member of SouthWest Writers. In addition to penning five nonfiction books, she's left her byline on hundreds of articles covering topics ranging from solar energy and organic gardening to those focusing on aviation.



TO REGISTER

Call the SWW office (505-830-6034, Monday - Thursday, 9 a.m. - noon) or use the Online Registration Form. (Our online payment portal utilizes PayPal, but you'll be given an option to pay by credit card without signing into PayPal.)

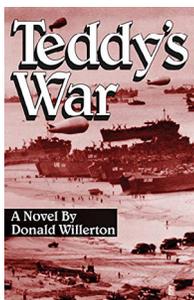
Members: \$20, Non-Members \$30
payment and login through
www.southwestwriters.com

The Zoom invitation link and the password will be emailed to those who purchase this workshop. For more information, please contact the workshop coordinator at programs@swwriters.com.

REMINDER: There is NO Tuesday Meeting in December

Brilliant **Holiday Gifts** Come From SWW's VIRTUAL BOOK TABLE

In normal times, books written by SWW friends and colleagues would occupy a front-and-center position in members' thoughts of what to give for the holidays. Without meetings and the book table to facilitate those thoughtful purchases, many of our authors are looking for other ways to reach holiday buyers. In November, the SAGE offered SWW member-authors the opportunity to use its pages as a *Virtual Book Table* to encourage holiday sales. Most of the books you find on this "table" were published in 2020. The authors have braved all the marketing challenges that implies. Links provided should take you directly to each book's sales site. Should a link misdirect or malfunction, simply highlight the link with your cursor, copy and paste into your browser's search bar.



Teddy's War by Donald Willerton

Teddy Gunnarson must tell his terrible secrets of WWII, but his confession reveals the personal betrayals by his family while he was away. Most important, he must show his family the source of the peace and grace that allowed him to survive.

Available from Amazon.com Click [HERE](#)

A SEVEN MONTH CONTRACT AT FOUR THOUSAND PER

by Dennis Kastendiek

Kansas High graduate, Johnny, wrestles remorse after his pranking results in his sister's broken leg prior to her community playhouse debut. Fortunately, or not, Johnny has learned her lines while watching rehearsals. A roving talent scout, a contract offer too good to pass up, and "Johnnie" is on a gender-bending odyssey.

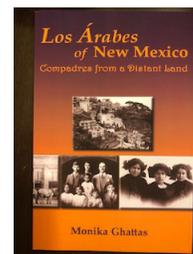
Available at [Amazon.com](#)



Los Árabes of New Mexico: Compadres from a Distant Land

by Monika Ghattas

Arabic-speaking peddlers arrived in the territory of New Mexico in the late 19th century. Most of them came from what is today the country of Lebanon. They were hard-working and frugal and eventually settled in Hispanic communities with which they shared many cultural and linguistic similarities. Order from: monghattas@gmail.com

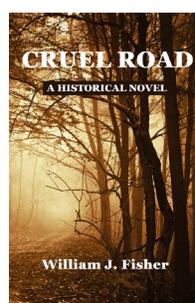
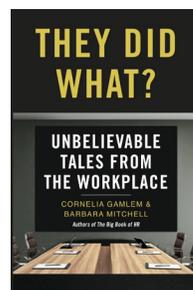


THEY DID WHAT? UNBELIEVABLE TALES FROM THE WORKPLACE

by Cornelia Gamlem and Barbara Mitchell

People have been misbehaving at work since work began. If you've ever been curious about workplace misbehavior, *They Did What? Unbelievable Tales from the Workplace* just might hold some answers. It's a compilation of tales based on actual situations woven into a narrative showcasing employee shenanigans at work. Available from Amazon and BookBaby.com:

<https://store.bookbaby.com/book/they-did-what>

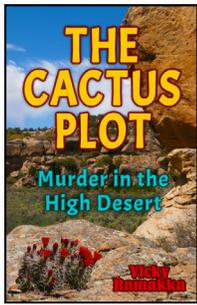


CRUEL ROAD by William Fisher

Cruel Road is a mid-Eighteenth-Century historical drama. It is the story of real-life John and Jane Fraser, among the first settlers of western Pennsylvania. Their lives are challenged by Indian conflicts, French and English fighting

over territory, and survival in the Pennsylvania wilderness.

Available at amazon.com/author/fisherwilliam



THE CACTUS PLOT

Murder in the High Desert

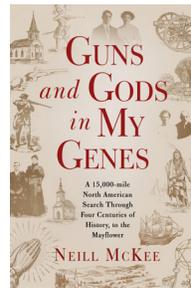
by Vicky Ramakka

NM-AZ Book Award Winner for Cozy Mysteries
 Botanist Millie Whitehall leaves her New Jersey home for a job in New Mexico. She plans to spend a peaceful summer surveying rare plants. Instead she becomes entangled in two heartless murders. When autopsies reveal the deaths involve plants, Millie uses knowledge of ecology to investigate—before becoming another victim. <https://bit.ly/thecactusplot>

Guns and Gods in My Genes: A 15,000-mile North American Search Through Four Centuries of History, to the Mayflower

by Neill McKee

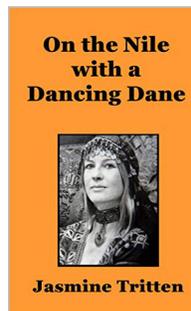
While researching his roots in Canada and USA, the author finds ancestors who were involved in every major war in North America and 9th great-grandparents on the Mayflower. He discovers heroes, villains, and godly folk in his genes, while unearthing many facts and exposing myths. Available from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), Barnes & Noble, independent bookstores, and libraries through Ingram Books.



On the Nile with a Dancing Dane

by Jasmine Tritten

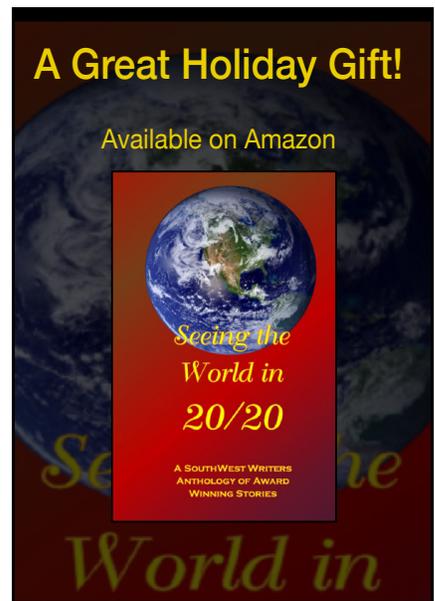
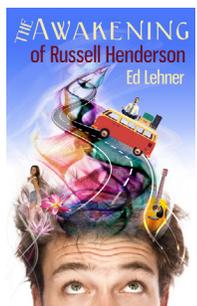
An adventurous travel memoir by award-winning author Jasmine Tritten, exploring the land of the pharaohs, overcoming challenges and obstacles while following her love for dance and the Egyptian culture. Filled with mystery and surprises. Original artwork and photos by the author. <https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B08FHGJ2R7>
<https://www.amazon.com/-/e/B00RI7ZIU0>
<https://www.facebook.com/JasmineTrittenLLC>



The Awakening of Russell Henderson

by Ed Lehner

Russell headed west in his old Westfalia camper, away from what he considered to be a failed life. An unanticipated twist interfered with his well-laid plans after picking up a woman hitchhiker. Her uninhibited spirit took him to discover new worlds, dissolving the narrowness of his previous life. Available from: www.amazon.com/author/edwardlehner or email elehner@frontier.net for a signed copy www.elehner.com



Anthology Success

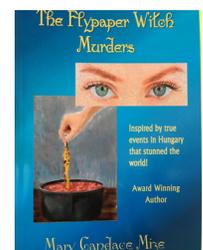
Took a copy of the SouthWest Writers 2020 anthology of award winning stories with me today to read while waiting to see my dentist. He asked what I was reading. I showed it to him and mentioned that my winning short story is in it. While the numbing medication was taking effect he read my story and noticed another one with a topic he is interested in and asked how he can buy a copy. As I was leaving, he said he will definitely buy a copy. So you see, the anthology sells itself!

- Don DeNoon

The Flypaper Witch Murders

by Mary Candace Mize

Hungarian men returned from World War I expecting to resume traditional roles, while women had managed without them, relishing their freedoms, and had even been treated like queens by Russian prisoners of war assigned to their farms. Divorce was impossible, marriages were arranged, and domestic abuse was common. In one isolated village, a maelstrom of events spiraled downward in desperate times to desperate solutions. Where could the women turn? To the Midwife, the Shaman's daughter. And at what cost? Inspired by trials in Hungary that stunned the world. By a SouthWest Writer Award Winner. Available at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)



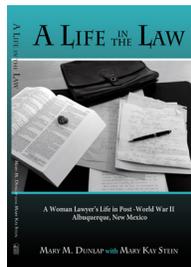
A Life in the Law

by Mary M. Dunlap with
Mary Kay Stein

In 1949, there were only a handful of women lawyers in Albuquerque. Attorney Mary M. Dunlap left her successful practice in Denver to leap into Albuquerque's challenging culture of macho male lawyers and judges, as well as scores of clients and unbelievable cases. Undaunted, she was used to overcoming barriers.

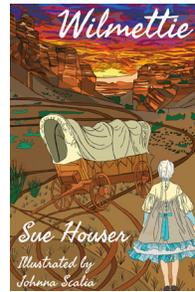
Available from Amazon.com.
Click [HERE](#)

Or order from Sunstone Press:
Order Department
SUNSTONE PRESS
Box 2321, Santa Fe, NM 87504-2321
Phone toll-free at (505) 988-4418



Wilmettie

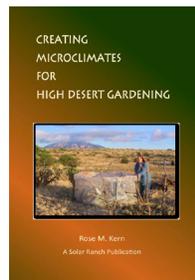
by Sue Houser



Wilmettie is the story of a 12-year-old girl's covered wagon journey with her family to New Mexico Territory in the early 1900s. Along the way, they face hardships, treacherous river crossings, and near-death illnesses. Wilmettie encounters people and cultures different from her own. Will she accept her new home? Available at Treasure House Books, Organic Books, and [Amazon.com](#)

Creating Microclimates for High Desert Gardening

by Rose M. Kern



How do you protect your plants from freezing or frying in our radical high altitude desert environment? This book by Master Gardener Rose Kern gives you a look at how plants can be protected and nurtured with ways to extend the growing season.

Available from Amazon.com Click [HERE](#)

**A GOOD READ
BUY AND SHARE**

**Victory
from the
Shadows**
Growing Up in a New Mexico
School for the Blind
and Beyond

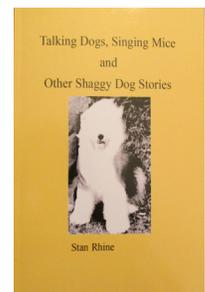
Gary Ted Montague
and Elaine Carson Montague

www.elainemontague.com
Victory from the Shadows FB page
<https://binged.it/2zo1yc>
authormontague505@gmail.com

Talking Dogs, Singing Mice and other Shaggy Dog Stories

by Stan Rhine

Should little Portia Weevil marry tall, handsome Timothy, or short, stubby Sam Weevil? What about the dog who seeks to become a secretary? What happens when "Adobe Juan" Canovi tries to deliver a hole? What's the real story of *Titanic's* sinking? Fifty-nine stories promise more groans than a weight-lifters' competition. Available from [Amazon.com](#).



The Milagro Mysteries

by Katayoun Medhat

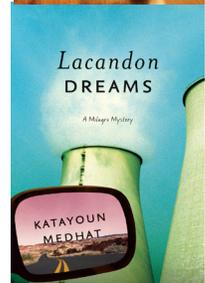
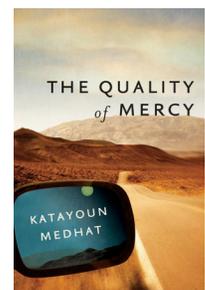
You don't expect life to be easy when your name is Franz Kafka and you're a small-town cop in Milagro, borderlands boom-and-bust town, ruled over by a cartel of good ol' boys and new mean boys, high on profit and power—and as determined and destructive as wildfire.

THE QUALITY of MERCY

<https://www.indiebound.org/book/9781935248958ISBN>

Lacandon DREAMS

<https://www.indiebound.org/book/9781948585040>



SouthWest Writers Anthologies

Dozens of award-winning short stories and poems from SouthWest Writers contests and the SAGE.

Get all three from [Amazon.com](#)

The Sage Writing Challenge

JANUARY

Drawing from at least two, and no more than four of the paint chips below as inspiration write a short poem (limit 200 words) or story (limit 800 words) in any genre. Your title should include something from the names of the chips you use.

sun rays

porcelain

spice market

strawberry

alpine

Paint chip prompt derived from *Paint Chip Poetry; A Game of Color and Wordplay* by Lea Redmond. Chips are drawn randomly from a box of 400. This game and many others for “engaging the imagination” of children and adults are available at www.chroniclebooks.com

The Challenge for December was to write a humorous limerick for the end of 2020.

WHAT IS A LIMERICK? Many of you will likely notice that not all of our “limericks” adhere to the rules of limerick writing. A limerick is a poetic form that consists of five lines arranged in one stanza. The first line, second line, and fifth lines end in rhyming words. The third and fourth lines must rhyme. The rhythm of a limerick is anapestic, which means two unstressed syllables are followed by a third stressed syllable. The limericks and non-limerick poems we selected for this challenge appear on the next page.

SAGE CHALLENGE AND ARTICLE SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- Payment is in bylines and clips.
- **Deadline is the 15th of the month prior to the next issue.**
- Standard article lengths are from 300-800 words; certain *Sage* Challenges may set more specific word count requirements (see the Challenge description box, left). Submissions may be edited for accuracy, readability and length. Submissions must be tasteful; free from profanity, explicit sex or violence, political commentary, etc.
- Send all submissions as either standard text in an email or in a Word document in 12 pt. size. Single spaced. Do not get fancy with formatting or fonts. To ensure proper author credit, your name or pen name must appear within the document you submit. Submissions with no name will not be considered.
- Polish your work. Submissions should be professional in appearance and quality of writing, fully edited and ready for publication.
- Accompanying art/photographs are appreciated but proper attribution and permission is required.
- Inclusion in the SAGE is subject to the discretion of the editor.

SouthWest SAGE

The *SouthWest SAGE* newsletter is the professional publication of SouthWest Writers. Submissions focusing on all aspects of research, writing, and publishing in any genre are welcome. To familiarize yourself with the types of articles published in the *SouthWest SAGE*, read past issues at southwestwriters.com.

Here are four ways you may be included:

- Write an article for the SAGE related to the craft of writing, getting published, etc.
- Enter stories, poems, or articles inspired by the monthly writing challenge announced in each SAGE.
- Send in a short story/poem/essay of your own—on any topic (inclusion in the SAGE is subject to the discretion of the editor).
- Enter artwork/photographs related to writing in general or accompanying your stories.

Be sure to read, understand and follow the **guidelines** for submission (above). **Submissions that do not comply with the guidelines will not be considered.**

Send questions or submissions to:
Kathy Schuit
SouthWest SAGE Editor
sage@swwriters.com



Limericks

Goodbye 2020

by Laney Payne

We once were the land of plenty
At the onset of 2020
When a virus took hold
All the TP was sold
And we had to start wiping with money.

by Dan Wetmore

There once was a year twenty-twenty,
of faults it had more than a-plenty,
from infectious disease...
to election unease...
- and no other word rhymes with *twenty!*

by KLS

Twenty-twenty's been quite a year
to contemplate what we hold dear.
I'd start a list
of things I've missed
but I've just run out of beer.

by Rose Kern

20/20 makes everyone howl
Cries from seclusion most foul
But my garden doth bid
Me to say Covid Schmovid
Someone please hand me my trowel!

by Sam Moorman

When fools insist
on a claim I resist--
There is no sense
in nonsense--
my proof here exists

Critique Group Essentials

by Robert Speake, Critique Group Coordinator

Critique groups can greatly enhance SWW's mission to help writers "improve their crafts and further their careers." In my years as a member of critique groups (in Albuquerque, Denver, and Houston), I've found them to be essential to my writing. I work on a piece until I think it's perfect, but it never is (sigh). Submitting it to an audience of discerning readers for supportive professional feedback reveals its imperfections that I must fix before submitting it for publication or to a contest. I may need to revise a piece several times for group critique before it's ready to submit.

A degree of insecurity goes with being a writer. The blank page can be formidable and the support of others is critical in moving from there to the finished piece...

A critique group can help with the marketing of a piece by having members suggest a market for it, based on its particulars. Knowledge of the potential markets for a piece is also an essential part of the writing process, and it helps to have the experience of others to shorten the research effort. Marketing can be intimidating for the writer, too—it has been for this writer!—and the support of a critique group can help us endure the rejection we get until the piece finally finds its audience. A critique group teaches us that it's our WORK that's being criticized or rejected not US. A critique group can help us achieve the emotional distance from our work necessary to keep improving it and sending it out. Just as salespersons are taught to "celebrate the Nos," critique groups can help us celebrate the rejections! (A brave way to deal with a painful rejection letter is to read it aloud in the critique group and get supportive feedback from the members whose pieces have been rejected, too! Some writers even frame them.)

A degree of insecurity goes with being a writer. The blank page can be formidable and the support of others is critical in moving from there to the finished piece, ready to send out for publication or to a contest. Even if a writer says they're uninterested in publication, just submitting their work to anyone for critique can be intimidating, and a supportive, caring critique group can

cont'd on page 11

Specificity

by Kirt Hickman

Populate your world with specific, concrete details. Doing so is the surest way to capture your reader's imagination. It makes your world real.

Consider the following:

Chase would have to start packing soon. Maybe tomorrow he'd crate up his belongings.

Does the word *belongings* invoke an image or emotion? Does it reveal anything about the character or the world in which he lives? Does it bring the setting, character, or story to life? No, because it's not specific.

Real life isn't populated with vague references. We use them in our speech when we think the listener knows what we're referring to, but your reader is not like a listener. Your reader doesn't know your world. You must show it to her.

Watch what happens when I replace *belongings* with a few specific details.

He'd have to start packing soon. Maybe tomorrow he'd crate up the nonessentials: his drawing table, most of his clothes, even that ridiculous hologram Erin sent him last year, the one that misrepresented Pluto's orbit. Eventually everything would go, except for the framed DeMitre on the far wall. Painted to make use of the base's high-ceilinged lunar architecture, it was too big to take back to Earth. Besides, he'd have little need for an Earthly landscape of the Olympic Range when he could look upon it with his own eyes.

I carefully selected belongings that would bring the setting and character to life. The drawing table, perhaps unexpected by the reader, shows something about Chase without saying, "Chase likes to draw."

When I describe the image in the painting and provide the artist's name, it becomes a real thing that the reader can visualize and believe in. I use the painting to show Chase's emotion. He won't miss it because he'll have something better: the real thing. He looks forward to going home.

The painting accomplishes a couple of other things. It suggests where Chase is moving to. I reveal later that his daughter lives in Seattle, near the Olympic mountain range. The painting also gives me the opportunity to show how architecture on the Moon differs from architecture on Earth: high ceilings to accommodate the leaping strides necessary in low gravity. Will the reader pick up on this

subtle detail? Who knows? It's there for those who care to contemplate it.

The hologram as a merchandising trinket shows an advancement of technology. It seems real because Chase doesn't like it; nobody likes things that just clutter the shelves. Nevertheless, he keeps it. This shows the reader that Erin, whom the reader will later learn is his daughter, is important to him.

I do one subtler thing with this hologram. Chase recognizes that it displays Pluto's orbit incorrectly. Pluto does have an odd orbit, therefore it's a credible mistake. Here, I show that Chase knows with confidence that the hologram is wrong. The reader will later learn that he was the first man to orbit Pluto and Charon.

Consider this example:

Amanda moved away from the dangerous equipment to a safer location near the wall.

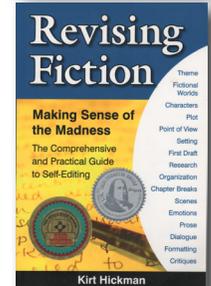
Does the word *equipment* evoke an image or emotion, even with the modifier *dangerous*? Does it reveal anything about Amanda or the world in which she lives? Does it bring the story to life? No, because it's also not specific.

Watch what happens when I replace the equipment and dangers in this scene with specific details:

Liquid helium whistled past the breached valve with the wail of a wounded banshee, 272 degrees below zero, cold enough to freeze human flesh in microseconds. Amanda dove for the far wall, where the stream of evaporating helium dissipated into the heat of the temperature-moderated maintenance chamber. Just beyond the bulkhead, super-heated gasses, the lifeblood of the terraforming project, roared through pipes as big around as a docking collar. An incessant, numbing vibration shook the floor.

This example demonstrates how a few well-placed specifics can transform a passage from a mere silhouette of reality into a crafted narrative that reveals character and setting in a way that invokes images and emotions in the reader.

The following example, from *Venus Rain*, illustrates the value of specificity in details not related to setting.



cont'd. on next page

SPECIFICITY, cont'd. from previous page

...the money was good, or good enough at any rate. With overtime, it paid the bills, so Amanda worked her ass off and kept her mouth shut.

This passages shows how Amanda feels about her job, and it shows that she's a workaholic. Yet, look what I can accomplish by replacing the word *bills* with something more specific.

...the money was good, or good enough at any rate. It paid her son's medical bills and her daughter's tuition, if she put in enough hours. So she worked her ass off, kept her mouth shut, and prayed that she'd have enough at the end of the month for the rent, the sustenance charge, and the Project tax.

This not only shows something about Amanda, but

about her kids as well. And it shows how the world I've created differs from the one in which the reader lives. Sustenance charge? Project tax? We don't have those today? At least not yet.

Here's another example from *Worlds Asunder*. An early draft read:

President Powers was working at her desk...

Apply specificity and this simple image becomes interesting:

President Powers glanced up from the latest version of the Transatlantic Mass Transit Proposal...

Find the vague words in your writing and make them specific.

CRITIQUE GROUPS, cont'd from page 9

help them get over that hurdle. For me, the writing process is incomplete until a piece finds its audience, and a critique group can serve as that audience. It can also encourage that shy writer to seek publication of their piece or to enter a contest.

Can a critique group work for a book-length project like a novel, memoir, or a work of non-fiction? In my experience, it's rare to get good feedback on a chapter out of a book. The reviewers tend to point out missing elements that are in other chapters, without pointing out things that need to be improved in the chapter they're reviewing. I think a critique group can work for a collection of short-stories, essays, or poetry with a common theme, as long as the writer outlines the theme in the first piece submitted, or the critique group helps them find the common theme in the collection they're developing.

As far as book-length projects are concerned, I think those can best be developed in a separate group, perhaps one facilitated by an SWW faculty member. I completed the two-year Book Project at the Denver Lighthouse Writers Workshop, and the critique of our submittals worked pretty well there, because our small groups were familiar with each other's books.

Should a critique group be single-genre or can it support a variety of kinds of writing? The Corrales Writing Group critiques the latter, but they're a veteran writing group with their own website and published anthologies of member writings. If a critique group's role is to help its members in their writing careers, an argument could be made that a critique group devoted to all kinds of fiction, non-fiction, or poetry could work. It would challenge the members to look past the genre-specific language for the principles of good writing the writer is trying to use. But I think the best approach for a new critique group is to stick to a single genre or type of writing until the

group is solidly bonded and then decide together on expanding the kinds of writing they'll accept. Many writers are "multi-discipline."

Occasionally a critique group may develop interpersonal conflicts which compromise the safety and trust in the group, where members may share their innermost feelings in their submittals and the group members may have a variety of skill levels. SWW's program will include ideas for small-group conflict resolution and other assistance for a troubled group.

Healthy, effective, enduring critique groups can be a great asset to SWW members and non-members alike. The guidance and training we can offer, through our members with a depth of experience with critique groups, can be an invaluable contribution to their own writing—and writing lives—and thus strengthen their group. The SWW members in the group can gradually enlighten the non-members on the breadth of SWW activities and writer support, which could encourage some of them to join us.

MAKE A SUGGESTION

What kinds of classes or workshops would you like SWW to offer?

Email your ideas to the
Class and Workshop
Coordinator at:



Info@SWWriters.com

children have received, like a company's annual report.

The following is an example of a travel/calendar reprise letter you might receive:

Holiday greetings to you. We had a very hectic year!

January—off to St. Lucia; in February we traveled to Buenos Aires; late March we flew to Johannesburg. In mid-April we went to Seville and spent a lovely three months in Spain. July—home for a few weeks, then off to the Grand Canyon. In August we visited our children in San Francisco, and in September we enjoyed the fall colors in New Hampshire. October—a few weeks in the Society Islands, and in late November we went to New York for the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Now we're off to Gstaad for a ski vacation. Hope all is well with you.

If I were inclined to respond to this letter, it might say:

I have literally been out of this world this year. Due to a large inheritance, I embraced an unexpected and unique opportunity to travel on a commercial venture into space. The launch was from Russia, so I am now an official cosmonaut. For three days I orbited our planet, and the fee I paid for this adventure helped fund the endeavor. As a gesture of thanks, the international astronomy community named a newly-discovered star after me. It is called Patricia's Brightious. From space I was amazed at how beautiful the earth is, and also at how inconsequential places like the Grand Canyon appear. Cities like San Francisco and Seville, Spain, appear as tiny spots of light, compared to the rest of the Earth. So, this year, it was just a venture into outer space for me and a gift of my very own star.

Have a happy holiday.

Probably, the most egregious holiday letters come from people who crow endlessly about their children. This might be an example of the my-offspring-are-perfect letter:

We are so blessed!

Our children continue their trek toward perfection.

Bobby graduated summa cum laude from Yale Law School and has joined a prestigious law firm: Money, Windsor, and More Money. He expects to make partner before next Thanksgiving. And why not? Maybe we are biased, but he has a brilliant mind and is unbelievably handsome. He met a lovely young woman. Candy is a tall, blonde, blue-eyed neurosurgeon who is also an underwear model. Our daughter, Callie, is working on an international banking assignment with Lloyds and will be in London for two years. At twenty-six, she has been escorted by many successful men, some of them from royal families, but she is not ready to settle down. She is extremely dedicated to her work and has spearheaded

the international effort to stabilize the value of the Euro. Even Her Majesty, the Queen, has received her at Buckingham Palace.

Our children are wonderful young human beings, and we are forever grateful for them. Other than that, all is well. Best wishes to you and yours.

There is only one meaningful way to respond to this kind of letter:

There is so much to say this year!

Our cat Midnight has been selected as the cover model for tuna-flavored bags of Kitty Krisps Gourmet Cat Food. You can see her on the cat food packages starting in January at your local store. It was her winning personality, golden eyes, and luxurious long black fur that awarded her a lucrative contract. Roamer, our dog, won four first-place ribbons in agility trials. He moves to the semi-nationals next spring. Already, he is a regional celebrity and signs cards with his paw prints at pet adoption events. Several pet product companies are now sponsoring him. At six years old, our largest koi, Kirby, has been painted into a new mural at the National Aquarium in Washington D.C. When she spawns in our garden pond, a fish specialist from Tokyo's International Koi Genome Project collects her eggs to be sure they hatch to maturity in safety. Apparently, she has the most desirable koi genes in America.

We hope you and your brood enjoy this special season.

I think a simple, mysterious response is best for any Christmas letter I receive. Something like:

How nice to hear from you and learn what is going on in your life. We both are in fascinating new phases of our lives, with many adventures completed and more planned.

All is well and life is good.

We wish you a happy holiday.

I figure a note like that keeps everyone guessing what the heck you're up to.



Flip The Script On Race

In October 2020, a white woman writer shared a story she had written and sought my opinion, as a woman of color, as to whether she had engaged in “cultural appropriation.” Her story centered on a black man raping his sister, who has a baby while he’s in jail. When he gets out, he rapes his daughter not knowing she’s his daughter. I told the woman that her story was not “cultural appropriation” but rather tapped into the worst racist stereotype about black men. As the woman grew emotional, I promptly ended the conversation and recommended she read Robin DiAngelo’s *White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Beacon Press, 2018).

Writing about race can be one of the most challenging tasks a writer takes on. One can sink into stereotypes or flip the script and write something unexpected. I told the white woman writer I thought her story was so horrid that, even if she changed the racial identity of her characters, I would not want to read it. Months later, I remembered I *had* read something similar but with a prominent white man as the rapist.

During the spring of 2020, I interviewed Dr. Bettye Kears for Collected Works. The original plan had been for me to introduce Bettye at the Santa Fe bookstore. After the pandemic forced the cancellation of large gatherings, the event was switched to online and the format re-conceived. Bettye wrote *The Other Madisons: The Lost History of a President’s Black Family*. Her family oral history maintains that James Madison, Sr., purchased her ancestor Mandy, who was stolen from Ghana, for his plantation, Montpelier. He raped Mandy and they had a daughter named Coreen. After she grew up, Coreen was raped by James Madison, Jr., who did not know Coreen was his half-sister. They had a son named Jim, whom President James Madison eventually sold.

When I read Bettye’s book, I was initially taken aback by the lack of source notes. I was expecting something similar to *The Hemings of Monticello*, in which Annette Gordon Reed meticulously documents the enslaved family closest to President Thomas Jefferson. Gordon Reed and other female historians flipped the script depicting Jefferson as having raped Sally Hemings and postulat-

ed that he may have loved Sally, who was the biological half-sister of his wife Martha. Jefferson arranged to free all four of Sally’s children who survived to adulthood and for Sally to live out her days with one of her freed sons, Madison Hemings. After interviewing Bettye, it became clear that she saw herself not as a historian, *per se*, but rather as a *griotte*, a female African storyteller who recalls and retells ancient family history.



The Writing Life

by Sherri L. Burr

Sherri Burr is the author of 27 books, including *Complicated Lives: Free Blacks in Virginia: 1619-1865* (Carolina Academic Press, 2019), which was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in History. A graduate of Mount Holyoke College, Princeton University, and the Yale Law School, Burr has been a member of SouthWest Writers for over 30 years. She currently serves as the President of New Mexico Press Women and on the Board of Trustees of the Authors Guild.

If you add race to tales of sexual violence, expect a reaction. The white woman writer sought my blessing for her story, which I could not give. While she was free to write whatever she wanted, I could only state that her story was not cultural appropriation because rape is not limited to Black culture. Rather, sexual violence is, unfortunately, part of the human condition.

Such stories abound throughout history and were told in *The Bible*. Genesis 34 tells “The Rape of Dinah.” When Shēchem saw Dinah, “he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her.”

This column urges storytellers to mindfully write about race. Rather than repeat stereotypes, consider flipping the script to contextualize differences. In his book, *How to Be an Antiracist* (Penguin Random House, 2019), Ibram X. Kendi compares racism to cancer, which divides the body politic. We witnessed this systemic disease when Officer Derek Chauvin knee-lynched an unarmed George Floyd. His last words, “I Can’t Breathe,” became a rallying cry against police violence.

To combat racism, Kendi encourages “the consumption of healthy foods for thought and the regular exercising of antiracist ideas.” He urges, “We must ... strive to be antiracist from this day forward.” Writers can heal, rather than increase, the cancer inherent in racist storytelling.



CURFEW

by Larry Kilham

Guatemala City seemed peaceful during the guerilla insurrections of 1978. I was a young man doing business in neighboring countries, and decided to spend a weekend in Guatemala sightseeing. I left a museum at closing, and walked to my small hotel. It was a two-story quadrangle with all rooms facing an open interior. The common rooms were on the ground floor, and guest rooms on the second floor. It had a fortress-like double front door which, when open, faced the two-story police station across the street, a solid structure with crenelated sections on the upper story. Two helmeted policemen guarding the door eyed me suspiciously through the early darkness. I turned into the hotel, and someone in the shadows closed the door and the locks clanked shut.

After a nap, dribbly shower, and a change of clothes, I felt refreshed and walked down the creaky stairs to the dining room where a family-style dinner was already underway. The eight or so people sitting together at the long oak table seemed to know each other, but they had somber expressions and did not talk much. I tried to look bright and interesting, but no one paid any attention to me.

From my experience in Central America, I surmised they were an educated Guatemalan family from out of town. One, probably the patrón, sat straight upright with a military demeanor. He was in his 40s and wore a quality, plain white shirt buttoned at the collar with no necktie. By dessert time, he fidgeted and looked



uneasy. His eyes swiveled from side to side. Then he rose, and, without saying a word, went upstairs.

Everyone looked silently at their watches. The 9 p.m. city curfew had started. We all neglected our dessert and headed upstairs quietly with only a little murmuring. I tried to read a guidebook but couldn't concentrate. I lay on the squeaky bed waiting for clues to what would happen next. I heard the kachinks of the cash register as the desk clerk closed up for the evening. All went still. I may have slept for an hour.

Suddenly, I awoke to the sound of a persistent banging on the outside doors. Finally, someone let the outsiders in. Heavy boots clomping upstairs broke the silence. Were they looking for me? Scenarios of the day and the evening raced through my mind. I remember the police guards' eyes following me as I passed them, but I hadn't done anything and I didn't know any terrorists. I was paralyzed and couldn't move even a finger. I calculated escapes to the door, window, and bathroom.

They passed my room and banged on a door a couple of rooms down the landing, shouting in Spanish, "Open up!" And then they kicked it in.

A blood-curdling scream reverberated throughout the little hotel with its thin walls. I heard several thuds like a clubbing, clicks like the closing of handcuffs, and then the thump, thump, thump of a body being dragged downstairs. Even upstairs with my door closed, I could hear muffled talk outside the hotel. Then I heard the starting and revving of motorcycles and the throaty start of a light truck. In unison, they said, "uno, dos, tres," followed by a metallic thud as the body was thrown into the truck. They gunned their engines and sped off. All was silent except for neighborhood dogs barking.

I could finally move and became conscious of sweat all over my body and the sheets. I tried to stay awake to think things through, but fell asleep.

A Victorious Life: Gary Ted Montague

Gary Montague "broke the constraints of earthly bonds on November 6, 2020." He was known to nearly every SWW member, even those who never met him. That's because his wife, Elaine, is the tireless champion of the book they wrote together. As a result, *Victory From the Shadows: Growing Up in a New Mexico School for the Blind and Beyond*, has become a six-time award-winner and a staple for the visually impaired, with copies now available in braille. *Victory From the Shadows* tells Gary's story—the child of a New Mexico homestead family, he was born with "low-vision."

"It took me 50 years to get Gary's permission to tell the story and another nine to write and publish it. Our theme is: Persevere with integrity whatever the challenge," Elaine said.

Gary's obituary, published in the *Albuquerque Journal* on Nov. 20, describes Gary as most of us will likely remember him: "A friend noted that Gary was always by his wife's side, inspiring her to do her best, while quietly going about his work, even during declining health. His engaging smile invited others to persevere, and they loved his sonorous voice."

Those who wish, may donate in Gary's honor to the food ministry of St. John's United Methodist Church, 2626 Arizona St. NE, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87108; or to the Elaine and Gary Montague Victory from the Shadows Endowed Scholarship in Special Education at UNM's College of Education and Human Sciences, UNM Foundation, <https://www.unmfund.org/fund/montague/>.



Writing Contests You Can Enter NOW

Submit partial or finished novel manuscripts to the [Inkshares All-Genre Manuscript Contest](#), open November 7 through February 28, 2021. There is no fee to enter the contest. Inkshares will select at least three authors to grant publishing deals (and representation in TV/film, au-

diobook, and foreign rights). The top three books will be determined through a combination of community engagement, our proprietary technology, Story Machine, and independent evaluation by the Inkshares Story Board.

Inkshares



NMPW

Communications Contest Open For Entries

The two-tiered, annual Communications Contests sponsored by New Mexico Press Women and the National Federation of Press Women are now open for submissions. Because the online submission process for the contests can be confusing, NMPW has made a video tutorial available through a link on their website. There's also a link to a PDF of the slides used in the video for further reference. Go to <http://newmexicopresswomen.org> and follow the links for information about each contest.

The NMPW contest is open to writers, authors, copy editors, public affairs professionals, photographers, publishers or others in the communications field. Entries for the 2021 contest must have been published or broadcast in some format during the 2020 calendar year.

The NFPW professional contest is open to first-place winners of state-level contests.

In addition to a first-place finish at the state level, to be eligible to compete in the national level the entrant must be a member in good standing with the National Federation of Press Women. Unless the affiliate contest requires membership to participate, the entrants can join NFPW once they learn of their winning status. First-place winning entrants must join NFPW by March 15, 2021.

The early deadline to submit entries to NMPW—and avoid a one-time additional fee of \$25—is Jan. 27, 2021. The final deadline for books is Feb. 3 and the final deadline for all other entries is Feb. 10.

THE TONY HILLERMAN PRIZE FOR BEST FIRST MYSTERY SET IN THE SOUTHWEST

To enter, complete the form at <https://us.macmillan.com/minotaurbooks/tonyhillermanprize>, upload an electronic file of your manuscript or print the entry form, and submit it with a physical copy of your manuscript.

Your manuscript must be formatted as follows:

- Either a Microsoft Word document or a PDF.
- Text must be double spaced.
- Pages must be numbered consecutively from beginning to end.
- The Manuscript must be saved as “Manuscript Title_Entrant Name”.
- Do not include Entrant name in the manuscript itself.
- To be considered for the 2020 competition, all submissions must be received by 11:59pm on January 2, 2021.

If you have questions or need further clarification regarding the rules and guidelines of this competition, you may contact tonyhillermanprize@stmartins.com



BOOK PIPELINE

Launched in 2014, Book Pipeline connects writers worldwide with publishers, agents, and the film industry. Through two submissions platforms—Unpublished and Adaptation—the company seeks both new and established authors and playwrights.

Awards include:

- \$2,500 to each category winner
- Immediate circulation to publishers, agents, editors, and other execs
- Consideration from producers seeking projects for film and TV adaptation
- Additional long-term reviews of other books for potential circulation
- Invitations to annual writer and industry events hosted by Pipeline Media Group

Next submission window opens December 7, 2020.

<https://bookpipeline.com/shop/unpublished-contest>



Wild Atlantic Writing Awards

The second international edition of Wild Atlantic Writing Awards, with 1,000 euro in total prize money, comprises both flash fiction and creative non-fiction (max. 500 words).

FLASH FICTION AWARD

Open to all genres—sci-fi, crime, romance, horror, humor, thriller, fantasy, mystery—but on one single theme: Nature. Max length: 500 words, even one word over the limit can disqualify your entry. Maximum length does not include the title.

Winner receives 500 euro in cash.

CREATIVE NONFICTION AWARD

Write a story of not more than 500 words (not including the title) inspired by the same subject: Nature.

Your story can be in the form of memoir, profile, literary journalism, personal essay, food, travel (and remember, award-winning travel articles don't have to be about exotic destinations, it could be about your own hometown), or any creative nonfiction category you prefer.

Winner receives 500 euro in cash.

Judges in both categories should be left in no doubt that a key element in your writing is linked in some way to Nature, mentioned clearly in the narrative or is the actual focus of your story.

<https://www.irelandwritingretreat.com/writing-competition>



Calling all indie book authors and publishers—including small presses, mid-size independent publishers, university presses, e-book publishers, and self-published authors who have a book written in English released in 2019, 2020 or 2021 or with a 2019, 2020 or 2021 copyright date.

Final entry date: February 12, 2021.

Next Generation Indie Book Awards
Independent Book Publishing Professionals Group
www.IndieBookAwards.com

OPPORTUNITIES FOR WRITERS

Kauai Writers Conference is thrilled to announce a series of weekly online Zoom sessions, cosponsored by *Poets & Writers*, led by many of today's foremost writers. There will be two tracks: one for writers and one for readers. You may participate in either or both.

For Readers

Many of us belong to book clubs. How would you like to take part in a book club where each session is led by the actual author of the book?

Welcome to the Kauai Book Club.

One Sunday each month, an author of a much-loved book will lead a live discussion of their work.

For Writers

Much of the world's great literature has been inspired by hard times and social upheaval. Today provides a unique opportunity and perhaps obligation to tell our stories. Whether fiction, memoir, nonfiction, poetry or screenplay, whether set in the present moment or not, everything we write now is touched by the current drama. KWC's online program for writers offers a chance to connect with a diversity of great writers and learn how they are faring in this time.

https://kauaiwritersconference.com/online/?mc_cid=468932d4e1&mc_eid=15aa15295d



Sunspot Literary Journal



Sunspot Literary Journal
SunspotLit@gmail.com
www.SunspotLit.com

"Culmination"

\$500 for a Prose, Poem, or Art Ending

Endings must bring all the disparate elements of a poem, work of prose, or art series together while also providing an exit point that will smolder in the reader's or viewer's mind. Sunspot Lit has launched Culmination: \$500 for a Prose, Poem, or Art Ending. No restrictions on theme, category, or the length of the piece from which the beginning is excerpted. Word limit is 250 for prose, 25 words for poetry, one panel for graphic novels, or one image for visual art.

Open: October 1, 2020

Close: December 31, 2020

Entry fee: \$5

Prize: \$500 cash, publication for the winner, publication offered to runners-up and finalists.

Visit our Submittable page (<https://sunspotlit.submittable.com/submit>) for full details and to enter.

SWW Board Meeting Summarized November 2020

- The board had a discussion about membership growth and maintenance and presented many ideas.
- A critique group identification project was initiated.
- The board discussed the various committees for 2021.
- Meetings, classes, and workshops will be conducted via ZOOM until further notice.



Board of Directors

Rose Marie Kern, President
Elizabeth Layton, Vice President
Jennifer Black, Treasurer
Patricia Walkow, Secretary

Michelle Auron, Meeting Media and Video
Brenda Cole, Writing Contest
Roger Floyd, Signage/Setup
Melody Groves, Classes/Conferences
Jacqueline Loring, Membership
Sam Moorman, Facilities Manager
Léonie Rosenstiel, Media/Public Relations
Kathy Schuit, Sage Editor
Camille Singaraju, Historian
Kathy Wagoner, Website
Dan Wetmore, Procedures/Awards

The SWW Board of Directors meets on the first Tuesday of each month from 6 - 8 p.m. Currently, meetings are being conducted via ZOOM.

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