



# SouthWest Sage

*The Voice of SouthWest Writers*

## Artificial Intelligence (AI) Surveillance and Other “New” Facts of AI Life

by Léonie Rosenstiel

*This article concludes the SAGE’s look at AI technology—where it came from, how it can help, and where it might get writers into trouble. Due to the success and timeliness of the series, the author is considering a book that will delve further into the subject of AI. If you’d like to learn more about this rapidly-changing field, stay in touch with Léonie and join her mailing list at [L.rosenstiel@gmail.com](mailto:L.rosenstiel@gmail.com). Catch up on missed installments of this series [HERE](#).*

Once upon a time, in the same land where we now live, people held the firm belief that they had privacy. They could speak to each other—either in person or on a landline telephone—with the expectation that no one else was listening to their conversation. They could even send each other written communications, convinced that they’d stay sealed until the addressee opened them. (In long-ago, faraway lands, monarchs had developed elaborate wax seals that would show whether there’d been any tampering before the messages reached the designated recipient.)

We live in a different world now. AI is with us at all points, from cradle to grave. The other day, I was reading Danielle Austen’s new book, *AI for Educators*. It forced me to acknowledge how in many ways teachers use AI and its close relative, machine learning. This technology can write letters to parents, be used to grade student papers, check for plagiarism, create tests, plan lessons, and even tutor students having trouble keeping up with the class.

In the process, AI might even monitor individual students for signs that they’re no longer paying attention. This last program sounds like it’s derived from [the apps](#) designed to wake up sleepy drivers.

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## Experts At Every Meeting! 2024

### **Kat O’Keefe-Kanavos**

Answers to the questions, “If I hybrid publish, will I ever get an agent or publisher? How do I organize my work?”

### **Parris Afton Bonds**

*New York Times* best seller, co-founder of Romance Writers of America, and author of more than 50 novels.

### **Charlene Bell Dietz**

Why Your Characters Misbehave, and  
Why AI Isn’t the Answer

### **Marcia Rosen**

Memoir Detectives—Writing Your Life Story

### **Léonie Rosenstiel**

How Jack Canfield Came to Write the  
Foreword for *Legal Protection*.

### **Donna Pedace**

Setting Up Marketing Events

### **Irene Blea**

Writing Ethnic Characters

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Screenwriting

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Writing A Series

*Details for all scheduled meeting and workshop speakers at [SouthWestWriters.com](http://SouthWestWriters.com).*

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by Léonie Rosenstiel

Photo Credit: Heidi Ruth Marshall

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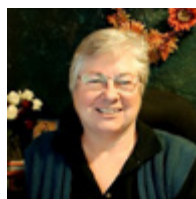
Published monthly by the Board of Directors of  
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**ATTEND SouthWest Writers MEETINGS**  
**IN-PERSON or ONLINE**

Directions and information at  
[SouthWestWriters.com](http://SouthWestWriters.com).

## FROM THE PRESIDENT



Has all the color gone from the world?

Looking around lately, I've noticed that the “powers that be” seem to be deliberately immersing

American society into a noir existence. Hotels, homes and office buildings are populating the landscape with black or white structures only enhanced with shades of gray. A few “enliven” this bland existence with pale sage or pale slate blues.

Cars are doing the same thing. If you go to the Buick, Audi, Lexus, Subaru, or Tesla websites, the home pages feature vehicles that are black, white, and gray. Then, later, they grudgingly show two color options: red and blue—always in the same shade, regardless of manufacturer.

Has the world run out of paint?

For many authors, writing can be this way: Subject, verb object. Subject verb object. Subject verb object. New writers especially tend to fall into this trap, especially those writing memoirs.

*I was born in 1955. I lived in Indiana. I went to Catholic School. I had four sisters.*

Yes, by definition a memoir is about the author's own experiences, but for heaven's sake, if you want anyone to read past the first page, PUT SOME COLOR INTO IT!

#### **EXAMPLE:**

On an autumn evening, well after sunset, Marie struggled from the overstuffed couch and waddled over to the small black and white television set to turn the channel. It was time to watch *The \$64,000 Question*. The child she carried kicked in objection as she bent towards the dial. Touching it, a short shock caused her to flinch as static electricity leapt to her fingers.

She stood up quickly as a flood of water streamed down her leg. “VITUS!” she yelled for her husband.

Alert to her abnormally strident tone, Vitus quickly arrived from the kitchen. “What's the matter?”

Eyes wide, Marie held her stomach and, with an excited calm, said, “I think I'm in labor.”

Remember, just because you feel an overwhelming need to tell your story, or the story of your family, or ANY story, does not mean anyone will really want to read it. Black-and-white TV was the first visual entertainment available at home, and as long as that was all that was available it sold well. But CBS broadcasting in color made black and white filming obsolete within 12 years.

People want color in their lives. Rich tapestries of words engender emotions and imagery far beyond a mere recital of black, grey and white facts to make your story flourish in the mind of the reader.

*Rose Marie*

# Bookstores

*SWW wants independent bookstore owners and operators to know that local writers see them and support them. If you have a favorite indie bookstore in New Mexico, tell the SAGE. Email Rosa at: [SAGE@swwriters.com](mailto:SAGE@swwriters.com).*

## GARCIA STREET BOOKS

“Literary Selections Designed to Surprise, Inspire, & Delight,” is the motto for **Garcia Street Books** on the east side of Santa Fe, NM. Folks are pulled inward by the charming, French doors as soon as they step under the covered patio.

SWW Larry Kilham writes, “**Garcia Street Books** is next to the well-known coffee shop and out-of-town (and country) newspaper place called *Downtown Subscriptions*.” He also mentioned owner Jean Devine does book signings.

Open daily, 10am to 5pm

- 376 Garcia St, Santa Fe, NM 87501
- 505.986.0151
- [GarciaStreetBooks.com](http://GarciaStreetBooks.com)
- [GarciaStreetBooks@gmail.com](mailto:GarciaStreetBooks@gmail.com)
- Offers a small assortment of totes, bookmarks and post cards

Shop using curbside pickup, home delivery, regular shipping or stop in and browse at your leisure.

And tune into *Literary Sound*

*Bites*, the bookstore’s “virtual platform created to join authors with the local readership and beyond.”

Though it is a small bookstore, with two small parking lots, Santa Feans have been enticed by **Garcia Street Books** for more than 25 years for its lovely atmosphere and knowledgeable, friendly staff.



Photo Credit: Images By Rosa

To nominate your favorite bookstore, send the store’s contact info and a sentence or two about why you think other members should check it out to [SAGE@SWWwriters.com](mailto:SAGE@SWWwriters.com).

## Look Who JOINED SWW in December

Mike Snyder  
Rick Brown  
Mary Lou Dobbs  
Jessica Taylor  
Amy Coleman  
Dawn Nieto

*Welcome!*



With 410 members  
WORLDWIDE!

## Lead the SAGE Into the Future!

After five years, Kathy Schuit, with this issue, retires from editing the SAGE newsletter. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to and supported the SAGE during that time.

This opens the door for another creative SWW member to take the reins of the SAGE and do it THEIR way. Kathy will be available to mentor, advise, and support. And, she will provide all needed files to make sure the new editor has everything needed for success and satisfaction in this rewarding role with SWW.

Email [president@swwriters.com](mailto:president@swwriters.com) or [info@swwriters.com](mailto:info@swwriters.com) to learn more!



## The Writing Life:

by Sherri L. Burr **Friendship Love**

**D**uring the month of February, much is written and discussed about romantic love. Yet among the seven types of love in Greek is *Philia* for friendship. What if, amid showering affection on our romantic partners, we were to pause for a few minutes during this month to send gratitude to friends who have supported us throughout our writing lives?

I am blessed with a core group of writing friends who meet most weeks to review each other's work. I appreciate their feedback, their ability to catch typos and grammatical errors as well as misplaced words that are accurately spelled but wrong for the context. I also love reviewing their work and being transported into worlds that are different from mine. They also have stepped in to provide advice such as when my mother decided she wanted an 84th birthday party and I didn't want to throw one after Mom didn't show up for her 83rd birthday party. One of my writing friends suggested we throw her a birthday lunch right after critique group on a Friday in December. My friends didn't blink when Mom said she wanted two gifts, one for her birthday and one for Christmas. They helped me honor Mom and make her happy.

I extend gratitude to SouthWest Writers for facilitating the first critique group I joined. Our focus was nonfiction, and I was the youngest member in my early thirties. As I read their stories, I benefited from the wisdom of their collective experience. Our oldest member, Bea Bragg, was in her 80s and I still remember a story she wrote about her daddy who in the dustbowl of Oklahoma traded two mules (Sue and Maud) for a Model T that could only turn right. He then traded the Model T for an old mansion. Bea's mother got suspicious when beautiful girls started showing up seeking work. It was only after young men sought entry in the middle of the night that her mother realized they had acquired a former brothel. Bea said that's when they scrubbed the place to a super shine. Bea's in heaven and I send her love and thanks for sharing a story that I can easily recall three decades later.

On a cold January day while visiting our nation's capital, I pre-arranged to meet a law school friend for lunch. Although Sabrina was two classes ahead of me, we had bonded over the French language during my first weeks of law school. I had just returned from studying language and business in France and Sabrina had grown up speaking French in New Orleans. When Sabrina arranged a Spring Break

Sherri Burr's 27th book, *Complicated Lives: Free Blacks in Virginia: 1619-1865* (Carolina Academic Press, 2019), was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in History. West Academic published *Wills & Trusts in a Nutshell 6th Ed.*, her 31st book, on October 31, 2022. A graduate of Mount Holyoke College, Princeton University, and the Yale Law School, Burr has been a member of SouthWest Writers for more than 30 years.



trip to Montreal, I was a quick volunteer to travel by train with her and her sister. Later, I followed Sabrina's advice into getting a clerkship with a federal judge, to working for the same San Francisco law firm, and into joining the legal academy. Sabrina abandoned the academy for the federal government and ended up retiring from the Interior Department. As we discussed how our careers diverged, I thanked her for being such a good early mentor. She seemed surprised that I remembered.

Once I started teaching, I realized my classes could benefit from an infusion of humor. I took a Continuing Education class with Goldie Garcia, a Harvard-educated local girl. Goldie scheduled class graduation at a comedy club. When she picked me to be the headliner (the last comedian on stage), I asked, "Why?"

"Because you were the only one who did your homework," Goldie replied.

After class ended, Goldie and I became friends, often attending cultural events together and even double dating. Then Goldie got a job writing a weekly column for *The Albuquerque Tribune*. When she heard they were looking for another columnist, she recommended me.

That writing job helped me explore the ranges of my voice as I wrote about varied subjects such as Albuquerque bank robbers and Middle East wars. At the time, a brash bank robber was picking corners with multiple banks and simply walking across streets to rob another while the police were investigating his first. When the bank robber was caught, it turned out that his friends had been hiding him. I questioned whether I had friends like that. Not a single person assured me they would hide me during a crime spree. Thank God!

No doubt your true friends have been as much a blessing to you as mine have been to me. Call them. Tell them. Thank them. Friends help us live our best lives.

# The Sage Writing Challenge

MARCH

FOR A CHANCE TO BE PUBLISHED in the MARCH SAGE write a short (500 words) non-fiction travel article about a place you've been that other writers might enjoy. Please follow all the submission guidelines and deadlines on page 11. **Submission deadline is February 15.**

Send submissions or questions to:  
SouthWest SAGE Editor  
[sage@swwriters.com](mailto:sage@swwriters.com)

*The challenge for publication in the February SAGE was to write short poetry or flash fiction on the subject of love.*

## Greater Love Hath No Man

by Suzanne Stauffer

He lifted the lid of the cake safe. There was one slice of Zulu King cake left.

He breathed in the warm aroma of chocolate and vanilla and coconut. He savored the memory of the soft, sweet pastry, the smooth and tangy vanilla cream cheese filling, and the dark fudgy icing. He recalled the nutty taste of the shaved coconut and the sudden explosion of flavor when biting into a chocolate chip hidden in the cream filling. He sighed and replaced the lid as his wife entered the kitchen.

"You have the King Cake for breakfast," he said.

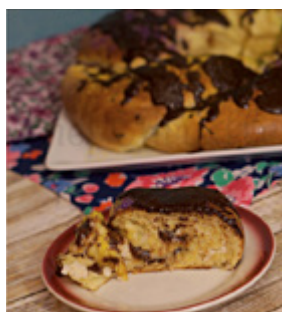


Photo Courtesy of [globalkitchentravels.com](http://globalkitchentravels.com). Make your own Zulu King cake for Fat Tuesday (February 13, 2024), or any time, [HERE](#).

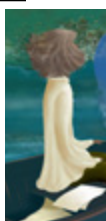
## For My Wife

by Larry Kilham

May every morning be one of Spring  
like the lilacs always bring.  
and we added to our garden of delights  
traveling the world to see amazing sights.

For forty memorable years  
we lived through laughter and tears—  
cherishing our love in every touch  
a silent love that meant so much.

My wife and lover ever true  
my heart and soul are what I have for you.  
With our love forever, we have much to enjoy,  
our souls entwined, we'll continue our story.



## Who Knows What Song the Sirens Sang?

by Dan Wetmore

Who knows what song the sirens sang,  
the tune which tolled, the notes that rang,  
and lured the main of men o'erboard  
in need past want, their company toward?

I know what lilted long ago,  
the haunting lyric of timeless throe:  
a dirge for dreamers, dying to die,  
in hope by vision's side to lie.

Naught in this world enough to hold,  
(it all by maiden's light made cold);  
their mournful croon, to death of death,  
entices some to seek first breath,

to punctuate the pule and pine  
for heart's discernment of divine;  
by deep embrace of flooring rain,  
quench separation's searing pain.

## My Girl

by Mark Fleisher

She is the essence of agility  
amid a sense of fragility  
an aura of indomitability  
yet a tinge of vulnerability  
*talkin' about my girl*

Rarely is she insufferable  
always eternally lovable  
exuding a wealth of gladness  
provoking in me sheer madness  
*talkin' about my girl*

## Love it Is

by Sam Moorman

That dull ache growing  
like in your back glowing  
until Spring is sprung  
you're in tune with June  
Someone you like likes you  
Oh, with passion growing  
like solar burning  
someone loves you, only you  
Oh, love!

Challenge continues on next page

CHALLENGE, continued

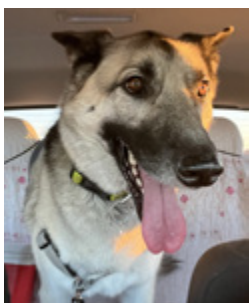
## Bliss

by Rachel Bate

Searching for a companion  
Amber eyes penetrate my heart  
Inside a lonely cage

German shepherd watches  
I slowly reach out  
Beautiful black moist nose  
Nuzzles my empty hand

BLISS!  
That shall be your name  
Heavenly creature  
Oh, happy soul  
My new furry friend



## SUNDias

by Ruth Vogel Mast

The Sun loves you in Spring when  
Fierce young winds bend  
Your wildflowers to the ground.  
Finding shelter, they bloom  
In the deepest folds of your colored  
dress.

And he loves you in Summer when  
Imprisoned in his arms  
He fades your peasant skirt.  
... And in the Fall when  
Wrapped in gold you shiver.

But the Sun loves you more when  
Winter veils you like a bride.  
From afar, he shyly brushes your  
hem  
With trembling fingers,  
And you blush!



# Winning!

SWW Members Share Their Writing Success



*The Spinster, the Rebel, and the Governor*, second edition, published by Artemesia Press, written by award-winning author, **CHARLENE BELL DIETZ**,

will be on shelves February 20, 2024 at favorite book retailers. Dietz unravels the hidden life of an unsung heroine in 1638 with a historical mystery full of suspense, secrets and scandalous action.

Margaret Brent, named one of the first female attorneys in America, asked for the vote two-hundred years before Susan B. Anthony. Murderous rebels and bigoted gentlemen can't prevent spinster Lady Margaret from wielding her power to defend Maryland settlers from plunder and obliteration.

### Connect with Charlene:

<https://inkydancestudios.com/>  
[chardietzpen@gmail.com](mailto:chardietzpen@gmail.com) or  
@CharBellDietz.

### Purchase:

<http://apbooks.net/srg.html>

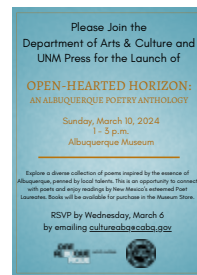
**DIANNE LAYDEN** has published an article in *Tablet Magazine*. "Remote Remembrance" is about the Legacy Plaques Project at the Santa Fe Jewish Cemetery. The project allows people to memorialize their loved ones, even when they are buried far away. For the article, Dianne worked in collaboration with Dr. Doris Francis of Santa Fe, whose efforts on behalf of the project are



detailed in the article. Read the article [HERE](#).

**ELAINE MONTAGUE's** poem "Albuquerque Past, Present, and Future" has been published in *Open-Hearted Horizon: An Albuquerque Poetry Anthology*. The anthology is a project of UNM Press in partnership with Albuquerque's Dept. of Arts & Culture. "It includes a wide range of Albuquerque-based poets and poems that are inspired—directly, associatively, obliquely—by Albuquerque."

A book launch, with readings by NM Poet Laureates, is scheduled for Sunday March 10, 2024 from 1-3 p.m. at the Albuquerque Museum, 2000 Mountain Rd. NW. RSVP to the book launch event by 5 p.m. on March 6 by emailing [cultureabq@cabq.gov](mailto:cultureabq@cabq.gov).



## Is Poetry... Popular?

YES, and growing more so every day. Statistics gathered by literary and educational web sources verify a trend in the rising popularity of poetry.

Key findings by the UK's [National Literacy Trust](#) revealed that 3 in 10 children (ages 8-18) surveyed in 2022 read poetry at least once a month—a 35 percent increase from 2010. The survey also showed that children who read poetry are more likely to write as a form of creative expression.

In December 2023, [The Guardian](#) news site included an article by Richard Brooks featuring the success of Scottish poet Donna Ashworth. Reportedly, Ashworth sold close to 70,000 hardback books in 2023 and ended the year with five of her books in the Top 20 poetry chart. She also has a million Facebook followers and 200,000 reading her poems on Instagram.

Sources like [USA Today](#), [National Endowment for the Arts](#), and [CNN](#) report a rise in the popularity of poetry, especially among young people and marginalized groups, that started around 2017.

April is poetry month!  
Start writing NOW.



# How To Create “Great Expectations”

by Ramona Gault

I much appreciated Sherri Burr’s article in the October SAGE about the “middle” of the story and how not to neglect it ([The Writing Life: The Middle, SAGE October, 2023](#)). I continue to struggle with the “muddled middle” of my current work-in-progress (WIP)!

We can’t slack off in the middle of our WIPs without losing readers, but the beginning is crucial to roping in those readers. I generally buy a novel based on how strong the first page is. If it doesn’t grab my interest, I put it back on the shelf. *From the Black Hills* by Judy Troy, a novel I’m reading now, has a terrific first page, IMHO. Here it is:

*“Early Sunday morning in the third week of August, Michael Newlin left Wheatley, South Dakota, for college. His mother stood in the driveway alone, in her church clothes, to see him off. Behind her was the two-story brick house he’d grown up in, which she would live in by herself now. His father had been missing for more than eight weeks. On June 18, without having done a violent thing ever before, he had shot and killed Mary Hise, the young woman who’d worked as receptionist at his small insurance agency. Then he’d disappeared. He’d been seen in Kansas, but that was back in July. By this time he could be anywhere.*

*“Concentrate on your own life now,” Mike’s mother had said.”*

Just from these few sentences, you, the eager reader, grasp the essentials of the story: Mike seems like a nice young man who’s lived an average middle-class life and is now college-bound. You instinctively feel positively toward him. You might be like him, or you certainly know young men like him. But wait: his father recently committed murder and went on the lam. Here we have a situation developing, a plot. And Mike’s mother says never mind, son, go to college and live your life. Right! Now you, the astute reader, know this is not going to happen. You sense a juicy tale about to unfold. You sense the tension in Mike’s situation. Mike’s life cannot be the same as it was before his father shot a young woman and disappeared. How will Mike deal with such a horrific thing when he rightfully should be studying and getting dates?

Here’s another opening page that sucked me right in. It’s from Kirstin Valdez Quade’s novel *The Five Wounds*:

*“This year Amadeo Padilla is Jesus. The hermanos have been preparing in the dirt behind the morada.*

*“This is no silky-haired, rosy-cheeked, honey-eyed Jesus, no Jesus-of-the-children, Jesus-with-the-lambs. Amadeo is muscled, hair shaved close to a scalp scarred from teenage fights, roll of skin where skull meets neck.*

*“Amadeo is building the cross out of heavy rough oak instead of pine. He’s barefoot like the other hermanos, who have rolled their cuffs and sing alabados. They have washed their white pants, braided their disciplinas the old way, from the thick fibers of yucca leaves, mended rips in the black hoods they will wear to ensure their humility in this reenactment. The Hermano Mayor—Amadeo’s skinny grand-tío Tive, who surprised them all when he chose his niece’s lazy son—plays the pito, and the thin piping notes rise.”*

Here it’s the author’s distinct style, or voice, that signals to the reader you’re in good hands. The author knows her material and knows how to create a world you can immerse yourself in. Plus, Amadeo sounds like a protagonist who’s worth following: he’s sketchy, maybe a bit dangerous, and he has a motive, a mission. We’re not sure what it is, but we want to find out more. If he’s lazy, why is he playing the role of Jesus in the Holy Week procession? The tension isn’t high here but the reader senses “all is not well,” for the man chosen to portray Jesus doesn’t feel right for the role.

So, in only a few sentences, Valdez Quade gives us a setting complete with music, a protagonist, and a drama about to unfold.

Everything I’ve read attests that editors and agents get so many submissions from first-time authors they don’t read past the first page before deciding “read or not-read” for a manuscript. Same for browsers in a book store. Almost needless to say, an established, best-selling author can get away with a low-tension, low-action opening chapter, but a newbie author has to impress from the first paragraph. Put your protagonist on stage, create tension, and build the sense that “all is not well” to keep readers going past the first page.



The last SAGE Anthology, 2018

## Join the SAGE Anthology Committee

A unique, SouthWest Writers opportunity

- Assist in the production of a new, 2024 SAGE anthology of material culled from past SAGE Newsletters.
- Participate in the process of compiling a book for publication.
- Share your ideas for the content and direction of this new anthology.

Email Allen at [nelson.reilly@gmail.com](mailto:nelson.reilly@gmail.com) or text at 505-331-7425.

# Links To Upcoming SWW Events

## MEETINGS in February

**Saturday, February 10, 2024**

10:00 am – noon

In Person & Zoom

**Speaker:**

**Kathleen O'Keefe-Kanavos**

**Publishing, Dreams & Cutting-Edge**

**Duke University Research: Fact or Fiction —**

Hybrid, Self or Conventional Publishing Pros, Cons  
and What is Right for YOU?

<https://www.southwestwriters.com/meetings/>

**Wednesday, February 28, 2024**

6:30 pm – 8:30 pm

Via Zoom

**Speaker:**

**Parris Afton Bonds**

**Writing Romance**

**Novels—Then and Now**

<https://www.southwestwriters.com/meetings/>



**The Writer's Wheel  
& Screenplay Hero's  
Journey: 2 Keys to  
Organize YOUR Writing into  
an Award-winning Book, and  
More**

**with Kathleen O'Keefe-Kanavos**

**Saturday, February 10, 2024**

12:30 – 2:30 pm (MST)

In Person & via Zoom

SWW members: \$20 ♦ Non-members: \$30

<https://www.southwestwriters.com/workshops/>

## CLASSES Starting Soon

**Free Online Memoir Writing Course for  
New Mexico Military**

Taught by Latayne Scott.

Starts February 2, 2024

For more information, go to [this page](#).



## **Just For Fun:**

**How many of these famous writers with birthdays in  
February can you name?**



(Top L-R) Amy Tan (*The Joy Luck Club*), Laura Ingalls Wilder (*Little House on the Prairie*), Wilhelm Grimm (*Grimm's Fairy Tales*—with his brother), Charles Lamb (*Tales From Shakespeare*), Johnston McCulley (*The Mark of Zorro*)

(Bottom L-R) Jules Verne (*Around the World in Eighty Days*), John Steinbeck (*The Grapes of Wrath*), Victor Hugo (*Les Misérables*), Susan Hill (*The Woman in Black*), James Joyce (*Ulysses*).



Austen is quick to insist that these educational uses are intended to be entirely benign, and that humans will always be needed to monitor and control AI. Machine intelligences are not self-aware, she reasons, and therein the ability to control resides.

I suspect that a few parents of teenagers might quickly attempt to convince her that, at a certain point, it might become difficult for humans to exercise that control. Entities with a lot of knowledge might become self-aware, but no one knows the critical mass of learning. How much learning might “create” awareness?

As of November, an article in *Futurism* claimed that AI was inherently limited because it was unable to handle anything [beyond the limits of its programming](#). Maybe the experts are correct, but recent developments have left me wondering.

A chatbot for the UK delivery service DPD lost its cool recently. Instead of replying logically (and calmly) to frustrated customers, according to “Customer Disservice,” Maggie Harrison’s January 22, 2024 article in *The Byte*, [it threw profanity](#) at customers, and also cursed the company. For its efforts the company disabled it, at least in part. But imagine this on a larger, more powerful scale. How do you suppose that bot learned to curse? Did it get its bad opinion of the company from its programmers too? Hardly likely. Have some AIs acquired a bad opinion of us? Should we ask them?

The fiction writer in me is quick to visualize the other side of this Austen’s scenario. It’s one in which some cabal reprograms educational AIs and chatbots for not-entirely-benign purposes.

How does AI monitoring affect us, as adult readers, and as writers? For one thing, Amazon monitors e-books. I don’t mean simply that it tracks sales, although it does that too.

As I read e-books, these days, I see one of two statistics pop up at the bottom of the page. The first is the traditional page count, but along with that, Kindle now also displays the percentage of the total pages read. The other option shows only a longer number, which I presume to be the number of paragraphs in the complete book, because Austen’s book contains more than 3,700. I’d never thought of counting the number of paragraphs in a book before, but apparently KDP’s AI did.

Tracking how much you’ve read might be a prelude to another change in Amazon’s policies. The company has altered them so many times that I’ve already lost count. We won’t know, for sure, about a specific new requirement until it’s announced to the public. However, being able to track the percentage of a book read might lead to a refusal to post a review if the reader cannot be verified to have seen a previously-determined percentage of the book. What might that be? 50%? 75%? 100%?

This leads to another question: Did you ever discard a book after reading the first chapter, with the complaint, “This is junk! I’m not going to waste my time reading

any more of it!”? Now, you might have to flip through every single page of the rest of it as a prerequisite to having your opinion heard.

A suggestion: Preserve your right to comment by paging through the whole text, regardless of your opinion of the work. You never know when Amazon might put this policy into effect. (FYI—the AI now embedded in MS Word fought me on this sentence. It wanted me to write “action” and not “effect,” but I decided to insist, on principle. I’m beginning to wonder whether, someday, acceptance of Word’s “editorial suggestions” might become obligatory.)

I wonder how Amazon might similarly monitor people who buy paperbacks and hardcovers. Perhaps an initial step would be to disallow unverified reviews. If you didn’t buy it on Amazon, perhaps your opinion will no longer count.

Amazon cares who our friends are. It wants to ensure that we have never sent those who review our books on its web pages a gift. If we ever have, it’s likely to refuse to post that review. I don’t mean family members who live with you, either. This interdiction might be applied to anyone to whom you’ve ever sent a gift you bought on Amazon, even your third-grade teacher if you sent her a present five years ago. Sometimes friends, or former teachers, might sincerely like what you’ve written, but Amazon might not allow them to say so. Everyone seems to be considered automatically guilty, with no way of proving their innocence.

But back to the whole concept of surveillance. From the now-outmoded presumption that we have the right not to have our pictures taken when we’re out walking, there’s now the idea circulating that, once you’re in public, you have no right to privacy. How many times per day is each of us on someone’s surveillance camera, if only the one attached to our neighbor’s doorbell? And, considering that there are so many people using the internet, perhaps we have no right to assume that we have privacy there either.

As [an opinion piece](#) in *Fast Company* warned on December 23, 2023, “Reader surveillance is a deeply intersectional threat.” We are living in the Wild West of data collection. There are few true privacy controls, so it now cuts across your reading habits, your political opinions, your medical needs, and all other aspects of your life. It’s tempting to believe that powerful forces are attempting to reduce us all to a set of algorithms that track our actions and preferences, perhaps with the goal of ultimate control.

*As a writer, editor, producer, and collaborator, Léonie Rosenstiel has published award-winning fiction and nonfiction, including Protecting Mama, which won First Place in the New Mexico-Arizona Book Awards (2022). She was named NMPW’s Communicator of Achievement in 2023.*



## CONTESTS and OPPORTUNITIES for WRITERS

### Invitation From Croak and Dagger

*NM's Sisters in Crime Chapter*

*Sisters  
in Crime*

Do you read mysteries? Write mysteries? Croak and Dagger, the local chapter of Sisters in Crime, (men also welcome), invites you to attend an open meeting, held on the fourth Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m.

Some meeting programs feature local or visiting authors on writing techniques. Other programs might have professionals talking about their day jobs. All are entertaining and educational.

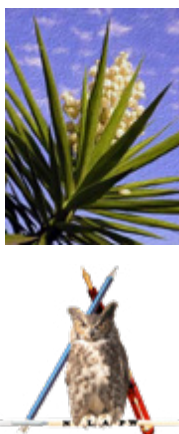
**February 27, 2024, we host  
Tom Zaleski of APD Bomb Squad**

Meetings held at the First Unitarian Church at the SW corner of Carlisle and Comanche.

Visit our website — [croak-and-dagger.com](http://croak-and-dagger.com).

### Scholarships for High School Writers

The Yucca (ABQ) Branch of the National League of American Pen Women will award two (2) scholarships—each a one-year membership to [SouthWest Writers](http://SouthWestWriters.com)—to youth writers. If you are a young writer (*not restricted to women*), or if you know a teenager with an interest in writing poetry, fiction or nonfiction who would benefit from this opportunity, please email [JacquelineMurrayLoring@gmail.com](mailto:JacquelineMurrayLoring@gmail.com) or [info@swwriters.com](mailto:info@swwriters.com).



Founded in 1897, the National League of American Pen Women, Inc. (NLAPW) is an organization that supports and promotes professional women in Arts, Letters, Music, and allied professions. The Yucca (ABQ) Branch was founded in 1952 and holds meetings and events monthly.

### It's Deadline Time!

**Contest entries for NMPW/NFPW  
Communications Contests  
due at noon on Wednesday,  
February 7, 2024.**

**Enter [HERE](#).**



**NFPW  
Contest**

## Rising Writers Program

Aspiring authors of suspense fiction, tune in for a 90-minute Zoom session with Best-selling suspense author, Joe Badal.

- 3:30 p.m. on February 17, 2024

If you are an aspiring author of suspense fiction, this session can help jump start your writing career and your effort to get published.

**Session Format:** Thoughts, advice, and stories from Joe's writing career will be shared with aspiring writers in the suspense genre. Expect robust conversation between participants and speaker.

**Rising Writers Program:** NMWriters is committed to supporting aspiring writers in New Mexico. Rising Writers offers a chance for aspiring, unpublished writers to spend time in conversation with an established writer in their chosen genre.

**There is no charge for the session**, but we ask that you commit to attending and alert us as soon as possible if you are unable to come, so we can let someone on the waiting list have a chance.

**To Register:** email your name to [lucymoore@nets.com](mailto:lucymoore@nets.com). You will receive the Zoom invitation.

### SWW Member Seeking Articles Related To The Rockies

Following the success and awards of *Unplugged Voices 125 Tales of art and life from Northern New Mexico, the Four Corners and the West*, Sara Francis is at it again. Her new project *Unplugged Rocky Mountain Voices* (volume 2) has entered the recruitment stage.

Writers, artists, or citizens with art and articles relating to the preservation of the Rocky Mountains and the West are invited to contact Sara Frances at [imagination@photomirage.com](mailto:imagination@photomirage.com) or 303-210-8528 for details and an invitation.

### Call for Submissions: Prose, Poetry, and Visual Art



Armed Services Arts Partnership (ASAP) is excited to launch a 2024 anthology with publisher Unleash Creatives. Submissions accepted from U.S veterans, service members, military spouses, family members, and caregivers.

**Theme:** Partnerships, The Untold Stories.

**Prizes:** \$500 Editors' Choice Grand Prize

\$250 each, for category winners in prose, poetry, and the visual arts.

**Deadline:** March 1, 2024

Rules and Entry [HERE](#).

## SouthWest SAGE

### SAGE CHALLENGE & ARTICLE SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

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](http://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.

Read the following before submitting:

- 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, which will be found on the Challenge page. **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; proper attribution and permission is required.
- Inclusion in the SAGE is subject to the discretion of the editor.

Send questions or submissions to:  
SouthWest SAGE Editor  
[sage@swwriters.com](mailto:sage@swwriters.com)

## 2024 Board of Directors

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### SWW Office:

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email: [info@swwriters.com](mailto:info@swwriters.com)  
website: [southwestwriters.com](http://southwestwriters.com)

The SWW Board of Directors meets on the second  
Tuesday of each month from 6:30-8:30 p.m.  
Meetings are conducted in person and/or via Zoom.