

Improving Your Craft

# ASJA MAGAZINE

>>>>

WINTER 2022

01

*A Quarterly Publication  
of the American Society of  
Journalists and Authors*



DEVELOPING  
THE TOOLS  
FOR SUCCESS

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WINTER 2022

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# ASJA MAGAZINE



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of the American Society of  
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## Publications Chair

Jennifer Nelson

## Editor

Stephanie Vozza

## Creative Director

Christina Ullman, Ullman Design  
www.ullmandesign.com

## Contributors

Lin Gensing-Pophal, Kelly K. James,  
Holly Leber Simmons, JoBeth McDaniel,  
Sharon Naylor Toris, Ami Neiberger-Miller,  
Susan Shapiro

## Proofreaders

Sally Abrahms, Theresa Barger, June Bell,  
Risha Gotlieb, Daria Hong, Leslie Lang,  
Janine Latus, Mark Ray, Sandi Schwartz

## Address changes

Send to:  
The ASJA Magazine  
American Society of Journalists and Authors  
355 Lexington Avenue, 15th Floor  
New York, NY 10017

Phone: (212) 997-0947

www.asja.org

Email: [asjaoffice@asja.org](mailto:asjaoffice@asja.org)

Magazine Editor: [magazine@asja.net](mailto:magazine@asja.net)

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*Founded in 1948, the American Society of Journalists and Authors is the nation's professional association of independent and entrepreneurial nonfiction writers. ASJA is a primary voice in representing freelancers' interests, serving as spokesperson for their right to control and profit from the uses of their work wherever it appears. ASJA brings leadership in establishing professional and ethical standards, as well as in recognizing and encouraging the pursuit of excellence in nonfiction writing. Since 2010, the ASJA Educational Foundation has been offering programming that covers all aspects of professional, independent writing for both established and aspiring writers. ASJA headquarters is in New York City.*

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LAURA LAING

Freelance Writer  
and ASJA President



*From the President's Desk*

## PRACTICING GOOD WRITING

“One by one, million by million, in the prescience of dawn, every leaf in that part of the world was moved.”

—James Agee, *A Death in the Family*

Four years ago, when I first read James Agee’s novella/short memoir, I wrote this quote in cursive on the chalkboard in my kitchen. It’s still there because it is too beautiful to erase, and I read it several times a week, as I emerge from the basement with a load of fresh laundry or pass by on my way to the front door.

Reading this sentence for the first time, I felt an electric shock. I had been drawn to the book by its prologue, a prose poem called “Knoxville: Summer of 1915,” published first in *Partisan Review* in 1938 and then excerpted and set to music by Samuel Barber. Later, this sketch of a 1910s American city block became the preamble to Agee’s posthumously published and Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *A Death in the Family*.

In the first week of my MFA program, the director read a long section of Agee’s prologue/essay aloud, and I was transfixed, first following the printed copy, and then closing my eyes to let the images unfold like a movie. The quote I love, however, comes later in the book. These 21 words encapsulate Agee’s themes and plot in the most beautiful and concise way possible. Before, the narrator had a father, his mother had a husband. After, they didn’t. And in that moment between, everything—including the leaves in that part of the world—had changed. That’s what a “death in the family” can do.

My own father had died 10 years before. It was a prolonged death but unexpected. My family, my town, was forever changed. In Agee’s book, the father is a drunkard; my own father was not. Still, for many of us, a father is

significant—no matter the situation. I felt the leaves turn in the moment of my daddy’s death, but I didn’t have the words and imagery to describe it. Agee illustrated it for me: perfectly, honestly, and in a shortish sentence beginning with three subjective clauses and ending in passive voice.

For me, this is exquisite writing. Not only was Agee describing complete transformation, but in the act of reading his words, I felt transformed. Perhaps that had to do with the step I was taking from journalism to creative writing. I was a jumpy, anxious student, wanting so desperately to please my mentors and impress my fellow students. For the first time in my life, I was in the presence of other writers while we were all writing. We spent hours reading one another’s work and then discussing it so we could write better.

Good writing is not reserved for literature, however. It spans all genres. It is rooted in reporting, thinking, and audience. It is inspired by events and even our clients. Good reporters know how to suss out the best quote in an interview or structure a story so the reader will follow to the end. A good content marketing writer can be a chameleon, taking on the voice of each. Good memoirists understand that what is left out can lead the reading to deeper understanding. We learn these things through practice and observation, combined with the compulsion to improve. For many of us, the goal is to become better and better and better at communicating the ideas in our heads that feel important, vital, whether we’re writing for ourselves or someone else.

There’s an argument in academia that it’s

impossible to teach a person to write well. That’s not to say we’re born with a writing gene, but good writing isn’t about perfect grammar or even spelling. It’s compelled by an inner light or voice—a drive—that pushes us writers to dig deeper, think harder, read more. To write well, I listen to the voice inside my head that says, “Not quite right” and then keep going. This kind of rigor is impossible with every project, but it buzzes under the surface, and when the writing really matters—to me or to the project—I keep revising, keep looking for ways to make my work shine. I don’t know for sure whether good writing can be taught, but I do believe it can be learned. That learning happens when a writer is practicing their craft.

I’m reminded of the Ira Glass interview in which he says, in part, “All of us who do creative work, we get into it because we have good taste. But there is this gap. For the first couple years you make stuff, it’s just not that good. It’s trying to be good, it has potential, but it’s not.” Being in that gap is painful, but we all experience it, Glass says. How does your work become good? “It is only by going through a volume of work that you will close that gap, and your work will be as good as your ambitions.”

And while writing is largely a solitary profession, the writing we do as professionals requires an audience. Otherwise, we’d be satisfied with journaling. The cycle isn’t complete until our words and ideas are in the world. It’s audacious to want that, and it’s that audacity that makes a career of writing.

I have been a good reporter, producing good stories that have been recognized by writers and editors I trust. I have written good books that evoke positive reactions from readers. A few of my essays feel worthy of pride. But I’m not yet where I want to be. I may never write a sentence that someone copies onto their kitchen chalkboard, but I want that. I have a mission, and all I know to do is practice, to write the words that lay a path to the prescience of dawn, where every leaf in my part of the world is moved.

STEPHANIE  
VOZZA*Freelance Writer  
and ASJA Editor**From  
the Editor*

## THE VALUE OF MENTORS

**M**y first job as a writer was in the custom publishing department of a large Detroit-area advertising agency. Fresh out of college, I started as an editorial assistant, answering reader mail. Eventually, I was given small assignments that lead up to my first feature story, interviewing David Hacker, a *Detroit Free Press* writer who traveled around Michigan's upper peninsula in a Chevy Astro van, writing about the people he met and the places he visited.

About two years into my career, the agency acquired a new account; we would be publishing a magazine for GMAC called *Quest*. The focus was on pursuing your dreams, and a new editor, Richard Bak, came on board to take the helm.

Richard gave me a steady stream of short pieces to write. Things were going along fine until one particular assignment: a story about a man who made it his mission to save his county's covered bridges.

I'll be honest. I phoned it in, pulling details from the newspaper clippings I had been given as background material, and hurriedly meeting my deadline.

A day later, I was sitting in my cubicle when Richard appeared at the door. He had a copy of the story I had written in his hands. He looked at me, crumpled it up into a ball, and threw it at me.

"If you ever turn in another piece of crap like this, you'll never write for me again," he said before he walked away.

Well, I hated Richard in that moment. "How dare he talk to me like that!" I thought.

It was also embarrassing; my coworkers were within earshot. I gingerly picked up the paper, trying to maintain my composure, smoothed it out, and read what I had turned in. He was right. My ego was bruised, but my determination was not. I rewrote the piece, starting from scratch, and turned it in.

A few days later, I was working late on a deadline. Most of the office had gone home. My phone rang. It was Richard. "Come to my office," he instructed. "Oh, and on your way, stop by the refrigerator in the breakroom and grab the bag that says, 'Richard's yogurt.'"

Entering his office, I put the bag on his desk. "Sit down," he said, opening the bag, pulling out two cans of Budweiser, and tossing one to me.

"Yogurt?" I asked, following that question up with another. "Are you firing me?"

"This is the article you should have turned in," he said, holding up my revision. "You're a good writer, but not if you take shortcuts. Short pieces deserve every bit of attention as features."

I wrote for Richard for many more years, transitioning from front-of-the-book pieces to cover stories. He sent me to Vermont to go on a bicycling adventure and to Los Angeles to spend the day on the set of *The Dating Game*. The editing process was often brutal—Richard didn't hold back when it came to criticisms—but I learned something new with every assignment.

Eventually, he left the agency, and I moved to Tennessee. We've stayed loosely in touch over the decades that have followed, mostly updates on life. Several years ago, I went to see him at his book signing.

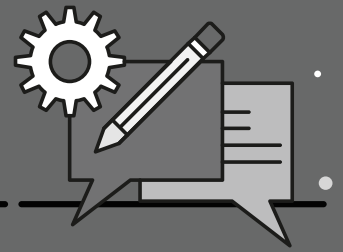
"You know, you were my mentor," I told him.

"Tormentor is more like it," he said.

"I would agree with that," I responded.

Looking back, I don't believe I'd be nearly as successful in my career if I hadn't met and been mentored by Richard. He's the best writer I know. Even his emails are worth savoring. Whenever I feel stuck, I pick up one of his many books and just let his craft inspire me.

Every writer should be as lucky as I was to have a tormentor like Richard.



## NEW ASJA MEMBERS!

JANUARY 2022

### PROFESSIONAL MEMBERS

Anthony Akaeze  
Houston, TexasSarah Brodsky  
Saint Louis, Mo.Jennifer Bryant  
West Chester, Pa.Rose de Fremery  
Astoria, N.Y.Emily P.G. Erickson  
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Coon Rapids, Minn.Amanda Norcross  
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Philadelphia, Pa.Jessica Rao  
White Plains, N.Y.Robin Raven  
Saraland, Ala.Laura Jane Willoughby  
Baltimore, Md.

### ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Amy Rea  
St. Anthony, Minn.Allison Troutner  
Indianapolis, Ind.

# We love to give away money to deserving writers in need!

The Writers Emergency Assistance Fund (WEAF) is here to help writers through hard times brought on by illness, natural disaster, or other emergency. Since 1982, WEAF has awarded more than 160 grants totaling approximately \$400,000.

## *You Can Help:*

- If you know a qualified writer who is experiencing an emergency, let them know about WEAF.

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- If you have had a good year, think about making a tax-deductible donation to WEAF.

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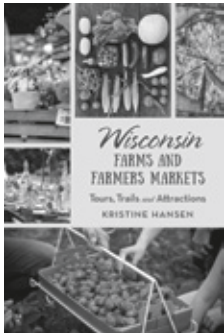
- If you want to have a long-term impact, consider naming WEAF as a beneficiary in your estate planning.

To find more information about the WEAF application process and making donations, click the WEAF link on the ASJA website: **ASJA.org**.



# MEMBER NEWS

## »»»» Book News



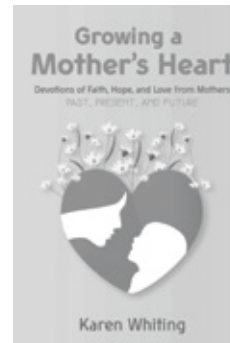
**Kristine Hansen's** second book with Globe Pequot Press, *Wisconsin Farms and Farmers Markets: Tours, Trails and Attractions*, was published in July 2021. It showcases the state's agri-tourism, including vineyards, farm stays, farm stands, farmers markets, and pizza farms. She recorded radio interviews and morning-show segments around the state to promote the slice of Wisconsin life.

**Amy Waters Yarsinske** has released *Asheville, North Carolina: A History of the Land of the Sky* (Fonthill Media.) She is the author of several best-selling, award-winning nonfiction books, including *An American in the Basement: The Betrayal of Captain Scott Speicher and the Cover-up of His Death*, which won the Next Generation Indie Book Award for General Non-fiction in 2014.

Travel writer **Janet Groene** draws on her travels, many of them on the water, to write a new Yacht Yenta "cozy" mystery e-book series, now numbering six books. *June Jeopardy* was recently published on Kindle, Nook, Google Play and other e-book platforms.



**Tanja Hester's** second book, *Wallet Activism: How to Use Every Dollar You Spend, Earn, and Save as a Force for Change*, was scheduled to be published in November 2021 by BenBella Books. While Hester was thrilled to have Hachette Books publish *Work Optional: Retire Early the Non-Penny-Pinching Way* in 2019, *Wallet Activism* marks her pivot from personal finance to the social change, climate action, and activism space.

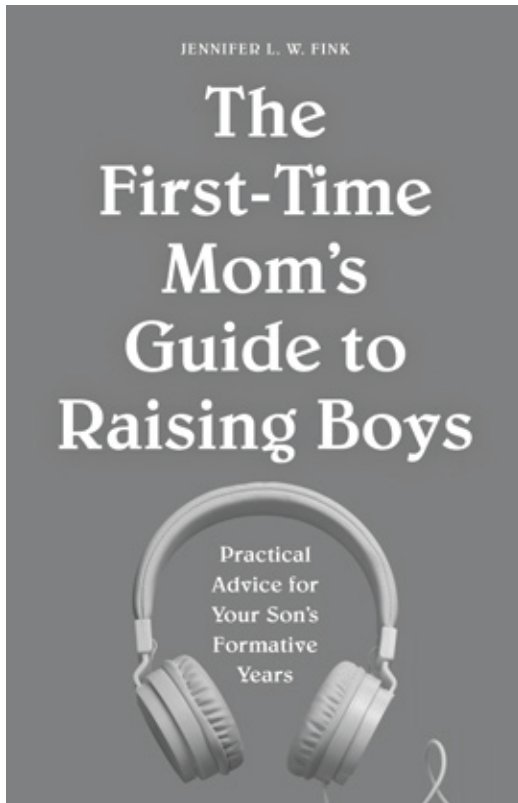


**Karen Whiting** received two book contracts that will expand her spring release of *Growing a Mother's Heart* into a line of books with a companion *Bible Study* (spring 2022) and *Growing a Peaceful Heart* (fall 2022).



**Julie Vick's** humorous advice book for introverted parents, *Babies Don't Make Small Talk (So Why Should I?)*, was published by Countryman Press in August 2021. With a mix of personal anecdotes, satire, and advice for surviving the years from pregnancy through preschool, this book shares hard-earned wisdom from the trenches, such as tests to prepare for parenthood ("Set up your laptop on one end of a Ping-Pong table and set up a Ping-Pong robot on the other end. Turn on both the robot and your computer and then try to send some work emails") and advice on ending a play date that has gone on too long: ("Do whatever it takes to get your toddler to have a meltdown"). Perfect for parents who may not be cherishing every moment of parenthood.

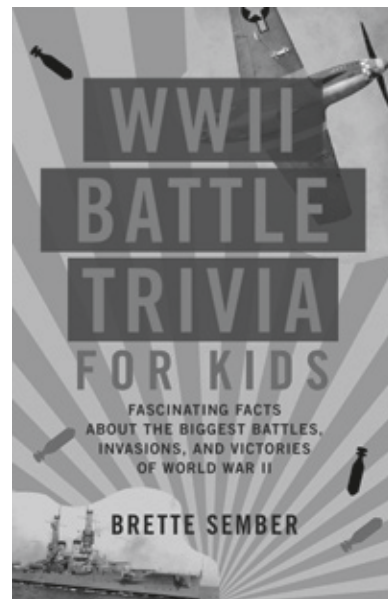




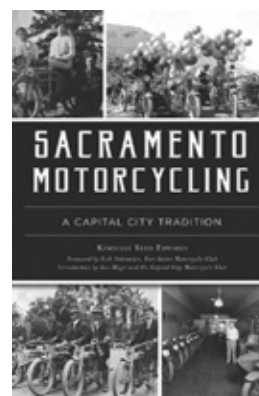
**Jennifer L.W. Fink's** first book, *The First-Time Mom's Guide to Raising Boys: Practical Advice for Your Son's Formative Years*, was published in July 2021. Michael Gurian, *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Wonder of Boys*, calls her book "a powerful and practical handbook for overwhelmed parents of tween boys." Fink is working on her second book, tentatively titled *Building Boys: How to Raise Great Guys in a World that Misunderstands Males*.



**Liza N. Burby's** 42nd non-fiction book, *VIP: Amelia Bloomer*, a new installment in the middle grade series, will be published by Harper Collins in 2024. Bloomer was the first editor of a newspaper dedicated to women's rights, *The Lily*. She was also a 19th century influencer, making the bloomer (loose pants worn under a skirt) famous internationally.



**Brette Sember** is the author of the newly released *WWII Battle Trivia for Kids: Fascinating Facts about the Biggest Battles, Invasions, and Victories of World War II*, published by Ulysses Press. The fun Q&A format is geared to kids ages 10 and older.



*Sacramento Motorcycling, A Capital City Tradition* by **Kimberly A. Edwards** was released in July 2021 by The History Press. In 44,000 words and 100+ photos, Edwards tells the story of the first 50 years of a sport that was grounded in the local power structure, unknown to many. Edwards found this to be the hardest project she ever took on, but her background in article writing came in handy. "When you write on different topics, you learn to quickly dive into new areas by finding industry leaders, clubs, and reference repositories before you can figure out where to start," she said.



»»»» *Activities, Awards and Accolades*

**Deborah Blumberg** was selected as the winner of the Writers' League of Texas 2021 manuscript contest in the category of historical fiction.



**Beryl Lieff Benderly's** article "Secret Shabes: How the 'Sabbath Delight' Hid an Astonishing Archive" in B'nai B'rith magazine won two prizes in the American Jewish Press Association's 40th annual Simon Rockower Awards: second prize for writing about Jewish heritage and Jewish peoplehood in Europe, and honorable mention for excellence in feature writing. "This is a sad, moving, and graceful story that pays homage to true visionaries and their heroic acts," the judges wrote.



**Deborah Lynn Blumberg** had an op-ed published in the New York publication *The Forward*. The column deals with the PRO Act, a bill currently before the Senate that has a concerning clause in it for freelancers, including freelance writers and editors. In her piece, Blumberg shares a story of her great great grandfather Gertz, an entrepreneur, and relates how she's worried that the PRO Act could damage the small business she's built as a freelancer.

*The Boston Globe* interviewed **Joan Detz**, author of *How to Write & Give a Speech*, for an article on commencement speeches.

**Margie Goldsmith**, winner of 94 writing awards, produced the blues album "Margie Goldsmith Kidnaps Rick Estrin & the Nightcats." She wrote the words, music, sang and played blues harmonica. Goldsmith plays with the award-winning band Rick Estrin & the Nightcats.



**Rosalind Cummings-Yeates** recently completed the National Critics Institute fellowship, working with *New York Times* critics covering culture, food, music, and theater. Time Magazine featured her profile of Accra, Ghana, in the *World's 100 Best Places 2021* issue.



**Susan Johnston Taylor** published nonfiction articles in the June and July issues of *Highlights for Children*, profiling kids giving back to their communities in creative ways.



ASJA Board member **Parul Kapur Hinzen** recently interviewed Vinod Busjeet for *The Paris Review* about Busjeet's novel, *Silent Winds, Dry Seas*, discussing what it takes to reconstruct a faraway childhood and reckon with the legacy of colonialism on the island of Mauritius, where this coming-of-age story is set.



**Sandra Ebejer** recently interviewed Laurence Jackson Hyman, son of acclaimed author Shirley Jackson, about *The Letters of Shirley Jackson*, for *Shondaland*. He shared insights into his mother's work, her legacy, and what it was like to play catch with J.D. Salinger.



**Mark Ray** wrote *The Costco Connection's* August 2021 cover story on Costco's relationship with Feeding America and other nonprofit organizations. Ray landed his first Costco assignment several years ago as a result of an ASJA Virtual Pitch Slam.

**Virginia Brown** published her first travel feature in *The Washington Post*, a first-person narrative of North Carolina's High Country. She thanks fellow ASJA member Kate Silver for the editor lead.



**GOT NEWS  
TO SHARE  
WITH ASJA?**

Submit your items at  
<https://asja.org/Member-Networking/submit-member-news>



# PAYCHECK

## EMPOWERED MAGAZINE

Article, consumer pub (online or print)

**Scope of work:** 2 posts

**Total fee:** \$300.00

**Article terms:** Acceptance

First and last time writing for this publication. In response to a tweet from the editor, I emailed a pitch, and she assigned it plus another idea generated in-house. All she sent was a hed and dek. The pay rate was lower than I'd normally accept, but the articles seemed simple and straightforward, so I negotiated a longer deadline and estimated that it should still work out to a reasonable hourly rate.

After completing the interviews and filing both articles, the editor who assigned the articles forwarded very short, extremely vague comments from her boss. It sounded like he wanted me to scrap all the interviews I'd done and start over from scratch on both articles. The top editor also seems not to have read my original pitch, because he expected the article I pitched to have a different focus from what was in the pitch, and that was never communicated to me.

I've dealt with lots of revision requests over a 10+ years of freelancing but never a request to start over from scratch. I emailed my editor saying I'd like to discuss things over the phone as it seems there's been a misunderstanding about the article I pitched. That was over a week ago, and she hasn't responded. The contract does not include a kill fee (which hasn't been an issue for me in the past so I wasn't concerned at the time), so there's not much chance of getting paid without starting over from scratch. I don't have

the bandwidth to keep redoing entire articles without clarity on what the top editor wants. I'm leaving it at that and considering the hours I've already put in to be a sunk cost. Writer, beware!

**Feedback:** 1

## SADDLEBACK EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHING

Books

**Scope of work:** 800 words

**Total fee:** \$1,000.00

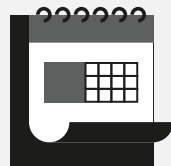
**Article terms:** Acceptance

These leveled readers are short and quick to write, and the editor is great

*Help your fellow members by submitting a paycheck report. Simply visit the Member section of the ASJA website. Under the Paycheck tab, click on Report a Paycheck. Knowledge is power!*

to work with. She typically has no edits or very minor edits, so it works out to a good hourly rate. Also, payment arrives quickly, often within a week of submitting the manuscript.

**Feedback:** 10



## ASJA EVENTS CALENDAR 2022

### *Virtual Pitch Slam and Virtual Client Connections*

Check the ASJA website for the latest details.

### *ASJA 51st Annual Conference*

May 1-2, 2022

Hyatt Regency Jersey City on the Hudson  
Jersey City, N.J.

# Announcing ASJA's Annual Conference 2022

## WE'RE MOVING TO JERSEY CITY!

Mark your calendars for ASJA's first in-person conference in two years. Let's gather at our new venue, Hyatt Regency Jersey City on the Hudson, with unparalleled views of New York City.

Sessions for journalists, content marketers, and book authors, as well as information you need to hone your craft and build your business.

Client Connections (for Professional Members only) on Monday, May 2: Your chance to meet with the top editors, publishers, agents, and clients in the business.



### GET A LOAD OF THIS VIEW!

Client Connections will be held on Monday in the Manhattan Ballroom with a mind-boggling view of New York City. Then we'll host a networking cocktail hour to close the conference. Make sure your travel plans include this special event!



MAY 1 & 2, 2022

➤ *Registration opens in late 2021. Check the ASJA website for details.*



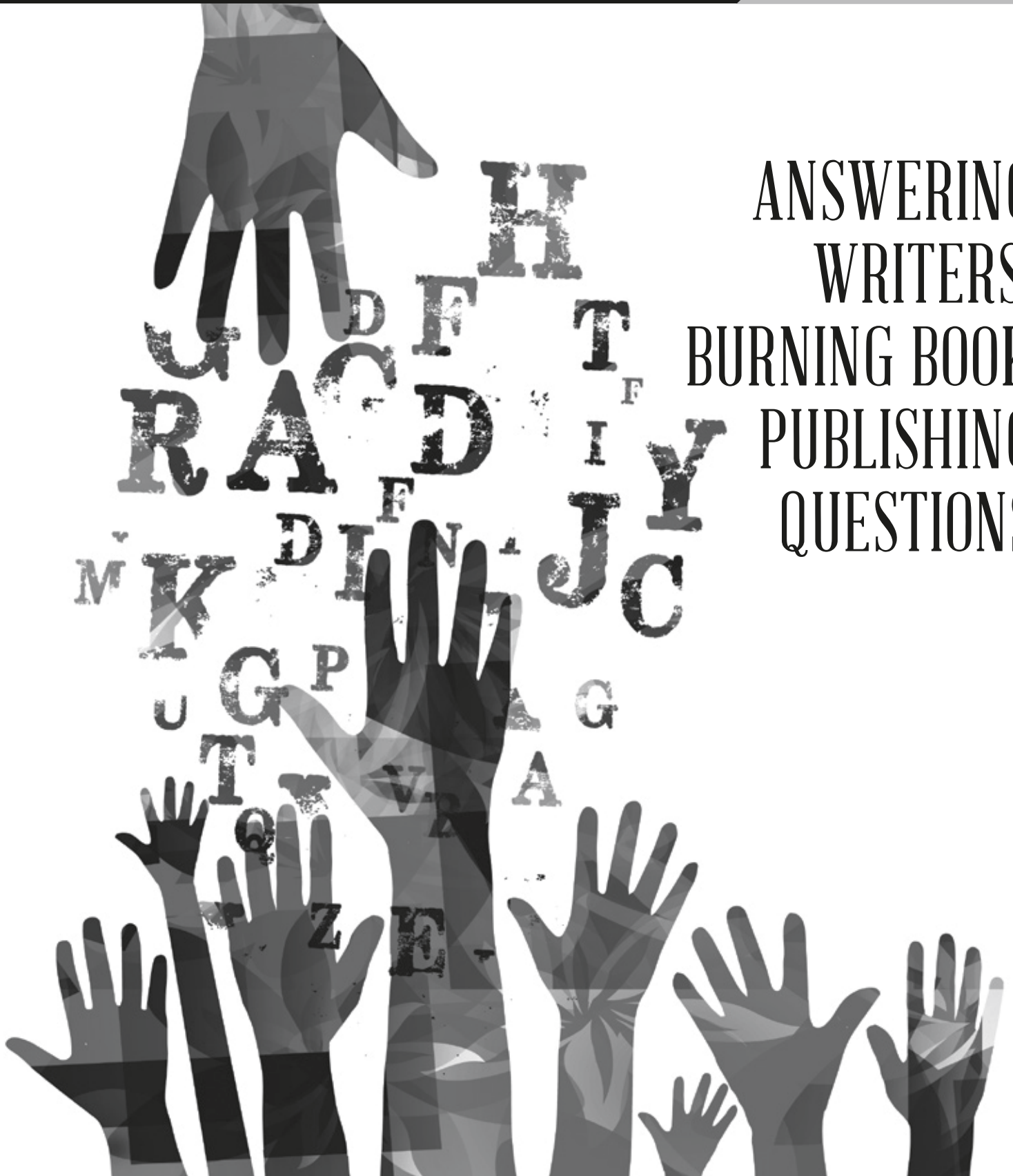
### Jersey City? Isn't that too far away?

Heck no, it's just across the Hudson River from our previous hotel—an easy ride on the New Jersey PATH Train or if you want a more scenic route, the New York Waterway Ferry. From there, you'll be at the Financial District, where you can continue to the World Trade Center or take the subway, a taxi, or Uber/Lyft to anywhere in Manhattan. And getting to Jersey City is a cinch flying into Newark Airport.



»» Eavesdropping on the Agent

ANSWERING  
WRITERS'  
BURNING BOOK  
PUBLISHING  
QUESTIONS



*My client and friend Gary Stern asks this question: Lots of ASJA writers are now content-marketing specialists. Are there any special adjustments they need to make if they want to become ghostwriters or collaborators?*

A paid writing gig is a paid writing gig. But then, how do you segue to writing books with experts?

Frankly, a book publisher doesn't care who writes the book proposal (and the subsequent book) as long as they do a good job. Pretty much the same for agents, though we do kind of want to know what the writer's background is. If you have written and published previous books, so much the better. But if you haven't, that doesn't mean you can't. Still, it does mean that the burden will be on you to come up with the expert who wants to write a book but doesn't know how to go about it. You will need to become their guide dog through the wonderful world of book publishing—of getting an agent and a publisher and creating a publishable manuscript.

I have actually done this many times myself: hunt down potential authors, both as an agent—such as the books I did with the late comedienne Phyllis Diller and with Congresswomen/sisters Loretta and Linda Sanchez—and in the days when I was still writing books for others.

I've coauthored about half of the books I've written, and the process is more or less the same: You find an expert who has not yet written a book but who has a good enough platform to warrant one. You get in touch with that person. (Don't ask how! That's for you to figure out!) And you introduce yourself as a fabulous writer, mentioning a few of your best credentials. You explain that what you bring to the collaboration—besides excellent writing—is the ability to create a topnotch book proposal, including helping the author come up with a great title and foreword writer, whose importance cannot be underestimated; to help identify an agent who will like the project and agree to take it on; and then to write/edit the book manuscript once it's sold. You might even offer to assist (for a fee) with some social media, ghost-blogging, and other PR activities after the book is published.

Trust me: most would-be authors do not know where to begin, and a writer who presents himself or herself with these skills will be highly appreciated by the wise expert seeking to become an author.

Of course, there will be experts you approach who will ask how many of the books you've written have appeared on *The New York Times* bestseller list or will have otherwise ridiculous expectations. If you don't have what's asked for, it's best to move on and seek out someone more reasonable. (Such a person will probably also be difficult to work with and will likely want to pay a pittance for your services.) Even those who agree to hire you may question your value initially ("Why am I paying all this money to a writer? I can write this book myself!"), but they will appreciate you more and more the longer you work together.

So, I would say that if you're a good writer, you can find work as a ghostwriter or collaborator, whatever you're currently doing. But it's on you to make it happen. If you thought a book publisher or literary agent would simply call you up and say, "Hey, content-marketing writer, how would you like to write this book?" ... Sorry, my friend!



LINDA KONNER

*ASJA member and president of  
the Linda Konner Literary Agency*



### **Got a Question for Linda?**

Send it to [asjamagazineeditor@gmail.com](mailto:asjamagazineeditor@gmail.com)

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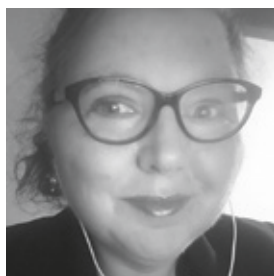
Linda Konner launched the Linda Konner Literary Agency in 1996. She represents approximately 75 authors of adult nonfiction books.

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# *Finances for* **FREELANCERS**

**W**hen I started my freelance public relations and writing practice in 2003, the thing I was the most nervous about managing wasn't the clients or the workload. It was the finances. The idea of handling the invoices, quarterly tax filings, and more terrified me. I met with an accountant at the Small Business Development Center to learn how to set myself up for financial success, and still follow some of the advice he gave me.

The big challenges most writers face are maintaining separate personal and business accounts, retaining receipts and records so taxes can be filed annually, setting aside funds for quarterly tax payments, and keeping budgets and income goals on track.



AMI NEIBERGER-MILLER

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*Freelance Writer*

Ami Neiberger-Miller is an ASJA member and the founder of Steppingstone LLC. She has worked as a PR professional on stories about Gold Star families, missing and exploited children, addiction, and domestic violence.





*“IT’S CRUCIAL THAT FREELANCERS  
WHO WANT TO TREAT THEIR  
WRITING LIKE A BUSINESS PROPERLY  
RECORD THEIR FINANCES.”*

**JENNY SPAUDO**

No  
>>>  
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# 1

## *Find your system*

“Carefully managing finances is essential for freelancers,” says writer Jenny Spauldo of Orlando, Florida, who uses Wave’s free accounting software. “It’s crucial that freelancers who want to treat their writing like a business properly record their finances, use a separate business bank account, and keep receipts. Otherwise, you risk inaccurately reporting your profit, not saving as much as you could on taxes, or even spending hundreds or thousands of dollars on a bookkeeper to clean up your messy financial records.”

The stakes can be high. Writer Elizabeth Hanes has spent nearly three decades as a health reporter and content writer pulling in a six-figure salary. “I’ve witnessed even veteran writers going through an emotional crisis when they discovered they had spent their tax set-aside and, thus, could not make their quarterly estimated payment to the IRS,” the Albuquerque, New Mexico, resident says. “So, peace of mind tops my list of reasons why writers should keep their financial lives in order.”

Understanding accounting and budgeting principles helps writers thrive, not just survive. “Keeping your financial life organized is the key to building wealth as a writer,” Hanes says. “Analyzing your financial data allows you to understand your effective hourly rate, see which clients pay the best or worst, figure out what you really need to be earning to meet your financial goals, and so on.”



*UNDERSTANDING  
ACCOUNTING AND  
BUDGETING PRINCIPLES  
HELPS WRITERS THRIVE,  
NOT JUST SURVIVE.*



## No. 2

### *Personalize it*

Systems can help, but every writer must figure out what works best for their business. For some, accounting software is a key tool. I struggled for years with different systems and finally struck gold when I found QuickBooks Self-Employed. All transactions for business and personal bank accounts and credit cards flow into the system and are categorized for tax purposes. I see current balances for all accounts in one place. I also use an Excel sheet to track invoices and payments.

A spreadsheet is all some freelancers need. Writer Katy Koontz of Knoxville, Tennessee, uses a simple spreadsheet she designed. It is “less complicated than trying to understand a program that offers a ton of options.”

Writer Marijke Vroomen Durning, a health writer in Montreal, initially struggled with managing the financial side of her business. “I spent a lot of time tracking down invoices: Did I make one? Did I send one? Was it paid? There were times when an invoice slipped between the cracks, and then I had to figure things out later.”

She turned to FreshBooks’ accounting software for support. “Tax time pre-FreshBooks was a nightmare,” Durning says. She notes that tax time is still not pleasant but is grateful that her records are correct and in one place.

Accounting software can help you stay on track, but it works only if you use it. Melanie Padgett Powers of Washington, D.C., also uses FreshBooks for invoicing and expense tracking but admits she didn’t consistently track expenses.

“I hate inputting expenses the most,” Padgett Powers says. “So, I just started paying for Bench, which is a bookkeeping service that I set up through FreshBooks. It’s pricey but should be worth [it if it helps] me catch up on expenses this year and then preparing all my papers for my taxes.”

## No. 3

### *Track spending*

Hanes has found success with the “You Need a Budget” (YNAB) system, which she uses with QuickBooks. This household budgeting system uses an “envelope budgeting” style of money management: Users assign income to expense “envelopes” with categories such as mortgage, utilities, and groceries.

“With this system, you can always see how much money you have left to spend in any particular budget category for the month,” Hanes says. “This is different from a traditional system like QuickBooks, in which you assign expenses to the appropriate budget line and then watch the total expenditure rise.”



*HANES HAS FOUND SUCCESS WITH THE “YOU NEED A BUDGET” (YNAB) SYSTEM, WHICH SHE USES WITH QUICKBOOKS.*

No  
>>> **4**



### *Track your profits*

What if you focused instead on paying yourself first and then covered expenses? “I know several other freelancers who’ve found the Profit First model to be a game-changer,” said freelancer Becky Lawlor of Salt Lake City.

The traditional profit formula deducts expenses from income, leaving the remainder as profit. The Profit First formula flips the script by categorizing a percentage of each payment as profit.

For example, a suggested Profit First allocation for someone making less than \$250,000 annually might be 5% of monthly income for profit, 50% for pay, 15% for taxes, and 30% for operating expenses. Freelancers using Profit First might set up checking accounts for income, compensation, and operating expenses and savings accounts for profits and taxes.

Freelancer Leanna Lee of the Chicago area uses her own version of the Profit First system to earmark income. Like me, she uses QuickBooks Self-Employed to track expenses and uses a spreadsheet she created to track income goals, payments, and invoicing. “I have separate bank accounts for taxes, operating expenses, payments, owner’s compensation, buffers, savings, etc. Every month, I divide up any payments into my Profit First percentages and send them to their designated accounts.”



*THE PROFIT FIRST FORMULA  
FLIPS THE SCRIPT BY  
CATEGORIZING A PERCENTAGE  
OF EACH PAYMENT AS PROFIT.*



*“IT’S NOT JUST THE TIME SAVINGS, IT’S FREEING UP THE MENTAL ENERGY THAT IT WOULD TAKE FOR ME TO KEEP MY BOOKKEEPING UP TO DATE.”*

SUSAN WEINER

No  
>>>  
5

### *Get help if you need it*

Others turn to professionals for help. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Susan Weiner used a bookkeeper who came to her home office. “It’s not just the time savings, it’s freeing up the mental energy that it would take for me to keep my bookkeeping up to date,” says Weiner, a Boston-area resident.

She prepared a three-ring binder with copies of invoices; statements from her bank, credit cards, PayPal, and book sales; and a monthly checklist. Weiner’s husband, who had previously worked as an accountant, took over her bookkeeping during the pandemic.

Whatever system you use to keep your financial life organized, everyone I interviewed emphasized that it is important to stick with it. A good financial management system can do more than just pay the bills—it can help you thrive as a writer.



## RESOURCES FOR FREELANCERS

▶ **Waveapps.com** Free software & business management tools for small businesses & entrepreneurs..

▶ **Profit First: Transform Your Business from a Cash-Eating Monster to a Money-Making Machine** is a book written by Mike Michalowicz that discusses the Profit First formula and approach.

▶ **Quickbooks Self-Employed** provides tools to track expenses, income and invoicing. <https://quickbooks.intuit.com/self-employed>

▶ **Freshbooks** is a web-based accounting system that can be accessed through desktop and mobile devices. It tracks invoicing, expenses, and payment as well as offers time tracking and project management features.

▶ **YNAB** or “You Need a Budget” is a budgeting program based on the envelope method. It is available for desktop and mobile devices as well as Apple Watch and Alexa. [www.youneedabudget.com](http://www.youneedabudget.com)

# GENRE FLUIDITY

*How Losing Old Labels  
Can Lead to Success*





**M**any writers aspire to be a novelist or a poet. Yet if you hit roadblocks selling your first project, staying wed to an external label can lead to rejection. I've learned it's better to be open-minded and published.

Stressing over voice, tense, and narrative structure, few aspiring authors realize that their most important decision is classification: figuring out your audience, division, and the bookstore section where your book will live. It's not as simple as you think. Many of my writing students were heartbroken when their first attempt to sell an adult literary novel didn't happen. Yet by switching to middle grade, young adult, or genre fiction (like romance, crime, fantasy, western, inspirational, mystery, horror, or sci-fi), they had a hit that led to bestsellers, series, and ongoing careers.

For a rough draft, follow your original vision. But if that doesn't work, don't give up. Consider taking a class, finding a mentor, or hiring a ghost editor with expertise in book publishing to give you honest feedback and a different direction. I'm stubborn, but I found career triumphs in malleability, revising my initial plan, and resuscitating stalled projects into better forms where they thrived.



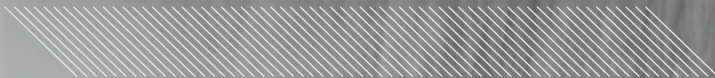
SUSAN SHAPIRO

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*Freelance Writer*

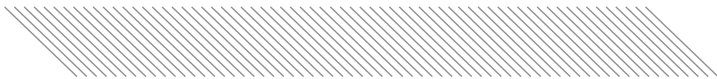


Few aspiring authors realize that their most important decision is classification: figuring out your audience, division, and the bookstore section where your book will live.





I switched my first-person humorous fiction to first-person humorous nonfiction... Being flexible saved many future projects.”



#### SHIFTING GEARS

For example, my autobiographical comic novel, *Overexposed*, is about two women switching lives, based on a Manhattan friend who married my Michigan brother. Editors said it was funny but didn't buy it. After six years of rejections, I asked a colleague to read it and tell me the truth.

“You have no imagination whatsoever,” she said. “Stop writing fiction. Sisters-in-law are boring. Write about sex. And you write best about people you love.”

Walking home crying, I swore at her under my breath. Frustrated, I vented to my writing workshop colleagues and my therapist, who said, “If what you've been doing hasn't worked in six years, try something else.”

I switched my first-person humorous fiction to first-person humorous nonfiction and launched my memoir *Five Men Who Broke My Heart*. It sold to my dream editor at Random House, leading to seven foreign editions and a TV/film option.

Being flexible saved many future projects too. I was sure my memoir *Secrets of a Fix-Up Fanatic*, about setting up 30 marriages and being matched with my husband, was brilliant. My ghost editor disagreed: “Reading about someone setting up couples is a snooze-fest. I'd rather learn how to meet someone myself.”

I added wisdom, interviews, quotes by experts, specific how-to advice, and the subtitle “How to Meet & Marry Your Match,” and my Random House editor bought that book, too.

I next tried a memoir called *Lies My Mentors Told Me*. My agent said, “It's not commercial.”

“Why not?”

“Because it's seven profiles of old people, three of them dead.”

Luckily, a smart Seal Press editor offered a new vision. I renamed it *Only as Good as Your Word: Writing Lessons from My Favorite Literary Gurus* and wrote a new intro and two-page coda on how to get your own mentors, adding takeaways to make it more of a writing guide. I was disappointed a smaller press offered a smaller advance. Yet a magazine editor who loved the book offered me a \$1,000 monthly column, which I did for five years, ultimately netting more than the larger advance.

Another memoir, *Unhooked*, co-authored with my addiction specialist, didn't sell. I hired another experienced ghost editor (also called a book doctor or developmental editor). For \$500, she gave me advice that changed my project: “Make it prescriptive. I want to know how to get over my addictions.”

I added a new introduction, question/answer sections, more of the methods the doctor shared with his patients and changed the subtitle to *Unhooked: How to Quit Anything*. The self-help version sold to Skyhorse Publishing who did a stellar job, making it an audiobook with foreign editions in Korea, Mexico, and China. It landed on *The New York Times* bestseller list and brought in royalties that more than covered the ghost editor.







Yes, we'd all like to write the great American novel or a brilliant collection of poetry. ... Asking for tough criticism and then compromising on genre can lead to luck and a lucrative career.



When I tried another memoir, *Speed Shrinking*, about how I became a food addict when my shrink left town, an editor said, "There are already food addiction memoirs published where the author gains or loses 100 pounds. You only gained 12. It's not dramatic. But it's funny. Make it into a comic novel."

After reading tons of humorous novels, I made the story crazier. The fictionalized *Speed Shrinking* sold to St. Martin's in a two-book deal, along with *Overexposed*.

#### URNS OUT THIS IS A THING!

**M**any authors I knew transformed a washout into a winner as well. After her beautiful *Modern Love* essay about recovering from sexual abuse and learning how to have a satisfying marriage, my former student Laura Zam hoped to sell her memoir *My Pleasure Plan*. Having no luck, she revised her pages, offering advice to other women. She found a publisher for *The Pleasure Plan: One Woman's Search for Sexual Healing* by morphing from memoirist to self-help guru, and helped more people in the process.

Similarly, my colleague Amy Klein tried selling a memoir about the infertility issues she'd poignantly chronicled in *The New York Times*, to no avail. Then an agent suggested how-to.

"I noticed I was always answering questions on how to survive infertility," Klein told me. "No one who is infertile wants to hear your story—they need help. I wrote a new proposal in two weeks, adding interviews with other women and couples, therapists, doctors, and scientists." It sold for six figures in auction to Ballantine as *The Trying Game: Get Through Fertility Treatment and Get Pregnant Without Losing Your Mind*.

My colleague Jim Jennewein couldn't sell his co-authored screenplay. Then he and his writing partner reimagined it as the middle grade fantasy series *The Rune Warriors Trilogy*, which sold to HarperCollins for six figures.

Sometimes changing genres requires only updating the title, subtitle, and sequence. Two colleagues started with humorous essay collections. They put the pieces in chronological order and brought back recurring characters in *Hypocrite in a Pouffy White Dress: Tales of Growing Up Groovy and Clueless* by Susan

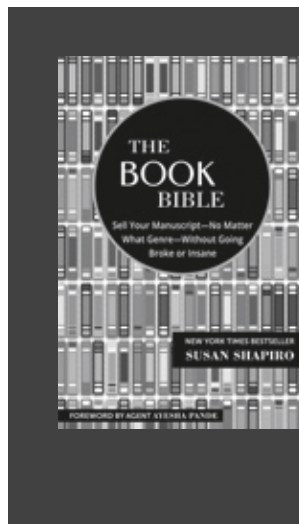


Jane Gilman (*Grand Central*) and *The Reluctant Metrosexual: Dispatches from an Almost Hip Life* by Peter Hyman (Villard), making them read like page-turning memoirs.

My former student Maria E. Andreu sold powerful essays about being an undocumented immigrant that led to her YA fiction books *The Secret Side of Empty* (Running Press) and *Love in English* (HarperCollins.) Alyson Gerber published a poignant piece revealing she had scoliosis as a teen. She turned her real-life story into the award-winning middle-grade novel *Braced* (Scholastic).

Jeff Henigson was told his pages on surviving cancer as a child were his best work. By focusing on the teenage protagonist, his adult book became the YA memoir *Warhead: The True Story of One Teen Who Almost Saved the World* (Delacorte Press).

Yes, we'd all like to write the great American novel or a brilliant collection of poetry. But decades of struggle and therapy taught me that asking for tough criticism and then compromising on genre can lead to luck and a lucrative career. And what a joy and privilege it is to be a published author at all.



ASJA member Susan Shapiro is the bestselling author of many books her family hates, including the memoirs *Five Men Who Broke My Heart* and *The Forgiveness Tour*, the novels *What's Never Said* and co-authored middle grade *World In Between* and the writing guide *Byline Bible*. This is from her 2022 sequel, *The Book Bible: How to Sell Your Manuscript – No Matter What Genre – Without Going Broke or Insane*, based on 25 years of teaching writing and publishing at NYU, The New School, Columbia University, and private classes and seminars, now online. You can follow her on Twitter at [@susanshapiro](https://twitter.com/susanshapiro) and Instagram at [@profsue123](https://www.instagram.com/profsue123).

# R&R *for* WRIT



JoBETH  
McDANIEL

*Freelance Writer*

## *Residencies and Retreats Near and Far*

»» Author and journalist JoBeth McDaniel lives in Southern California and chairs ASJA's First Amendment Committee.

If this never-ending pandemic has you hankering for a serene spot, far from the distractions of home, consider this: Thousands of artist residencies are actively seeking writers, hoping to grant our wishes for a quiet place to write. At the high end are the prestigious residencies offering luxury accommodations and chef-prepared meals, sometimes with generous stipends for travel costs and more. More common—and easier for most writers to access—are writing retreats offering low-cost or free lodging.

ERS



# YEARS AGO,

I tagged along with ASJA member Barbara DeMarco Barrett on my first official writing retreat, Dorland Mountain Arts Colony in the high desert near Temecula, California. My clean, cute one-bedroom cottage included a front porch with a stunning view, plus a wood-burning fireplace, full kitchen, and a grand piano. We worked in solitude during the day, meeting in the evening for readings, potluck dinners, or informal yoga with fellow residents.

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After multiple stays at Dorland, I applied for and won a two-week stay as a writer in residence at Write On, Door County, located in one of Wisconsin's loveliest vacation regions. When I arrived, a doe strolled across the lawn, munching her way to a nearby birch forest. I shared a spacious three-bedroom house with two Chicago writers, including Sandra Jackson-Opoku, a veteran of 15 writing residencies and retreats. Her favorites: Crosstown Arts in downtown Memphis; a high-rise on Shanghai's famous Bund; a luxury room set aside for writers at the Betsy Hotel in Miami Beach; and Dentro La Terra, where she stayed solo for three weeks in a villa in Italy's Abruzzo region. She's currently looking at a residency sponsored by the National Park system and told me about another one that takes place on long-distance Amtrak trains.

"Before I did a residency, I had a silly idea that this was some bourgeois affectation," Jackson-Opoku says. "I wasn't into 'going to the woods to write.' I thought artists should be able to work at home." She was pleasantly surprised at her first residency, six weeks at Ragdale, set on 50 acres of Illinois prairie. "I was able to get more work done than I'd been able to do in two years before. The residency allowed me to finish my novel and get it published."

Two of Jackson-Opoku's residencies lasted three months. A few allowed her to bring her then-young children or her partner—though her productivity tended to suffer when others were nearby. After a few surprises, she grew more discerning. Jackson-Opoku now reads reviews and emails or calls if she has any questions about facilities. Writers with mobility issues, she says, may not be a good fit with residencies set in historic buildings with lots of steps. Places in remote locations might require the added expense of renting a car, or in wintertime, a treacherous drive on mountain roads. Residencies welcoming dozens of artists at the same time may require more social interactions—a fun way to make connections, but less conducive to work than a solo stay. That said, Jackson-Opoku spoke highly of a Martha's Vineyard group residency, where she and others collaborated on a play later produced in a Chicago theater.



*"I was able to get more work done than I'd been able to do in two years before. The residency allowed me to finish my novel and get it published."*

SANDRA JACKSON-OPOKU

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## Enhancing your writing

**T**he best residency may be the one that dovetails with the subject of your work. When novelist Janet Fitch got the idea for a book set during the Russian Revolution, she applied to Likhachev Fellowship in St. Petersburg, which paid for translators, lodging, and meals for two weeks. Staffers connected her with experts and institutions with the hard-to-find information she needed for her two historically accurate novels, both now published. Fitch also enjoyed the camaraderie of nightly dinners with the other fellows, an international group of artists all working on projects related to Russia.

“It was stimulating to meet all these interesting people and hear the cross-pollination of ideas shared,” she says. “The entire experience was invaluable.”

But when Fitch needed to buckle down and write, she chose the Helen Riaboff Whiteley Center on San Juan Island, Washington. “It was the dead of winter outside, and only one other writer was staying there,” she says. “That was exactly what I needed at that time.”

## Admission tips

**W**hat Fitch doesn't like about the process: complicated admission requirements akin to a university application, with essays, reference letters, and long waits. Jackson-Opoku agrees: Despite all her awards and publications, she usually applies to five or more places to get a space in one or two residencies per year.

“Rejection means nothing,” Jackson-Opoku says. “It's all a numbers game. You can't take it personally. I'll apply to my dream residency, but add some backups, too.”

The pandemic added fresh challenges: Several residencies closed or reduced admissions. Others are busier than ever, juggling residents who deferred or were bumped because of travel restrictions. Prestigious residencies, such as the American Academy in Rome or MacDowell in New Hampshire, sort through thousands of applications to fill a handful of spots, with acceptance rates nearly as low as Harvard.

If this all sounds discouraging, consider applying to places where writers pay something to defray costs. These tend to draw fewer applicants than those providing meals and stipends to all. Nearly all residencies can offer some financial help to writers in need, along with a free or discounted application fee. For example, 11 days at Ragdale in Illinois costs \$385, or \$875



*The best residency may be the one that dovetails with the subject of your work.*





(L to R) JoBeth McDaniel, Tina Jenkins Bell, and Sandra Jackson-Opoku exploring Lake Michigan shipwrecks during their Write On, Door County Wisconsin residency.



*“It’s important to know that the writer has a specific project in mind and is realistic about what can be accomplished.”*

JEROD SANTEK







*Summer months are popular with academics, so if you can go in other seasons, you're more likely to win a spot.*

for a 25-day residency, including meals, with fees waived for those awarded a fellowship. The Hambidge Center, a rustic residency in North Georgia, charges \$250 per week, including most meals, though they can waive fees and offer a \$700 stipend to eligible writers.

Summer months are popular with academics, so if you can go in other seasons, you're more likely to win a spot. Another way to increase your odds: Carefully study the guidelines. A residency may only have one space for a non-fiction writer. Others give preference to emerging writers, those in mid-career, or artists working on projects aligned with the residency's location or mission.

Write on, Door County artistic director Jerod Santek says the applications that stand out are those showing a clear purpose. "It's important to know that the writer has a specific project in mind and is realistic about what can be accomplished," he says. "Red flags for us are statements such as 'I plan to write whatever the muse inspires,' which indicates a lack of focus."

### Keep trying

**A**t many residencies, including Write On, residents commit to a community project during their stay. At the start of my residency, I taught an essay class via Zoom, leaving the rest of my time free to dig deep into the nonfiction book I was writing. My experience left me yearning for a longer residency of a month or more—especially after I heard good news from Jackson-Opoku: She won a spot at MacDowell, her dream residency, for 2022. Jackson-Opoku nearly gave up many times, after six or eight rejection letters during the past 20 years. I asked her what was different this time around. "My writing has improved over that time, but I've also just gotten better at applying," she says.

She'll be working on a novel, but there's more good news from MacDowell: They're offering more spaces for long-form journalism, a category open to me and most ASJA members. Applications begin January 15, 2022—and yes, I'll be sending one in.

### R&R RESOURCES FOR WRITERS

▶ Sign up for a free newsletter, and get tips for applicants at **Artists Communities Alliance** (ACA – formerly the Alliance of Artists Communities) at [artistcommunities.org](http://artistcommunities.org), which includes a searchable directory of residencies worldwide.

▶ **DutchCulture** lists artist-in-residence opportunities worldwide, with more than 1,400 listed on its website, [transartists.org](http://transartists.org).

▶ **Rivet.es** offers reviews and a residency database (formerly known as RateMyArtistResidency.com).

▶ **CreativeCapital.org** publishes a monthly listing of upcoming deadlines.

▶ **ResArtis.org** lists mostly international residencies, including 38 in Italy, along with the latest "open calls" for applications.



# Adding Essays to Your Writing Repertoire

MAKING THE PERSONAL UNIVERSAL

**S**ince I started freelancing fulltime more than 25 years ago, I've penned nonfiction books, novels, book proposals, speeches, blog posts, and articles. But essays represent some of my favorite work. They may not pay as much as articles, but I enjoy the essay-writing process – and I still get a thrill when I sell one.

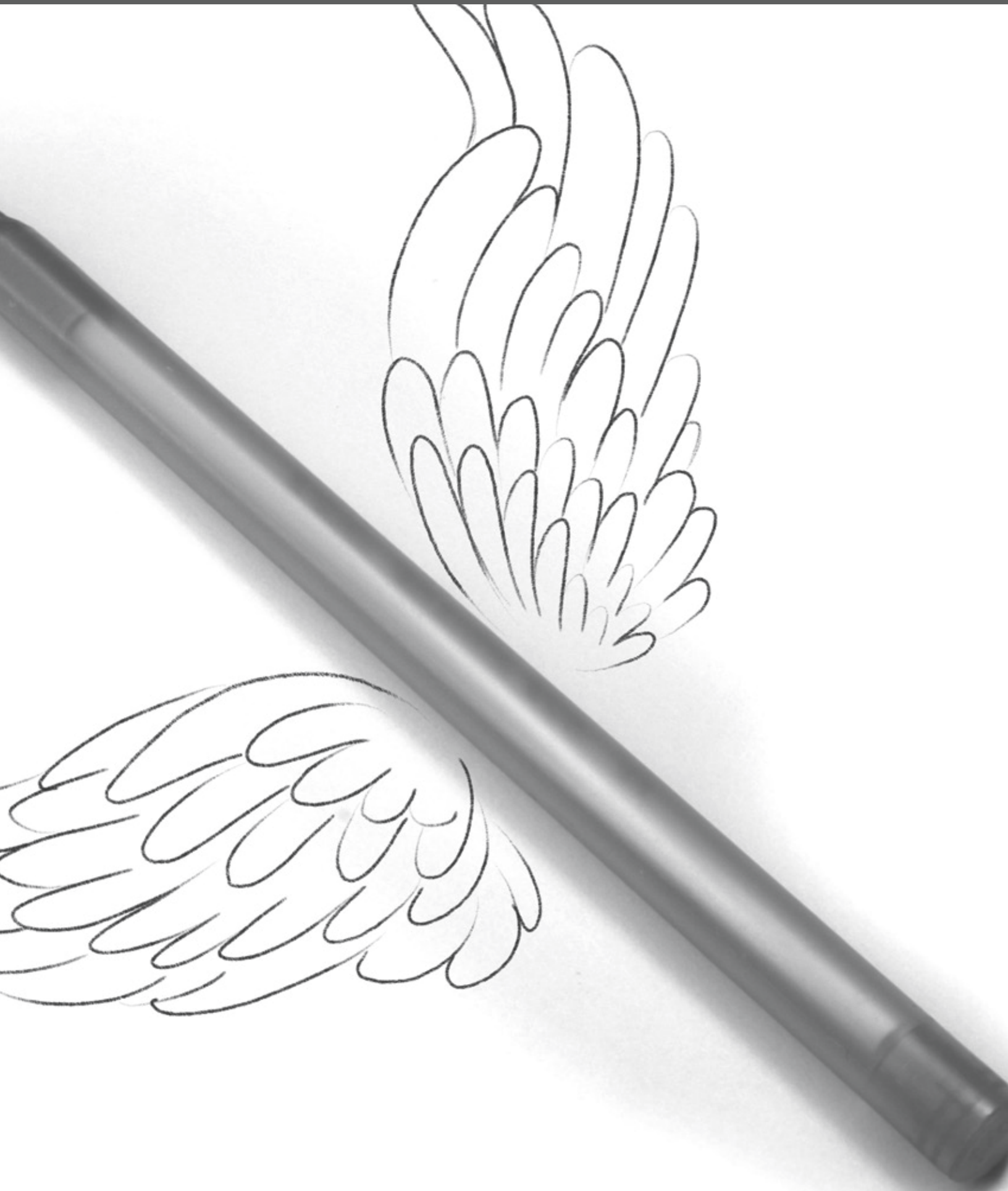
Better still, composing essays can improve your overall writing, help you build a platform, and let you write about a subject that matters to you. Here's a closer look at how two successful essayists approach them, and why you should consider adding essays to your freelance repertoire.



KELLY K. JAMES

*Freelance Writer*

Kelly K. James is a longtime freelancer and ASJA member who writes about health, fitness and nutrition from her home in Downers Grove, Illinois.





“For me, essay writing is really therapy. I’m not able to process things in my life unless I write about them. ... It’s personally gratifying ... and it’s a way to make sense of my experience and help other people make sense of it.”

**AMY PATUREL**

#### **THERAPY ON THE PAGE**

“For me, essay writing is really therapy. I’m not able to process things in my life unless I write about them,” says Amy Paturel, a writer in southern California who has published essays in *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *O*, and *Real Simple*. [Paturel also teaches online essay-writing classes; [www.amypaturel.com/classes](http://www.amypaturel.com/classes).] “If I’m going to do that anyway, I might as well put it into a narrative that will help someone else. It’s personally gratifying ... and it’s a way to make sense of my experience and help other people make sense of it.”

Cincinnati-based freelancer Judi Ketteler echoes similar sentiments. “I have so many ideas swirling around in my head all the time, and essays are the way to figure out how I feel about something,” says Ketteler, who’s published essays in *The New York Times*, *NBCNews’ Think*, *The Washington Post*, and *Good Housekeeping*. “An essay is a more sophisticated exploration of something I want to learn more about on a personal level.”

While essays may start with the personal, a compelling one has some kind of universal take-away – a message that readers can relate to. The

underlying goal of an essay is almost always to connect with the reader on an emotional level.

#### **SELLING ESSAYS HAS CHANGED**

In the past, most essays were sold “on spec.” You’d write an essay and then look for an appropriate market for it, sending in the entire piece. Today, however, many editors prefer that writers pitch essays instead of submitting them, says Paturel.

Like Paturel, Ketteler usually pitches ideas to editors instead of submitting a completed piece. “I used to write the essay first and then look for a market,” she says. “Today, I am probably not going to write an essay unless it’s assigned.” Because she knows the topic and angle her editor wants, she doesn’t waste time writing a piece she can’t sell.

While essays are often thought of as personal pieces, more editors, particularly those at major markets, are more interested in reported essays, where the piece includes not only the writer’s experience but quotes from experts or other sources and other background information. (For example, in an essay I wrote on pandemic burnout for Chicago

Health, I included stats on the number of people struggling with pandemic-triggered anxiety and depression.) “Fewer markets are running fewer straight essays,” says Paturel. “People want to learn something and you learn more from a reported piece.”

### SCOUTING FOR MARKETS

Pitching an essay, and including reporting, can up your chances of selling it, and there are plenty of markets out there that take essays. They range from major publications like *The New York Times* (how many of us dream of selling to “Modern Love”?) and The Washington Post to smaller ones. Even niche publications run essays relating to their topic areas. (For example, I’ve sold an essay on what I’ve passed on to my son, who was adopted, to *Adoptive Families* and an essay on the challenges of writing a “dear birth mom” letter for *The Writer*.)

Most publications have at least one essay slot; read, research, and review publication guidelines like you would with any market to determine suggested word count and how the editor prefers to be pitched (by submitting the piece or sending a query). Even if you submit the completed essay, include a brief cover letter introducing it.

### SHOW ME THE MONEY

The good news? There are plenty of markets out there. The not-so-good? The pay isn’t always that great, especially compared to a decade ago. “I used to write essays for *Good Housekeeping* for \$1200 and make \$1-\$2/word, and now I might get \$250 or \$300 for an online essay that they also run in print,” says Paturel.

Note though that you’ll likely to be paid more for reported pieces. “You might place a personal narrative essay for \$250 but if it has a reported element, it may pay \$350,” says Paturel. “It’s to your advantage to add the reporting aspect to it.”

The average rate for essays ranges in the \$100-125 to \$300 range. In the past year, I’ve been paid \$125 by *Next Tribe* for an essay on my former husband’s death; \$500 for a piece for *The Girlfriend* on pandemic drinking; and \$200 for a piece on breaking up with my boss for *Next Avenue*.

“I’ve been paid \$500 for *Cincinnati Magazine*, but NBCNews’ *Think* only pays \$350,” says Ketteler. “I’ve been paid \$1/word, up to \$2,500 for a lengthy, reported piece for *The New York Times*, but I’m not doing it for the money ... I wouldn’t do them for free, but I don’t expect for it to be a huge part of my income.”



### FINDING THE TIME

Essays take time, and that’s often in short supply for freelancers. Paturel transcribes her journal for story ideas in the quiet of the early morning. Ketteler writes essays early in the morning, or at the end of her workday. Both agree it’s time well spent.

Ketteler finds that essay writing makes her web writing stronger and vice-versa. “Writing essays helps get to the heart of what you need to say, whether that’s cutting extraneous words or using too many adjectives,” she says. “It’s made me more aware of the principles of good writing.”

“The beautiful thing about essays is they allow more creativity,” adds Paturel. “You get to do scene building and character building and explore story in a way you don’t in service writing.”

For them, and for me, there’s a reward in not only publishing an essay, but in writing it as well. Make the time to start exploring essay writing, and you may discover the same is true for you.

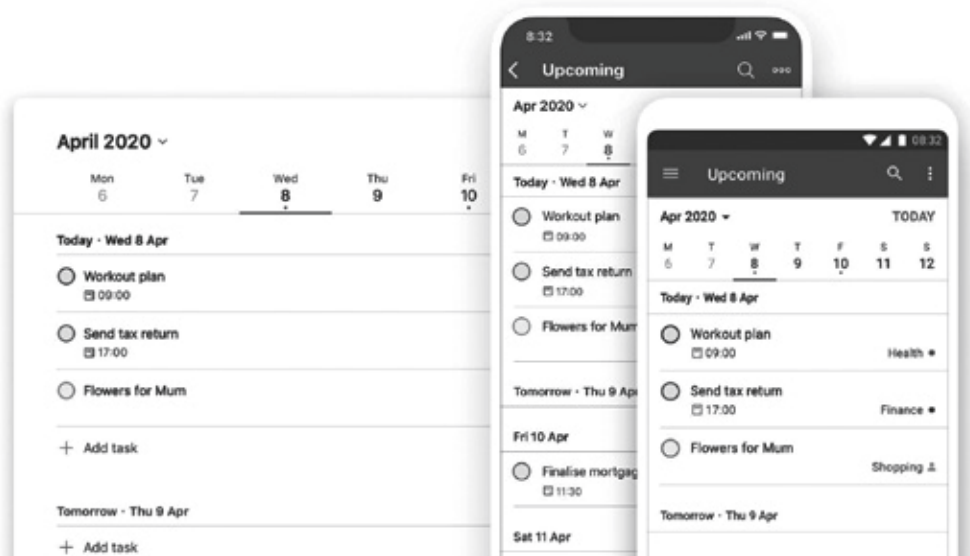
## Tools of the Trade



Like most freelancers, I'm constantly juggling multiple projects and always a little bit worried that something is going to slip through the cracks. I'd looked into various organization and time-tracking tools but all seemed to require a greater time commitment to learn how to use them effectively than the time I might save in my day.

Then I came across ToDoIst.

It's an easy-to-use tool that links to your calendar and helps you keep track of deadlines, tasks, and reminders of various types. It's accessible through an icon on my browser, so I can quickly add or edit a task – or include things directly from my calendar.



LIN GENSING-POPHAL

*Freelance Writer*

Lin Gensing-Pophal is a long-time member of ASJA and has been writing professionally since 1981. She generally writes business-related content for traditional media sources and digital channels, and does content marketing work with corporate clients and through agencies. In her "day job" she manages Strategic Communications, LLC, a marketing communication consulting firm she started in 2008 after working a number of years in corporate communications/marketing in the education, energy and healthcare industries.

You can set up categories that are color-coded to keep similar tasks together. For instance, I have categories for “Article,” “Teaching,” “Research,” “Lead Gen,” “Personal,” “Assigned to Interns,” etc.

My favorite feature is reminders. When you set up a task you can set reminders to be sent on specific dates or at specific times – e.g., every Friday. So, for instance, I’ve found that Wednesdays are a good day for me to work on social media-related tasks. I’m a bit burned out after two days of almost solid writing, so it’s a nice mid-week diversion. I set a reminder that I receive every Wednesday morning that it’s time to work on specific email accounts.

I’ve also set reminders to alert me to specific invoicing preferences of various clients. Most of my invoices are either sent along with the project or, for monthly retainer clients, at the beginning of the month. Some clients, though, have other specific requests – e.g., one of my clients wants to be invoiced every other Wednesday. I’d never be able to remember that, so I just add a task and receive an email reminder.

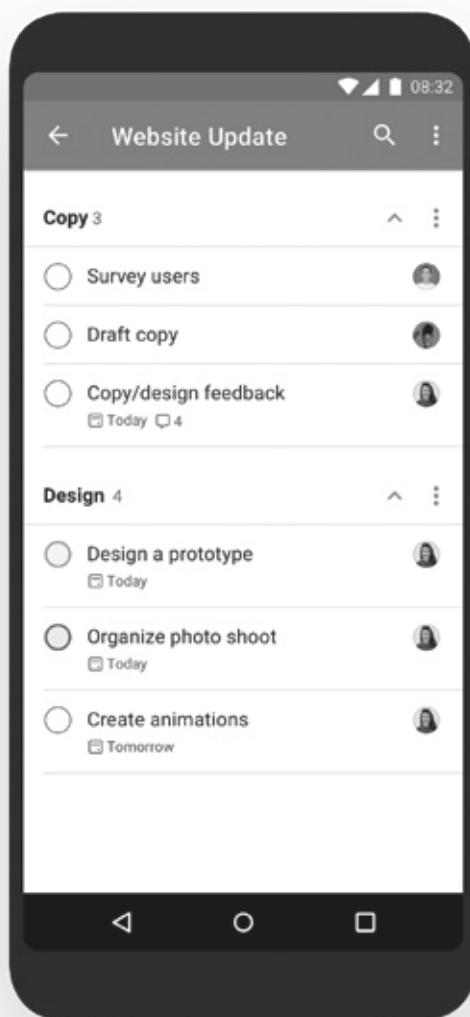
I use it for personal tasks, too. I have a reminder I receive every day at noon to take my vitamins. It may seem silly, but I know I’d forget if I didn’t have that reminder!

Every morning I probably receive 20-30 email reminders – I quickly browse through and delete those I won’t work on that day.

There’s also a useful help function and a blog with tips on improving productivity and gaining efficiencies in whatever type of work you do—or even your personal life.

Best of all, the price is right. I used the free version for a while, which served my needs quite well, and then updated to the Pro version, which is \$3/month if billed annually; \$4/month if billed monthly. A business account for teams is also available for \$5/month annually; \$6/month monthly. Definitely worth the money!

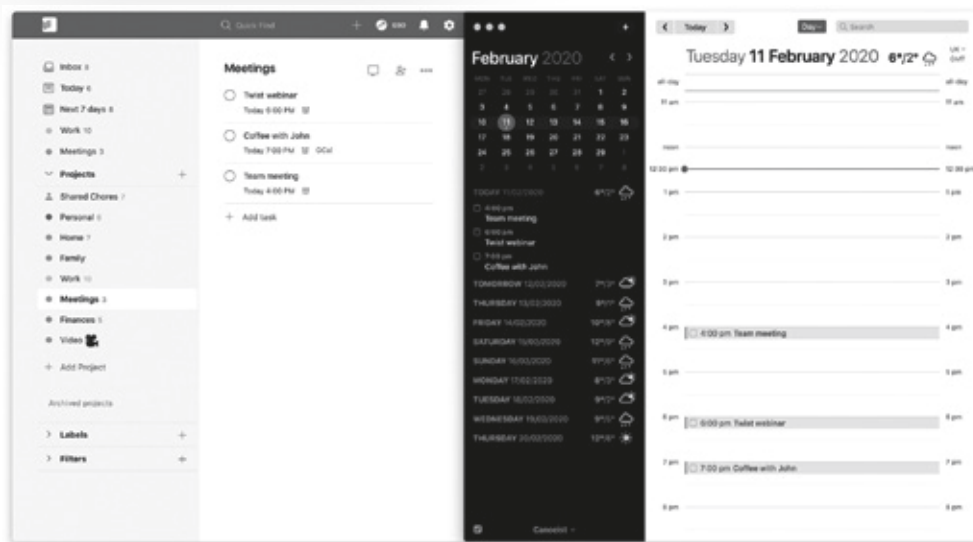
I’d highly recommend this tool as an intuitive, easy-to-use way to stay on top of deadlines and deliverables with minimum effort.



### ADVANCED FEATURES

There are a number of more advanced features, as well, that I haven’t taken the time to look into yet, but that could be useful for others. For instance, you can:

- Set up subtasks associated with a to-do.
- Delegate tasks to others.
- Use boards, which are a visual, Kanban-style feature.
- Integrate with other apps like Alexa, Dropbox, and many more.
- Run reports on past tasks to review progress.





# Darcy Lewis

WRITING SPECIALTY/FOCUS:  
*Health, medicine, and health policy*



**Editor's Note:** ASJA is in the process of updating its website. As you can imagine, this is no small task, and the project is being driven by volunteers. In this issue, we want to acknowledge and honor the hard work and dedication of Darcy Lewis and Jane Langille, who are heading up the overhaul. When the new site is unveiled, be sure to thank them!

► **Tell us about the work that went into creating the new ASJA website:**

By the time I came on, our UI (user interface) architect/web developer, Toronto-based Think33, had already put in dozens of discovery hours with ASJA leaders and written a roadmap. After staffing the website committee and planning assigned roles, we launched our first major project: overseeing the design, approval, and launch of a new logo (special shout-out to Jane Langille—I knew her brand management background and my advertising account management background would make us an unbeatable strategic team). The committee also refined the sitemap, approved wireframes, and advised the board on the critical matter of selecting the association management software (AMS) that keeps ASJA running.

As we moved into overseeing graphic design, the next step was to help Think33 take our approved homepage look-feel to a fully designed homepage with art and copy in place for board approval. With that approval secured, we continued to review and approve page designs for the WordPress part of the site. Dara Chadwick agreed to take on the lead copy role. Separately, I was also tasked with planning and staffing a content curation taskforce to determine which ASJA resources should make the trip to the new site. Meanwhile, we also had to work with committee chairs to update their copy from the old site.

Most recently, in addition to being Think33's primary ASJA contact, I have also helped facilitate communication between them and our other tech partner, Kellen IS. As Think33

moved from designing the site to building it out in WordPress, Kellen IS simultaneously built and populated the AMS. After each completed their respective portions, they then had to connect the WordPress site with its AMS backend to function as a single, unified website. And then we had to troubleshoot, edit, refine, and repeat. Whew!

► **Why did you decide to get involved with the project?**

The truth is that I like a challenge, and I knew I could successfully lead this project, as huge as it's been. I knew it would be a challenging mix of strategy and execution that would push my limits, even as I increased my skills. I've written a lot of website copy, but leading this process has been all about going deeper into the nuts and bolts for me. I have already reaped the benefits: I used the newly approved ASJA homepage as a sample to help me win a new website project for a billion-dollar medical company.

► **What is your writing specialty/focus?**

For the past 15 years, I have been pretty much all health and medicine, all the time.

My passion is writing about clinical medicine to help physicians deepen their knowledge while staying current and to help patients make better health-related decisions. I also write about health policy, the business of healthcare, and B2B in the pharma/devices space. I used to write a lot about general B2B, higher ed, architecture and home design, but I no longer seek out those types of clients. Sometimes they still find me, though!

► **In which publications/outlets have you been published?**

AARP, Healthgrades.com, Everyday Health.com, U.S. News & World Reports' Best Colleges, Writer's Digest and the late, lamented History Channel Magazine and HGTV Ideas. My content clients include Scientific American Custom Media, University of Chicago Medicine, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, UVA Cancer Center, Bayer in Radiology, McKesson, and many more.

► **Please share a proud writing moment:**

The more times I judged the ASJA Annual Awards and read stacks of impeccably



*"I knew I could successfully lead this project, as huge as it's been. I knew it would be a challenging mix of strategy and execution that would push my limits, even as I increased my skills."*

DARCY LEWIS





# ASJA >>>> Membership Benefits

Did you remember that ASJA provides membership benefits that go beyond this magazine, the annual conference and Client Connections, Pitch Slams and Special Interest Group (SIG) events?

» Some benefits you may not have taken advantage of lately include: «



## Delta Airlines

Special discounted airfare for ASJA members traveling across the world, up to 10% of the fare.



## Avis Car Rental

A corporate discount program for ASJA members to enjoy low rates.

researched and written prose, the less I thought I would win myself. I won an ASJA award in 2020, the first time I submitted my own writing. I was delighted when I had heard from that editor that my winning article had already helped many of their oncologist readers update their approach to managing patients' pain during the opioid epidemic.

### ► *How long have you been an ASJA member?*

Between 5 and 10 years. I never got around to applying to ASJA until fairly recently. At first I was too intimidated, and then I was too busy.

### ► *How long have you volunteered for ASJA?*

I usually volunteer to help judge the ASJA Annual Awards, but chairing the website committee is my first ASJA leadership role.

### ► *Why do you volunteer for ASJA?*

I am very motivated by my connections with friends and colleagues, and volunteering is an organic way to build those relationships in a fun and meaningful way. There are also some things I think ASJA could do better, so volunteering is how I choose to put those thoughts into action.

### ► *How do you fit volunteering in with your work commitments?*

To be honest, that is very much a work in progress. Leading the website project would easily consume at least 25-30% of a staff person's time. That is a lot to squeeze in when business is booming, as it has been throughout the pandemic. When I saw a dip in my 2021 Quarter 1 billings, I knew I needed to put better boundaries in place. Throughout the final weeks leading up to the website launch, I told the developers that we should get on Zoom when they needed anything more than a quick yes or no from me. It sounds counterintuitive, but I found I could react and respond in real time and then get back to work more quickly than getting bogged down answering a morass of emails.

### ► *What do you like to do when you're not writing?*

I also play and teach violin and viola. These days, I can't take on more than seven or eight students without interfering with my writing, but I very much enjoy my secondary musical career. I also serve on the board of one of the two orchestras where my husband and I are members.



# Jane Langille

WRITING SPECIALTY/FOCUS:  
*Health, medicine, and science*



▶ **Tell us about the work that went into creating the new ASJA website:**

My contribution to the team was co-leading the development of ASJA's new logo. I drafted the creative brief, request for quote for designers, and the recommendation to the board for the designer, and then helped shepherd lead design options through final board approval. I also participated in discussions on the choice of association management software and home page design options, and created a style guide and templates for the web page writing team.

▶ **Why did you decide to get involved with the project?**

Darcy Lewis, chair of the Website Committee, invited me to join the team. We knew each other already, so I knew we would work well together, and I was right!

▶ **What is your writing specialty/focus?**

Health, medical, and science topics for hospitals, healthcare organizations, academic health research institutions, publications, and brands.

▶ **In which publications/outlets have you been published?**

My clients include Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, Weill Cornell Medicine, Hospital for Special Surgery and St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in the U.S., and the Centre for Aging and Brain Health Innovation and ALS Canada in Canada. My work has been published in *Medscape*, *Doximity*, *STAT*, *Clinical Leader*, *Targeted Oncology*, and *Cancer Today* in the U.S. and *The Globe and Mail*, *Canadian Living*, the *Canadian Journal of Medical Laboratory*



*“Working with friends and colleagues on projects that benefit AJSA members is both fun and rewarding.”*

JANE LANGILLE

*Science, and the Canadian Healthcare Network in Canada.*

▶ **Please share a proud writing moment:**

One of my favorites is when my client started addressing me in emails as “EC,” which was short for “esteemed colleague.” It always made me smile, knowing that she considered me an essential part of her team.

▶ **How long have you been an ASJA member?**

Eight years. I joined in November 2013, so I could attend ASJA's first regional conference in Chicago. It focused on content marketing writing and included Client Connections, two aspects not available in Canada.

▶ **How long have you volunteered for ASJA?**

Since 2015. I was invited to speak at the 2015 and 2019 annual conferences and organized and spoke on a panel in 2016 called Health and Medical Writing: No Science Degree Required. In addition, I have been a host and a host leader for Virtual Client Connections. I volunteered on the Client Connections team for the 2018 and 2019 annual conferences, inviting clients to participate, and won the prize for recommending three of my clients to attend.

▶ **Why do you volunteer for ASJA?**

My freelance writing business has grown significantly due to ASJA's professional development, networking, and Client Connection. Volunteering allows me to say thanks by giving back.

▶ **How do you fit volunteering in with your work commitments?**

I add volunteering to my project management system and treat it like any other job with tasks, deliverables, and deadlines.

▶ **What are the benefits of volunteering?**

Working with friends and colleagues on projects that benefit AJSA members is both fun and rewarding. I really enjoyed working with the team and the design agency to narrow dozens of logo design options down to three finalists and was proud when the new logo launched in February 2021.

▶ **What do you like to do when you're not writing?**

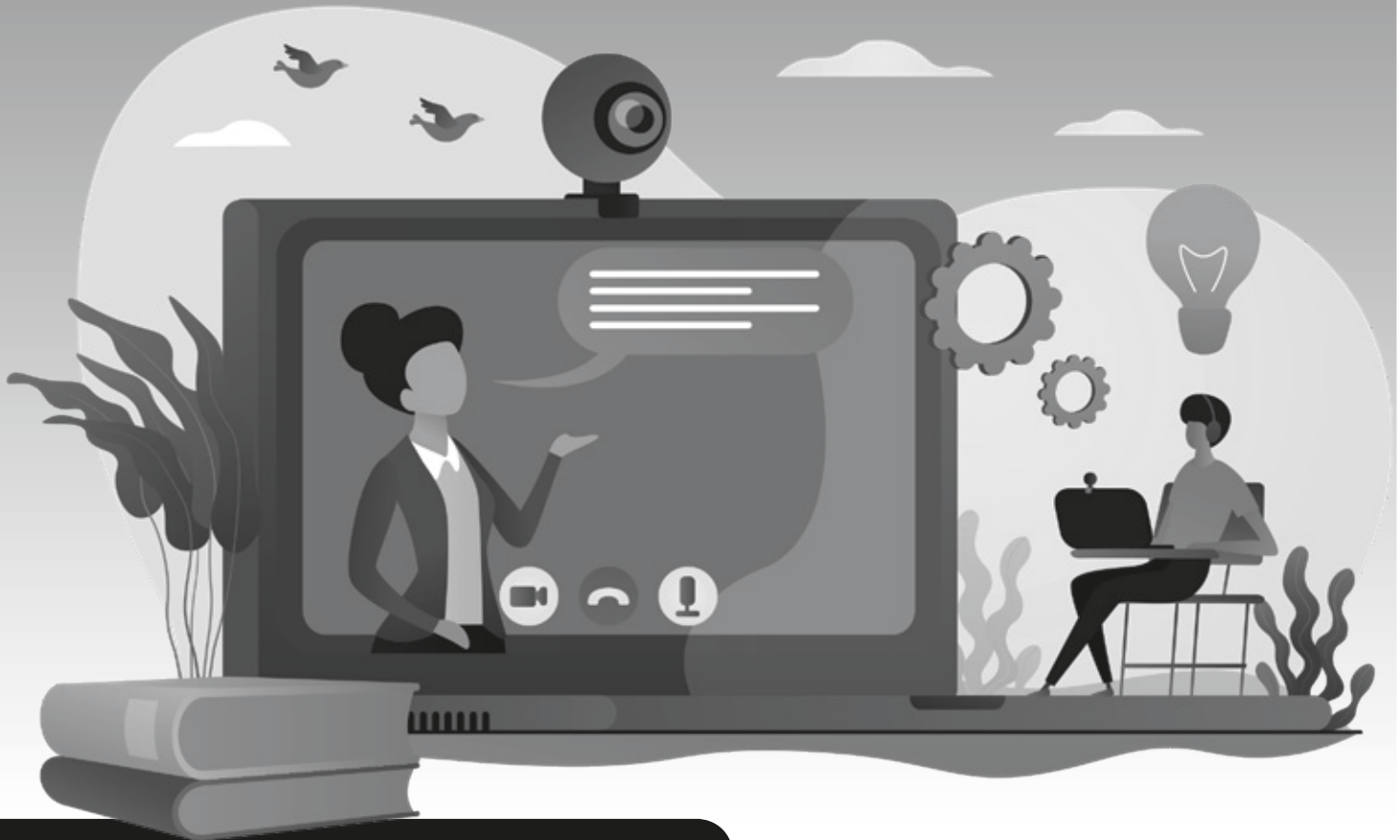
I like to do something active away from my screen. I love getting out on the lake in my kayak or on my paddleboard, biking, or walking in the summer. I walk every day and sometimes snowshoe in the winter, no matter the weather.



Read more about the new logo project: <https://www2.asja.org/theword/2021/02/16/asjas-new-logo-launches-today/>

## ASJA COMMITTEES

# Have you heard about the ASJA Virtual Education Committee?



We're a small but very active team passionate about bringing learning opportunities to the ASJA community. To date, we've organized a dozen webinars and masterminds covering topics like how to deliver a cracking TED talk, how to expand your business through coaching and podcasting, and the latest news on the PRO Act and book publishing.

Some other topics you can expect to learn about:

- **How to write standout reported essays**
- **Business tools for freelancers**
- **Diversifying your income streams**
- **Negotiating contracts and pay**

➤ ***If any of this sounds like it might interest you or another awesome freelancer you know, please head to our [Webinars](#) page to see upcoming and past events!*** ◀



»» “Martha Stewart Living is not trend-driven, so we are more interested in creative and beautiful ideas: a home with great personal style, an inspiring native garden, a creative business or maker, an individual or family that entertains or celebrates holidays in a distinct and creative way.”

JENNIE TUNG



SHARON  
NAYLOR TORIS

*Freelance Writer*

Sharon Naylor Toris is also the author of 35+ books, two novels, and many to-do lists. She lives with her husband Joe in Morristown, N.J.

# Market Report |

## MARTHA STEWART LIVING

If it's possible to fall in love with a magazine, consider me smitten. Imagine my chin lowering into my hand as I tilt my head and sigh. *Martha Stewart Living Magazine* is here. As a pre-teen, I'd beeline to the mailbox, flip through every magazine and letter in there, find that unmistakable Martha font and those glossy pages, and soak up every feature. It was a feast of the beautiful life. I read every article in Martha's voice, no matter who wrote it. I checked Martha's calendar each day to see when she was planting her bulbs or making pierogies. Smitten Martha Stewart Kitten right here.

So, imagine my pre-teen heart knowing that I was emailing a real *Martha Stewart Living* editor. For you, dear friends and colleagues. To get the Market Report details for you. I haven't yet broken into this magazine, but perhaps someday. Executive Editor Jennie Tung wrote back in a few moments, happy and grateful to be included in our Market Report column. Her positivity delivered the first big lesson of the day: the biggest magazines with the biggest names may have a stable of regular contributors, but they're always looking for fresh voices and views. *Martha Stewart Living* is eager to receive quality, on-target pitches, and I was a bit surprised at how many sections are open to freelancers there.

Tung says that *Martha Stewart Living* "is not trend-driven, so we are more interested in creative and beautiful ideas: a home with great personal style, an inspiring native garden, a creative business or maker, an individual or family that entertains or celebrates holidays in a distinct and creative way." It means something that these features in MSL are so seamless and aspirational that I assumed – for many years – that they were all surely written by staffers. I'm happy to have been so wrong.

"We welcome pitches for food, home, crafting and garden features, as well as health columns and American Made ideas," says Tung.

With this kind of wide-open door in the subjects department, you'll surely want to get your hands on their 2022 editorial calendar so that you can tailor your pitches. Tung estimates that the *Martha Stewart Living* editorial calendar will be out in early fall (her guess at the time of this writing in July 2021.) and she reminds us that the MSL masthead is a handy guide for directing your pitches:

### MARTHA STEWART LIVING AT A GLANCE



**Pay:** \$2 per word

**Terms:** Payment is on acceptance

**Word Count:** Front of Book stories ranges from 750 to 1,000 words for home and health stories, on average. Word count for well features runs anywhere from 500 to 1,000 words, on average, "plus deep captions, which are very hardworking in our pages," says Tung.

**Website:** [www.marthastewart.com](http://www.marthastewart.com)

"Email is the best way to submit your ideas," says Tung. Direct your messages as follows:

- Home stories to home editor Lorna Aragon
- Food stories to food director Sarah Carey
- Craft ideas to style director Tanya Graff
- Other general lifestyle features to Melissa Ozawa

Tung says she is happy to be a catch-all and pass ideas on to the appropriate person. For all editors and staffers, including Tung, use the editor email formula for Meredith Corporation: *firstname.lastname@meredith.com*.

The *Martha Stewart Living* media kit provides snapshots of their demographics, helping to refine your concept, and of course online issues are worth a look to gather their latest topics, treatment, and again, the perfect captions that bring all those dreamy images to life.

You could be a part of it. Your feature could be one that a starstruck Martha fan tears out of the magazine and tucks into a planner, a keeper.



# The Writer's Gripes



HOLLY LEBER SIMMONS

*Freelance Writer*

**A**h, the writer's life. Glorious. Flawless. Effortlessly lucrative. In the words of Meryl Streep in *The Devil Wears Prada*, "Everybody wants to be us."

It's a good thing I just wrote that because if I had to say it aloud, I wouldn't be able to keep a straight face. We're all writers for a reason. I joke that mine is that my social anxiety tends to make me stammer when I speak, but in writing I can communicate more effectively. But the life of a writer is hardly bereft of its gripes and frustrations.

I took to the ASJA Facebook page to ask my fellow members, "What are your greatest writer gripes?" There were many excellent responses, but I can't take up the whole magazine, so obviously couldn't include everything. (I highly recommend finding the thread.) Without further ado, things that can suck about the writer's life:

## MONEY TENSIONS

Such a weird, tense topic. I would honestly rather talk to most people about sex or religion than money. So many writers I know, myself included, run into endless money-related tensions, both internally and from clients.

▪ **Fear of being seen as greedy if we want to talk price upfront, and clients who confirm this fear.** “I was told by one never-to-be-my-client that I was too focused on money ... the writing should come first,” said Marijke Vroomen Durning. No, the writing comes after we settle on the money.

▪ **The rate dance.** “I know you have a budget for this. Just tell me what it is,” said Brette McWhorter Sember. “Can we just start with the number, and I say ‘yes’ or ‘no’?”

▪ **Cheapskate prospects who want you to work for peanuts but promise great exposure.** “At this point, if I wanted to expose myself, I’d wear a trench coat,” said David Volk. “I don’t want exposure; I want to eat.”

## ANNOYING CLIENTS AND EDITORS

Once we get past the negotiations and the contracts are signed, it’s all smooth sailing with editors, right? Yes, and as Dorothy Parker famously wrote, “Love is a thing that can never go wrong, and I am Marie of Romania.” Let’s talk about how clients/editors can make you tear your hair out.

▪ **Unclear, vague direction or feedback.** You know, “I trust your judgment,” then throwing a tantrum when it’s not what they envisioned and demand you rewrite half the story. (Jazz hands: Charge for revisions!)

▪ **Clients who don’t respect your time,** either in the form of expecting you to be able to drop everything to fulfill their insane timelines, expect you to have calls or meetings at night or on the weekends, or keep you on tenterhooks for weeks, then expect you to turn around a revision immediately.

▪ **Micromanagers who send the “How’s it going? When can I expect a draft?” emails.** As Melanie Padgett Powers said, “Um, on the deadline you gave me. And it’s going fine.”

▪ **The ones who send the little “add a comma here” nitpicks that would be easier for them to do themselves.** Anyone else think those people are just insecure, inexperienced folks who need to exercise their Bambi boss legs?



*Family and friends, well-meaning though they might be, can be very dense when it comes to understanding what we do.*

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## FAMILY AND FRIENDS WHO DON’T GET IT

Family and friends, well-meaning though they might be, can be very dense when it comes to understanding what we do. No, this isn’t a hobby. Yes, you can make a living at it. Yes, contrary to popular misconception, writing is a skill, and no, not everyone can do it. Honk if any of these sounds familiar.

▪ **“Are you still writing?”** “Do I ask them if they’re still lawyering/working in finance/teaching?” said Laurie Greenwald Saloman.

▪ **“You should write a novel!”** Except you’re a B2B health tech writer, so no, you’re probably not going to write “something like Fifty Shades of Grey,” even though yes, she did make a lot of money.

▪ **“Are you going to get a real job?”** I have one, thanks. And with the right strategy and persistence, the earning potential and work-life balance can be a lot better than it would be if I were an employee, plus I don’t have to wear pants.

▪ **“Oh, I’m going to be a writer when I retire!”** Michele Wojciechowski had a great reply: “Really? When I retire, I’m going to be a heart surgeon.” Shuts them up really fast,” she said.

▪ **“Are you getting paid for that story?”** Sigh. Yes, Mom.

There are a lot more, obviously, but I have to go back and cut this in half now. Well, in a little bit. Right now, I have to go build a Magna-Tiles tower with my toddler. Which is one of the main reasons I choose to live this writer’s life, despite all the gripes. That, and I can’t do splits so I never would have made it as a Broadway dancer.

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»» Holly Leber Simmons is a writer and editor based in Silver Spring, Maryland. Her areas of coverage include the arts, culture, health and nutrition, cooking, family and gender issues, sex and romantic relationships, sustainable living, religion and personal profiles. Her work has appeared in *USA Today*, the *L.A. Times*, the *International Herald Tribune*, the *Times of Israel*, *Washington Post Express*, and on websites Mic.com and Paste, among others.

GET YOUR  
DUES FREE!

## Know someone who might be eligible to join ASJA?



If you know an associate or professional-level writer who'd benefit from ASJA membership, refer them and enjoy a dues discount when they join!

The referral discount is 25% off your membership dues, so if you refer four people your dues are free!

### MEMBER BENEFITS INCLUDE:

- ▶ Virtual Pitch Slams
- ▶ Member-only private Facebook group & virtual Zoom chats
- ▶ New mentorship opportunities
- ▶ ASJA Weekly newsletter
- ▶ ASJA quarterly magazine
- ▶ Virtual Client Connections

➤ Visit <http://asja.org/Join-or-Renew>