

AUGUST | SEPTEMBER 2026

ISSUE 45

ARIZONA

AUTHORS DIGEST

ARIZONAAUTHORS.ORG

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Kathleen Cook

PRESIDENT
Arizona Authors Association



I've been more contemplative this month because we lost two incredible members in the past few months. One was Penny Orloff, our former Editor-in-Chief, Secretary, and Board Member. She and I had our differences, mostly because I tend to speak first and think second, a legacy from a family famous for chaotic, constant emotional outbursts. As a child, I longed to escape, to find calm in meditation, and to snatch a moment of peace wherever I was lucky enough to find it. That's probably why, for the first 13 years of my life, I hung out with the nuns at my Catholic school. I planned to join a cloistered order as soon as I turned 18, one in which silence was the foremost rule. I longed for silence. But then I discovered boys.

Despite a very few differences (which I sometimes take comfort in calling similarities), I always recognized Penny as a beautiful, vibrant woman whose heart was in the right place and whose energy and generosity knew no bounds. I was sorry to see her leave the board. Weeks before she left, I offered to step down and give her the presidency. I was heartened to learn that she still thought I should stay in the job. Frankly, she would have made a heck of a president, and I knew it. In my heart of hearts, I always hoped she would run for the Arizona Authors presidency late next year, when my term ends. It hurts my heart that we'll never get the chance to welcome her as the new leader of our incredible community of authors. If you think I'm good, you ain't seen nothing of what we could have been.

Another member who died earlier this year was less well known to the membership, but I considered her a kindred-soul sister, one who was tossed from place to place in her earlier years yet somehow landed on her feet, heart bruised but intact, and wanting nothing more than to serve the world and do some good in it. I haven't had the heart to take her member page down, but I suppose I'll have to do so soon. Mary Coday Edwards had planned to lead

a workshop for us in 2024 and again in 2025, but health issues and surgeries kept her from fulfilling that goal. She was so extraordinary that I can't even begin to go into her many accomplishments worldwide. She lived for years in Afghanistan during the height of the conflict there. She lived in Pakistan and Indonesia and held jobs that men in those places felt should have gone to another man (certainly not the safest thing to do). Yet she survived and thrived.

Mary once shared her favorite poem, one that I think exemplifies all women who grow, learn to overcome their past, learn to forgive themselves, and keep striving to become better and better, no matter what life originally dealt them. The poem is by Emory Hall, and she and I both loved it:

*Make peace with all the women you once were.
Lay flowers at their feet.
Offer them incense, and honey, and forgiveness.
Honor them and give them your silence.
Bless them and let them be.
For they are the bones of the temple you sit in now.
For they are the rivers of wisdom leading you toward
the sea.*

Mary, I hope you rest in peace, with flowers, incense, honey, and all the forgiveness and wisdom you have surely achieved. I hope you're enjoying the sound of the waves and the wild beauty of a heavenly ocean. You are deeply missed. You and Penny are both deeply missed.

—Peace, Katy

Kathleen Cook is the president of the Arizona Authors Association, as well as its web administrator and former editor. She retired from Brighter Stars Editing Service in 2017 and has since published numerous books. Her historical western set in 1880s Prescott, *The Sun Always Trumps*, features clerical sleuths known as the St. Francis Gang.



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All other inquiries should be sent to:

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The Arizona Authors Association, including its staff, neither endorses nor takes responsibility for the opinions expressed in this publication.

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

Arizona Authors Association membership comes with practical benefits for writers at every stage.

This **Digest** is your bimonthly guide to workshops, events, and activities—many free or low-cost—created to help you strengthen your craft. Our **blog** and **newsletter** also share advice, ideas and insights to support your growth as an author.

Our annual **Literary Contest** gives you a chance to showcase your work and compete for prizes that can raise your profile. Have an older title that deserves a second look? The **Oldie but Goldie category** helps you reintroduce it to new readers. Members can also connect with audiences through **in-person book fairs and online events on Zoom**.

Advertising through the Association is an easy, affordable way to promote your work and expand your visibility.

Use the Digest to share your accomplishments on our **Congratulations** page, where we celebrate member success and inspire fellow writers. We also welcome author-related updates, literary news, helpful tips, and useful resources. When members share what they know, the entire community benefits.

One of the strongest benefits of membership is the ability to **promote your book releases and services** directly to fellow members.

You may submit one free quarter-page ad for author-related services.

Books released within the past six months—or launching soon—are also eligible for one free full-page ad. Members may promote multiple books.

See the Arizona Authors Association membership application on the following page for more info.

ARIZONA AUTHORS DIGEST SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Submit by **September 1** for inclusion in the next issue.

Advertising

Advertisements are subject to editing, formatting and content. The publisher reserves the right to refuse any advertisement deemed inappropriate or inconsistent with organizational standards and policies.

New Releases

Members may promote one new book or short release published within the past six months at no cost. See the New Releases page for details.

Feature Articles

Articles should inform, inspire or help writers improve their craft or promotion. We recommend pitching ideas before submitting a draft. Include a headshot and 50-word bio. Length: 600–1,200 words.

Congratulations & Upcoming/Recent Events

Share book signings, workshops, sales or other literary events in Arizona or nearby. Include a 50–100-word summary. Photos and links are optional.

What Are You Reading?

Tell us in 200–300 words about a book you're reading and whether you'd recommend it. Please do not review your own work.

Quotes and Photos

Submit a writing- or publishing-related quote or joke in 100 words or less. We also welcome Arizona landscape photos. Include your name and the photo location.

Submission Guidelines

- Label your email subject line, e.g., "Book Release for October–November 2026."
- Send text in the email body or as a Word document.
- Submit images as PNG or JPEG files at the highest resolution possible. Please submit only photos you have taken yourself and include photo credit.
- All submissions are subject to editing.

Send entries to: **KylePatton.AZ@outlook.com**





Application for Membership

Benefits of Membership

**Literary Contest Awards Banquet Literary Magazine
Book Festivals Book Signings Facebook Page Critique Groups
Newsletter Speakers Workshops Website Page**

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WOULD YOU LIKE TO VOLUNTEER? Yes ____ No ____ Maybe Later ____

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www.arizonaauthors.org/join to either join
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**The Arizona Authors Association
Box 538
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Arizona Authors' Association is a Non-profit 501c3 organization. Its mission: To foster literary achievement, advance the art of writing and serve the writers, authors, editors, publishers and allied professionals of Arizona and the nation.

WELCOME

NEW MEMBERS of the Arizona Authors Association



Samara Beth

Samara is a distinguished keynote speaker, award-winning event planner and best-selling author known for her transformative impact on audiences and communities alike.

> LEARN MORE

Eleanora Ioffe

Eleanora is a memoirist whose writing explores identity, family history and the immigrant experience with warmth, honesty and humor.



> LEARN MORE

Virginia Ewing Hudson

Virginia is an award-winning novelist, poet and former performing cellist whose work has earned recognition in national fiction and poetry competitions. She lives in northern New Mexico, where she continues to write fiction, nonfiction and poetry.



> LEARN MORE



> LEARN MORE

Ross Lampert

Ross is a science fiction author and writing coach whose books explore apocalyptic futures and the craft of effective critique. He lives in Hereford and has led the Cochise Writers' Group since 2007.



Dr. Sally Goldberg

Sally is an educator, parenting expert and author whose books and articles have helped families for decades. A prolific magazine writer, her practical advice has appeared in publications nationwide.

> LEARN MORE

Tim Lennon

Tim is a nonfiction author whose work examines the history and impact of the survivors' movement against sexual abuse. Through research and interviews, he explores how survivors have driven lasting social, cultural and legal change.



> LEARN MORE

Lila Guzman, Ph.D

Lila is an author, educator and former U.S. Navy officer who has spent her career teaching languages and exploring different cultures. She co-authors books with her husband and enjoys bringing her lifelong love of language and storytelling to readers.



> LEARN MORE

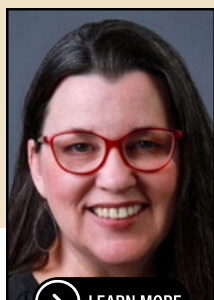


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Ernie Massey

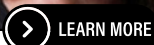
Ernie is a retired Air Force veteran and children's author who discovered writing as a source of comfort and inspiration. His stories are rooted in family, including a book inspired by his great-granddaughters.

NEW MEMBERS of the Arizona Authors Association



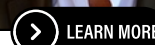
CJ Penland

CJ is an author, lifelong reader and former homeschool mom who writes picture books, middle-grade fiction and cozy mysteries. She enjoys turning the stories she's collected over a lifetime into books for readers of all ages.



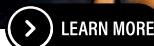
Erik Swanson

Erik is an award-winning speaker and bestselling author who inspires audiences around the world with his message of personal and professional growth.



Kirsten "Kiki" Ringer

Kiki is a literary agent and publishing consultant with 30 years of experience in editorial, marketing and author strategy. She helps independent authors navigate the publishing industry while producing books that meet traditional publishing standards.



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FROM THE EDITOR

Kyle Patton
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Arizona Authors Digest



If you've taken a gander at the cover, you've probably noticed that this issue embraces a monsoon theme. The cover, along with several pieces of artwork throughout these pages, draws inspiration from one of my favorite parts of living in Arizona: monsoon season. I still hope we have a few more thunderous days before summer gives way to fall, though I'll admit I've been keeping an eye on a few trees in my neighborhood, especially the one just outside my bedroom window.

It's not because I'm worried about damage to my apartment. That's what renter's insurance is for. As I've gotten older, though, I've developed a real appreciation for trees and the life they support. Maybe it's just the Tolkien fan in me. The one outside my window is home, or at least a favorite gathering place, for dozens of sparrows. Every morning they're there, chirping away, and I'd hate to see Mother Nature evict them before she's finished with this year's storms. Then again, Arizona's monsoons teach us that even the strongest trees have to yield to forces greater than our wishes.

That thought made me think of another reminder of how temporary things can be. On page 11, you'll find a special tribute to **Penny Orloff**, a longtime Arizona Authors Association member, former editor of this Digest and someone whose contributions, especially to the arts, reached far beyond these pages. I hope you'll take a few moments to celebrate her remarkable life and legacy.

I'd also like to thank contributors **Dan Baldwin**, who continues his series on ghostwriting, while **Tracy Skochil** shares the emergence of services that certify a book was written by a human. That's certainly not a sentence I expected to write a few years ago, but here we are.

We're not above the AI here at the Digest. In fact, most of the artwork in this Digest is AI-generated. It's a practical decision that helps us control costs. Stock art subscriptions are surprisingly expensive. And you don't want me trying to draw anything.

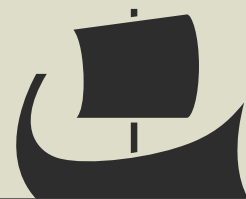
The use of AI got me thinking about what is original and what is adapted.

I recently saw "The Odyssey" in theaters. Like nearly every film adapted from a book, it sparked its share of debate, but I've long since learned to judge adaptations on their own terms. And if a movie sends people back to its original work, then it has done something worthwhile.

A minor controversy surrounding the film involved which English translation Homer's epic should draw from. I was interested to learn there are more than 50 English translations alone, with hundreds more in other languages. That curiosity led me to Emily Wilson's 2017 translation, and I'm enjoying it. It's approachable for modern readers and faithful, matching the original poem's 12,110-line count exactly. Whether you've never read *The Odyssey* or it's been years since your last voyage with Odysseus, I encourage you to pick it up. Great stories have a way of finding us again, no matter how many times they're retold.

In the spirit of celebrating the original work behind every adaptation, I'd like to give away a copy of Wilson's translation.

The first Arizona Authors Association member to email me their favorite quote from *The Odyssey* will receive a copy, on me. You can reach me at kylepatton.az@outlook.com.



Kyle Patton is an Arizona native and Phoenix-based editor, writer and journalist. He has worked for a variety of publications and is currently the Editor-in-Chief of the State Bar of Arizona's Arizona Attorney Magazine.



LITERARY TRIVIA

(answers on the back page)

- 1** Approximately how many English translations of *The Odyssey* have been published?
A. 25
B. 50
C. 100
D. 300
- 2** What subject is Mary Roach best known for exploring in her nonfiction books?
A. Medieval history
B. Science and the human body
C. Politics
D. Mythology
- 3** Which type of books has BookTok been most influential in popularizing?
A. Westerns
B. Thrillers and mysteries
C. Non-fiction
D. Romance
- 4** Which famous manuscript did Bill Gates purchase for \$30.8 million in 1994?
A. Leonardo da Vinci's Codex Leicester
B. Shakespeare's First Folio
C. The Dead Sea Scrolls
D. The Gutenberg Bible



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A TRIBUTE TO



Penny Orloff

1948 – 2026

Penny Orloff served as an Arizona Authors Association Board Member from 2023–2024 and volunteered as both our Secretary and as the *Arizona Authors Digest* Editor-in-Chief. She hosted events for us, such as the 2024 Arizona Authors Awards Luncheon, and donated a great deal of her time and money to our organization. She produced the annual 2025 *Arizona Authors Literary Awards Magazine*.

Penny was a ballerina extraordinaire, a soprano for the New York Opera House, an actress and an incredible woman.

She passed on May 19, 2026.

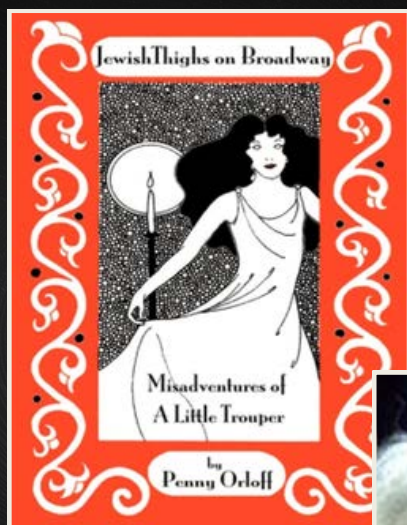
We will all miss her.

**THANK YOU, PENNY, FOR EVERYTHING
MAY YOU FOREVER MORE DANCE AND SING AMONG THE STARS**



Arizona Authors Association Board of Directors – August 2024

PENNY ORLOFF CLIPS:



» Penny in her role in the movie, *Obsidian* ◀

» *Miracles* with Penny Orloff ◀

» Penny singing in *The Ant and the Grasshopper*, an opera by Allan Shawn ◀



Penny Orloff – photo courtesy of Robert Ronning

UPCOMING EVENTS



August 20

Donis Casey's "Tell Me Your Story" guest for August is Arizona author Claire A. Murray. A lifetime member of Sisters in Crime and current president of the Desert Sleuths chapter, Murray is also the lead editor of several mystery anthologies and the author of *Play the Hand You're Dealt: A Crime & Mystery Short Story Collection*. Read about her writing journey beginning August 20 at DonisCasey.com.

October 2

Roxanne Doty will be doing a reading from her new release (see pg. 28) *What Surrounds You* at Changing Hands Bookstore's First Friday Poetry Reading, on October 2nd.

First Friday Poetry is sponsored by Changing Hands Bookstore, Tempe, AZ (6428 S. McClintock Drive). Changing Hands has been sponsoring First Friday Poetry for about 40- years. The featured guests have included both poets from Arizona as well as across the country. The event runs from 6pm - 7pm. It includes a guest featured poet followed by an open mike where attendees can share their work. It is a very supportive venue for both experienced poets as well as those just beginning their writing journey.

August 1:

Stop by our booth @ **White Mountains Festival of Books** in Show Low, AZ — 9a-3p

August 8:

Open Mic Night at the Historic Y in Downtown Tucson, AZ — 6p-8p

SUBMIT TO THIS SECTION

Send 50-100 words, a photo and a link (photo and link optional). You're an author. Show off that authorship! Write a sharp, engaging summary, and you might see yourself featured in an upcoming issue.

Email: KylePatton.AZ@outlook.com

August 15:

Zoom Workshop: **Letters to the Editor** with Former Arizona Republic Opinions Editor Robert Leger — 10a (see flyer on pg. 15)

September 12:

Zoom Workshop: **How to Choose the Best Writing Resources Right for You** with Lorraine Haataia, PhD, Founder of Prolific Writer's Life — 10a (see flyer on pg. 33)

September 15:

Arizona Authors Literary Contest Finalists Announced

October 10:

Open Mic Night at the Historic Y in Downtown Tucson, AZ — 6p-8p

October 16-17:

ASU Desert Nights, Rising Stars Conference and Book Fair

UPCOMING EVENTS

CONTINUED

October 17:

Stop by our booth @ **Desert Foothills Book Festival** in Scottsdale, AZ

October 24 :

Zoom Workshop: **The Author's Tactical Promotion** with Jeanne Burrows-Johnson — 10a

November 14:

Zoom Workshop: **7 Deadly Sins of Writing Romance** with Donna Hatch — 10a

November 28:

Arizona Authors Literary Awards Event held at the **Musical Instruments Museum** in Phoenix, AZ

November 28:

Stop by our booth @ ~~Green Valley Holiday Book Fair, **Desert Hills Lutheran Church**, Green Valley, AZ~~ **EVENT CANCELED**

December 6:

Stop by our booth @ **Mesa Holiday Book Festival**, Mesa AZ

December 12:

Zoom Workshop: **Inspired by True Events: Adding Realism to your Fiction Writing** with Nancy Hicks Marshall — 10a

December 12:

Open Mic Night at the Historic Y in Downtown Tucson, AZ — 6p-8p



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Letters To The Editor

with former Arizona Republic Opinions Editor

Robert Leger

Free Zoom Workshop for Arizona Authors Association Members



Have you ever wondered what an editor looks for when choosing letters to publish? What are the most effective ways to get your opinions, views, and beliefs in front of thousands of readers of a major publication? As the former Opinions Editor for the *Arizona Republic*, Robert Leger will share his answers with our members, and offer insights on how and why news publications have changed over the years.

Robert wrote 4 million words in his career as a reporter, columnist, editorial page editor, and public affairs consultant. Some of those words won national awards and many of them influenced local events and politics. Robert led editorial pages in Phoenix, Springfield, Mo., and Coffeyville, Kan., overseeing work that won national Headliner and Sigma Delta Chi awards, as well as winning state and national awards in his own name. In 2002-03, he was national president of the Society of Professional Journalists, the county's oldest and at the time largest association of journalists.

Come and join us for a look into the news industry and what writers can do to get their timely stories to a wider audience.

Saturday, August 15, 2026 10:00 AM MST

Register now for this free workshop:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/eTr1VWZDTZmTeHVNaNc8Pg>

RECENT EVENTS



July 20



Donis Casey's July “Tell Me Your Story” guest is acclaimed Australian author Elisabeth Storrs. An award-winning historical novelist and founder of the Historical Novel Society Australasia and the ARA Historical Novel Prize, Storrs discusses her writing journey, her passion for history and myth, and her latest novel, *Fables & Lies: A World War II Novel*. Read the interview at **DonisCasey.com**.

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Send 50–100 words, a photo and a link (photo and link optional). You're an author. Show off that authorship! Write a sharp, engaging summary, and you might see yourself featured in an upcoming issue.

Email: **KylePatton.AZ@outlook.com**

SPOTLIGHT ON ARIZONA AUTHORS



The Luke AFB Base Exchange is proud to introduce an exciting new program designed to showcase the talent of Arizona authors!

This initiative will feature local writers, their books, their personal journeys, and unique merchandise—while giving you the chance to meet them in person.

Interested in being a featured guest author?

Email Jaime Layman at **laymanj@aafes.com** to learn more and secure your spot!



CONGRATULATIONS

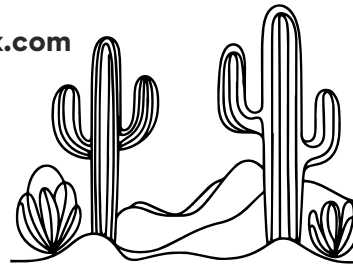


Kevin S. Moul has been named the 2025 Shelley Award Grand Prize Winner by Chanticleer Book Reviews & Media for his debut novel, *Lander's Gate*. The Shelley Awards recognize excellence in supernatural and paranormal fiction, with *Lander's Gate* earning the program's highest honor. Moul accepted the award at the 2026 Chanticleer Authors Conference and the 2025 Chanticleer International Book Awards Ceremony in Bellingham, Washington.

SUBMIT TO THIS SECTION

Send 50–100 words, a photo and a link (photo and link optional). You're an author. Show off that authorship! Write a sharp, engaging summary, and you might see yourself featured in an upcoming issue.

Email: KylePatton.AZ@outlook.com



Gifford MacShane's latest novel, *Without the Thunder*, received the 2025 Firebird Book Award in the Multicultural category from Speak Up Talk Radio. Set in the Arizona Territory, the historical western romance explores themes of racism, misogyny, family relationships and trust. The fourth installment in the *Donovan Family Saga*, the novel can also be enjoyed as a stand-alone. Learn more at Books2Read.com/WithoutTheThunder.

The **Phoenix Writers Club** will celebrate its 100th anniversary with a centennial celebration on Nov. 12, 2026. Event details will be posted on the club's website in the coming months. The Arizona Authors Association congratulates the Phoenix Writers Club on reaching this remarkable milestone and wishes the organization continued success in its second century.



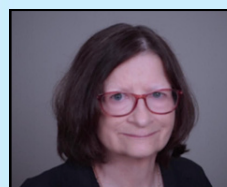
Mark Walker has been named Outreach Coordinator for the Advisory Committee of Peace Corps Writers, the organization that published his first book, *Different Latitudes*, and will soon release *My Saddest Pleasures: Expanded Edition*. In his new role, Walker will help expand the organization's reach, support fellow authors, and promote stories inspired by Peace Corps service around the world.

Author **Mike Rothmiller** will be interviewed in Prescott by entertainment reporter Dominik Maur and an RTL Television crew from Germany about his book, *Bookshell: The Night Bobby Kennedy Killed Marilyn Monroe*. The interview coincides with the centennial of Marilyn Monroe's birth, marking what would have been her 100th birthday this month. RTL's broadcasts reach audiences around the world.



Dr. Sally Goldberg recently published two family-focused articles in the *Fountain Hills Times Independent*. "**May Is the Month of Mothers**" appeared on May 18, 2026, followed by "**Welcome June, Our Month for Fathers**" in June. Both articles celebrate the important roles parents play in children's lives and are available on the *Fountain Hills Times Independent* website.

Rick Noble's *King Cotton III: Jack & the Ripper* was named Best Western Fiction in the 2026 National Indie Excellence Awards, following its gold medal for historical fiction at the 2025 CIPA EVVY Awards. His earlier novel, *King Cotton II: Kentucky Gold*, was also selected as a finalist in the 2026 Colorado Authors League Book Awards for Historical Fiction—Post-1850s. Noble is currently working on the next installment, *King Cotton IV: Slaughter in New Mexico*. Learn more about the series at kingcottonbooks.com.



Marilyn June Janson M.S. Ed. CEO of Janson Literary Services, Inc. offers her literary expertise to both new and veteran authors.

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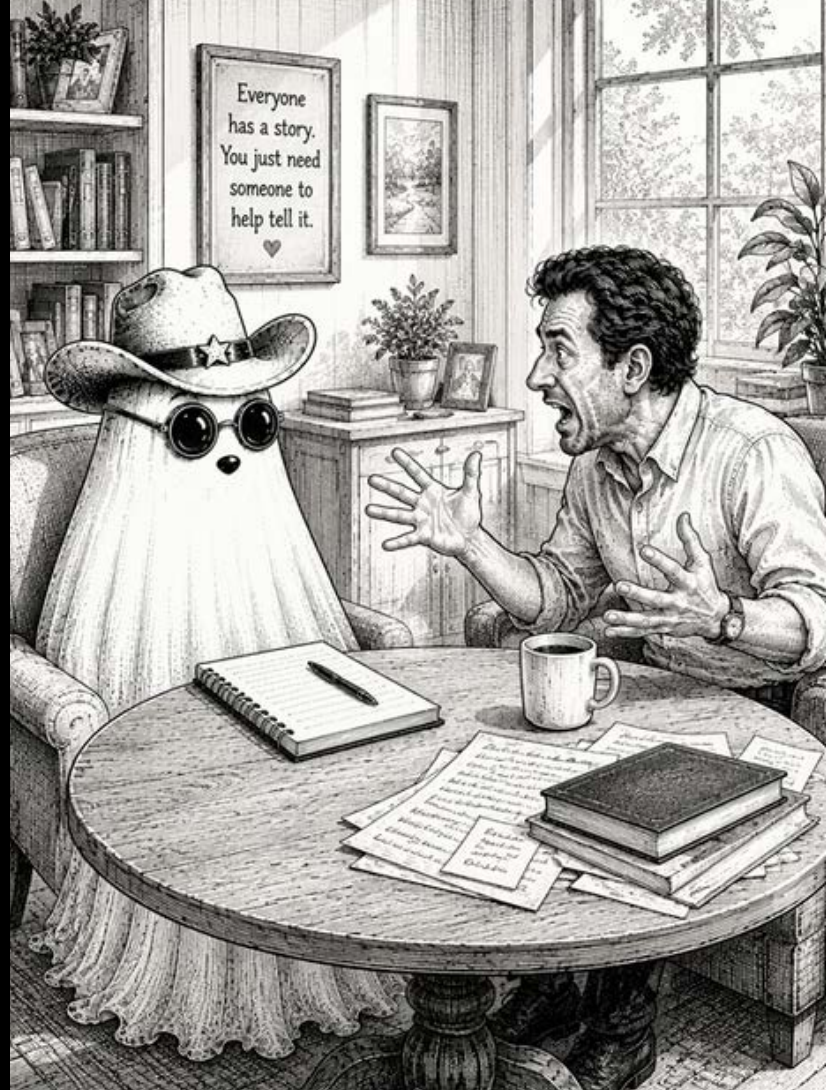
By Dan Baldwin

PART III OF V A GHOSTWRITING SERIES

[Editor's Note: We are pleased to present the third installment of a five-part series by Dan Baldwin on the craft and business of ghostwriting. In Part III, Dan discusses essential steps for successful ghostwriting, from defining the book's core message and building a strong author-writer partnership to maintaining communication, gathering source material ethically, and developing a clear outline. Look for Part IV in the October–November 2026 issue.]

ONE STEP AT A TIME

Lao Tzu said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Once begun, the journey continues step by step. It's that simple in ghostwriting. Taking the first steps helps ensure a successful journey. Here are five basic steps I believe must be covered, understood, and accepted before the process of ghostwriting a book begins.



KNOW YOUR MESSAGE

Surprisingly often, the message of the work isn't clear in the author's mind (name on the book). In those cases, the first duty of the writer (name on the check) is to help the author clearly, precisely, and briefly define what the hell the book is about.

You (the writer/author team) must be able to state what the book is about in a single sentence. "This is a book about my life story" isn't a message. "This is the story of my struggle against sexism, racism, ageism, and the common cold as I climbed my way to the top of the XYZ industry" is a message. "How my faith supported me in rebuilding my business after the market crashed and I became homeless" is a message. "Follow my ten steps to prosperity and personal happiness in your professional and personal life" is a message.

This step is essential because it defines the spine of the entire book. It will shape every chapter, page, paragraph, and sentence. Get it right, because one

wrong step here sets you up to stumble through the entire project. Neither of you can afford Lao Tzu's first step to be a misstep.

GET ON THE SAME PAGE

This is the author's book, and the ghostwriter must understand the author's perspective and the force driving the author to write the story. As in any business arrangement, the partners will learn from each other.

That's natural and essential. Any uneasiness should fade during this process. You will learn from each other. You must feel confident and comfortable working together so the author and writer can see that the author's message is told properly.

You don't have to become bowling buddies or hang out at Cheers or Duffy's Tavern after work. Still, you do have to develop a relationship that encourages open, honest, and frank discussion.

As noted in last week's comments, the ghostwriter must know the book's real audience. Who or what group is the true target audience for the work? This needs to be one of the first tasks for the team to accomplish.

KEEP THE COMMUNICATION FLOWING

I don't require nor do I provide excessive "hand-holding," but the telephone and especially email provide authors and writers with easy, convenient, and efficient ways to keep the project on time and on budget.

The author shouldn't nag the writer, but the author is due and should expect timely, regular updates. As the writer, you will need additional information and focus throughout the process. Make sure your client knows they are to be accessible and will need to respond in a timely manner. The work is a collaboration, and each partner needs to handle their 50 percent of the work.

GET THE INFO YOU NEED

The manner in which the information is provided should be convenient for the author and writer.

Some of my authors write a very rough first draft, which I rewrite using additional materials, interviews and my own experiences. Some authors prefer to dictate their thoughts and then transfer the recording to a CD or send them over the Internet. (If the book is lengthy, I do not transcribe such recordings. The author provides typed transcripts on their nickel.)

Virtually anything can be used as source material, provided the writer does not plagiarize that material. The writer can take the information contained in a book, magazine, e-zine, newspaper or whatever and completely rewrite it in the author's voice. They cannot legally "cut and paste" material from any source.

I have had authors tell me to "just take that from the magazine/book/website, whatever and use it." I absolutely refuse to do that. That's to protect the author from their own foolishness and to protect me from harming my professional reputation. Believe me, if you steal copyrighted works, you will get caught.

DEVELOP A CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER OUTLINE

The author may know where they want their book to go. Sometimes he doesn't have a clue. It's the writer's duty to help the author find the key topics that will become chapters. Expect to change the order of chapters, delete chapters, break up or add new chapters as the story develops. This is okay, and a standard part of the process, but the original outline helps keep you focused on the ultimate message.

One author told me, "Oh, don't worry about all that research. You can get everything you need on the Internet." My response was, (a polite), "Well, then why do I need you?" The command to find it on the Internet won't do. When using source material from the Internet, the author should provide specific websites and the specific materials to be used (dates, titles, and so on). When referencing books, the author must cite the chapters and page numbers where the specific information can be found.

Again, regardless of pressure from the guy who writes your name on the check, make damn sure you

use only the information and not the presentation of that information. Cheat, and you will get caught. The author loses a book and goes back to their career. You lose your reputation.

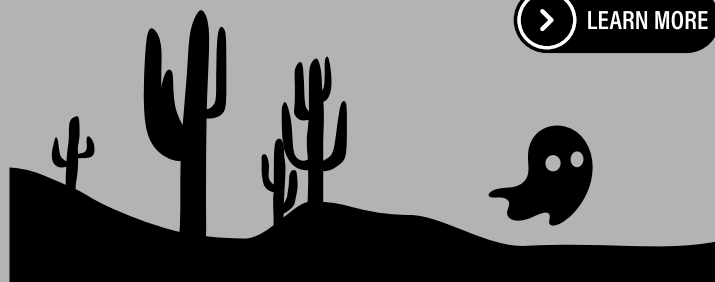
Lao Tzu wrote something about leadership that I believe applies to the ghostwriter's profession. "A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves."



Dan Baldwin is an author, ghostwriter, multi-genre novelist, and published paranormal investigator. His work has earned multiple awards, including Best Book Awards, National Indie

Excellence, Book Excellence, the New Mexico-Arizona Book Awards, a national Telly, Addy, and honors from major film festivals and advertising networks. His public-awareness campaign for the Louisiana Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse was cited as a national model.

He lectures on writing, paranormal investigations and the JFK assassination. Learn more at **DanBaldwin.com**.



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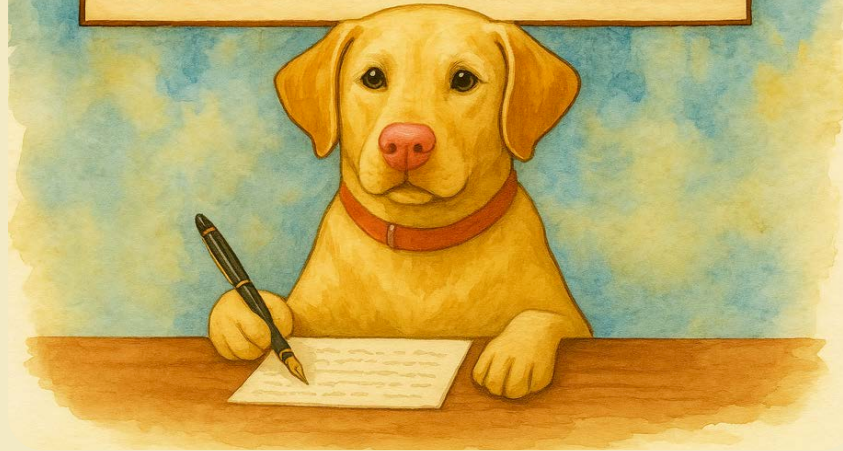
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LARRY'S CORNER



MY MOM TALKS TOO MUCH

By Larry Renner

Edited by Barbara Renner (Mom)

My mom talks to me all the time. Not that I mind. I just look at her like I understand everything she says. I know most of the important words like “sit” and “down” and “wannagoforawalk?” and “wannatreat?” I can also tell if she’s happy, or mad, or sad just by the tone of her voice and facial expressions.

Mom told me that when writing a story, dialogue is simply what people, or your characters, say to each other. Think of it as a game of fetch with words. If everyone throws the same old tennis ball, the game gets boring. But if each toss is different, everyone wants to keep playing.

If my buddy Max sees a squirrel, he yells, “Squirrel! After him!”

Meanwhile, old Daisy sighs, “Oh, let him enjoy his day. He’ll come down eventually.”

Did you see what I did there? Instead of using the dialogue tag “said,” I used “yells” and “sighs.” Not only does it show emotion, but it also breaks up the

monotony. No one likes boring old yellow tennis balls all the time. Personally, I prefer the ones that squeak.



Each dog has a unique personality, too. Once the writer establishes characterization, speech can be written without dialogue tags, and the reader still knows who is talking. Max is a Jack Russell Terrier and has boundless energy. His dialogue can be written that way, too. Daisy is a French Bulldog and likes to take naps. They could play their game of fetch without speech tags, and the reader still knows who is speaking:

When Max and Daisy decide to go to the park to play, they see a group of kids playing softball.

“I see Jon. Hurry up. I don’t want to miss all the fun.”

“Calm down. I stepped on a rock, and my paw hurts. I need to rest.”

Good dialogue should also help move the story along or reveal important background information. Imagine if Mom spent three pages asking whether

I wanted dinner:
“Are you hungry?”
“Maybe.”
“Do you like chicken?”
“Perhaps.”
“What about beef?”
“I’m thinking.”

Of course I want dinner! Put any edible item in my dish, now!

Here are Max and Daisy building suspense in a story that will lead to the next scene:

Before Max and Daisy entered the old park, they stopped under a huge mesquite tree.

“Hey Max, is this the tree your Grandpa Rufus told us about?”

“Yep. He buried his lucky bone here years ago before the park was turned into a playground. Let’s see what we can dig up.”

—Excuse me, but I hear Mom calling. “Larry, check your dish.”

“Dinner time. See ya.”



Larry and his Mom, **Barbara Renner**, are the authors of the award-winning coffee table book *Larry's Words of Wisdom* and the world-famous *Larry's Words of Wisdom* desk calendar. Larry has continued his writing career by publishing monthly articles in the *Neighbors of Sun City West* magazine.

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"The genuine kindness, compassion, and shared understanding reminded me that even through our diversity, we are more alike than we are different." – SK



"The breakthroughs I experienced through therapeutic writing were incredibly transformative, making the retreat an unforgettable journey."

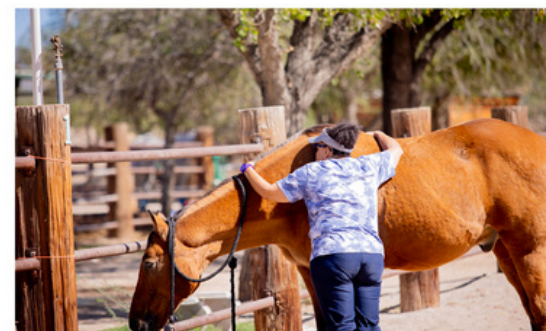
– V. Dennison-Murray

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– MW

"Kim has curated an amazing experience full of activities that are supportive of introspection and self-discovery. I am so grateful for this chance."

– MZA



THE MILLION MILE WALKER WHAT WE'RE READING AND WHY

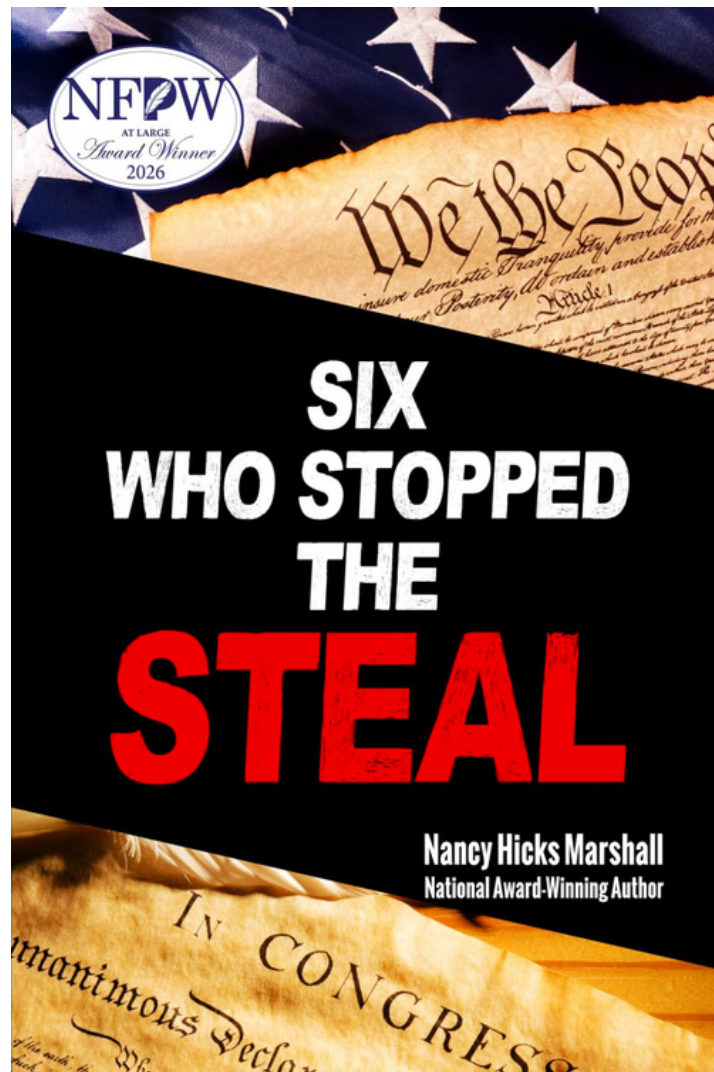
By Mark D. Walker

I met Nancy Marshall at a conference of Arizona Professional Writers. Over lunch, we recognized our shared interest in immigration politics, and we also shared interests in social justice and democratic institutions—my focus was on Guatemala, and hers was on Arizona. Her latest book, *Six Who Stopped the Steal*, arrives at a moment when American democracy feels both fragile and fiercely contested. With midterm elections looming and public trust in institutions strained, Marshall offers a timely, deeply researched, and morally anchored account of six elected officials—Republicans and Democrats—who refused to bend to pressure, conspiracy, or partisan intimidation during the 2020 election certification process. Her central argument is simple but profound: integrity is still possible in American politics, and courage is not the exclusive domain of any one party.

Marshall writes with a clear commitment to justice and democratic norms. She does not hide her belief that truth matters, that elections matter, and that public servants have a duty to uphold the Constitution even when doing so carries personal or political cost. What distinguishes her approach is that she does not romanticize these six officials. Instead, she presents them as ordinary people who made extraordinary choices that, in her view, helped prevent a constitutional crisis. Her Christian worldview, shared to varying degrees by the six officials she profiles, becomes a quiet but steady through-line: a belief in moral accountability, the dignity of every person, and the idea that public service is a calling rather than a career ladder.

One of the book's most compelling elements is

Marshall's account of how difficult it was to secure interviews with these officials. Many had been threatened, vilified, or politically isolated for refusing to endorse false claims about the election. Marshall described the painstaking process of identifying common ground in faith, family, and shared civic values—elements that helped build trust. Her



persistence reflects both journalistic discipline and pastoral sensitivity. She approaches each official not as a partisan symbol but as a human being navigating fear, duty, and uncertainty. This relational groundwork becomes part of the story itself, revealing how fragile and personal the work of democracy can be.

A standout chapter, “Monsters,” explores how cognitive dissonance can catalyze growth rather than lead to denial. Marshall argues that when individuals confront information that contradicts their beliefs, they face a choice: retreat into comforting falsehoods or step toward truth, however unsettling.

The six officials she profiles chose the latter. Marshall uses the metaphor of “monsters” to describe the internal and external forces—fear, tribalism, misinformation—that must be confronted. Her treatment of cognitive dissonance is unusually hopeful: She suggests that the ability to learn and revise one's understanding is not a weakness but a democratic virtue.

The book's 150 footnotes are not just for show; they reflect a serious commitment to documentation, transparency, and intellectual honesty. Marshall draws on public records, legislative transcripts, interviews, and media accounts to reconstruct the pressures these officials faced. In an era when political writing often substitutes opinion for evidence, her meticulous sourcing strengthens the book's credibility and underscores her belief that facts still matter. This scholarly rigor is one reason *Six Who Stopped the Steal* is poised to strengthen civic institutions: it models how to engage with political controversy without distortion.

As midterm elections approach, Marshall's book serves as both a warning and an invitation. The warning is clear: democratic institutions depend on individuals willing to uphold them, even when it is costly. The invitation is equally important: citizens, too, can choose integrity over outrage, discernment over conspiracy, and courage over cynicism. Marshall's profiles remind readers that democracy is not self-executing. It requires vigilance, humility, and a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths.

This book reminded me of *Profiles in Courage* by John F. Kennedy and Ted Sorensen, which celebrated eight U.S. senators who defied their own parties for the sake of conscience. Marshall's contribution is a contemporary counterpart, showing that the same moral steel can still be found in the twenty-first century.

Like Kennedy and Sorensen, Marshall is interested in the moral psychology of political courage. But whereas *Profiles* focused on senators operating within the insulated world of mid-century Washington, Marshall's subjects face a far more volatile environment—one shaped by social media, disinformation, and the erosion of shared civic

narratives. Her book suggests that courage today requires not only defying one's party but also resisting entire ecosystems of pressure. In that sense, *Six Who Stopped the Steal* may be even more relevant to contemporary readers than its predecessor.

The author's experience in faith-based leadership, her work in civic education and community engagement, and her personal commitment to reconciliation and dialogue enabled her to write a book that is both morally serious and narratively compelling.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nancy Marshall is the award-winning author of the children's book *A Rattler's Tale*, which received a 2022 National Federation of Press Women award for Children's Fiction, and the novel *A Dry Hate*, which won first place for fiction from both the National Federation of Press Women and the Arizona Authors Association in 2024. Born in New York, Marshall graduated from Smith College, earned a master's degree in teaching from Wesleyan University, and received her law degree from Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey. She taught high school before serving as a field officer with the New York State Division of Human Rights. She moved to Arizona, where she served for nearly five years as executive director of the Arizona Civil Liberties Union.



Find over 80 book reviews on my website under the “Library” tab. I’d love to hear your thoughts on the newsletter, my reviews, and what you’re reading—your insights could inspire future columns and may be featured in the next edition.

Reach me at **Mark@MillionMileWalker.com**, MillionMileWalker.com, or facebook.com/millionmilewalker.

Sign up for the Million Mile Walker Dispatch, a monthly review of my latest articles, book reviews, cultural insights, favorite quotes, and the occasional surprise.



Members may advertise in one issue without cost any new book or short release published within the past six months.*

ADD YOUR BOOKS to the October-November issue of the Arizona Authors Digest no later than **September 1, 2026**

Email: KylePatton.AZ@outlook.com

Include:

- Book title
- Author name
- Book cover
- 100–150-word synopsis
- 100-word bio
- Author headshot
- Genre
- Publisher
- Link

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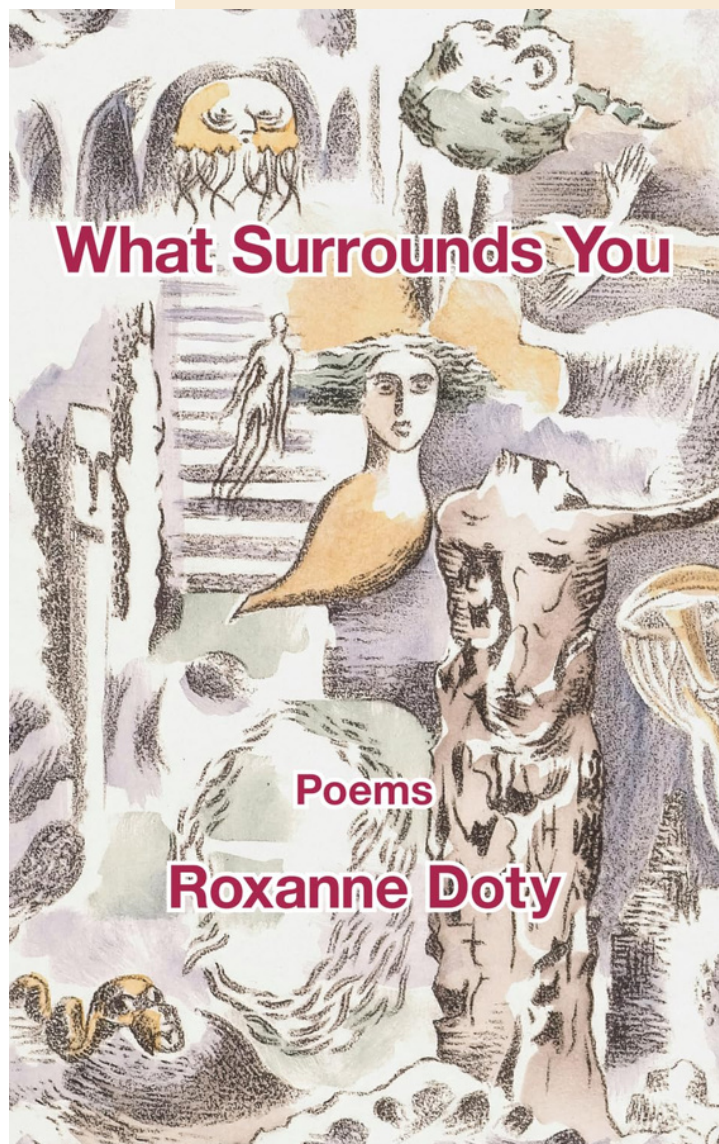
BOOK RELEASES
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NEW RELEASES

NEW BOOKS

WHAT SURROUNDS YOU
Poetry | Kelsay Books



What Surrounds You is a collection of poems I've written over the years that contain elements of memoir, journeys through various experiences and physical surroundings from freeway underpasses, to highways, roadside motels and universities. I try to capture pieces of the lives, emotions and struggles that occur in these places. I think of each poem as a snapshot and story of people I have observed and come to know in both fleeting moments as well as over a lifetime. I try to capture dark and despairing moments as well as those that often sparkle with possibility.

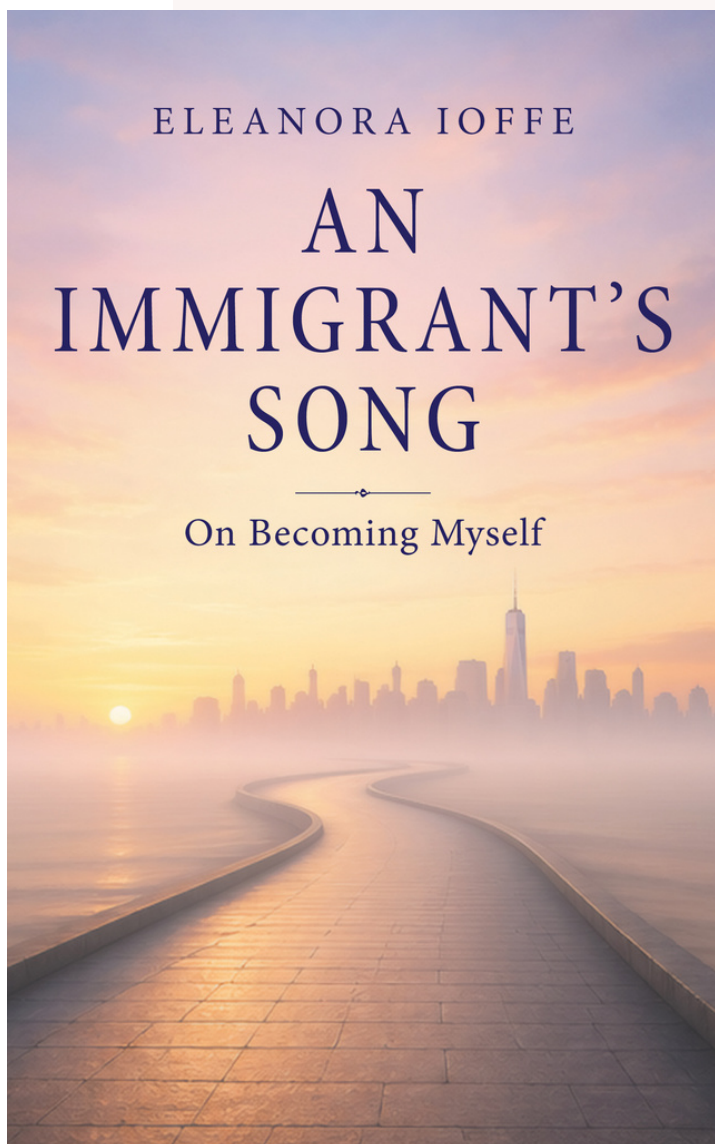


Roxanne Doty's novel, *Out Stealing Water* was published by Regal House Press in 2022. Her poetry chapbook, *Hours of the Desert* was published by Kelsay Books in 2024. Her poetry collection, *What Surrounds You* was published by Kelsay Books in June, 2026. Her short stories and poems have appeared in various literary journals including *The Baltimore Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Quibble Lit*, *Cagibi*, *Superstition Review*, *Amethyst Review*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Soundings Review*, *Lascaux Review*, *The Orchard Poetry Review* and *San Pedro River Review*. Her short story collection, *Ride With Me* is still looking for a home.



NEW BOOKS

AN IMMIGRANT'S SONG: ON BECOMING MYSELF
Memoir | Uniquity Press



How do we become who we are, what shapes our identities? Does changing the physical landscape of our lives break the chains that tie us to our past?

An Immigrant's Song: On Becoming Myself is a memoir about family, identity, memory, and a life shaped by two worlds. With wit, honesty, and unsparing self-reflection, it moves between pre-revolutionary Russia, the Soviet Union, and the immigrant experience in the United States, as it follows one woman's quest to understand where she came from and how the past continued to shape her choices, relationships and sense of self.

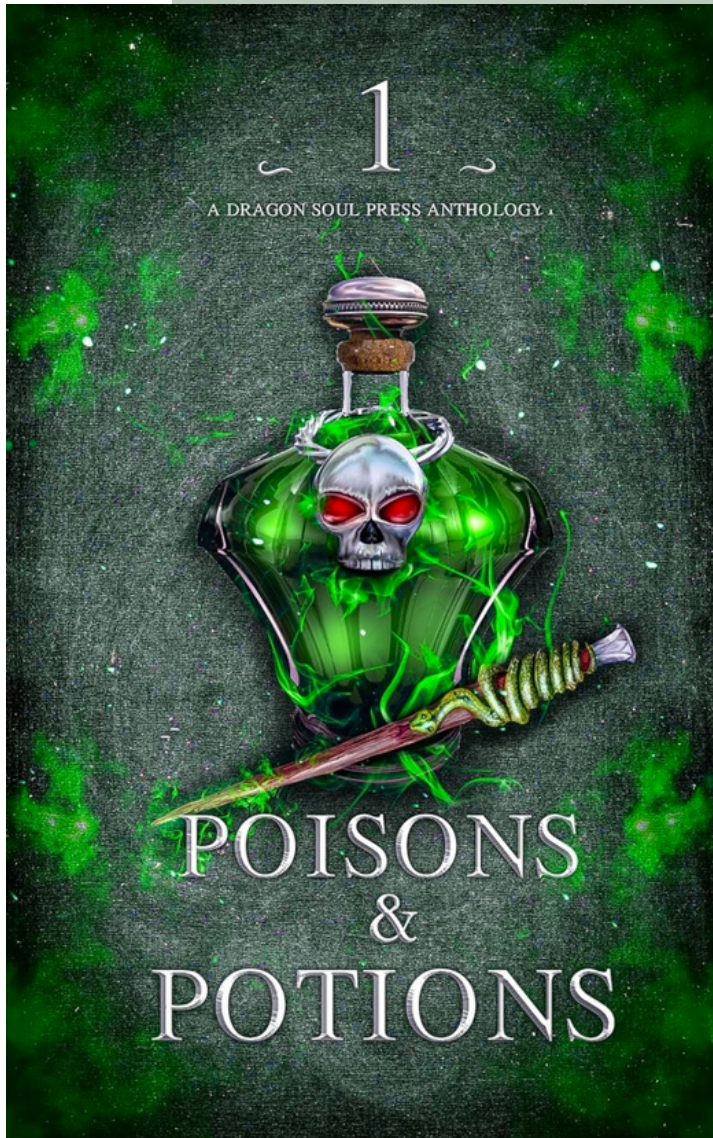
It is a story of family legacy and reinvention, ambition and disappointment, resilience, and the unexpected clarity that can come only from looking back.

Eleanora Ioffe is a recently retired marketing and communications professional turned memoirist. She is also a yoga teacher, aviation addict and compulsive world traveler. She published her first memoir, *An Immigrant's Song: On Becoming Myself*, in May 2026 and has no intention to stop writing. She lives in Phoenix and has no intention to ever experience winters again.



NEW BOOKS

POISONS AND POTIONS: A DRAGON SOUL PRESS ANTHOLOGY
(THE DARK MAGIC TRILOGY)
Dark Fantasy | Independently Published



Magic thrives within...

Whether hiding from the law, trying to live a simple life or diving into danger, each of these witchy stories drags you along for an adventure. And when you have magic, nearly everyone wants your help. Attachments – like friendships, relationships – can be woven like threads of pretty silk, only to strangle victims later.

Featuring 18 stories by the following authors: Desirae Gracyn, J.E. Feldman, Roberta L. Smith, Hubble Stark, Faith Auad, Benjamin Adams, Elizabeth Hosang, Matt Spencer, Barend Nieuwstraten III, Adele Liles, Nicola Lombardi, Rod A. White, Diana Parrilla, Sawcy, Kelly Zimmer, Estelle Tudor, Jessica Lee Minneci, V.L. Jones, and Amanda Rein.

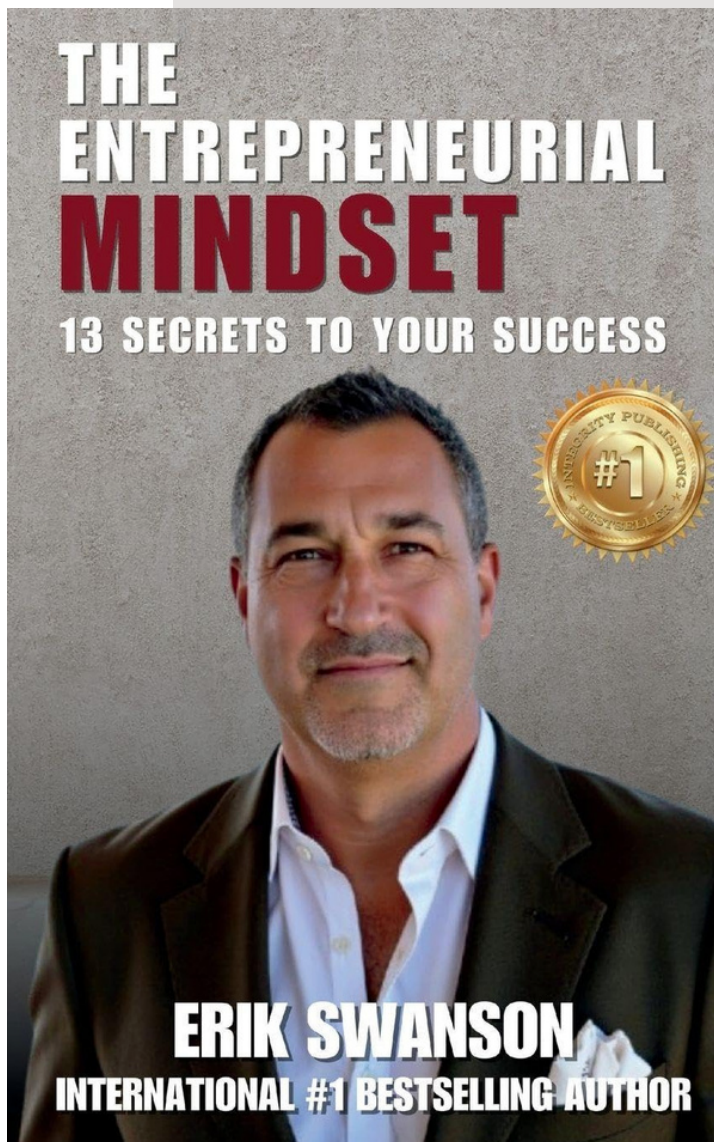


V. L. Jones is a horror writer and paranormal enthusiast who grew up in a haunted house in Washington, sparking a lifelong fascination with the supernatural. After enlisting in the Navy, she was stationed in Scotland, where its rich history of ghost stories and folklore inspired her writing. Now based in Tucson, Arizona, Verona explores haunted locations whenever she can. Her stories blend horror with urban legends, cryptids, and folklore. She is especially drawn to creatures like Bigfoot, the Mothman, the Black Dog, and the Ozark Howler.



NEW BOOKS

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET: 13 SECRETS TO YOUR SUCCESS
Self-help | Integrity Publishing (WA)



What if the "entrepreneurial mindset" isn't something you're born with... but something you build-one decision, one habit, and one belief at a time? In *The Entrepreneurial Mindset*, award-winning keynote speaker and multi-time #1 international bestselling author Erik "Mr. Awesome" Swanson delivers a modern, motivating, and action-forward guide to the inner game of success-rooted in the timeless principles made famous by Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich*.

This book is designed for builders-entrepreneurs, leaders, creators, and go-getters-who are ready to stop drifting and start directing.



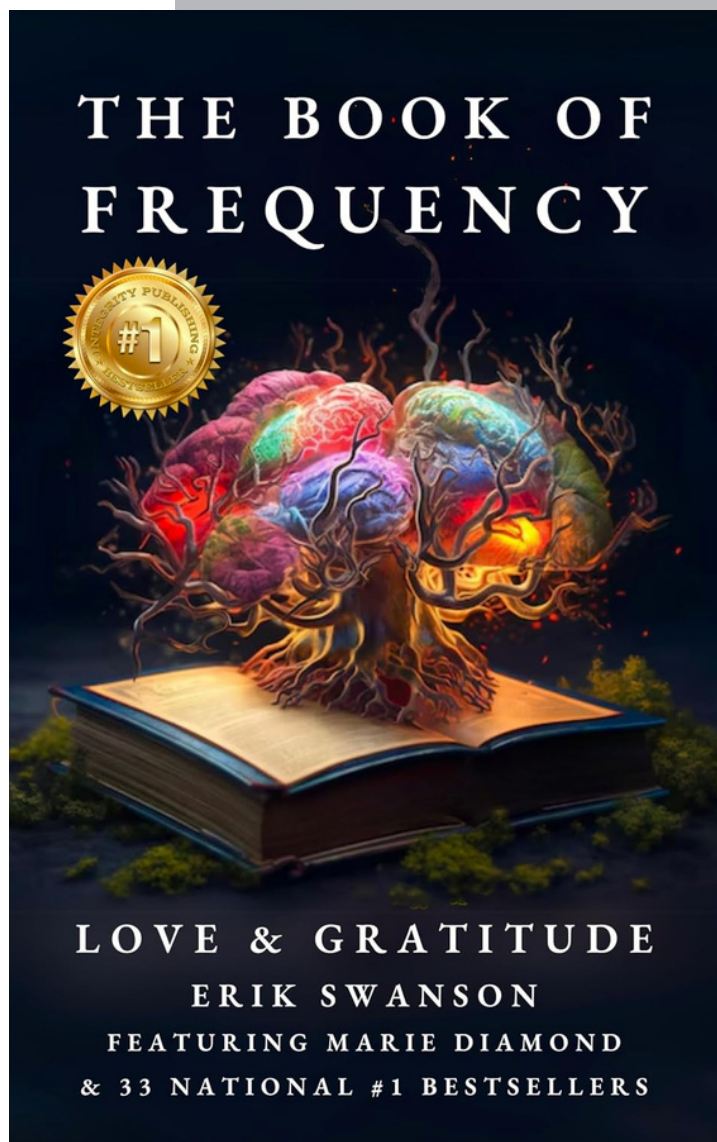
***Erik "Mr. Awesome" Swanson** shares stages around the world, inspiring audiences to become a better version of themselves! He shares principles on how to become awesome in one's life. Too many of us around the world allow other negative influences to come into our environment and stay there. It's time to build strategies to combat these negative thoughts and build a life worth living with amazing and awesome thoughts throughout each and every day.*

One of Erik Swanson's talks is all about "NDSO", which stands for "No Drama - Serve Others!", in which he shares strategies for humans to get rid of the negative and the drama in people's lives and focus more on helping fellow human beings be the best they can be and give back to others around the world.



NEW BOOKS

THE BOOK OF FREQUENCY - LOVE & GRATITUDE
Self-help | Integrity Publishing (WA)



The Book of Frequency is a transformational series that explores the unseen energy shaping our everyday lives. Our thoughts, emotions, and beliefs all carry a frequency that influences the people, opportunities, and experiences we attract.

Created to help readers better understand and align with these powerful forces, each volume focuses on two interconnected frequencies that can inspire meaningful personal growth.

Through heartfelt stories, lived experiences, and practical insights, the contributing authors share how these frequencies have guided their own journeys and how they can help you create a life filled with greater purpose, abundance, resilience, and joy.



Erik "Mr. Awesome" Swanson shares stages around the world, inspiring audiences to become a better version of themselves! He shares principles on how to become awesome in one's life. Too many of us around the world allow other negative influences to come into our environment and stay there. It's time to build strategies to combat these negative thoughts and build a life worth living with amazing and awesome thoughts throughout each and every day.

One of Erik Swanson's talks is all about "NDSO", which stands for "No Drama - Serve Others!", in which he shares strategies for humans to get rid of the negative and the drama in people's lives and focus more on helping fellow human beings be the best they can be and give back to others around the world.



How to Choose the Best Writing Resources Right for You

with Lorraine Haataia Ph.D



Being part of a writing association or group already puts you ahead of most writers, but did you know there's a whole world of additional resources out there that could support your writing in ways you haven't even considered? In this interactive session, Lorraine Haataia, PhD, founder of [Prolific Writers Life](#) and author of [*Finish Your Book: Plug Into the Power of the Writing Community and Get It Done*](#), will walk through the four kinds of writing communities every writer moves through over the course of a writing life, and where to find the practical, often overlooked resources.

We'll explore:

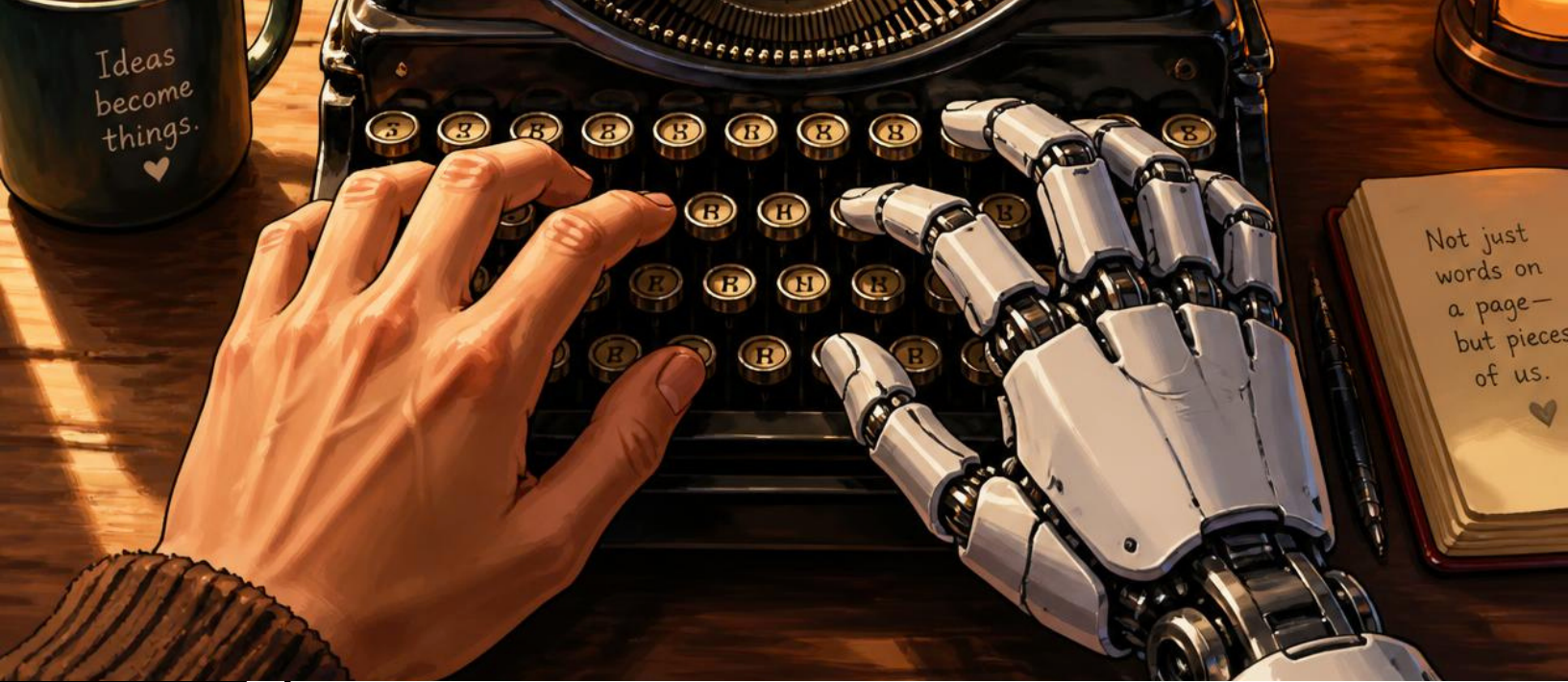
- **The Four Quadrants of Writing Community.** Fleeting encounters, temporary bonds, enduring connections, and deep rooted kinship, and how to recognize which one you need right now
- **Beyond community.** Resources for legal questions, beta readers, and other support most writers don't know exist
- **Your own treasure map.** An open discussion where you'll share the resources, groups, and tools that have helped you, so everyone leaves with new options to explore

Saturday, September 12 10:00 AM MST

Register here:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/P7NVILN2SBqjFbPzp11Qjg>

SEE YOU THERE!



HUMAN AUTHORED CERTIFICATION IS HERE

—DO YOU NEED IT?

By Tracy Skochil

Human Authored Certification is meant to distinguish real human authors from books created using AI. But is certification useful? Enforceable? Necessary? Arizona literary leaders weigh in.

[Editor's Note: This article is republished with permission from Tracy Skochil, Executive Director of PHX Oasis Press.]

Who would have thought the world would get to a point where human authors were encouraged to put a stamp on their book to verify that the words in their book were, in fact, written by a real human? Yet here we are, with the Authors Guild's Human Authored Certification beckoning.

Questions abound: Do I need it? Is it useful? Can't people tell I'm a human author without me needing to get certified? There's a lot to unpack when it comes to AI, authorship and verification.

AI/HUMAN LINES ARE BLURRING

Readers don't want books written by robots, you might be thinking. Yet the Waterstones CEO said he would sell books by AI in his stores, if they were

clearly marked (yet there's no legal push for them to do so) and if that's what readers want. You might also be sitting there, confident in the fact that you have never once used AI in your work, so you're fine. But headlines dominated recently about how Hachette, a major book publisher, yanked horror novel "Shy Girl" from distribution, with all sides saying the other side put AI into the work. Or maybe you're thinking it's very clear that I'm a real human—readers can just look at my socials or Google me. You might want to skip forward to the Velvet Sundown paragraph.

All things considered, the Authors Guild was forward-thinking when they first launched their certification in 2025. It received renewed interest in 2026.

WHAT IS HUMAN AUTHORED CERTIFICATION?

The Authors Guild, America's oldest and largest community of writers, "advocates for free speech, fair contracts, and copyright." They launched Human Authored Certification with one goal: "distinguish

human creativity in an increasingly AI world.”

HOW HUMAN AUTHORED CERTIFICATION WORKS

Any author with books published in the U.S. who agrees to the licensing terms can apply for Human Authored certification. It's \$10 per title, with ID verification. Both are waived for Authors Guild members. The registration process is fast and easy.

- Create an account
- List whether it's the work of one human or multiple
- List the title, author name, and optionally list ISBN, ASIN, and publisher
- Review the licensing contract
- Accept the terms
- Wait for acceptance

Once accepted, the certified work will be listed in the publicly accessible Human Authored Database along with the author's assigned registration number. This database is freely available to the public. Authors also receive a 'Human Authored' mark to include on the copyright page of their book and for use in their book marketing, per the Guild's suggested usage guidelines.

THE ELEPHANT IN THE CERTIFICATION ROOM: VERIFICATION

Right now, the Authors Guild certification doesn't run a check on the words within a submitted book to verify if it does or does not use AI. Because determining AI usage is tricky to do at best, it is dangerous to do so if you get it wrong. We've all seen cases where everyday people share how they cut and pasted an excerpt from a famous, historical literary classic into an AI detector only to have the AI come back and call it '100% AI.' Take that, Jane Austen and your 73.9% AI-generated *Pride and Prejudice*.

A recent Jane Friedman article points out that the Authors Guild certification “does permit a small amount of AI-generated text, mainly to allow for AI-powered grammar and spell-check applications. Use of AI for research or brainstorming does not disqualify a book, as long as the text is human-written.”

The Authors Guild admits as much in its FAQ: “As of now, there is no reliable way to test whether a

work includes AI-generated material, though this may change in the future. We are using a self-certification system with enforcement against those who misuse our mark, as is typical, and have certain measures in place to prevent use by scammers, such as limits on the number of new titles that can be registered in a year (exceptions will be made with express permission), the issuance of a unique registration number for each title, and a fee for use by non-members.”

Which means there's work to do when it comes to Human Authored certification. Sure, it's far from perfect right now, but it's a start. And 'a start' is something we *haven't* seen when it comes to legislation requiring those who use AI to author books to reveal themselves.

SHOULD YOU GET YOUR WORK CERTIFIED?

Whether any author should invest in this type of certification depends on a lot of variables, including cost per certification, the time and energy to apply and put into the market, whether it's a point of pride for the author, and whether they see it as setting them apart on bookshelves.

PRO-CERTIFICATION

Susan Pohlman, editor, writer and founder of Phoenix Writers Network, sees the certification as a strong positioning of an author's skill. “One of the issues I see with AI-generated or AI-enhanced manuscripts is that AI tends to flatten voice. The voice of a writer is vital to storytelling,” Pohlman said. “A machine does not understand some of the decisions writers make regarding diction, syntax, and even punctuation at times to create certain effects. A writer crafts a story artfully in a variety of ways. It takes time, craft knowledge and heart. This should be rewarded and recognized by publishers and the public in general.”

Kathleen Cook, president of the Arizona Authors Association, calls out the value of ID verification for authors. “Having your author identity verified by an established organization is a good idea, since there are so many books and magazines published nowadays under the mask of anonymity (or even deception, in the case of authors who use a more famous pseudonym than their own),” Cook said.

She also applauds the Guild for creating the certification and hopes other groups follow suit as an added perk of membership.



PRO BUT SKEPTICAL

At PHX Oasis Press, we meet with a lot of indie authors fighting an uphill battle to build a platform and get their book noticed. If a \$10 certification can help someone stand out in a market crowded with AI work (or AI slop), it feels worth testing. The cost is minimal, but the reach is unknown. It's likely that more players will enter the certification game, across

geographical boundaries and possibly by platform and publisher. If that happens, what will it cost to manage certification databases? How will those costs be passed on to authors? And will certification become mandatory in the future, making it less of a differentiator and more of a table-stakes effort?

"It's honorable, but silly, honestly," said Kolby Granville, editor-in-chief of *After Dinner Conversation*, a popular international lit mag based in Arizona. Granville wonders about the certification's usefulness. "Are you really going to walk around a bookstore and look for this symbol on the book? And if it's not there, are you going to assume it is AI-generated or simply assume the publisher didn't go through the process of getting the certification?"

READERS WANT HUMAN-AUTHORED WRITING ... RIGHT?

The Arizona literary experts who participated in this article all firmly believe in the power of human-authored stories. They also believe human-authored stories are really what the public wants to buy. "[Readers] very much are anti-ai and want human-authored writing," Granville said.

Tranise Robinson, owner of Onyx Oasis Bookstore & Author Services, an oasis for Black literature, sees this firsthand in buying habits. "Many readers feel the need to support human-created arts to combat AI's theft of work by human creators," Robinson said. Robinson also points to the staggering amounts of energy and water AI data centers consume, something the state is seeing plenty of pushback on. "Many readers are environmentally conscious."

Molly Yin, founder of Lit and Lattes Book Club, would "absolutely care and prioritize human-authored works over AI. When you're reading a story by a human author, you're tuning into their creativity and how their mind works." But Yin admits there are some AI lines readers might cross. "Readers in our club would most likely not support AI authors, but some might look past it for the perfect romance, or might look past AI-generated book covers."

Those moments when readers give space to AI-generated efforts create a slippery slope.

THE NETFLIX / BLOCKBUSTER EFFECT

Netflix versus Blockbuster is a famous marketing tale.

Blockbuster had thousands of stores and billions in revenue. Netflix, a startup that mailed DVDs, was struggling. Netflix approached Blockbuster, but Blockbuster declined. Blockbuster was so set in its belief that customers would always want to go to a store to get movies that it was blind to what was coming. Netflix turned around and capitalized on Blockbuster customers' frustrations with late fees, out-of-stock titles, and waiting. We all know how that story played out: there's only one Blockbuster left, in Bend, OR. It's a cautionary tale about potential blind spots we can have when it comes to buyer preference, consumption trends and spending power.

We all agree readers love stories. And readers have a strong penchant for human-authored stories. We hope that never changes.

VELVET SUNDOWN-THE BAND THAT WASN'T REAL

But what happens when the landscape makes it hard for readers to know who is human on the bookshelf, and who isn't? What happens when people and companies focused on profit rather than craft are let loose in a world that lacks AI regulation yet makes free all the tools of creativity embedded with thousands (millions?) of pirated books to pull from?

Back in 2025, a band called Velvet Sundown raked in more than one million streams on Spotify. The band released two albums, had a whole backstory and busy social media feeds. Then it came out that Velvet Sundown was an AI creation, "not quite human. Not quite machine ... living somewhere in between." Listeners revolted once they knew

WHO ARE PLATFORMS RECOMMENDING TO YOU?

Today, music streaming platforms aren't legally obligated to make it clear when music is AI-generated. Many sites recommend 'playlists we think you'll like,' and if the listener clicks in, it certainly might sound like something you'd normally listen to. But often, platforms are pushing AI-only playlists and 'artists,' unbeknownst to the listener.

What might this look like if it comes to digital book stores 'recommending' work that was AI-created yet isn't listed as such, and includes a whole backstory for the AI author? If it's a good story, many readers

might dive in. If they don't care that it's AI, no foul.

—Yin also wonders if bad actors would try to certify AI-authored works. "There really is no way to verify that all of the works that get certified are actually human-authored. With all of the changes in technology in the future, I would be concerned about how this certification would remain true to its original intent."

THE BOOKSTORE BATTLEGROUND

This battle feels like it will play out in physical and digital bookstores across the nation – a landscape that, in wildly positive news, added "about 422 new indie bookshops in 2025" according to the American Booksellers Association.

Indie bookstores have always championed human authors. In Arizona, bookstores and book mobile pop-ups host dozens of 'meet the author' events, community readings, and book launch parties every month. They are all-in on human-centered storytelling.

So much so that Robinson notes, "this certification would absolutely change what I would stock. I'd be more inclined to stock a book that I know is human-authored, instead of a book that I'm unsure of."

AI & HUMAN AUTHORED BOOKS SHARING SHELVES

We can't ignore the idea of a future where 100 percent AI work sits alongside human-written works on bookshelves. Waterstones CEO James Daunt hinted at this in December 2025, quoted in a BBC article as saying he "would stock books created using artificial intelligence ... as long as they were clearly labeled, and if customers wanted them." Daunt did, however, go on to note that he doesn't expect that to happen.

And while British-based bookseller Waterstones might feel a long way from our valley of the sun, Daunt is also an executive with Barnes and Noble. Decisions he makes carry local impact.

SPENDING HABITS IN TOUGH ECONOMIES

Book sales are a hundred-billion-dollar business. Print sales fell 3.1% in the first quarter of 2026. There are a lot of factors at play here, including this quarter's print numbers going up against last year's, when

there were more books printed due to some blockbuster titles launching. Add to this the fact that inflation is at the highest level in nearly two years. Prices are up everywhere. It costs more to fill up our cars and book bags. Consumers should have transparency as to which books are AI-authored. If someone chooses to spend their money on AI works, that's fine. But they should know what they're buying up front, not after the fact.

IN THE END, IT'S ABOUT TRANSPARENCY

Authors face a new world filled with Human Authored certification, books written by bots, and distribution networks trying to keep up on what readers really want. The Authors Guild Human Authored certification is the tip of a larger AI Transparency iceberg that seems to be revealing itself at a glacial pace. Until legislation comes out that propels AI to identify itself, the next best thing is for authors to make it easier for readers to see our human side, and for authors to support other human authors (and creatives) on this journey.

PS: If you enjoyed this article and want to support 25 local Arizona authors, grab a copy of PHX Oasis Press's newest anthology, ***The Weight of Almost Knowing***. Each one of the authors is a real human, and we couldn't be prouder of their efforts. Proceeds from sales help us continue to offer free programs and resources for Arizona authors to build writing and business skills and connect.



Tracy Skochil is Executive Director of PHX Oasis Press, an organization that offers free programs and resources to help Arizona authors build writing and business skills, and connect. A storyteller who has fallen into marketing and never left, Tracy runs a small marketing agency that helps entrepreneurs and author-preneurs reach audiences. Tracy writes science fiction about the intersection of technology and humanity, but her newest piece is a thriller about ravens.



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A WRITER'S TIP

FROM KAREN ODDEN

WHY WRITERS SHOULDN'T LOOK AT GOODREADS REVIEWS (FOR VERY LONG)



One thing I didn't know until I published my first book is that Goodreads, like Netgalley and Edelweiss, will post reviews prior to pub day. The idea is that the reviews will stir up interest. Conversely, Amazon publishes reviews on pub day and after.

Some authors feel Goodreads can be a decent bellwether of reviews to come. However, most writers will tell you not to read Goodreads reviews, mainly because they're written for other readers, not for authors. They can be snarky. They can be meh or even nonsensical. They can be full of praise ("I loved it!") and still give it three stars.

I remember that when my first book, *A Lady in the Smoke*, was published, I read every Goodreads review carefully ... until I came upon two written consecutively. One said something along the lines of this:

"I loved all the historical detail! The information about railways and the Victorian medical profession was fascinating! The romance was a bit too heavy-handed, but the mystery was pretty good, with complications and a twist at the end I didn't see coming."

The next said, "I loved the romance and the mystery! Lady Elizabeth was so believable and sympathetic. The book got a bit bogged down by historical detail, especially about the railways, but I skimmed those parts."

Goodreads (and other review sites) will show you again and again: reading is subjective. I'm living proof! The book everyone seems to adore right

now—*Theo of Golden*—I DNF'd at page 100. Too sweet for me, too much saintliness, too episodic.

It's important to remember this subjectivity exists beyond online reviews, as well. Some professionals in the book industry, whom I admire and respect, love my books. Some people in the book industry whom I admire and respect don't love my books, and yes, it stings. But it doesn't mean I shouldn't be writing books.

I have also learned from Goodreads reviews. A thoughtful review often alerts me to some aspect of my writing, and more than once, when a comment rings true, I've used feedback to shape my next book.

As for my recent reviews for *An Artful Dodge*? One review calls it "slow-paced" and "character-driven." Another calls it "fast-paced historical fiction" with "well-rounded characters." Another says she felt like she couldn't get into the characters at all because they weren't developed enough. It's a little batty, right?

On the other hand, a review that begins "I adored this" or "I devoured this" or "Anna Burnett's narrator is perfection!" is like a hit of adrenaline. It's like getting 777 on the slot machine. But we all know that playing slots for long stretches is not healthy. It's a losing game. At some point, we should stop putting in our quarters.

My advice (to myself as much as anyone!)? Print out two or three of the really good reviews to put on your bulletin board, and then stop looking. Write the next book.

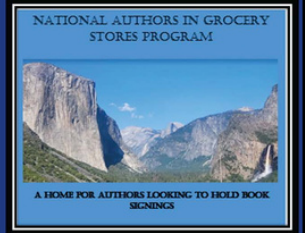
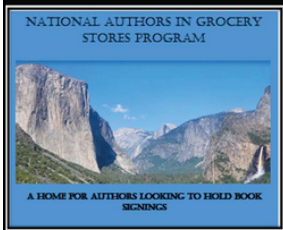


Karen Odden is a USA Today bestselling author; her latest book is *Under A Veiled Moon*, an Inspector Corravan mystery. For more writer's tips and other news, subscribe to Karen's newsletter or visit her website.

You may also visit her Arizona Authors Association page.



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ODDS & ENDS

***“Be still, my heart; thou
hast known worse than this”***

— Homer, *The Odyssey*

Literary Trivia Answers (from page 10)

1. B. 50
2. B. Science and the human body
3. D. Romance
4. A. Leonardo da Vinci's *Codex Leicester*

Bearizona Wildlife Park

WILLIAMS, ARIZONA

Photos courtesy of Mike Rothmiller

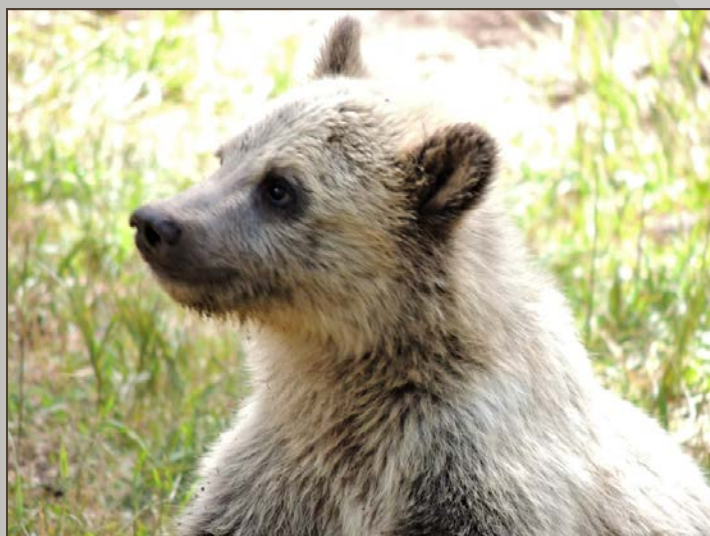


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