

WORKSHOP LEADER BIOS

Pauletta Hansel (Keynote speaker) is a poet, memoirist and teacher whose newest book is a hybrid of poetry and prose entitled, *Understory: A Women's History of Appalachia*, out in October from University Press of Kentucky. Previous collections include *Will There Also Be Singing?* (Shadelandhouse Modern Press), poems of witness and protest; *Heartbreak Tree* (Madville Publications) winner of the Poetry Society of Virginia's North American Book Award; and the Weatherford Award-winning *Palindrome* (Dos Madres Press 2017.) Her writing has been featured in *Cincinnati Review*, *Oxford American*, *Rattle*, *Appalachian Journal*, *Cutleaf*, *The Southern Humanities Review*, and *The Southern Poetry Anthology*, among others. Pauletta was born and raised in southeastern Kentucky, and was a founding member of WV's Soupbean Poets and of the Southern Appalachian Writers Cooperative. She was Cincinnati's first Poet Laureate and was 2022 Writer-in-Residence for The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County. Visit her website at <https://paulettahansel.wordpress.com/>.

Brad Barkley is the author of the novels *Money, Love* and *Alison's Automotive Repair Manual*, named Best Books of the Year by *The Washington Post* and *Library Journal*. His short fiction has appeared in *Fractured Lit*, *The Southern Review*, *Oxford American*, *Glimmer Train*, and *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, which twice awarded him the Balch Prize for Best Fiction. He has also authored three YA novels from Penguin/Dutton and received fellowships from the NEA and the Maryland State Arts Council. His new YA novel, *The Reel Life of Zara Kegg*, arrives from Regal House Publishing in June 2026. More at bradbarkley.com.

Laura Treacy Bentley Laura Treacy Bentley is an internationally published writer who was born in Hagerstown, Maryland. She has lived most of her life in Huntington, West Virginia, and divides her time between West Virginia and a cabin in Western Maryland. Laura is the author of a poetry collection, *Lake Effect*, a psychological thriller set in Ireland, *The Silver Tattoo*, a picture book, *Sir Grace and the Big Blizzard*, and a poetry/photography chapbook, *Looking for Ireland: An Irish-Appalachian Pilgrimage*. She received a Fellowship Award for Literature from the West Virginia Commission on the Arts, and her work has been featured on the websites of A Prairie Home Companion, Poetry Daily, O Magazine, and Publishers Weekly. She served as the writer in residence for three years at the Marshall University Writing Project and taught creative writing at the 2013 West Virginia Governor's School for the Arts at Davis & Elkins College. Her work has been published in the United States and Ireland in journals such as *The New York Quarterly*, *Art Times*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Antietam Review*, *Rosebud*, *blink*, *Ginseng*, *Wind*, *The Stinging Fly*, *Kestrel*, *ABZ*, *Crannog*, *Now & Then*, *3x10 plus*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology*, *Still*, *Goldenseal*, and *The Windward Review*, among many others, including a number of anthologies. One of her poems is featured on a poster published by the Greenbank Observatory in Pocahontas County in West Virginia and another poem was displayed in a city bus in Morgantown, West Virginia. Laura read with

Ray Bradbury in 2003 and signed her books with Nora Roberts at her Turn the Page Bookstore in 2017. Her newest novel, *Glass Mountain*, is a contemporary suspense novel published by Henlo Press.

Ace Boggess is author of eight books of poetry, most recently *Tell Us How to Live* (Fernwood Press, 2025) and *My Pandemic / Gratitude List* (Mōtus Audāx Press, 2025). His writing has appeared in *Indiana Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Hanging Loose*, and other journals. An ex-con, he lives in Charleston, West Virginia, where he writes, watches Criterion films, and tries to stay out of trouble. His first short-story collection, *Always One Mistake*, is forthcoming from Running Wild Press.

Andrew Garland Breeden is senior editor of The Upper Room daily devotional guide, located in Nashville, Tennessee. He is a graduate of Lipscomb University and Vanderbilt University Divinity School. He has been with The Upper Room for more than ten years. Andrew loves spending time outdoors hiking, cycling, and climbing. He lives in Charlotte, Tennessee, a beautiful, rural part of the state.

John Edward Harris I first walked a labyrinth in 1996 and have been walking and creating labyrinths ever since. I am a Certified Veriditas Labyrinth Facilitator and have been facilitating workshops and walks since 2023, including a workshop and walk for some writers in the northern panhandle.

Rajia Hassib is the author of two novels, *In the Language of Miracles* (a *New York Times* Editors' Choice) and *A Pure Heart*. She has written for *The New York Times Book Review*, *The New Yorker*, and *Literary Hub*. She teaches English and creative writing at Marshall University.

Laura Jackson is an environmental writer and humorist. Her essays and humor have appeared in many places, and her essay collection, *Deep & Wild: On Mountains, Opossums, & Finding Your Way in West Virginia* was named the 2025 Book of the Year by the Writers Conference of Northern Appalachia. She lives in Wheeling with her husband and sons.

Jason Kapcala is a novelist from Morgantown, West Virginia, and the author of two books, including *Hungry Town* (West Virginia University Press, 2022), a silver medalist in the 2023 Independent Publisher Book Awards, described as “taut and powerful” by *Publisher’s Weekly*. He has published more than forty stories, essays, and poems, in numerous magazines and journals, including *BlueLine*, *Summerset Review*, *Santa Clara Review*, *Saw Palm*, *Clever Magazine*, *Long Story Short*, *Four Way Review*, *Canyon Voices*, *Masque and Spectacle*, *Prime Number*, and *The Good Men Project*, and his

writing has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He received his graduate writing education at Ohio University, and has been teaching creative writing in the community for the past twenty years.

Gwendolyn Kiste is the four-time Bram Stoker Award-winning author of *The Rust Maidens*, *Reluctant Immortals*, *Boneset & Feathers*, *Pretty Marys All in a Row*, and *The Haunting of Velkwood*. Her short fiction and nonfiction have appeared in outlets including Lit Hub, Nightmare, Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy, CrimeReads, Titan Books, The Lineup, and The Dark. She's a Lambda Literary Award winner, and her fiction has also received the This Is Horror Award for Novel of the Year as well as nominations for the Shirley Jackson, Premios Kelvin, Ignotus, and Dragon Awards. Originally from Ohio, she now resides on an abandoned horse farm outside of Pittsburgh with her husband, their excitable calico cat, and not nearly enough ghosts. Find her online at gwendolynkiste.com.

Michael Knost is a two-time Bram Stoker Award® winner who has written across multiple genres and edited dozens of anthologies. His *Writers Workshop of Horror* won the 2009 Bram Stoker Award® in England for Superior Achievement in Non-Fiction, and its sequel, *Writers Workshop of Horror 2*, received the same honor in Denver in 2021. His *Writers Workshop of Science Fiction & Fantasy* is an Amazon #1 bestseller.

Michael was awarded the Horror Writers Association's Silver Hammer Award, and in 2021 he was named the organization's Mentor of the Year. He has also received the prestigious J.U.G. (Just Uncommonly Good) Award from West Virginia Writers, Inc. and was recently inducted into the inaugural class of the Imagination Hall of Fame in July 2025.

His novel *Return of the Mothman* was adapted into a feature film, and he continues teaching writing classes and workshops. Michael lives in Chapmanville, West Virginia, with his wife and daughter.

Amber (Decker) Koch grew up in the mountains of West Virginia, where she still lives and writes. She has performed her work in theaters, coffee shops, laundromats, dive bars, and record stores across the country—from New York to New Orleans to Portland to Los Angeles and back again.

She is a past recipient of the Jack Grapes Poetry Prize, presented by LA's Cultural Weekly, and has served multiple times as a judge for the annual Poetry Superhighway contest. In 2024, she was invited to open for Barbara Kingsolver during the Pulitzer Prize-winning author's only tour stop of the year in Barboursville, West Virginia.

Her latest collection, *Appalachian Gothic: Poems Inspired by the Life and Works of*

Edgar Allan Poe, explores Appalachian landscape, grief, and folklore in conversation with the work of Edgar Allan Poe.

Renée K. Nicholson chases the muse across disciplines, including poetry, prose, and academic work. Her writing has appeared in many publications, including *The Gettysburg Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *The Millions*, *Electric Literature*, *Poets & Writers*, and *Bellevue Literary Review*, and she is a contributing writer to the health humanities journal *Synopsis*. Her poetry collections include *Feverdream*, *Postscripts*, and *Roundabout Directions to Lincoln Center*. Her nonfiction books include *Fierce and Delicate: Essays on Dance and Illness* and the award-winning anthology *Bodies of Truth: Personal Narratives of Illness, Disability, and Medicine*. Renée recently served as director of the Humanities Center at West Virginia University (now emerita) and was the 2018 recipient of the Susan S. Landis Award for Distinguished Service to the Arts from the State of WV. She is a creative partner in *Healthcare Is Human* and Series Editor for *Connective Tissue* at WVU Press. She holds an BA in English/Creative Writing from Butler University, her MFA from West Virginia University, and a Certificate of Professional Achievement in Narrative Medicine from Columbia University and is a member of the National Book Critics Circle. She lives in Morgantown and can be found online at www.reneenicholson.com.

Edwina Pendarvis writes poems and essays mostly centered on Appalachian life and literature. Author of four poetry collections (most recently, *Ghost Dance Poems*) and author or co-author of nine nonfiction books (most recently *Another World: Ballet Lessons from Appalachia*), she has contributed work to regional and national periodicals. Among her proudest accomplishments is a series of young-adult biographies of Nobel Prize winners, published in dual-language editions by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. She's also proud to be a professor emeritus at Marshall University in Huntington, where she's lived for the past forty years.

Cat Pleska is a 7th generation West Virginian and 9th generation Appalachian. She is the author of two memoirs, "Riding on Comets" (WVUP, 2015) and "My Life in Water" (Uncollected Press, 2024). She also has published numerous essays in literary magazines and is the editor of four anthologies. She teaches full time in the English Department at Marshall University. She has been a radio essayist for WV Public radio, a book reviewer for the *Charleston Gazette*, and is an oral historian. She lives in Scott Depot with her husband and five cats.

Bonnie Proudfoot's writing focuses on the intersection of family roles, place, and identity. Her novel, *Goshen Road* (OU/ Swallow Press), about two sisters who live in rural WV, received WCONA's Book of the Year and was Longlisted for the 2021 PEN/Hemingway. Her 2022 poetry chapbook, *Household Gods*, can be found on Sheila-Na-Gig editions. Her fiction, poetry, reviews, and essays have appeared in journals and

anthologies, and have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and the Best of the Net. A full-length poetry collection, *Incomer*, based on moving to the Appalachian region, is forthcoming in Spring of 2026 on Shadelandhouse Modern Press.

FRIDAY NIGHT MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT

Ananga Martin is an orange groves to Appalachia singer-songwriter living in West Virginia. She loves to explore the idea of “home.” She dreams strong, is deeply inspired by her inner and outer landscapes, and tries to understand how they are connected through songwriting and art. A mother and grandmother, Ananga can usually be found outside with the trees and plants, where she feels most open and held. She speaks best in song, and hopes her voice will contribute to the greater good and collective liberation of all living beings. She has released two albums, *Moonlight & Fire* (2019) and *Santa Ana* (2023).