

Presenters and sessions

This FY25 Community Arts Mini Grant Project is presented with financial assistance from the West Virginia Department of Arts, Culture and History and the National Endowment for the Arts, with approval from the West Virginia Commission on the Arts.



Colleen Anderson



Colleen Anderson is a writer, songwriter, and graphic designer in Charleston, WV. Her work has appeared in *Redbook*, *Arts & Letters*, *Antietam Review*, *The Sun*, and many other publications. Two of her stories were nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

In 2012, Colleen's chapter book, *Missing: Mrs. Cornblossom*, won a Moonbeam Children's Book Award. Her poetry chapbook, *Bound Stone*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2016. Two of her essays for WV Public Radio have won national awards.

Colleen has produced three collections of original songs: *Fabulous Realities*, *Going Over Home*; and *Trail through the Trees*. She has

performed poetry and songs on Mountain Stage, and more than a dozen of her songs have been featured on the show.

Her writing has earned two Individual Artist Fellowships from the West Virginia Commission on the Arts as well as residency fellowships from the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation of Taos, New Mexico and Monson Arts of Monson, Maine.

Visit her website at colleenanderson.com.

Body Language: Beholding the Body with Words

“Behold, the body includes and is the meaning, the main concern, and includes and is the soul.” —Walt Whitman

Mary Oliver called the five senses the “five rivers,” and writers know that sense imagery is key to vivid writing. What a rich source of inspiration, then, when we turn our five senses toward the body they inhabit! In this workshop we will consider several approaches to writing about the human body. We may contemplate the large and small movements of our lungs, limbs, fingers, and toes; mark the milestones of physical age and loss; turn our attention to body embellishments, from clothing to jewelry to tattoos: What messages do they send, what stories do they tell? The workshop will include a writing prompt.

The Keepsake Chronicles: Leaving a Legacy in Writing

The kids don’t want your twelve settings of porcelain dinnerware or Grandma’s silverplated gravy boat. And that big armoire in the hallway? It weighs a ton, even if your great-great-grandad made it with his own hands. But there’s one gift that is sure to be treasured: your family stories. And those beloved-but-inconvenient keepsakes can be the springboards to wonderful essays, poems, and letters. This workshop will introduce the idea of keeping an inventory of stories, and offer examples of ways in which creative writers have imbued those stories with humor, love, and meaning. The workshop will include a writing prompt.

The Little Engine that Can: The Heart of the Short Essay

Composing the short-short essay—one that takes two or three minutes to read aloud—is crafting an artwork in miniature. A good short essay can be intimate, heartfelt, and moving. It combines the narrative flow of fiction, the concise quality of lyric poetry, and the emotional power of song. Creating the short essay can employ the research skills of a journalist, the critical eye of an editor, and the performance techniques of a storyteller. In this workshop we will discuss some of the reasons and inspirations for writing short essays, hear examples of memorable essays, and hone in on the advice of the late Donald McCaig, who said, “The simpler the narrative, the more emotional weight it can carry.”

Burke Allen



Allen Media Strategies “Director Of Fun” and National Conference of Personal Managers Board of Directors Member/National VP Burke Allen brings decades of media, marketing, public relations, broadcast and entertainment industry experience to his author, expert and celebrity clients.

His background includes successful stints as a personal manager, agent, radio and TV host, media trainer, author consultant and coach, writer, top-rated morning show personality, radio station owner and programmer, broadcast consultant, voiceover talent, audiobook narrator, podcaster and media trainer/educator.

Based in Washington DC, Allen Media Strategies has provided high impact

representation and guidance for hundreds of authors including New York Times best-sellers, Amazon #1 best-sellers and hundreds of literary award winners. He also proudly represents small/indy press and self-published authors, providing them with massive earned media exposure, demonstrating that “anyone with a great story deserves for the world to know about it”.

Burke consults or represents several publishers, agencies, government entities and charities including Speakermatch, the National Publicity Summit and the Denver Foundation, manages national and international touring musicians, members of Rock and Roll Hall of Fame groups, Tony nominated Broadway talent, reality TV personalities, motion picture, network television and streaming platform talent, subject matter experts, political campaigns and candidates, non-profit groups, corporations and many others.

Allen Media Strategies has overseen hundreds of book signing events and author personal appearances, concerts, television and radio media tours, satellite media tours, print and online campaigns, campaign releases and more. He was the Executive Producer of two separate TV telethons, which featured dozens of entertainers and celebrities and raised nearly a half million dollars for flood recovery efforts throughout Appalachia,

For over two decades, Burke’s clients have landed massive exposure on every major U.S. television and radio network and cable outlet, many overseas outlets and networks and hundreds of leading print and online outlets around the world.

The author of the award-winning author PR guide, “Becoming Semi Famous”, Burke has been a contributor to various publications including Radio and Records, All Access, was featured in a cover story for Insights magazine, is a Billboard Award winner, a sought after speaker on media, marketing, PR strategy for authors, publishers, the music and entertainment industries, and has appeared as a speaker or panelist at multiple conferences for Reader’s Favorite Awards, Pollstar, the National Conference of Personal Managers, Morning Show Boot Camp, The Learning Annex, national associations and several colleges/universities. Learn more at www.allenmediastrategies.com.

Top Ten Strategies for Generating Thousands In Free Media and Marketing Coverage For Your Book

Burke Allen, Washington DC-based and WV-born PR, media and marketing strategist and Director of Fun at Allen Media Strategies, shares the specific ways his team has landed their author clients massive free exposure worth millions of dollars on leading outlets from coast-to-coast. This session is a “must-attend” if you’re serious about growing your reader fanbase.

Author-PR Speed Dating; Our Expert Will Come Up With Instant Free Media Hooks For Your Book

Not sure how to pitch your book to get potential readers interested? Learn how expert book marketers get to the essence of what motivates people to take action. You’ll even have the opportunity to develop your own ‘author and book elevator pitch’; just be sure you’re open to energetic, fresh outside-the-box thinking!

Media Training 101: Learn How To Give Great Interviews That Will Make Readers Want To Buy Your Book

Authors, experts, politicians, celebrities, business leaders and others routinely pay thousands of dollars for media training before they go on camera or behind the microphone to promote their book, product, service or platform. This fun, interactive presentation will show you how to be ready to sell your book and get more readers when you’re “on the air”!

John Burroughs



John Burroughs is a writer, performer and publisher born in Richwood, West Virginia, and based in Cleveland, Ohio. A recent U.S. National Beat Poet Laureate (2022-23) and Ohio Beat Poet Laureate (2019-2021), Burroughs is the author of *The Wrest of the Worthwhile* [2023, Far Queue Press], *Rattle & Numb: Selected and New Poems* [2019, Venetian Spider Press] and numerous chapbooks. He serves as a vice president for the Ohio Poetry Association and, since 2008, as the founding editor and publisher for Crisis Chronicles Press. Find him at <https://linktr.ee/johnburroughs>.

We Got the Beat

Exploring elements of Beat poetry with a generative workshop.

Stand and Deliver

Exploring how to better read / perform your poetry publicly.

Jigsaw Puzzle Sandwich

Exploring how to best organize your poetry manuscript.

Brad Barkley



Brad Barkley, a North Carolina native, is the author of *Money, Love* (Norton), a Barnes & Noble "Discover Great New Writers" selection and a "BookSense 76" choice. Named one of the best books of the year by *The Washington Post* and *Library Journal*, it was followed by *Alison's Automotive Repair Manual* (St. Martin's), another "BookSense 76" selection.

He has published two short story collections, *Circle View* (SMU Press) and *Another Perfect Catastrophe* (St. Martin's). His short fiction has appeared in nearly forty magazines, including *The Southern Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Oxford American*, *Glimmer Train*, *Book Magazine*, and *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, which twice awarded him the Emily Balch Prize for Best Fiction.

His first YA novel, *Scrambled Eggs at Midnight* (Penguin/Dutton), was a "BookSense 76" choice, followed by *Dream Factory*, also a "BookSense

76" selection, a Library Guild "Book of the Month" pick, and the Texas Institute of Arts and Letters' "Best Young Adult Book." In 2009, he published *Jars of Glass* (Penguin/Dutton). His latest novel, *The Reel Life of Zara Kegg*, is forthcoming from Regal House in 2026.

Brad has received four Individual Artist Awards from the Maryland State Arts Council and a Creative Writing Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. He lives in Western Maryland with his wife, Kristin, and can be found on X @bradbarkleybook.

Note: Brad Barkley is serving as a panelist for Diane Tarantini's "No Tax on Tips" and "To MFA or Not to MFA" panel discussions.

Mike Dittman



Michael Dittman is a professor of English and Creative Writing who lives and writes near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His most recent novel is *Who Holds the Devil*. He is also the author of *Jack Kerouac; A Biography*, *Masterpieces of the Beat Generation*, and *Small Brutal Incidents*. His new book, *The Smoky City*, is to be published in 2026. His short stories and poetry, as well as his journalism and non-fiction, are widely published and anthologized. His play, *The Clear Creek Tract*, was produced by Kent State University in 2023. He has been awarded the Hicks Prize for Poetry, a Pennsylvania Arts Council Special Stipend Grant Award, a Pennsylvania Artist in Education Grant, the Small Press Distribution Lannan Literary Grant, and the Brennecke Award for Outstanding Scholarship. He is the poetry editor of *Appalachian Lit*. He was a National Poetry Slam Semi-Finalist and performed his spoken word with the Lollapalooza tour. Contact him at Michaeldittman.com

Writing the Body: Using Physicality to Deepen Imagery and Emotion

In this generative workshop, participants will explore how physical experience and bodily sensations can serve as powerful metaphors for emotional depth and complex human experiences. By engaging directly with the body as both subject and tool, writers will deepen their ability to convey emotion and layered meaning in their poems. Participants will leave with rough drafts of poems and an understanding of how to use the body as both literal and metaphorical material in their poetry, deepening the emotional complexity of their writing.

Surprising with Structure: Using Form to Create Organic Turns and Surprises

Drawing from Randall Jarrell's observation that "a successful poem starts from one position and ends at a very different one," this workshop explores how poets can use poetic structure to create dynamic, surprising shifts in meaning, tone, and perspective. By experimenting with both traditional and innovative structures, participants will learn how to create poems that build toward unexpected turns, enriching their work with surprise, insight, and emotional depth. By the end of the workshop, participants will have a deeper understanding of how structure can drive meaning and provide a means to surprise and engage readers. We'll have the opportunity to share our work with each other and offer feedback on the craft and technique used. Participants will leave with a new poem that uses form to heighten its impact.

Tightening Imagery: Revising for Precision and Emotional Impact

In this workshop, participants will focus on the revision process to refine and enhance their use of imagery, making sure that each image serves a clear, deliberate purpose in the poem. The goal is to help writers hone their skills in cutting away excess language while ensuring that each image resonates with the reader emotionally and intellectually. By the end of the workshop, participants will have refined their understanding of how to use imagery to carry meaning and emotional weight in a poem. They will leave with a revised poem that demonstrates more precision and emotional depth through imagery. While there will be some generation in the workshop, participants will benefit greatly from bringing poems that are ready to be revised to the workshop.

Tobi Doyle and Sheila Redling



Tobi Doyle is the author of over a dozen romance novels. A recipient of RWA's 2022 Service Award and 2022 PRO Mentor of the Year Award for her work on the RWA Guide to Writing Romance, and the JUG award, she loves working with Sheila Redling at Intensive Genre Workshops, where they provide a writing craft foundation for genre writers.

Sheila Redling is a Huntington local, a graduate of Georgetown University, and fifteen-year veteran of the WKEE morning radio show. After hanging up her headphones, she turned to fiction. Her first thriller, FLOWERTOWN, sold 50,000 copies in the first six weeks. Since then, she has released a series of mind-bending thrillers and sci-fi novels, including DAMOCLES; the Dani Britton series; and BAGGAGE, her first novel set in West Virginia. She also co-wrote the comedy stage play, One Night in Venice, with Lulu Smith. A recipient of the WV Library Association's 2022 Literary Merit Award, Redling has been a presenter at Bouchercon, Left Coast Crime, WV Writers and more. Now, with author Tobi Doyle, she co-directs Intensive Genre Workshops, a workshop program helping emerging genre writers reach their writing goals. Redling also acts as guest liaison at the Huntington Area CVB, promoting artists and events, and welcoming guests to the city she loves. When all of that is done, she lives in Huntington with a wide array of wildlife.



Corralling Your Characters

Are your side characters running amok? Have they taken over the storyline like a bunch of sugared-up second graders? Is your main character frozen in place, refusing to do your bidding? Or worse, have they become boring? Sheila and Tobi will help you regain control of your narrative and get your characters back into place by figuring out roles, motivations, and goals. Mary Sues must die!

What Attendees Will Learn: Give your main characters agency and damage-driven motivation. Put them through the wringer. Raise the emotional stakes and get the most out of your side characters to drive the story forward.

Villains and Conflicts

Great villains make a book memorable but how do you elevate your villain from a mustache-twirling cartoon character to a fully fleshed out human being your readers will love to hate? Make them the perfect villain for your hero and up the conflict! Join Sheila Redling, and Tobi Doyle as we discuss the balance and contrast needed to craft a villain that is the perfect foil for your main character.

What Attendees Will Learn: Using emotional baggage, thwarted desires to understand the unique characteristics that make a great villain standout, including the powers of hubris, sympathy, and narrative tension.

Kathleen Guire



Kathleen Guire is an author, teacher, and speaker with a passion for storytelling that reflects her trauma-informed background. A mother of seven—four through adoption—and a former National Parent of the Year, Kathleen has written over a dozen books spanning fiction and nonfiction. With twenty years of experience teaching creative writing, she weaves resilience and healing into her narratives. Her fictional characters navigate challenges using trauma-informed strategies, creating compelling, relatable stories. You can find Kathleen podcasting, blogging, or working on a new book at KathleenGuireAuthor.com.

Rapid Series Release: How I did it and Why.

I'd love to share my experience with rapid series release in a way that resonates with young or aspiring writers who are eager to see their stories come to life. Here's what I'd focus on in the workshop:

- **Planning for Success:**
I'll show attendees how I mapped out my series step by step, from creating exciting story arcs to keeping track of characters and themes. I'll share tips on using tools like Dabble to stay organized and explain how setting clear, achievable goals can keep the writing process on track and manageable.
- **Building Momentum:**
I'll talk about how I built a writing routine that works, even with a busy schedule. Whether it's using writing sprints, blocking out time for creativity, or staying motivated during tough moments, I'll give practical advice to help young writers stay consistent and inspired.
- **Why Rapid Release Works:**
I'll explain how releasing a series quickly can help build a loyal audience, keep readers engaged, and make an impact in the competitive world of publishing. I'll also talk about the fun and creative side of marketing—like promoting pre-orders, designing eye-catching covers, and sharing your journey on social media.

This workshop is perfect for young writers who dream of publishing their stories and want to learn how to keep the momentum going from one book to the next. It's a mix of practical advice and inspiration, designed to empower them to take their first big steps as authors.

Writing the Middle School Novel: Adventure, Humor, and Heart

As a writer of middle school mysteries like *The Case of the Missing Skeleton* and *The Case of the Missing Heirloom*, I know firsthand how exciting—and challenging—it is to write for this dynamic age group. Middle schoolers are curious, imaginative, and emotionally invested in stories that speak to their experiences. In this workshop, I'll share how I craft novels that balance humor, adventure, and heartfelt themes to captivate younger readers.

Here's what we'll cover:

- **Crafting Relatable Characters:** We'll dive into creating characters middle schoolers can see themselves in—whether it's Sera Craven's sleuthing curiosity, Josiah's steady leadership, or Mandy's fearless spirit. We'll also explore how quirks and flaws make characters more lovable and real.
- **Developing Engaging Plots:** Learn how to craft plots with age-appropriate stakes that feel big to middle schoolers, whether it's solving a mystery, saving a community event, or tackling friendship challenges. We'll discuss pacing, twists, and how to keep readers hooked from chapter one.
- **Balancing Humor and Heart:** Middle schoolers love to laugh, but they also want stories that make them think and feel. I'll share tips for blending lighthearted moments with meaningful themes, like navigating identity, family, and friendship, without being heavy-handed.

Attendees will leave this workshop with actionable strategies to create stories that entertain, inspire, and connect with middle school readers. Whether you're writing a quirky mystery, a heartfelt adventure, or anything in between, this session will help you craft the perfect balance of fun and depth.

This workshop is designed for writers who want to tap into the vibrant world of middle school storytelling. I'd love the chance to share my passion for this age group and help others bring their stories to life!

Creating Trauma-Informed and Quirky Characters with Depth and Heart

As a trauma-informed writer and creator of memorable characters like Sera Craven, a determined young sleuth with a compelling adoption story, and Sister Zita Gloria, a quirky nun who leaves a trail of glitter wherever she goes, I've developed methods for crafting characters who are both authentic and unforgettable. In this workshop, I'll share how to bring emotional depth and playful charm to your stories by balancing trauma-informed writing with unique quirks that make characters shine.

Here's what we'll explore:

- Understanding Trauma's Impact: How trauma shapes behavior, relationships, and choices, creating characters who feel real and relatable.
- Adding Quirks Without Gimmicks: Tips for infusing characters with endearing or surprising traits—like Lemon's 1950s flair and her loyal dog Rusty—that feel organic and enhance their depth.
- Avoiding Stereotypes: Writing respectfully about sensitive topics while celebrating individuality in your characters.
- Practical Techniques: Proven methods to create multi-dimensional characters that resonate with readers, balancing humor, heart, and humanity.

Attendees will leave this workshop inspired to write nuanced, emotionally rich stories featuring characters who captivate readers with their relatability, complexity, and charm—just like Sera, Adelina, and Sister Zita Gloria.

This session is ideal for writers looking to craft characters with both heart and humor, blending trauma-informed depth with quirky, unforgettable details.

Natalie Homer



Natalie Homer is the author of *Under the Broom Tree* (Autumn House Press). Her recent poetry has been published in *Bayou Magazine*, *Radar Poetry*, *Raleigh Review*, and others. She received an MFA from West Virginia University and works for WVU Press.

What We Privilege in Poems

...which looks at what poets focus on first in terms of poetic elements, e.g. image, sound, lineation, content, etc. and asks participants to consider what they tend to privilege or overlook in their work.

Poetry as Assemblage

How we might think of poems like a collage or assemblage of disparate yet curated pieces. Looking at examples of poems that are not a straight, linear narrative, but rather line-by-line creations that, while cohesive, don't have to be so prose-like in their structure.

The Line

Focusing particularly on how the line is the unit of measure within a poem, and one of the only elements that is unique to poetry as opposed to prose. Paying attention to line breaks and structure—being intentional about what is included or excluded in lines. Reviewing definitions of end-stopped, parsed, and enjambed lines.

Tim Huguenin



Timothy G. Huguenin is a hillbilly writer of the strange and spooky, living in the dark Allegheny Mountains of West Virginia. His books include *When the Watcher Shakes*, *Little One*, and *Unknowing, I Sink*. His short stories have appeared in various publications, including *Vastarien: A Literary Journal*, *Anthology of Appalachian Writers Volume XI*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*. He is the current editor of *Mountain Whispers*, the member newsletter of West Virginia Writers, Inc.

Okay, I Wrote It... Now What?

You've been to countless critiques and craft workshops. You've carved and you've whittled and you've polished the manuscript until you're sick of looking at it. It's finally ready for publication! How exactly does that happen, again? If you're bewildered by conflicting advice about cover letters, manuscript formatting, and submission etiquette, then don't miss this. Timothy will share his strategies and tips on maximizing your chances with editors, finding magazines and anthologies to submit to, and keeping track of all your submissions. This presentation will focus primarily on short fiction submissions, though some content may be relevant for poetry, nonfiction essays, and longer manuscripts.

Build-A-Blog Workshop

Need a website, but have no idea where to start? Running on a shoestring budget—or maybe skip the shoes altogether? Join Timothy as he walks through setting up a free Wordpress website/blog in this live demonstration. For absolute beginners, no coding or design skills required!

Note: Tim is also serving as a panelist for Diane Tarantini's "No Tax on Tips" panel discussion.

Anna Dickson James



Anna Dickson James is the author of the short story collection *Boys Buy Me Drinks to Watch Me Fall Down* with Whiskey Tit Press. She earned her MFA in Creative Writing from Queens University of Charlotte, NC and is a professor of Literature and Writing at Garrett College in Deep Creek, Maryland. When she's not teaching or writing, she can be found hiking America's National Parks, seeking new adventures and the perfect vista.

Note: Anna Dickson James is serving as a panelist for Diane Tarantini's "No Tax on Tips" and "To MFA or Not to MFA" panel discussions.

Donna Kathryn Kelly



Donna Kathryn Kelly has practiced law for three decades, primarily in the Illinois criminal justice system. Kelly began her career as an assistant public defender handling felony and juvenile delinquency cases. She later served for seven years as an assistant appellate defender and she has argued cases before the Appellate Court of Illinois and the Supreme Court of Illinois. Kelly's legal work on a clemency petition is featured in the HBO docuseries, *The Murders at Starved Rock*, and she appears extensively in Episode 2 of the series.

After devoting a decade to criminal defense work, Kelly served as an assistant state's attorney in McHenry County, Illinois, where she headed the Gang Prosecutions Unit and successfully prosecuted numerous felony cases to jury verdict. She rose through the ranks to serve as Chief of the Civil Division, and subsequently, First Assistant State's Attorney. Later in her career, Kelly was the Chief Civil Deputy State's Attorney in the Minnehaha County State's Attorney's Office in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Kelly is the author of *The Cheney Manning Series*, a collection of suspense novels featuring a public defender turned amateur sleuth who investigates homicide cases. She is also the author of the paranormal horror thriller, *THE DESCENT: A Halloween Novel*, which was a semi-finalist in the 2023 Soon to be Famous Illinois Author Project Manuscript Contest. Her latest novel, *The Lion at the Falls*, was a finalist in the 2024 *Killer Nashville* Claymore Award Competition (Supernatural Category) and was awarded third place in the 2024 West Virginia Writers' Competition (Book-Length Prose Category). Kelly's poetry has appeared in various literary journals and anthologies, such as *Oakwood*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Southern Arizona Press*, and *Heart of Flesh Literary Journal*. You can find out more about Kelly and her writings [@donnakathrynkelly.com](https://donnakathrynkelly.com).

Photo credit: Linda M. Barrett Productions

Cross-Examination, Closing Argument & Credibility: How to Write Compelling Fiction

Cross-Examination, Closing Argument & Credibility: How to Write Compelling Fiction is a workshop which aims to enhance the skills of beginner to intermediate fiction writers. The program is a dynamic, interactive approach to creative writing: one that encourages attendees to reflect introspectively on their own life experiences in drafting realistic fiction. As an attorney who has practiced law for three decades, primarily in the Illinois criminal justice system, the presenter discusses how her legal career has influenced her fiction writing. The workshop includes a writing exercise concentrating on dialogue and character development.

Parlaying the Play: How Drafting a One-Act Play may Enhance your Fiction Writing.

Parlaying the Play: How Drafting a One-Act Drama Script may Enhance your Fiction Writing is a workshop for fiction writers of all levels but who have minimal experience with playwriting. The class will focus on utilizing playwriting techniques to develop credible dialogue and action in fiction writing. The workshop includes a writing exercise in which the presenter will provide a brief overview of three Opinions of the Supreme Court of the United States. Each participant will be asked to select the fact pattern from one of the cases as a backdrop for a play and then will draft a scene inspired by the particular case.

The Common Ghost: Incorporating Paranormal and Supernatural Themes in Fiction Writing.

The Common Ghost: Incorporating Paranormal and Supernatural Themes in Fiction Writing is a presentation on incorporating speculative elements in fiction writing, regardless of the genre. The speaker will discuss the use of paranormal and supernatural imagery in classical literature. The presentation will also cover the import of creating grounded characters in magical realism and horror writing.

Kate Long



Kate Long grew up in Fayette County. Her fiction, songwriting, and journalism have won national awards. She has coached writers in venues ranging from the Governor's School for the Arts and the Augusta Heritage Center to the Atlanta Constitution-Journal and the Dallas Morning News. These days, she directs the online *Voices of West Virginia* (www.voicesofwv.org).

Damn right we have writers.

Voices of West Virginia started as a public radio series, aimed at torpedoing the idea that West Virginia is a literary backwater. Now it's online, with hundreds of writing activities and an opportunity to learn from some of our best writers. This year, they added a quarterly newsletter that spotlights more of our great writers every three months. You'll come away from this session with fresh inspiration and the names of WV writers you'd like to read. And you'll have a chance for input into the newsletter.

A Writing Toolbox that Works

Before she retired, Kate Long worked as a writing coach all over the US, with journalists, poets, fiction writers, songwriters, teens and kids. She developed a system she says works with any kind of writing and any age person. This will be a rapid-fire hour of one writing tip after another. Come ready to write and take notes. You'll come away with a pack of fresh ideas you can apply to whatever you write.

Karen Salyer McElmurray



Karen Salyer McElmurray's *Surrendered Child: A Birth Mother's Journey*, was an AWP Award Winner for Creative Nonfiction. Her novels are *The Motel of the Stars*, Editor's Pick by Oxford American, and *Strange Birds in the Tree of Heaven*, winner of the Chaffin Award for Appalachian Writing. As a fiction writer, she is the recipient of a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Kentucky Foundation for Women and the North Carolina Arts Council.

She has co-edited, with poet Adrian Blevins, an essay collection called *Walk till the Dogs Get Mean*. *Wanting Radiance*, a novel, and *Voice Lessons*, a short collection of lyric essays, came out in 2021. A new essay collection, *I Could Name God in Twelve Ways* came out in September 2024 from University Press of Kentucky.

Houses as Doorways to Ourselves

This nonfiction workshop will look through the lenses of our memories at houses—ones we inhabit and ones we dream. We will read a few excerpts from memoirs that explore houses that are, as philosopher Gaston Bachelard says, places of contemplation and a gathering-in of memory and self-discovery. Most importantly, we will start writing memoir pieces centered in the houses of our pasts, our present lives, and our imagined futures. We will share and discuss these important pieces of new writing.

Writing Wonder: A Look at Writing Joy in Difficult Times

These are troubled times—with fires, hurricanes, floods, political upheavals, and the aftermath of a pandemic. To my mind, one of the most important things we can do during such times is focus on community, connections, compassion, and joy. We will look at some writers who write joy in all its complexities via the natural world, the spiritual world, and via the transformative power of language. We will focus on excerpts from longer readings, and we will write in response to some exercises that can later be opened to full drafts of stories or essays or poems.

Endings and Beginnings

Novelist Graham Greene says that “A story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead.” The

arbitrariness—catching hold of an idea or a dream or a moment of insight—is certainly part of the sheer magic of writing. But beginnings and endings are also the weaving and unweaving of words. Deciding how to start a story and how to end it involves careful translation of our original moments of insight. Beginnings and endings become careful revision once we capture the arbitrary experience we begin with. This fiction workshop will look at some examples of openings and endings from some classic and some contemporary stories. We will discuss, and we will also begin work on some openings of our own.

Renée Nicholson



Renée K. Nicholson is the author of *Fierce and Delicate: Essays on Dance and Illness*, co-editor of the award-winning anthology *Bodies of Truth: Personal Narratives of Illness, Disability, and Medicine*, and the poetry collections *Postscripts*, and *Roundabout Directions to Lincoln Center*. In 2024 she left her formal roles in academia to consult in the areas narrative medicine and health humanities. She is the Series Editor for *Connective Tissue* on West Virginia University Press and is a contributing writer for *Synopsis: a Journal of Health Humanities*, and the author of many creative pieces and scholarly articles. Renée has recently been named an upcoming writer-in-residence at Chateau d'Orquevaux in Champagne-Ardenne, France; was a past Emerging Writer-in-Residence at Penn State-Altoona; and was the recipient of the 2018 Susan S. Landis Award for Distinguished Service to the Arts from the West Virginia Division of Arts, Culture, and History. She is a creative partner in the art and story initiative *Healthcare Is Human*. She can

be found at www.reeneenicholson.com, and on IG/Threads @ReneeKwrites and on Bluesky @reeneknicholson.bsky.social.

Business and Accounting for Writers: The Basics

Have you ever wondered if your writing can be considered part of the “creator economy?” You might be curious about the ways in which an author is a kind of entrepreneur. Whether we like it or not, artists do operate in a marketplace. In this session, you’ll learn some basics to help you successfully manage your writing life, including some rudimentary accounting and ways to manage this aspect of your writing career without it being a major stressor. Learn about what you can, and cannot, write off as reasonable expenses, and create a system that works for you.

Your Poetic Universe

Your favorite poets probably capture your attention not only through a sense of intimacy, with you, the reader, but also because their poems contain a kind of sensibility that is unmistakable across poems and collections. Of course, we want to create this sense not only in our individual poems, but across our poems. In this session, you'll map out your own poetic universe, details and particularities that will be at the heart of your style and sensibility, sustaining your unique voice across poems. You'll walk out with a personal taxonomy that can serve as a repository you can dip into as you create across poems. From a series of exercises, you begin to see your poems as stars in a larger constellation, helping you see where your poems have been, are going, and what they could be in the future.

The Poetry of Restoration

Living in fractured times, with constant demands pulling at us, and often in need of repair for physical and/or psychic wounds, this session is meant to show how the reading and writing of poems can be a great source of restoration. Poems can help us disconnect from the reductive, the mechanistic, the technological, the materialist, and so on. The exercises in this session will help you read and write poems that help reconnect you with those things that nurture and sustain you. The poem can be a great source of healing power, and our goal is to find those poems, both by others and inside us, that imbue us with spirit, wisdom, and that are aware and responsive to our presence and needs.

Emily Patterson



Emily Patterson is a Nationally Board Certified English teacher who has survived eighteen years in the classroom with students in grades 6-12, with most of her time spent teaching eighth grade English at John Adams Middle School because she thinks middle schoolers are the best! She is a fellow of the Central West Virginia Writing Project and works closely with the WV Young Writers contest, often serving as a contest judge. Emily holds a BA in English from Washington & Lee University, a Master's degree in Secondary English Education from WVU and a Master's of English Literature from Middlebury College's Bread Loaf School of English. In her spare time she sings with womanSong Chorale of West Virginia, plays flute in the Kanawha Valley Community Band, enjoys running very long distances and reading very long books, but not at the same time. She lives in Charleston with her fur family: Taco, Rose, Lucy, Bert, and Ernie.

Note: Emily is one of our two youth track instructors.

10-9-8: Finding Power in Word Choice

In this session, writers will complete a guided 10-9-8 writing exercise to explore the power of diction & syntax and then examine the impact of a single word on a longer creative piece.

Measured Moments: Inspiring Character Creation through Music

In this session, writers will craft a unique character inspired by musical selections. We will explore the way character traits influence a character's actions in plot and relationships to others in longer texts.

Diane Tarantini



Award-winning writer Diane Tarantini is the proud parent of the children's book, *The Brave Knight*, which was chosen to be given to every foster child in the state. In addition, Tarantini's second book, *Everyone Was Silent: A memoir*, launched last year. Passionate about child safety, Tarantini is also a body safety presenter in West Virginia schools and communities. She credits the West Virginia Writers organization with giving her a firm foundation in the craft, starting with the 2009 summer conference in Ripley. You can read her blog at dianetarantini.com.

No Tax on Tips: Free Advice from Writers Who've Paid Their Dues

Looking for writing advice that won't cost you a dime? Join us for No Tax on Tips, where four award-winning writers share their best insights – completely free of charge. Inspired by Silas House's workshop, "Everything I Know About Writing," this panel offers hard-earned wisdom, practical tips, and a few laughs about the joys and struggles of the writing life. Whether you're stuck on a first draft or fine-tuning a final one, we've got advice worth more than its price tag.

To MFA or Not to MFA? That Is the Question.

The decision to pursue an MFA in Writing can be both exciting and daunting. Is an MFA the right path for you? What can you expect from the experience, and how does it shape your writing career? In this panel discussion, award-winning writers Brad Barkley, Anna James, Rhonda Browning White, and Diane Tarantini will explore the pros and cons of MFA programs, including mentorship, networking, time to write, and the financial and career implications. Whether you're considering an MFA for artistic growth or professional advancement, this session will provide honest insights to help you make an informed decision.

Patty Thompson



Patricia Thompson is the acquisition editor at Redhawk Publications, a creative initiative of Catawba Valley Community College in Hickory, NC. In this role, she evaluates manuscripts from authors, negotiates contracts, guides accepted titles through the publishing pipeline, and develops book launch marketing strategies.

During her four years with Redhawk, she has worked with over 100 authors and overseen the publication of nearly 200 books.

Patty is an outspoken advocate for the literary arts and a champion of all artistic endeavors. She proudly serves as the president of Arts Culture Catawba and

as a board member of the North Carolina Writers' Network.

She has a twenty-year background in higher education and holds a Master's degree in Education from George Washington University, as well as a Bachelor's degree in English Literature from Georgetown University.

Pitch sessions (held over two workshops)

Patty Thompson, Acquisitions Editor for Redhawk Publications, is holding 10-minute pitch sessions with writers who have a manuscript ready for submission (poetry, fiction, or nonfiction). She'll give constructive feedback during the sessions, and she hopes to come away with at least one (or more!) authors signed for publication at Redhawk Publications. Redhawk will be closed to submissions at that time, but she'll open the press to submissions only for WV Writers, Inc. conference attendees, giving them a leg up.

To have your work considered, please have ready – at a minimum – before entering your session:

- Status of the work (Done? Halfway?)
- Word-count estimate
- Marketing plan
- Summary of the manuscript
- At least the first 2 chapters

Only 14 sessions are available across two separate workshop slots (seven sessions per slot) at a cost of \$25 each. You must purchase a ticket to reserve your session. Tickets must be purchased in advance, in person, at the registration table starting on Friday, June 6 at 2:00 pm. All purchases are first-come, first served – WV Writers will not save a spot for you.

Travis Vandal



Born and raised in Kanawha County, West Virginia, I have a B.A. from Marshall University in secondary education and a Masters Degree from WVU in social studies and English secondary education. Over my nineteen years as an educator, I have earned my National Board Certification (NBPTS), participated in a variety of workshops, co-directed the Central West Virginia Writing Project, and provided instruction for over 2,000 students. In addition to my education duties, I have coached multiple sports and I am currently the athletic director at John Adams Middle School. I enjoy traveling throughout the United States. I'm a singer/songwriter with music available on streaming services. I also play on a trivia team called Seabass and the Fellas. I have two teenage sons and my wife is a teacher as well. Life is good.

Note: Travis is one of our two youth track instructors.

Seven Stories

This session will involve a hands-on activity at the beginning creating what I call a "little book." We take one sheet of paper and create an 8-page small book. This can be used for a variety of assignments in any curriculum. With this activity, the participants will come up with "seven stories" that can define their life; things that happened throughout their lives that make up who they are. On each page of the little book, they will summarize those stories with simply a title or one sentence. Then, they will expand on one of them into a lengthier piece. We will come back and share some or all of the story. As an exit, the participants will brainstorm ideas about different ways they can use the little book activity.

The Pick 3

I will go over a brief powerpoint relating to something from my content. It may be a presentation on John Brown, Mary Ingles, the Pringle Brothers, etc. After the short presentation, we will talk about diverse writing options, and how everything doesn't have to be straight prose. The idea is to engage kids in writing, there needs to be a variety of types from which to choose. For example, when I do the Mary Ingles activity, I give the students five options: 1. Write a journal entry from Mary that takes place at any point during her ordeal with the Shawnee. 2. Write a

couplet poem about Mary. 3. Write an obituary that would appear in the newspaper upon Mary's death (research obits in the local news as examples). 4. Write a fictionalized retelling loosely based on Mary's story as a fairytale. 5. Write a letter from Mary to her husband Will describing the day she was kidnapped by the Shawnee.

Rhonda Browning White



Rhonda Browning White gleefully resides in Hickory, NC. Her first novel, *Filling the Big Empty*, was published in November 2024 by Redhawk Publications. She is currently editing *The Appalachian Grit Lit Anthology* featuring some of our region's best authors, forthcoming in 2025 by Redhawk Publications. She received the 2019 Press 53 Award for Short Fiction for her short-story collection, *The Lightness of Water and Other Stories*. Her work also appears in *The Ignatian Literary Magazine*, *Entropy*, *Prime Number Magazine*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, *Qu Literary Journal*, *Hospital Drive*, *HeartWood Literary Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Steel Toe Review*, *Ploughshares Writing Lessons*, *Tiny*

Text, *New Pages*, *South85 Journal*, *The Skinny Poetry Journal*, *WV Executive*, *Mountain Echoes*, *Gambit*, *Justus Roux*, *Bluestone Review*, and in the anthologies *Appalachia (Un)Broken*, *Ice Cream Secrets*, *Appalachia's Last Stand*, and *Mountain Voices*. Rhonda served as a guest editor for *The Chestatee Review* and *Prime Number Magazine*. Four of her stories have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, but alas, she is still a Pushcart bridesmaid. Her blog "Read. Write. Live!" is found at www.RhondaBrowningWhite.com. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from Converse University in Spartanburg, SC and was awarded the Watson Fellowship and a Standiford Scholarship from Eckerd College's Writers in Paradise.

Note: Rhonda Browning White is also serving as a panelist for Diane Tarantini's "No Tax on Tips" and "To MFA or Not to MFA" panel discussions.

She May Be Little, But She's Tough

Writing short stories: why shorter can be harder, and how to overcome their challenges.

Cut it! Cut it! Cut it!

Self-editing for writers.

Small Press Publishing: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly . . . and the Beautiful. (with Patricia Thompson, Acquisitions Editor of Redhawk Publications.)

In this one, I'll be discussing my personal experience with small-press publishing, as I have two books out with different small presses, and I've received contract offers with five. Patty will be discussing the topic from an AE's POV. We'll open it for a Q&A, as well.