



GCWA Annual Writing Contest Opens We want to hear your stories!

Our annual writing contest opened for submissions March 15th! Works of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry may be submitted online through June 30th. Members and nonmembers can submit multiple pieces. Each category offers first, second, and third-place prizes--\$200, \$75, and \$50, respectively. Details can be found on the [GCWA website, Contest tab](#). Prose submissions are limited to 1500 words and poetry is capped at 40 lines. Previous winning works can be viewed at the [Contest Winners](#) tab.

Winners will be announced by August 15th. The Septmeber GCWA meeting will celebrate the winners!

April Monthly Meeting

Our April Monthly meeting is sure to please with not one, but two speakers!

Join us on **Saturday, April 19th** from 10:00 – 12:00 p.m. at the Lakes Regional Library, 15290 Bass Road, Ft. Myers, FL 33919 to hear from Florida's favorite storyteller, Sean Martinelli, and Art Wenk, author of mystery novellas. Bring your questions!

Unable to attend in person? Join us by [Zoom](#). No registration required.

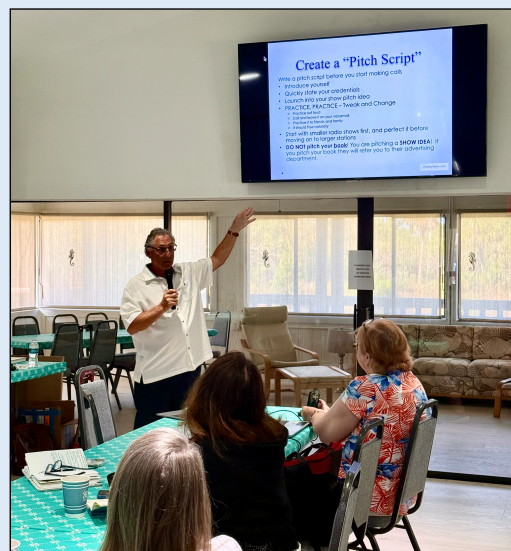
GCWA Has a New Home

GCWA is rehomed! Join us beginning in May at [St. Hilary's Episcopal Church](#) at 5011 McGregor Blvd, Fort Myers. As an added bonus to its central location, the McGregor Local Farmer's Market is held on the grounds of St. Hilary's each Saturday. GCWA members and guests will be able to stock up on produce and other goods at every meeting!

March Meeting Recap

Our March meeting offered members and guests a wealth of information related to GCWA including the reelection of the existing [Executive Team](#) and a presentation by Charley Valera on "[Marketing Strategies for Writers.](#)" Charley offered successful tips from his arsenal including how to effectively land book signings, who to reach out to further build awareness, what makes a good pitch (topical!), and most importantly, have a plan. You can find the PDF in the [member resource](#) section of our website.

Other news included announcing the [Annual Writing Contest](#), GCWAs new home (see sidebar), and that plans are underway to celebrate our 30th Anniversary! A committee has been meeting to discuss various ideas and venues, and we will have additional details to share at the April meeting. Stay tuned!



CELEBRATE POETRY!

April is **National Poetry Month**, established in 1996 by the Academy of American Poets to raise awareness and appreciation for poetry and poets. Listed below are some fun ways to recognize and participate (even if you aren't a poet...)!

- Celebrate National Poetry Month with a **poetry reading from Punta Gorda author Mary Imo-Stike**. The reading is at the Punta Gorda Charlotte Library, Saturday, April 5, 3:00pm - 5:00.
- Subscribe to a **Poem-a-Day**, the only daily poetry series publishing new work by today's poets to receive daily poetic inspiration in your inbox.
- Observe **Poem in Your Pocket Day** April 10. Celebrate wherever you are by selecting a favorite poem and carrying it with you throughout the day. Share it with others in person or on social media using the hashtag #PocketPoem.
- Join other poetry fans at the Punta Gorda Charlotte Library Friday, April 25, 2025 for the annual **Poet-Tea**, a literary and culinary event where pairings of tea and poetry will be explored in a guided program and discussion. Each of the teas to be sampled will be complemented by a corresponding poem and tasty treats! This year will feature all new pairings. Space is limited; **registration is required**.

GCWA Monthly Meetings

Mark your calendars for the following meeting dates @ 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Saturday, 4/19/25 – Author [Art Wenk](#) will discuss the decision to write mysteries, tips for writing in this genre, various publishing options, and what he's working on these days.

Saturday, 5/17/25 – Avoiding Trademark Troubles in Your Writing with [Bridges DelPonte](#)

Visit www.Gulfwriters.Org/Calendar for current info and other local events.

Do You Need a Website?



By Sheryl Stillman and AI

In several member meetings, the conversations have touched on the importance of [building a platform](#), having a [marketing plan](#), and nailing pitches, all to promote your writing. But before you generate a lot of awareness, you'll want to create a landing zone for your fans to learn more about you, read your work, and/or purchase your books.

Here are five reasons why having an online platform is crucial for writers:

1. **Builds Your Brand:** Writers can use websites to showcase what you're all about. By consistently sharing work, thoughts, and expertise, you can create a unique identity that resonates with readers and followers, which is valuable for the long term.
2. **Lends Credibility:** A professional website helps you establish yourself as a serious professional in a specific genre.
3. **Engages Community:** An online platform lets you interact directly with your audience. Whether through blog posts, social media, newsletters, or comments, you can engage with readers, receive feedback, and build a loyal following.
4. **Markets and Promotes:** Writing is not just about creating content but also marketing it. A landing space for readers helps you promote work, share excerpts, announce releases, and build anticipation for new projects while touting yourself as an expert.
5. **Allows for Networking and Collaboration:** Online platforms provide writers with ways to connect with other creatives, editors, agents, and professionals in the literary world. Networking online can lead to collaborations, opportunities for guest posts, joint projects, or even career-changing connections.

Next month we will feature ways to build your online presence. Tell us your stories or suggestions on what has worked for you, with or without a website, and we'll include them in the upcoming Craft Corner. Email to: communications@gulfwriters.org.



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Ginger Wakem

Editor's Note: The Member Spotlight is a regular feature that celebrates our members' journeys and their accomplishments.

Transformative Voices

Walking into a sliding door in 2002 and detaching a retina wasn't how I planned to end my working career. Adjusting to the loss of sight in my left eye took time, but my passion for landscape photography became my salvation. I only needed one eye to capture nature's beauty and tell its story through my camera lens. I began competing online and created a [website](#) to showcase my best work.

I've always been a writer, specializing in nonfiction. My work as a legal secretary taught me how to present facts clearly – an invaluable skill when my husband and I opened Clean Water America, writing marketing materials, customer instructions, and website content.

Life was good until Hurricane Irma devastated our landscape in 2018. Being avid gardeners, my husband and I began cleanup, and it was during this time the voices started...

First, Grace showed up in my dreams, a woman who thought she knew her husband Ray, her partner in a thriving trucking business. Then Ray interrupted, insisting on telling me about his mafia connections and second family - secrets Grace knew nothing about. He was adamant that his story mattered more than Grace's, though their narratives were inextricably linked.

I couldn't sleep. Their voices haunted me day and night, telling stories that wouldn't stop. I needed to purge this story if I ever hoped to sleep again.

I took a break from gardening and wrote instead, even without knowing anything about fiction writing. A friend, an accomplished author, read my first thirty pages and said, "You can write. Now go learn your craft." That's exactly what I did. For six years, I studied, wrote, edited, listened to beta readers, hired professional editors, submitted to countless agents, faced numerous rejections, and documented my journey.

In April 2024, I connected with Charlie Levine of Munn Avenue Press, a hybrid publisher, and, by October 2024, my novel "[Trust No One. Promise Nothing](#)" launched and reached #1 on Amazon's eBook list for mafia romance. Since then, I've completed a podcast and am taking part in a book club discussion about my novel on Discord.

(continued)

Transformative Voices *(continued)*

Those voices that once kept me awake now fuel my creativity. What began as an unwelcome intrusion has transformed into my greatest gift. The characters who insisted on being heard have found their home on the page, and readers around the world have welcomed them into their hearts. From a detached retina to a bestselling author—life's unexpected turns have led me exactly where I was meant to be. And Grace and Ray? They're just the beginning. More characters are already whispering their stories, waiting for me to bring them to life.

Reading Festival Creates Visibility and Fun



Readers of all ages, favoring all genres, visited the GCWA tent. Claudia Geagan entertains one of our youngest visitors.

Gulf Coast Writers Association had a great showing at the Southwest Florida Reading Festival March 1. Connecting best-selling authors and avid readers, the Festival also highlights local talent. Our GCWA tent attracted a stream of visitors eager to talk with our authors and buy books.

GCWA members, Jeanne Meeks, Ed Donlin, Ginger Wakem, Patti Walsh, Sarah Fisher Pointer, Pauline Hayton and Andrew Conlin filled the morning tent; Curt Ayers, Amy Pontius, Lori Swick and Jeanelle [for DL Havlin's books] covered the afternoon.

Claudia Geagan, GCWA Special Projects Director, organized our presence, and Ginger Wakem created an attractive sign with a QR code to access GCWA information. Numerous individuals inquired about meetings and membership.

Share Your News!

GCWA wants to share and celebrate our members' successes. Please submit your news to: Communications@GulfWriters.org to be included in The Gazette's next edition.

Petite Passages

Editor's note: This excerpt is from Lori Joan Swick's latest historical novel "The Sculptor and the Saint, just released in March. In a tale of passion and agony, two lives separated by centuries are united in their search for purity and purpose.

Vignette from *The Sculptor and the Saint*

By Lori Joan Swick

Rome. 287 A.D.

She could not raise her head from the blood pooling on the tile floor. She forced words through the pain in her throat. "Has night fallen?"

"Yes, Cecilia," Bishop Urban appeared within the steam. "It is a glorious night to join your divine spouse in heaven. The moon is almost full within wisps of clouds. Angels are holding it in place just for you." He took a stylus from his jurist's hand and placed it into hers. He forced her fingers around it. "You see, if you will make your mark here, we can arrange for a central place for you in the new Christian catacombs below the land your sainted husband left you."

"Sebastian?"

His name was the last word she would say. She choked as her lungs deflated and her throat closed over. Memories flooded her mind. She saw Sebastian's confident stride into the center of the Colosseum. He found her within the midst of the roaring crowd. Their eyes locked as three men entered with loaded whips and began to flay the skin from his beautiful shoulders, his back, his thighs. After they had destroyed his strong, young body, they began to bludgeon his head. Blood oozed out of his massive dark curls, until at last his eyes closed over.

Puer Valeria's sweet voice floated from somewhere behind the Bishop of Rome. "She wants a church built for Sebastian where she laid him to rest in the northern corridor."

"Of course." Urban moved Cecilia's hand toward the slate. "With your signature, we will turn your home into a beautiful church that will bear your name. This will assure your servants a safe place to live and worship."

We love printing GCWA members' short works!

Do you have a 250-word excerpt from your work? Maybe you are adventurous enough to write a Flash story of 250 words (brief fiction or nonfiction pieces that tell a whole story). Perhaps you have a poem that fits the bill.

Let us Share Your Petite Passage. Share it with us at Communications@GulfWriters.org

Member Good News!

GCWA wants to share and celebrate our members' successes. Please submit yours to: Communications@GulfWriters.org to be included in The Gazette's next edition.

MaryJo Buscemi-Timmons' nonfiction novel, "[The Empire of Greed and Deception](#)," an adrenaline-charged narrative of an FBI agent whose work takes him to Noreiga's Panama, is now available at booksellers.

Joni Marie Iraci's novel, [Vatican Daughter](#) "weaves history, reality and speculative storytelling and offers readers a character-driven exploration of faith, power, and intrigue." It will be released in the U.S. May 1.

Gerald Kostecka has released his latest book, "[The Christmas Pebble](#)," in February — a story of hope, kindness, friendship, and the magic of Christmas.

Wayne Wissner's "Standing in Lilacs," a children's book inspired by his nephew and illustrated by his wife, Sheila was released in December.