



This month, we are focusing on the 2024 Gulf Coast Writers Association (GCWA) Annual Writing Contest and the second anniversary of Hurricane Ian making landfall, changing the lives of Southwest Floridians across the Sunshine State. Still today, homes, families, and businesses continue to suffer the storm's aftermath. To give voice to the victims, many GCWA members contributed to *Storm Stories; Hurricane Ian—Stories of Survival, Heroism, and Humanity*, published in late 2023. As writers, we often process through written words, so this anthology, which offers over 80 accounts of prose and poetry, is a tribute to love. Throughout this Issue, you will find excerpts and poetry highlighting the terror of that day (Wednesday, September 28, 2022) to celebrating the hopes of tomorrow.

WRITERS SPOTLIGHT
GCWA Contest Winners



Editor's Note: Our regular feature, Member Spotlight, has been broadened this month to celebrate accomplishments of all writers who earned awards in the 2024 GCWA Writers Contest.

We are beyond pleased to celebrate the nine winners of this year's Annual Gulf Coast Writers Association Writing Contest with names and placements highlighted below. The award-winning stories can be read on GCWA's website under [Contest](#).

Fiction

1 st Place	2 nd Place	3 rd Place
Richard Drummer Bonita Springs, FL <i>"Prey for Me"</i>	Bradley Burt Fort Myers, FL <i>"My Whiffenpoof"</i>	Linda Saether Cape Coral, FL <i>"Woman in the Adidas Shirt"</i>

Nonfiction

1 st Place	2 nd Place	3 rd Place
Patti Walsh Fort Myers, FL <i>"Between the Heat and the Bugs"</i>	Sheryl Stillman Fort Myers, FL <i>"What I Learned About Grief After my Dog Died"</i>	April James Fort Myers, FL <i>"Down the Rabbit Hole"</i>

Poetry

1 st Place	2 nd Place	3 rd Place
Daniel Moreschi Wales, U.K. <i>"Maracaibo Melodies"</i>	Ed Sessa Fort Myers, FL <i>"The Last Decoy"</i>	Amelie Flagler Raleigh, NC <i>"Illogical Imaginings"</i>

Entries were submitted by writers across the three genres—Fiction, Nonfiction, and Poetry—and from around the world. "It is a joy to honor these talented writers," shared GCWA president, Mary Charles. "They remind us of the persuasive power of words."

Don't miss the opportunity to hear authors read their prized stories at the next Monthly Meeting on September 21, 2024, at 10:00 – 12:00 p.m., at the Lakes Regional Library in Fort Myers. Light snacks and refreshments will be served. Open to the public. Please RSVP to: GCWAContest@gmail.com.



**CRAFT
CORNER**

Part 1 of 2

A Hearty “Thank You!” Goes out to our GCWA Writing Contest Judges

We remain committed to providing the GCWA Writers Contest annually. We appreciate these judges and organizers who gave time and energy to ensure the integrity and success of the 2024 Contest.

Claudia Geagan, Special Projects Coordinator
Christie Zarria, Assistant Coordinator

Fiction

Ginger Wakem – Lead Judge
Sheryl Stillman
Lori Swick

Non-Fiction

John Granatino – Lead Judge
Claudia Volkman
Jan Porter

Poetry

Patti Walsh – Lead Judge
Mary Lou Williams
Jeanne Meeks

The Judges

Some of our contest judges have extensive experience while others are early in their judging journey. Several have earned numerous “wins” and others are just beginning to submit their own work. *In this two-part article, judges share their thoughts from both sides of writing contests.*

The Gains

“Judging is worth the investment.” All would volunteer again, citing personal satisfaction in supporting other writers, GCWA and its mission, and the Contest. They noted that judging informs their own writing; it hones skills, inspires creativity, builds confidence, and motivates them to improve and pursue goals.

The Advice

Jeanne Meeks advised, “Don’t submit...before it’s ready. Take the time to make it your very best.” In every contest, submissions are disqualified because guidelines were not followed or because of grammatical or spelling errors. Another suggestion to contest entrants is to study previous contest winners, for tone, arc, and quality. *See more advice in Part 2.*

GCWA – Surviving and Thriving

Between the COVID-19 pandemic and Hurricane Ian, GCWA membership also took a beating. The organization remained intact but with only seven to ten members at meetings. Yet, our leaders chose to stay the course and rebuild. Ironically, that devastation pushed us toward resilience and action. Nearing Ian’s second anniversary, we reflect on the work we’ve done and our progress.

Writers Write

Despite many challenges, a team set out to encourage survivors to write about their experiences. In partnership with the Alliance for the Arts, Jeanne Meeks, Christie Zarria, Mary Charles, and Claudia Geagan devoted untold hours to assembling personal reflections, resulting in “Storm Stories - Hurricane Ian,” now a landmark compilation of 83 narratives and poems, recording the most devastating storm to strike our area. [Read this article in the Pine Island Eagle.](#)

“Storm Stories” Success

[The book’s launch at the Alliance for the Arts](#) in September 2023 was standing-room only, with over 100 attendees. Journalist Sean Martinelli with NBC-2 “Stories to Share” was the moderator, and the Tamiami Tale Tellers members read excerpts from each piece as authors were recognized. It was a powerful experience.

Since its release through this July, we’ve sold 1,200 copies in all formats ([eBook, paperback, and hardcover](#)) through [Amazon](#). Online royalties amounted to \$3,675. We also sold 589 books through members and retailers. Local artist Leona Lovegrove recently ordered 50 books to sell at her new gallery’s grand opening. Her artwork is on book’s cover and her story appears inside.

Giving Back

GCWA committed a portion of its book sale profits to a charity that serves people in need. Mary Charles praised the efforts of the Cajun Navy in “Creeks Became Oceans. Then the Navy Came.” We recently sent [a moving letter, a \\$400 donation, and a copy of “Storm Stories”](#) to the Cajun Navy Ground Force.

Building Up

With increased GCWA visibility through the media and events like the Southwest Florida Reading Festival., GCWA has doubled its membership with a current roster of 104 members; 41 joined in 2024.

Celebrating It All

Over the past couple of years, we’ve been fortunate to offer members meaningful programs, dynamic speakers, and the continuation of our annual writing contest. Through these turbulent times, GCWA has rebounded and is poised to celebrate its 30th Anniversary in April 2025! A big “thank you” to everyone for contributing to our success!

There are simply too many heartfelt stories to include in the newsletter! If you don't already have a copy of the book, you can purchase [Storm Stories](#) directly from Amazon. Here are just a few passages to whet your appetite, illustrating the breadth of writing talent among our association.

Petite Passages – Special Edition dedicated to the one-year anniversary of *Storm Stories*

Single Shingle

Carla O'Brien
Storm Stories, p. 163

I stick
Unafraid of the violent storm
That rages around me

I cling
To the home of my memories
That shake my foundation

I dance
In the turbulent twist of a gusting
That spins me

I survive
Perched atop a vast bareness
That anticipates tomorrow

Oh, that Ian

Brian Sluga
Storm Stories, P. 160

In Florida's despair and deep flood waters, mosquito larvae had multiplied. Trees that once gave shade, now rot with decay. Florida's coast, a beloved retreat and home for many, was ripped apart. Our beach access has been washed away and many palm trees were downed or ripped to shreds. Further away, bridges and buildings lay in ruin. Strange things have happened here, but we have grown. I learned to write quietly to keep my mind at ease. Neighbors and communities came together like mothers to their newborns. A great community nurtured its residents as best it could.

Rooted Aftermath

Kelly Elen Lavery
Storm Stories, P. 259

The trees tell a story, of great loss and pain.
Look carefully as you drive by, observing what remains.
The broken branches, fallen woodland, over turned trees.
They represent the storm, that brought a state to its knees.

The trees were alive, thriving and plush.
Woodlands were happy, flowers were lush.
Grass was green, Waters would flow.
A change was coming, we didn't know.

The warning came, uncertain of the path.
Homes were secured, awaiting Ian's wrath.
Some drove away, some tried to flee.
Others stood firm, like the brawn of a tree.

The winds howled, waters raised high.
Lives were lost, in the blink of an eye.
Buildings were gone, swallowed by the sea.
Water levels were measured, by the height of a tree.

The world gave us hope, as heroes arrived.
Because of you, so many more survived.
The rooted aftermath goes by unseen.
But it tells a story, between the brown and the green.

Behold the fragility, tiny buds on the tree.
For that new beginning of life, is happening to me.

Barefoot Beach Storm Surge

Hugh Nevin
Storm Stories, PP. 1-2

Before I had a plan, the wind lifted me and threw me like a rag doll across Barefoot Beach Boulevard and straight into a mangrove forest. As I clung to the tree, I noticed tables, chairs, paddle boards, and kayaks flying through the air. They broke in half as they hit the trees, and I knew that if one of them hit me, I would not survive.

It Wasn't Coming Here

Rita Angelini
Storm Stories, P. 87

Cars, hot tubs, kayaks, sheds, and other debris floated by in the rapids. We prayed for the safety of our other neighbors as all contact had ceased.

Petite Passages - continued

Creeks Became Oceans Then the Navy Came

Mary Charles
Storm Stories, P. 368

It will be seventeen days before power is restored. The work of removing destroyed belongings is not just emotionally draining. It's also physically arduous. Spirits flag. Small acts of kindness bring tears of gratitude. "Would you like some soup?"

...And now they [the Cajun Navy] have come to the rescue of Hurricane Ian's victims. With great energy and never-ending good cheer, volunteers with the Cajun Navy hand out tons of ice each day, hundreds of gallons of water, and countless meals of nonperishable food...the Cajun Navy stays for many weeks.

Sunset, September 29, 2022

Cheryl Lynn Dratler
Storm Stories, P. 183

This is the moon; these are the stars that have nightly filled the sky through the wartime bombings of so many generations. This is the moon, and these are the stars that have come out at dusk hovering over every flood and quake and volcanic eruption in the history of humankind. This is the same moon, and these are the same stars that give solace to those who are safe and those who are not. And even today, as the sun sets on war-wearied Ukrainians, Syrian refugees in camps far from home, and Hurricane Ian survivors still in shock, the moon will rise and shine, giving its comfort in the night.

Faraway Winds

Brian Devitt
Storm Stories, P. 359

In the coming weeks, we watched WINK News features stories about the areas most devastated by Ian which included Matlacha, Captiva, Sanibel, and Fort Myers Beach. I was as proud as any snowbird could be to see the gutsy determination in everyone they interviewed. There were no 'feeling sorry for themselves' attitudes nor 'the government has to bail us out' outbursts. Instead, those interviewed talked about everyone coming together under the banner 'Fort Myers Strong' to rebuild even better than what was there before. God bless them all.

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

GCWA Monthly Meetings

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

Saturday, 9/21/24 – Celebrating GCWA Contest Winners (Lakes Regional Library)

Saturday, 10/19/24 – Publishing Essays to Gain an Audience – Sheryl Stillman & Cheryl Lynn Dratler

Saturday, 11/16/24 – GCWA Holiday Gathering

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

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.

To submit story ideas or questions, contact: Communications@GulfWriters.org