



## 26 Years Celebrating the Power of Reading!

### GCWA participates in the Southwest Florida Reading Festival Saturday, March 1, 2025

[The Southwest Florida Reading Festival](#) is being held on **Saturday, March 1** from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Fort Myers Regional Library – 2450 First St, Fort Myers.

Twelve GCWA authors will be located at the GCWA tent in the “local author marketplace” to talk with readers, pass out promotional items like bookmarks, and sell books! Morning writers are **Ed Donlin, Ginger Wakem, Patti Walsh, Sarah Fischer Pointer, Pauline Hayton and Andrew Conlin**. The afternoon writers are **Curt Ayers III, Roger Baker, Melissa Waters, Amy Pontius, Jeanelle Havlin and Lori Swick**. Nearby tents will host writers from the Florida Writers Association and the Southwest Florida Fiction Writers.

Multiple stages host celebrity authors sharing the ‘inside scoop’ about their latest books or what makes a story idea click for them. Books are available for purchase and authors can sign them. Children’s activities run throughout the day.

Plan to attend the festival, support your fellow GCWA writers, catch a celebrity author presentation, and pick up a few new ‘reads’ for your personal library.

#### GCWA Monthly Meeting

The GCWA March Program will feature Charley Valera, presenting “Insider Secrets on Book Promotion and Media Success. His presentation will be followed by a critique session.

Saturday, 3/15/25 from 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Location: Island Park Village Clubhouse  
17783 Port Boca Circle  
Ft. Myers, FL 33907

To attend via Zoom: click [here](#).

If you’d like to watch the February session, please email: [czarria57@gmail.com](mailto:czarria57@gmail.com)

#### GCWA Annual Writing Contest Begins Soon!

The 2025 Gulf Coast Writers Association Annual Contest opens on 04/01/2025 and is open to GCWA members and writers around the world.

With nine prizes in total across three genres—Fiction, Nonfiction, and Poetry—there are plenty of opportunities to be a winner! Previous winning works are available on the GCWA Website. Full submission details will be available soon.

And remember, without judges, there can be no contests. Our writers’ contest requires nine judges. To sign up and learn more, reach out to [Executive@GulfWriters.org](mailto:Executive@GulfWriters.org). Thank you!



## Judges Offer Contest Advice

By Cheryl Lynn Dratler

With the **2025 Writing Contest** nearing its submission period, we turn to last year's judges for advice about what makes winning entries.

Without judges, there can be no writing contests. We appreciate these members who volunteered to judge last year's GCWA Writing Contest. For the *Fiction* category: **Ginger Wakem, Sheryl Stillman and Lori Swick**; *Non-Fiction*: **John Granatino, Claudia Volkman and Jan Porter**, and for *Poetry*: **Patti Walsh, Mary Lou Williams and Jeanne Meeks**.

### Universal Advice

Every judge emphasized strictly adhering to guidelines. While this sounds elementary, it echoes in every contest article I've read. This includes formatting and word count, as well as proper grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. Contest instructions are not suggestions, they are imperatives. Entries that don't meet criteria are disqualified quickly. Jeanne suggests not submitting your piece is ready. "Make it your very best by having others critique your work and take their suggestions to heart," she says.

### Study Previous Winning Entries

Sheryl said studying past winners to see what worked improves her own entries. This includes understanding story framing, tone, arc, and quality. Contests have expectations about what makes a winning story. Reviewing previous winners can provide insight into what judges look for.

### Just Do It!

Most judges have also been contest entrants. All have encountered feelings of fear, inadequacy, or intimidation. Lori noted, "whether or not you win, it's always a win just to get your writing out into the world. Nothing happens with it until you do!" Mary Lou adds, "Don't be intimidated. You don't have to be a literary genius to have a chance at winning. The experience of competing is empowering. Your chances of winning are a lot better than your chances of winning the lottery."



## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

### Ed DeJesus

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

### My book's journey with speed bumps, bruises, and Force Majeure

After nearly four years of plotting, writing, rewriting, editing, more editing, beta readers, searching for a publisher, working with a professional editor, and more editing ... my thriller novel, *The Vulnerable*, an intricate Eco-thriller set in Massachusetts and Florida, will be coming out this spring!

Along the way, I was disrupted, disheartened, and reeling with PTSD from three category-four hurricanes: Ian, Helene, and Milton. Set back by a heart attack and two months of rehab. Delayed by three surgeries: Peripheral Iridotomy on both eyes for narrow-angle closure glaucoma, an emergency heart stent, and recently, long overdue, dual cataract surgery further complicated by glaucoma eye pressure; even as I write this piece with a patch over one eye!

Not surprisingly, I was rejected or ignored by large and midsize agented and non-agented publishers. But I learned from every submittal. After being solicited by several vanity publishers and aggressive and overpriced hybrids, I did a ton of due diligence on small indie press and other reputable hybrids that I passed on.

Finally, my selection and then my acceptance in January 2025 into an excellent, author-centric co-op and fellowship of talented award-winning authors at Indies United Publishing House (IUPH). This was a pivotal moment in my literary journey. "The Vulnerable" is scheduled to be released in April. I hope to have my collection of short memoir stories, "Simpler Times in The Spindle City," published in late 2025.

For me, the work of finding a collaborative partner (which was exhaustive) is paying off. Perseverance and forging on past every obstacle were critical on my path to fulfill my aspiration of sharing my stories with a broader audience.

Click [here](#) to learn more about Ed.

## February Monthly Member Meeting Recap

### Editing Overview

The February 15, 2025 meeting at the Cape Coral Library drew an audience of nearly 50, including nine new guests. Welcome to GCWA!

**Claudia Volkman**, GCWA member and owner of Creative Editorial Solutions shared the various forms of editing prior to publishing. Highlights are below.

**Developmental editing** is performed as the first draft is near or at completion. It is 'big picture' editing, and reviews the overall concept, and organization as well as the delivery of the message to the desired reader.

**Book doctoring** is a collaborative, hands-on type of editing where the editor may actually work with the author or make editorial changes to help clarify the writer's message.

**Content or Line Editing** occurs after revisions and is a line-by-line review for polishing of grammar, syntax, word choice, factual accuracy, and 'tightness' of the prose.

**Copy Editing** is a detailed editing for grammar, syntax, typos, and consistency of usage and formatting throughout the work.

**Proofreading** is conducted after layout and typesetting. It is another layer of editing for grammar and punctuation. It also ensures, headers, footers, and other formatting are correct and consistent.

### GCWA Writer Critique

Our debut open critiquing session was introduced by **Brian Devitt**, based on an established program in his writer's group in Philadelphia. GCWA members were invited to critique three 5,000 word works or excerpts submitted by our members. The three bold authors for this first critique session were **Rob Gilmore**, "Cannassett - The Space Port" (excerpt), **Laura Schueneman**, "How to Murder Your Man's Mistress" (excerpt), and **Richard Drummer**, "Blood Symphony."

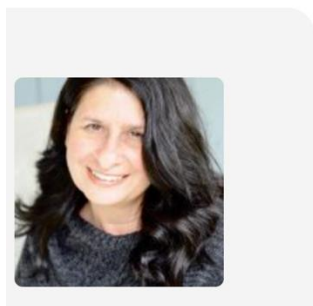
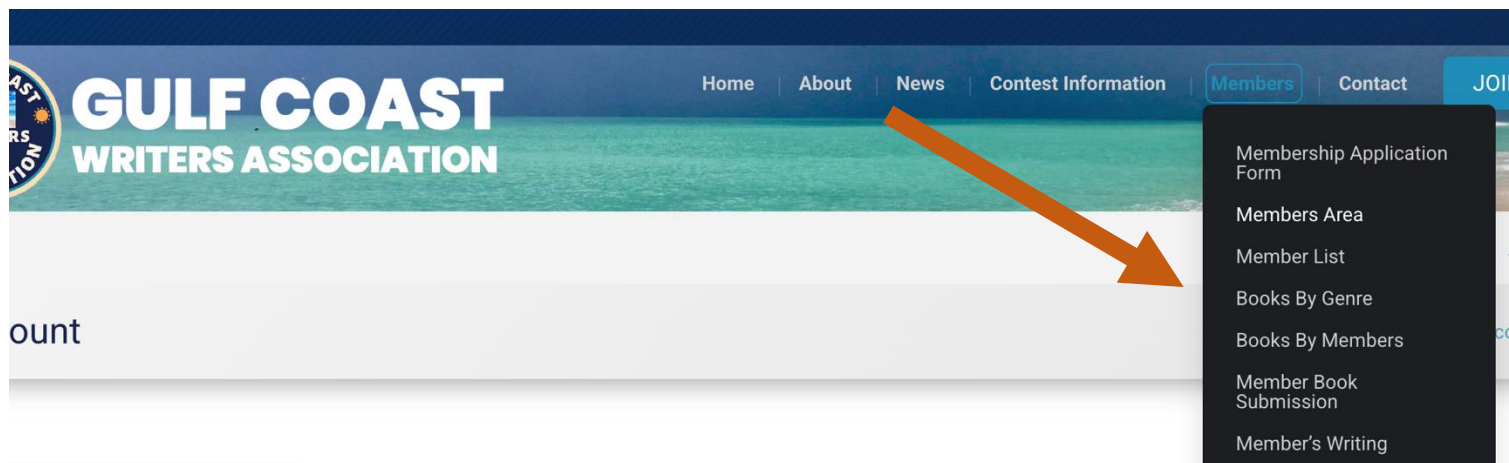
During open critiques, Brian and Jeanne Meeks led members who read the works online. Emphasis was placed on what was good about the writing – what worked well, and then constructive suggestions for improvement. The discussion was active and positive. The program was well received and there was a consensus to make this a monthly part of the program for authors who wish feedback on short works. The suggestion was made that slightly shorter pieces might be more manageable.

Look out for further information for the March meeting's Open Critique submissions.



*Photos: Claudia sharing her editing expertise to GCWA members and guests; bottom photo: Rob Gilmore, Laura Schueneman, Richard Drummer | Photos courtesy of Ginger Wakem*





### Tell Us About Yourself...

Are you present on the [GCWA](#) website? It's simple to start meeting friends, colleagues, and potential collaborators in GCWA! As a dues-paying member, you have access to information not available to the general public, including member bios, meeting recordings, critique groups, Association-related news, and more.

Once you're logged in, check out the **MEMBERS** tab at the top of the page. From the drop-down menu, a click on **Members Area** will take you to your account. Upload your photo and bio (250 words) and other information you'd like to share. In addition to your bios, you can also submit book covers and synopses, click on **Member Book Submission** Under the **MEMBERS** to find the instructions and form.

Last, but not least, take a look at the [Resources & Event](#) tab for upcoming contests, conferences, or readings.

NOTE: Your email address serves as your user ID. If your login is not recognized, select "forgot password," and you'll be directed to create a new one.

### Member Good News!

**Lori Joan Swick's** latest historical novel *The Sculptor and the Saint* will be released in late March 2025. In a gripping tale of passion and agony, two lives separated by centuries are united in their search for purity and purpose. *The Sculptor and the Saint* speaks of a history only ever written in stone.

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

### Volunteers Needed!

The Communications team continues to request additional support.

Do we have any Social Media experts who would like to promote GCWA on Twitter (X), Meetup, LinkedIn, and Facebook?

Ginger Wakem has become our sole (and wonderful!) photographer. We want to ensure we have backups, if the need arises.

Thank you!