



January 18 Meeting Recap

Our first 2025 meeting was held at Lakes Regional Library. The featured speaker was award-winning Florida author, [Brenda M. Spalding](#) who was inspired by a 2017 Bradenton Herald article about prosecutions for alligator egg poaching. Intrigued, Spalding launched into a three-year journey to research and write her book.

“The Alligator Dance” is the first of three books in her [Florida Wildlife Heroes](#) series. Based on actual occurrences and researched heavily, Spalding fictionalizes her stories, weaving in murder and mystery, a favorite theme.

In “The Alligator Dance” fictionalized Manasota State Park Head Ranger Seth Grayson is a Seminole Indian. This choice deepened Spalding’s research into the native attitudes, practices and history related to alligators, and provided the title for her book.

Spalding shared interesting facts about the highly controlled, and laborious process of alligator egg collection in Florida, noting that only 30 licenses are issued for collection on public lands, most of which are passed down through families. Collection on private land requires considerable procedure and documentation as well. All collectors must be accompanied on collections by a biologist as well. Despite technical difficulties, she shared an informative video on [“Collecting Alligator Eggs for the State of Florida,”](#) before a lively Q & A session.

Ideas Needed – GCWA 30-Year Celebration!!

This year is the 30th anniversary of Gulf Coast Writers Association. We are exploring ways to commemorate our history and celebrate with new purpose — events that bring us together as writer-friends and adds new meaning to our writing lives. There is new energy among our membership. Send your thoughts and ideas to the GCWA Executive Committee by January 30, 2025, to: executive@gulfwriters.org

GCWA is on the Move

GCWA is still looking for a permanent location to accommodate our growing membership. If you have a recommendation, please send to executive@gulfwriters.org.

February Meeting

The February meeting on Saturday, 2/15, will be from 10 – 12 noon at Cape Coral-Lee County Library at 921 SW 39th Terrace, Cape Coral 33914. It’s a large room, with seating for all.

Professional editor and GCWA member Claudia Volkman will discuss editing challenges and give advice regarding the process.

Writing Critique Initiative

As Mary mentioned in her recent letter to members, a new critique opportunity will be launched at the meeting with up to four member pieces critiqued at the meeting. As of today (1/30), three writings have been submitted. Last chance to get yours in for this month. We will hang onto the others for the following meeting in March and so on.

If interested, please upload 5000 words, to our new critique pod. It can be a short story, a chapter from completed work, or a work in progress. It must be in MS Word or a Word-compatible program. Send work to <https://forms.gle/pNqvzjFEN2vpwN698> by **Friday, January 31.**

Writers must be present to have their work reviewed in the meeting and will receive a marked-up copy of your work, with reviewers’ comments and recommendations.

Brian Devitt is spearheading this initiative and will ask for volunteers to join him to review the submissions. He’ll also be the “review host” for the four reviews at our February meeting. Brian is also asking for volunteers to be reviewers; let Brian know [bdevitt55@gmail.com] if you can help review work for the February meeting.

Member Good News!

GCWA wants to share and celebrate our members' successes. To have your news included in *The Gazette's* next issue, submit yours to:
Communications@GulfWriters.org

[Paul Petruzzi](#) published "[Brooklyn 4, New York: Lyrical Voices](#)" in November. The collection paints vignettes of immigrants who arrived from across Europe and beyond to settle in mid-century New York City.

[Richard Drummer](#) received another award – "Saving Grace," took the gold medal for best unpublished suspense thriller in the Florida Writers Association's Royal Palm Literary Awards. This book, his third, is a paranormal thriller, in which "Death isn't always thorough."

[Thekla Fagerlie-Madsen](#), co-author of three crime thrillers has had her short story, "A Cozy Deception," published in the anthology, "[It was a Dark and Stormy Night, Dontcha Know](#)." Editors challenged writers to open each story with the same sentence and use several "Easter eggs" – specific words within every story that readers work to find as they read.

[Jack Head](#) recently finished the 200-page biography of his grandmother "Margarett Cole, The Daughter of John Nelson Cole," and he highly recommended [Newpapers.com](#) which was a tremendous resource during his research. His latest book, "The Wheel," is a historical look at the Underground Railroad, and will be released on Amazon soon.

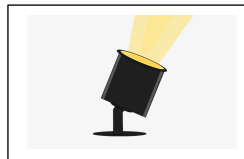
[Claudia Volkman](#), proudly announced she wrote a chapter for "Soulful Leadership." As a long-time editor of nonfiction and owner of Creative Editorial Solutions, Claudia "hasn't been a writer." Although pleased with her first writing experience, she noted that she much prefers editing over writing.

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 and when the need arises. Thank you!



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT Patti Walsh

Editor's Note: The Member Spotlight is a regular feature that celebrates our members' journeys and their accomplishments. Patti Walsh has published her second middle grade book.

Hounded into a Story

Imagine a Celtic Karate Kid in a Percy Jackson adventure. The result is "Hounded", a contemporary coming-of-age novel inspired by the legendary Irish warrior, hero, and demigod Cú Chulainn [*koo KULL-an*].

Written for a middle-grade audience, *Hounded* tells the story of Tony Setanta, a 13-year-old nerd bullied by his onetime friend Ferdy Daman. To escape his tormentor, Tony changes his name to Colin and flees to the protection of his grandaunt, Alba.

Hounded by visions of a lizard-like character threatening the boy, Alba teaches Colin to be a Celtic warrior through discipline, magic, and the Irish martial art *bataireacht*—shillelagh fighting.

The original premise for the book, however, had nothing to do with bataireacht, shillelaghs, or magic. While visiting a friend, I raided his bookshelf and stumbled upon "Red Branch" by Morgan Llywelyn, which novelizes the legend of Cú Chulainn.

Born Sétanta, Cú Chulainn ran away as a young boy to join King MacNessa's Red Branch warrior-training school.

One night, the swordsmith Culann invited the king and his warriors to dinner. Sétanta was late; his absence went unnoticed until Culann released his beloved guard dog Cú (Irish for hound) to protect the property.

When howling filled the night, the king shouted, "Where's Sétanta?" Everyone rushed outside thinking the hound had killed the boy. Instead, the boy had killed the dog. Humble and contrite, Sétanta offered to take the guard dog's place until a replacement could be bred. Hence, he became the "Cú of Culann," or Cú Chulainn.

He went on to study under a fabled Scottish warrioress and martial arts teacher. There, he became brothers-in-arms with the warrior Ferdiad Daman.

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Hounded into a Story*(continued from previous page)*

Each had a special weapon. In the legendary Cattle Raid of Coley, the two warriors fought to the death. Shortly after killing Ferdiad, Cú Chulainn himself was slain.

"Don't you think it's time for some contemporary Celtic hero stories?" I asked my friend as we sat around a fire. I mulled the possibilities.

I envisioned Tony Setanta meeting Ferdy Daman in prison where a guard taught martial arts. *Hounded's* evolution into a middle-grade adventure is a testament to the power of allowing a story to tell itself.

While delving into Irish martial arts, I found Maxime Chouinard, a master of a traditional style of bataireacht, who encouraged me to use his research.

The same serendipity struck when I happened upon "Tecosca Cormaic", an Old Irish wisdom text in which a legendary king taught, among other practices, that being a listener in woods and a gazer at stars (two of my favorite pastimes) train the young to become old and wise. These lessons, and Aesop's fable on the "The Oak and the Reed," provided a thematic structure to *Hounded*.

"The Cattle Raid at Cooley," described Cú Chulainn's battle rage so vividly that it inspired Bill Green to illustrate Colin's progression in *Hounded* from nerd to warrior for the book.

What emerged is the second book in the Companion Moon series—far, far from a prison drama. Packed with action, humor, and contemporary themes, *Hounded* draws on mythological characters, conflicts, and warrior training to show that it takes more than fighting skills to become a warrior. *Hounded* not only explores the transformational power of discipline and friendship, but also the cathartic energy of letting a story tell itself.

Available at pattimwalsh.com, [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com), [Annette's BookNook](https://www.annettesbooknook.com), and other outlets.

PETITE PASSAGES**Every Man Truly Lives Alone (excerpt)**
By Curtis Ayers, under pen name C.P. Tertius

As she danced and the narrative song wafted on the thick evening air, Miller, the soldiers and their families relaxed on mats, mesmerized, gazing at the performers in rapt silence. He felt that the song would never end, although he soon became enmeshed in it. Even though he could not understand many of the words, the song deeply touched him, moving across the boundaries of geography, language, culture and time.

He recalled once reading a passage attributed to the noted English cellist Jacqueline du Pre, that music was the purest expression of humanity, especially when expressing pain, sorrow and loneliness. In that moment, he could not have agreed more. The transcendence of the music overwhelmed Miller to the point of tears as the embers of the fire slowly ebbed and night enveloped him.

Save the Date! [Southwest Florida Reading Festival](#)

GCWA will again have a presence at the Reading Festival March 1, where our published authors can meet the public and sell their books. Twelve of our members have signed up to display, discuss, market...and *sell* their books. There are no spaces left for The GCWA tent at this year's Festival. Volunteers are welcome, especially for set up and break down. Please contact [Claudia Geagan](#), GCWA event coordinator if you can help March 1.

GCWA Authors at Book Nook Reopening

After surviving Hurricanes Ian and Milton, Annette Stillson's Book Nook on Fort Myers Beach has reopened for business! Offering new and used books for children and adults, and island-themed gifts, Annette's Grand Re-Opening was held January 18. The event featured local authors, including GCWA members, Jeanne Meeks and Patti Walsh. Other members went to the event to celebrate the reopening. Annette's Book Nook which supports local authors is located at 7205 Estero Blvd.