

Sieze the moment. Remember all those women on the Titanic who waved off the dessert cart. **Marriage has no guarantees.** If that's what you're looking for, go live with a car battery. **When your mother asks,** "Do you want a piece of advice?" it is a mere formality. It doesn't matter if you answer yes or no. You're going to get it anyway. **I had been hiding** my hopes and dreams in the back of my mind. It was the only safe place in the house. **My theory on housework** is, if the item doesn't multiply, smell, catch on fire or block the refrigerator door, let it be. No one cares. Why should you? **It takes a lot of courage** to show your dreams to someone else. **There is nothing more** miserable in the world than to arrive in paradise and look like your passport photo. **He who laughs ...**

Never go to your high school reunion. You will think that's all you have done since graduation. I thought of cherries, what was I doing in the pit? I was there and I have advocated separate vacations for men and women. **In her infinite wisdom,** my mother said, "When you hit menopause. It'll take your mind off things." **I have** dieted continuously for the last two years. I lost 758 pounds. By all calculations, I should have been a beautiful woman. **Whatever a group** of women going to the gym ways



VIRTUAL ERMA BOMBECK

W r i t e r s ' W o r k s h o p

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON
Oct. 29-31, 2020

“You
can
write!”

Three little words
from
English professor
Brother Tom Price
that
changed
my
life.

ERMA BOMBECK

Humorist Erma Bombeck is one of America's most celebrated writers. For those who grew up with Erma's columns hanging on our refrigerator doors, we always felt as though she could be our next-door neighbor. Her writing captured the foibles of family life in a way that made us laugh at ourselves.

The University of Dayton held the first Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop in 2000 as a one-time event to commemorate the Bombeck family's gift of Erma's papers to her alma mater.

We thought a writers' workshop in Erma's name would be an outstanding tribute to her legacy. Erma's famous friends — columnist Art Buchwald, "Family Circus" cartoonist Bil Keane and author and ERA

advocate Liz Carpenter — headlined the event. It proved to be so popular (and so much fun) that we decided to offer it again.

And the rest is history. Today, writers inspired by Erma's humor and humanity gather every other year to laugh and learn from the likes of Dave Barry, Phil Donahue, Nancy Cartwright, Don Novello, Amy Ephron, Leonard Pitts, Gail Collins, Alan Zweibel, Liza Donnelly and Lisa Scotoline. The event sells out within hours — without a marketing brochure or a tradi-

tional ad. It draws new and established writers from around the nation and beyond. It is the only workshop in the country devoted to both humor and human interest writing.

The personal involvement of the Bombeck family makes the event memorable and sets it apart from the myriad of other writers' workshops offered across the country.

The workshop is a labor of love. It's run on a shoestring budget by University of Dayton staff, professors and volunteers. The University of Dayton's Alumni Association underwrites the cost of scholarships that allow University students to attend for free. In 2004, University of Dayton alumnus Ralph Hamberg '56 and his wife, Cindy Price Hamberg '48, gave a \$100,000 gift to start a workshop endowment fund in memory of her cousin, Brother Tom Price, S.M. This University of Dayton English professor first told Erma "three little words" of encouragement, "You can write."

The Hamberg family, the Bombeck family and other supporters continue to contribute to the endowment fund, which allows the University of Dayton to keep the workshop affordable.

This effort to honor Erma Bombeck's legacy goes beyond the writers' workshop.

The workshop has spawned a blog (go.udayton.edu/erma); an online museum (ErmaBombeckCollection.com); a documentary

produced by ThinkTV and distributed nationally through American Public Television; an international writing competition co-hosted by the Washington-Centerville Public Library; an unconventional humorist-in-residence writing residency;

The personal involvement of the Bombeck family makes the event memorable and sets it apart from the myriad of other writers' workshops offered across the country.



a writing prize; a humor anthology; an Ohio historical marker on campus; a monthly e-newsletter; and a lively social media presence. In 2010, *CBS Sunday Morning* with *Charles Osgood* aired a Mother's Day tribute to Erma Bombeck, using the workshop as a backdrop for the piece.

Our mission is simple: to encourage and inspire writers in the same way Erma Bombeck found encouragement and inspiration at the University of Dayton.

Our mantra is timeless: "You can write!"

Welcome to the University of Dayton's Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop.

During a pandemic with the workshop facing its second postponement in 2020, we asked ourselves, “What would Erma want?” She’d want us to laugh, learn — and carry on.

Welcome to the virtual Dayton Riviera!

We’re celebrating our 20th anniversary with a spectacular program and the largest gathering of writers in our history. We welcome first-time attendees, University of Dayton students and writers joining us from Australia, Canada, Germany, Pakistan, Singapore, Spain, the UK and throughout the nation.

As the workshop has grown in popularity and prestige, it has maintained its welcoming, supportive atmosphere. Writers know this workshop is unlike any other. It’s part love letter, part family reunion, part pep talk. It’s been dubbed the “Woodstock of Humor” and a “Brigadoon” for writers that only appears every other year “out of the mist” on the edge of the Great Miami River, which we affectionately call the Dayton Riviera.

Five sessions will be offered during each time slot. Simply choose which one you want to attend or hop between them. You don’t have to miss any because replays will be available of every workshop and keynote talk.

For the final session on Saturday afternoon, all attendees are invited to “Pitchapalooza,” billed as *American Idol for Books* (only kinder and gentler). It’s back following rave reviews.

A few highlights:

■ The funny, gracious Patricia Wynn Brown returns as emcee. She’s our Mistress of Mayhem.

■ Celebrated *New Yorker* cartoonist and former EBWW keynoter Liza Donnelly will live draw the keynote speakers and post her drawings in real time on social media.

■ We will honor the winners of three contests, Nickie’s Prize for Humor Writing, the Erma Bombeck Writing Competition and A Hotel Room of One’s Own: The Erma Bombeck | Anna Lefler Humorist-in-Residence program.

■ Dozens of brave, funny writers signed up for the opportunity to perform at the popular Attendee Stand-Up Comedy Night, hosted by Brian Kiley, head monologue writer for Conan O’Brien. A few comedians were chosen through auditions at the pre-workshop event, “Erma’s Got Talent,” while the rest were chosen randomly.

At the Erma Bombeck Writers’ Workshop, you will discover inspiring faculty who are approachable and encouraging. You will laugh and learn in an atmosphere that’s supportive to writers of all levels.

Most importantly, you will hear the words Erma first heard at the University of Dayton: “You can write!”



The virtual venue

We're using Crowdcast, an engaging live-streaming platform, to bring you this year's workshop.

A bonus: The sessions are automatically recorded, allowing you to view any (or all) up to a year afterwards.

You can find a quick reference guide at <https://bit.ly/3lopHku>, but here are answers to FAQs about the platform:

Do I need to download any software?

Unlike Zoom, you do not need to download anything for most devices. Registrants will receive an email with a link 10 minutes before the event. However, at any time you can sign into the workshop (<https://www.crowdcast.io/e/virtual-erma-bombeck>) with the email address you used at registration.

What is the recommended browser?

Chrome is best. Firefox is also compatible.

Does Crowdcast work on mobile?

It works on Android devices, iPhones and iPads. However, for Apple devices, you must download Crowdcast mobile, a free app.

How do I choose sessions?

A scroll-down menu will appear in the top left corner. Simply choose what session you'd like to attend. For concurrent sessions, you can hop between them, if you'd like.

Will I be seen on the screen? (In other words, if I bounce between workshop sessions, will anyone see me leave my virtual seat?)

It's an interactive platform, but you will only be seen on the screen if you're called to the virtual stage to pitch a book proposal at Pitchapalooza, perform at Attendee Stand-Up Comedy Night or read your writing from exercises in sessions. Our technical consultant recommends you wear earphones or ear buds when you're on the stage.

When will replays be available?

The recordings will be available on the event page just a few minutes after the live stream ends.

How do I make the most of this virtual experience?

Please personalize your Crowdcast profile by changing the avatar to your photo and adding a brief bio. To do so, go to your profile page and click "edit." We also recommend that you change your username to your name, making it easier for our tech team to call you up to the stage. We encourage you to participate in the chat. Ask questions. Take our periodic polls. And most importantly – laugh and learn.

How can I share the workshop experience through social media?

Use our hashtag #VirtualErma.

Some of our sessions will be pre-recorded, but the majority are live. While watching a live session or a replay of it, click the "Clip moment" button on the bottom left. You'll be able to select a 15-second clip from the last five minutes. Simply drag the orange slider to find the start of the moment you'd like to share, give it a title, create the clip and share directly to social media.



All times are Eastern Daylight Time (EDT)

Thursday, Oct. 8

Special pre-workshop event, free and open to the public

7 p.m.

Erma Bombeck Writing Competition Awards Ceremony

Keynote speaker: Betsy Bombeck

(Replay available: <https://www.crowdcast.io/e/erma-bombeck-awards-ceremony>)

Wednesday, Oct. 14

Special pre-workshop event, free and open to the public

7 p.m.

Erma's Got Talent: The Stand-Up Auditions

Featuring celebrity judges Brian Kiley, Wendy Liebman and Leighann Lord, hosted by Nancy Berk

(Replay available: <https://www.crowdcast.io/e/standup>)

Thursday, Oct. 29

6 p.m.

Welcome

Virtual networking cocktail hour, hosted by Kathy Kinney and Cindy Ratzlaff

7 p.m.

Opening night kick-off with emcee Patricia Wynn Brown, featuring recognition of the Nickie's Prize for Humor Writing winners and a fireside chat with keynoters Peggy and Mike Rowe

9–10:15 a.m. — **Concurrent sessions**

Satire Starter Pack — Riane Konc

Profitable Authorship — Quit Your Day Job — Rebecca Regnier

Ask The Agents — Panel featuring Stacey Graham, Sam Hiyate and Paula Munier, moderated by Jessica Strawser

Using Humor to Weather the Pandemic — Tracy Beckerman

Pitching During a Pandemic Without Getting Ghosted — Estelle Erasmus

Break

10:30–11:45 a.m. — **Concurrent sessions**

Welcome to the Writers' Room — Joel Madison

Finding the Funny in Your Story — Annabelle Gurwitch

Sweet and Salty: Writing the Food Memoir — Diana Abu-Jaber

Eight Reasons You Need a Blog and E-Newsletter — and Eight Tips for Quickly Making Them Work for You — Jess Montgomery

Book Publishing Paths: What's New? What's Old? What's Right for You? Panel featuring Jim Azevedo and David Braugher, moderated by Nancy Berk

Lunch break

1–2 p.m.

Wendy Liebman keynote
Q&A

Friday, Oct. 30

2:15–3:30 p.m. — **Concurrent sessions**

Personal Essays Gone Wild — Susan Pohlman

Humor Writing: Punch Up Your Prose — Dan Zevin

**Tools & Tips to Get More Eyes on Your Words: It Doesn't Matter
How Good Your Writing Is if Nobody Sees It — Kim Bongiorno**

The How-To of National Syndication — Lisa Glowinski

**Intro to Ebook Self-Publishing: How to Publish, Distribute and
Sell Your Ebook — Jim Azevedo**

Break

3:45–5 p.m. — **Concurrent sessions**

**How to Uncover Your Own Voice and Get It Down on Paper —
Kathy Kinney and Cindy Ratzlaff**

**Family — The Ties That Bind...and Gag! — Panel featuring
Tracy Beckerman, Bruce Ferber and Leighann Lord,
moderated by Lian Dolan**

**Surprise and Delight Your Readers on Every Page —
Jessica Strawser**

Writing Stories That Matter — Lee Martin

How to Tell Your Story — Margot Leitman

Dinner break

7 p.m. **Annabelle Gurwitch keynote**
Q&A

Break

9 to 11 p.m. **Attendee Stand-Up Comedy Night With Brian Kiley**

9–10 a.m.

Sophronia Scott **keynote**
Q&A

Break

10:15–11:30 a.m. — **Concurrent sessions**

Wooing Your Muse: Rediscovering Inspiration and Jumpstarting Your Writing — Katrina Kittle

How to Brand Yourself, Build a Platform, Balance a Personal Life and Create a Bestseller Without Killing Your Spouse, Alienating Your Friends or Running Screaming into the Night — Cindy Ratzlaff

Beginning to Bloom: Opening Up to Poetry — Barbara Fant

Write a Page Turner: An Agent's Secrets to Creating Stories Readers Can't Put Down — Paula Munier

How to Get Published Successfully — Arielle Eckstut and David Henry Sterry

Lunch break

1 p.m.

Mike Reiss **keynote: "Finding the Funny in Terrible Times"**
Q&A

2:30–4 p.m.

Pitchapalooza
Arielle Eckstut and David Henry Sterry with guest judges Stacey Graham and Paula Munier

4 p.m.

Wrap-up with Emcee Patricia Wynn Brown

SPECIAL FEATURES

Live Drawings

Featuring Liza Donnelly

Celebrated *New Yorker* cartoonist and former EBWW keynoter Liza Donnelly will “live draw” the keynote sessions and post her drawings in real time on social media. She’s live-drawn the Academy Awards, Tonys, Grammys, political conventions and marches.

Stand-Up Comedy Night

Hosted by Brian Kiley

In his debut appearance at EBWW, Emmy Award-winning comedian Brian Kiley will emcee the traditional Stand-Up Comedy Night. Several won the opportunity to perform on the virtual stage with their comedic performances at Erma’s Got Talent: The Stand-Up Auditions before a panel of celebrity judges. The other comics have been chosen randomly.

■ 9-11 p.m., Friday

Pitchapalooza — *American Idol* for Books

Featuring Arielle Eckstut and David Henry Sterry (with guest judges Stacey Graham and Paula Munier)

A workshop favorite! Pitchapalooza is *American Idol* for Books (only kinder and gentler). Twenty writers will be selected at random to pitch their book idea. Each writer gets one minute — and only one minute! A panel of judges will help these writers, and everyone in the audience, improve their pitches. Judges critique everything from idea to style to potential in the marketplace and much more. Authors and audience come away with concrete advice as well as a greater understanding of the ins and outs of the publishing

industry. Whether you’re pitching yourself, or simply listening to trained professionals critique other writers, Pitchapalooza is educational and entertaining for everyone. From Los Angeles to New York City, and many stops along the way, Pitchapalooza has consistently drawn standing-room-only crowds, press and blog coverage, and the kind of bookstore buzz reserved for celebrity authors. At the end of Pitchapalooza, the judges will pick a winner. The winner receives an introduction to an agent or publisher appropriate for his/her book. Numerous authors have received publishing deals due to Pitchapalooza.

■ 2:30-4 p.m., Saturday

Get Your Book Published! (one-on-one self-publishing consultations)

Jim Azevedo and David Braughler

Struggling to understand the difference between hybrid publishing and DIY self-publishing? Not sure which path is right for you? Don’t know what you don’t know? Fret not. Jim Azevedo of indie ebook distributor Smashwords and David Braughler of hybrid publisher Braughler Books are available to meet individually with writers to answer all your burning questions. From the essentials of editing, cover design, formatting, ISBNs and copyright, to marketing, retail and library distribution, David and Jim can address the questions you should be asking yourself before publishing your book. (To schedule a time with David Braughler, use the link provided in the attendee newsletter. For Jim Azevedo, email jim@smashwords.com.)

Concurrent workshop sessions

CRAFT OF WRITING

Sweet and Salty: Writing the Food Memoir

Diana Abu-Jaber

Tell me what you eat, said Brillat-Savarin, and I shall tell you what you are. Lives are filled with stories and plots, but none is juicier than the one told with food. Culinary memoirs are wildly popular, taking readers beyond memory into the senses — especially the deep pleasures of the appetite. Food sharpens the focus, introduces universal themes and endows writing with imaginative, emotional and physical layers of complexity. This workshop will look at ways to write your life stories through the culinary lens. There will be writing prompts, exercises and discussions. We'll be thinking and comparing notes, considering all the ways that our connections to eating give rise to remembering and inspiration. Come and see what you cook up. Bring your curiosity and your appetite, a sense of play and a sense of humor.

■ Offered 10:30 a.m. Friday

Beginning to Bloom: Opening Up to Poetry

Barbara Fant

This workshop is geared towards new writers trying to write their first poem and those just interested in poetry. Participants will be guided through a series of generative writing exercises geared to introduce poetry. Through the reading of poetry, poetry exercises and discussion, we will explore craft, poetic tools and forms, and create original poems.

■ Offered 10:15 a.m. Saturday

Personal Essays Gone Wild!

Susan Pohlman

The literary world is all abuzz about this new, hybrid essay form. A term coined by Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola, the “hermit crab essay” is a delightful new breed of personal essay that borrows known structures — recipes, how-to manual, syllabus, drug facts, the pain scale, apologies, dating profiles, form letters — to tell a story or explore a topic. A great choice for both humor and human interest writers, these essays touch the heart and tickle the funny bone in creative and unique ways. In this interactive session, we will examine this emerging form and write one of our own.

■ Offered 2:15 p.m. Friday

Writing Stories That Matter

Lee Martin

This session takes on the question of how to write the stories that matter. We'll consider how to work with structure, characterization, detail and irony to create memorable stories either in fiction or in creative nonfiction. Come prepared to write. After considering some models, we'll close with an activity designed to generate the beginning of a story.

■ Offered 3:45 p.m. Friday

Concurrent workshop sessions

How to Uncover Your Own Voice and Get It Down on Paper

Kathy Kinney and Cindy Ratzlaff

Using a series of improvisational writing techniques and a simple kitchen timer, this hands-on workshop will help you get past your self-criticism, reveal your unique voice and help you incorporate that voice into your writing. You'll learn how to use your voice to paint a clear picture for readers, helping them experience who you are, where you are, who you are to the others in your scene and what makes this day so important in the story. Come prepared to write without self-editing and to give your imagination a good workout.

■ **Offered 3:45 p.m. Friday**

Wooing Your Muse: Rediscovering Inspiration and Jumpstarting Your Writing

Katrina Kittle

Are you seeking the inspiration (and nudge) to start a new project (or finally finish one!)? This workshop provides a creative boost by focusing on creating and defending a writing schedule, dealing with the inner critic and defeating writer's block — as well as providing writing prompts and exercises to get you back on track when you've lost your way (or your muse has stopped taking your calls).

■ **Offered 10:15 a.m. Saturday**

Write a Page Turner: An Agent's Secrets to Creating Stories Readers Can't Put Down

Paula Munier

In this interactive and informative workshop, literary agent and *USA Today* bestselling author Paula Munier reveals the secrets to writing stories that grab the readers' attention on page one and keep them turning the pages until The End. You'll learn how to build tension, dramatize the various kinds of conflict and master such page-turning plot elements as twists, reveals and reversals. Paula uses lots of examples and exercises to illustrate the special storytelling tools, tips and tricks you need to write suspenseful, engaging stories that leave your readers begging for more.

■ **Offered 10:15 a.m. Saturday**

Surprise and Delight Your Readers on Every Page

Jessica Strawser

Suspense isn't just for thrillers. It's not even just for fiction. Whether we're reading a humorous essay, a heartfelt memoir or a page-turning novel, we love the build of anticipation, the satisfaction of the unexpected. This interactive workshop uses prompts, examples and tips to help you master tricks for keeping your readers on the hook, from the paragraph level to the story's premise. You'll twist turns of phrase, uncover your character's secrets (even if that character is you!), pull the rug out and leave with plenty of ideas for adapting these techniques to your own work-in-progress.

■ **Offered 3:45 p.m. Friday**

Concurrent workshop sessions

HUMOR WRITING

Finding the Funny in Your Story

Annabelle Gurwitch

New York Times' best-selling author, Thurber Prize finalist and humorist Annabelle Gurwitch leads a workshop on finding the funny in your story. She will lead a creative brainstorming session with writers on current project ideas and works in progress. She'll share her process of cultivating humor in even the most serious subjects and work with writers individually on finding opportunities in a piece of writing they will send in advance. You'll learn a process you can apply each time you sit down to write. This workshop combines (short) lectures, writing, reading short excerpts of their work (unless a student prefers not to), discussion of craft and brainstorming with Annabelle and class members.

■ Offered 10:30 a.m. Friday

Using Humor to Weather the Pandemic

Tracy Beckerman

How can you find your funny and regain your mojo during such uncertain times? It's time to channel your inner Erma and inject humor into your life and the lives of others through your writing. Nationally syndicated humor writer Tracy Beckerman will talk about what you can make light of and what you shouldn't during a pandemic, the ways social media can help or hurt your brand, and how you can find the funny even if you don't feel especially on top of your game right now. This session will include a short writing prompt, spurring you to write in a way that's relatable, uplifting — and funny.

■ Offered 9 a.m. Friday

Family — The Ties That Bind...and Gag!

Moderated by Lian Dolan, featuring Tracy Beckerman, Bruce Ferber and Leighann Lord

With humor, compassion and irreverence, Erma Bombeck brought to life "a strange little band of characters," the family, in her writings. Lian Dolan, host of *Satellite Sisters*, a podcast she created with her four sisters, moderates a panel of writers who beautifully and, often hysterically, write about the foibles of family life.

■ Offered 3:45 p.m. Friday

Humor Writing: Punch Up Your Prose

Dan Zevin

Your friends think you're funny, your family thinks you're funny, and your sensibility is more Seinfeld than Sartre. So how come your writing sometimes winds up so dry? Hint: Your high school English teacher said that writing was solemn business. In this workshop, it's payback time. You'll be encouraged to look at the world the way nature intended: with your sense of humor. We'll discuss personal essays, comic fiction and topical satire. And our in-class exercises (relax, no cardio) will help you find the funny in the characters, dialogue and situations you create. Whether your goal is to write a "Shouts and Murmurs" piece for *The New Yorker*, a list for *McSweeney's* or a book-length humor collection, the first step is the same: take your sense of humor seriously.

■ Offered 2:15 p.m. Friday

Concurrent workshop sessions

How to Tell Your Story

Margot Leitman

In this interactive workshop, you'll learn how to turn painful, strange or even mundane life experiences into performable funny stories from a master — a winner of The Moth GrandSLAM. You'll dig inside your own lives to find humorous, relatable material, which unifies an audience, making them laugh at their own experiences through your performance. You will leave with a strong direction of how to structure a live story while thinking, "I can't believe I told a room full of strangers about that and I can't believe they all laughed!" Workshop includes writing and oral exercises, for all levels of experience.

■ **Offered 3:45 p.m. Friday**

Satire Starter Pack

Riane Konc

Satire is often called the "comedy of outrage." It's a form of writing that uses the deep emotions of the author to express a point of view through comedy. In this workshop, you'll look at satirical examples, learn tips and tricks, discuss different formats that work for *The New Yorker's* "Shouts & Murmurs" section and *McSweeney's* and learn a repeatable brainstorming process to use going forward to create topical and evergreen satire.

■ **Offered 9 a.m. Friday**

Welcome to the Writers' Room

Joel Madison

Writing scripted comedy is a dynamic, collaborative process. Rewriting scripted comedy is what a writers' room is all about. This session will mirror the tasks and atmosphere of a professional rewrite room as you and your fellow attendees dig into a real sitcom script under the direction of industry veteran Joel Madison (*Roseanne*, *Fresh Prince*, *Undeclared*, *Crashing*). You will have the opportunity to review and study pages of a real script in the weeks before the workshop and gather your thoughts on how to improve it from your own comedy perspective. Then, in a group setting, pitch your new jokes, scenes and even entire story lines to Joel and your fellow attendees as everyone collaborates to hammer out a better, funnier version of the script. As Joel moderates this fun and lively session, he will also share his own hilarious anecdotes from the TV and movie trenches, giving you a true insider's view of the scripted writing experience. Whether you want to jump in and pitch your own jokes or you simply want to see what a real comedy writers' room is all about, this session will give you a perspective that you can't get anywhere outside of Hollywood.

■ **Offered 10:30 a.m. Friday**

Concurrent workshop sessions

PUBLISHING

Pitching During a Pandemic Without Getting Ghosted

Estelle Erasmus

Whether you want to write a first-person essay, how-to, reported piece or profile, a good pitch letter with a great spin on a topic, timely element, newsy connection or an unusual personal experience will capture the attention of an assigning editor. That's no easy feat. Editors receive hundreds of pitches a day, and as a magazine editor and widely published journalist and writing coach, Estelle Erasmus knows how to break through the noise to elicit an editor's interest. The first part of the session will feature tips and tricks — and show why Estelle and her students have gone viral in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. In the second part, she will review your written pitches and help you to make them pique an editor's interest.

■ Offered 9 a.m. Friday

Ask the Agents

**Moderated by Jessica Strawser,
featuring Stacey Graham, Sam Hiyate
and Paula Munier**

This Q&A with a panel of agents provides you with an opportunity to find out what agents look for in sample chapters, what makes them stop reading, what they can do for self-published authors, what they want to hear during a live pitch and much more. You'll get the chance to ask the agents about any topic, from platform and marketing to self-publishing and series writing. Whether you're writing for children or adults, fiction or nonfiction, these agents can answer your questions.

■ Offered 9 a.m. Friday

Intro to Ebook Self-Publishing: How to Publish, Distribute and Sell Your Ebook

Jim Azevedo

It's easier to self-publish an ebook than you might imagine. No technical knowledge required! In this introductory, jargon-free primer on ebook self-publishing, Smashwords marketing director Jim Azevedo covers the basics. The workshop begins with an overview of the latest publishing industry trends, then delves into the benefits of ebook self-publishing and concludes with an ebook publishing checklist covering everything you need to know to get started — from ebook formatting and pricing, to metadata and cover design best practices. Attendees will leave with actionable information they can use to get their ebooks distributed to global retailers and public libraries.

■ Offered 2:15 p.m. Friday

Profitable Authorship — Quit Your Day Job

Rebecca Regnier

Within three years, Rebecca Regnier earned enough money from book revenue to put her son through college and quit her TV journalist's job. Rebecca did it without an agent or a publishing house. In this dynamic session, Rebecca explains why she chose independent authorship and why it might be right for you. She'll blow the doors off of antiquated publishing business models and share methods on how to discover a profitable genre. Rebecca will lead attendees through in-depth analysis of cover design, successful book blurbs, and how to craft stories that readers want. Learn the mindset and the resources needed to succeed as an indie author. If you've ever dreamed of earning a full-time income as an author, this session might be your first chapter.

■ Offered 9 a.m. Friday

Concurrent workshop sessions

The How-To of National Syndication

Lisa Glowinski

What does it take to get nationally syndicated and paid? Is syndication the holy grail as perceived? As the writing landscape has changed, it is no longer about being an excellent writer. It's about branding. What's your niche elevator pitch? Lisa Glowinski, who oversees More Content Now for Gatehouse Media, will share how writers with expanded platforms — podcasting, video blogging, YouTube and other social media — can attain national syndication.

■ **Offered 2:15 p.m. Friday**

Book Publishing Paths: What's New? What's Old? What's Right for You?

**Moderated by Nancy Berk, featuring
Jim Azevedo and David Braughler**

Over the last decade, the publishing industry has undergone tremendous evolution with the growth of online retail and digital books, as well as the power of authors to publish and distribute their work at the click of a button. But which path is right for you and your book — and how do you sift through the increasing number of hybrid publishers and services that make a lot of promises but cost you a lot upfront? A panel of publishing pros helps you understand the pros and cons of every major publishing path.

■ **Offered 10:30 a.m. Friday**

How To Get Published Successfully

Arielle Eckstut and David Henry Sterry

It is the greatest time in history to be a writer. The barrier to publishing has been torn down and now anyone can get published. But to get published successfully is a whole other matter. Two publishing pros — known as The Book Doctors — take you through the entire publishing process. This step-by-step, soup-to-nuts workshop will remove the smoke and mirrors from the murky world of publishing and give writers a compass and map to a successfully published book. Topics covered include:

- Choosing the right idea
- Creating a blockbuster title
- Crafting an attention-getting pitch
- Putting together a selling proposal/manuscript
- Finding the right agent/publisher
- Self-publishing effectively with ebooks, print-on-demand or traditional printing
- Developing sales, marketing and publicity savvy
- Producing a video book trailer and helping it go viral
- Building a following through social media

■ **Offered 10:15 a.m. Saturday**

Concurrent workshop sessions

MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Tools & Tips to Get More Eyes on Your Words: It Doesn't Matter How Good Your Writing Is if Nobody Sees It

Kim Bongiorno

Writers want to spend their time writing, not building and managing a social media platform. This class is designed to teach you how to create a professional online presence, plan promotion of your work using social media and engage an audience in a way that is fruitful for your career without making it the focus of your workday. You'll learn which social media accounts you should consider, how to set them up to appeal to their specific audiences, how to improve the quality/content of your posts and how to manage it all in a much more time-efficient way. By setting your online self up properly and making smarter choices about how/when/what to post, you will find social media not only gets more eyes on your work but also can create connections that result in opportunities for growth in your writing career. Taught in relatable terms with clear visuals and helpful handouts, this class is suitable for everyone from the newcomer to social media on up to all who want to make the most of their online presence without taking time away from the writing that they love.

■ **Offered 2:15 p.m. Friday**

Eight Reasons You Need a Blog and E-Newsletter — and Eight Tips for Quickly Making Them Work For You

Jess Montgomery

With a plethora of social media platforms, aren't blogs and email newsletters *passé*? Best relegated to the realm of dinosaurs...and dial-up modems? No! The overwhelming swirl of social media is just one of several reasons why you DO need a blog and an e-newsletter,

created in tandem, no matter where you are on your writing and publishing journey, and no matter what kind of writing you do — fiction, humor, nonfiction or other. But fear not. Though the idea may at first make you groan at “having-yet-one-more-thing-you-must-do,” by the end of this session, you'll feel energized about jumping in (or jumping back in) to creating your blog and e-newsletter. You'll learn why it's best to create both together, as a pair that supports one another. Plus, you'll learn practical tips and how-tos to keep your blogging and e-newsletter creating time simple and fast, so that rather than just taking time from your writing life, the practice will enhance your writing life.

■ **Offered 10:30 a.m. Friday**

How to Brand Yourself, Build a Platform, Balance a Personal Life and Create a Bestseller, Without Killing your Spouse, Alienating Your Friends or Running Screaming into the Night

Cindy Ratzlaff

Cindy will share the exact steps she used in helping bestselling authors create powerful, purposeful and result-oriented personal brands on their websites and through social media. She'll share her formula for determining which social platforms will work best for you, based on your unique goals. You'll come away from this workshop with a step-by-step plan for creating a digital footprint that will help readers find you and your work. A handout with free social tools and recommended uses will be included.

■ **Offered 10:15 a.m. Friday**

KEYNOTERS

ANNABELLE GURWITCH

Annabelle Gurwitch is a *New York Times*' best-selling author, comedic actress and activist.



Most recently, *The New York Times* published her essay about sending her child back to college after a stint in rehab and the *Los Angeles Times* featured her essay about opening her home to house at-risk youth experiencing homelessness.

A prolific writer, she takes a hilarious look at family in *Wherever You Go, There They Are: Stories About My Family You Might Relate To*. Her book, *I See You Made an Effort: Compliments, Indignities, and Survival Stories From the Edge of 50*, hit *The New York Times*' bestseller list and was named a Thurber Prize finalist. She also has penned *You Say Tomato, I Say Shut Up* (co-authored with Jeff Kahn) and *Fired!*, which was turned into a Showtime comedy special.

Her byline frequently appears in national outlets, including *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Los Angeles Times*, *McSweeney's*, *Real Simple*, *The Hollywood Reporter* and others.

Annabelle gained a loyal following during her stint co-hosting the fan favorite *Dinner and a Movie* on TBS and years as a regular commentator on NPR. She was the news anchor on HBO's *Not Necessarily the News* and hosted three seasons of *W\$TED* on the Planet Green network.

Her acting credits include: *Better Things*, *Seinfeld*, *Boston Legal*, *Dexter*, *The Shaggy Dog*, *Daddy Day Care* and *Melvin Goes to Dinner*. She's a veteran of "many lauded and even more misguided" theatrical productions, including the world premiere of Donald Margulies' *A Cone*

Island Christmas at The Geffen Playhouse and the West Coast premiere of *Go Back to Where You Are* by David Greenspan at The Odyssey. Her performances have earned her a place in Top Ten Performances of the Year in both *The New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

Annabelle's many media appearances include *Real Time with Bill Maher*, *PBS NewsHour*, *The Today Show*, *CBS Early Show* and *Oprah*.

She's a frequent speaker at book fests, writers' conferences and with The Moth. Annabelle teaches on the faculty of The School of The New York Times. She's currently working on a new solo show, *If You Lived With Me, You'd Be Home By Now*, based on her *Los Angeles Times* essay, and is at work on a new book, *You're Leaving When?* It will be published in March 2021.

WENDY LIEBMAN

In 1985, Wendy Liebman took a class called How to be a Stand-up Comedian at the



Cambridge Center for Adult Education in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Since then she's performed on Carson, Letterman, Leno, Fallon, Kimmel, Ferguson, *Hollywood Squares* and @Midnight.

Wendy has done specials for HBO, Comedy Central and Showtime (*Taller on TV*) and was a semifinalist on NBC's *America's Got Talent*, season nine. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband and Jindo rescue dogs and produces the monthly show *Locally Grown Comedy* in Studio City, California, featuring local stand-up comics.

A crowd favorite at the Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop, she hosted the attendee stand-up comedy night in 2016 and 2018.

MIKE REISS

Mike Reiss has won four Emmys and a Peabody Award during his 28 years writing for *The Simpsons*. He ran the show in season four, which



Entertainment Weekly called “the greatest season of the greatest show in history.” In 2006, Mike received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Animation Writers Caucus of the Writers Guild of America

West. He has written 19 children’s books as well as the best-selling memoir *Springfield Confidential: Jokes, Secrets, and Outright Lies from a Lifetime Writing for The Simpsons*.

Mike has written jokes for Johnny Carson, Joan Rivers, Garry Shandling ... and Pope Francis. For his comedic contributions to the charitable group “Joke with the Pope,” Pope Francis in 2015 declared Mike a Missionary of Joy. He co-created the animated series *The Critic* and created Showtime’s hit cartoon *Queer Duck* (about a gay duck), which BBC named one of the 100 Greatest Cartoons of All Time. *Queer Duck: The Movie* was released in July 2006, winning awards in New York, Chicago, San Diego, Sweden, Germany and Wales.

He has been a contributing writer to more than two dozen animated films — including four *Ice Ages*, two *Despicable Me*, *The Lorax*, *Rio*, *Kung Fu Panda 3* and *The Simpsons Movie*. The *Hartford Courant* named Mike’s first play, *I’m Connecticut*, one of the year’s 10 best plays. *Broadway World Connecticut* voted it Best Play of 2012. His caveman detective story *Cro-Magnon P.I.* won an Edgar Award from the Mystery Writers of America. Mike also composes puzzles for NPR and *Games Magazine*.

As a professional speaker, Mike has lectured at more than 400 institutions on six continents. His topics include *The Simpsons*, comedy and Judaism, and the sorry state of television. Mike

is a former president of *The Harvard Lampoon* and editor of *National Lampoon*. He has been happily married for 30 years. Like most children’s book authors, he has no children.

MIKE ROWE

From the Baltimore Opera to the QVC shopping channel, executive producer, host and best-selling author Mike Rowe has had hundreds of jobs and relished his role as a chronic free-lancer. He’s best known as the “dirtiest man on TV,” a title he earned on the hit series *Dirty Jobs*. Most recently, Mike is in search of remarkable people making a difference in their communities on Facebook’s groundbreaking series *Returning the Favor*.



You can listen to him on *The Way I Heard It*, America’s #1 short-form podcast of five-minute mysteries for the curious mind with a short attention span; read his best-selling book *The Way I Heard It*, a mix of biography and autobiography based on his popular podcast; or watch him on the TV series *Somebody’s Gotta Do It* on TBN.

Mike is also the CEO of the mikeroweWORKS Foundation, a 501(c)(3) public charity that debunks myths and misperceptions about the trades and helps close the skills gap. The foundation has granted, or helped facilitate the granting of, more than \$5 million in technical and vocational education, including Work Ethic scholarships. In his spare time, Mike keeps a lively conversation with more than 5 million Facebook friends, where he talks about everything from the musings of his persnickety terrier named Freddy to the merits and pitfalls of blind patriotism.

PEGGY ROWE

Peggy Rowe wrote her first book, *About My Mother*, at the age of 80. It was a best-seller. "It took me 80 years to find my voice," she says, "and now, I can't shut it up." Her recently published second book, *About Your Father And Other Celebrities*



I Have Known also landed on The New York Times Bestseller List.

After a brief teaching career, Peggy was a stay-at-home mom to three sons in Baltimore. She and her schoolteacher husband, John, lived across the lawn from Peggy's parents for nearly 40 years. "Oh yeah," she says, "I've spent a lifetime surrounded by rich characters."

Peggy's blog on Facebook has more than 140,000 followers, and millions read and hear her letters and texts to her TV personality son Mike Rowe.

Peggy's motto: "It's never too late."

SOPHFRONIA SCOTT

Sophronia Scott began her writing career as a journalist for *Time* and *People* magazines. When her first novel, *All I Need to Get By*, was published by St. Martin's Press in 2004, she was nominated for best new author at the African American Literary Awards and hailed by Henry Louis Gates Jr.



as "potentially one of the best writers of her generation."

Sophronia holds a bachelor's degree in English from Harvard University and Master of Fine Arts in writing, fiction and creative nonfiction from Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her

latest novel is *Unforgivable Love* (William Morrow). She's also the author of an essay collection, *Love's Long Line* (Ohio State University Press's Mad Creek Books), and a memoir, *This Child of Faith: Raising a Spiritual Child in a Secular World*, co-written with her son Tain (Paraclete Press). Her essays, short stories and articles have appeared in *Killens Review of Arts & Letters*, *Saranac Review*, *Nu-méro Cinq*, *Ruminate*, *Barnstorm Literary Journal*, *Sleet Magazine*, *NewYorkTimes.com*, *More*, and *O, The Oprah Magazine*. Her essay "Why I Didn't Go to the Firehouse" is listed among the Notables in *Best American Essays 2017*.

Sophronia is the newly named founding director of Alma College's low residency MFA in Creative Writing program. She also teaches at Regis University and Bay Path University and has delivered craft talks and held workshops at the Yale Writers' Workshop, Antioch Writers' Workshop, Meacham Writers' Workshop, the Mark Twain House and the Hobart Festival of Women Writers in addition to her own retreat, *The Write of Your Life*, which takes place in Veneto, Italy, each September. She lives in Sandy Hook, Connecticut, where she is working on her next novel as well as a nonfiction book about her virtual mentorship with the monk Thomas Merton. This also means she is fighting a losing battle against the weeds in her flower beds.

EMCEE

PATRICIA WYNN BROWN

Patricia Wynn Brown is a performer, speaker, producer and author of two books, *Hair-A-Baloo: The Revealing Comedy and Tragedy on*



Top of Your Head and *Momma Culpa: One Mother Comes Clean and Makes Her Maternal Confession*. Pat has performed her humor-memoir *Hair Theater* shows across the United States. She is a featured humor-

ist in the PBS documentary, *A Legacy of Laughter*, about the life and work of Erma Bombeck. She also is a three-time winner of the James Thurber summer writing contest. Pat's work currently focuses on trauma and the healing power of stories, laughter and high jinks. This includes shows and a fun yet potent "charm school" at the Ohio Reformatory for Women; work on the Ohio State University Medicine and the Arts Board; participation in the Ohio Prison Arts Connection network; singing in the Harmony Project Choir; and persisting as a humble student of ballet, often performing in character parts. (No one dances the role of "dead grandmother" in the *Matchgirl* ballet better than she.)

DIGITAL JOURNALIST

LIZA DONNELLY

Liza Donnelly is a writer and award-winning cartoonist for *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, CNN, CBS News and others.



Liza is the creator of a digital visual journalism called live drawing. For CBS News, CNN and *The New Yorker*, she covered the Democratic National Convention in 2016, the 2017

Inauguration, White House Press conferences and political protest marches. She was the first

cartoonist to be granted access on location to live-draw the Academy Awards; she has also live-drawn the Grammys, Tonys and more. Her innovative approach to reporting and commenting on events has been covered by *The New York Times*, CBS News, The BBC, NBC, *Ad Week*, *USA Today* and *People Magazine*.

An extensive traveler, she has received several international awards for her editorial cartoons. An accomplished public speaker, she has been a cultural envoy for the U.S. State Department, traveling the world to speak about freedom of speech and women's rights. Her TED talk was translated into 38 languages and viewed over 1.4 million times. Along with her husband cartoonist Michael Maslin, she was profiled on *CBS Sunday Morning*, has been a guest on numerous podcasts, television and radio shows, and has been interviewed for many publications. Liza is the recipient of an honorary Ph.D. from University of Connecticut and taught at Vassar College and the School of Visual Arts in New York City.

Liza is the author/editor of 17 books. Her latest book, *Women On Men*, was a finalist for the Thurber Prize for American Humor. A revised edition of her history, *Funny Ladies: The New Yorker's Greatest Women Cartoonists*, will be published in 2021.

She is a charter member of the international project, Cartooning for Peace, and the Norman Rockwell Museum recently exhibited a retrospective of her work. In 2018, she served as the opening night keynote speaker at the Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop.

PRESENTERS

DIANA ABU-JABER

After parents asked her to recommend books about Arab-American families, Diana Abu-Jaber



wrote *Silverworld*, a fantasy with an Arab-American girl at its heart that was published this spring from Crown Books/Random House. Diana often writes about the intersection of food, family and cultural

identity. Her memoir, *Life Without A Recipe*, was described by Ruth Reichl as “bold and luscious.” *The Language of Baklava*, her first memoir, has been published in many languages. Her latest novel, *Birds Of Paradise*, won the Arab-American National Book Award. Her other novels include *Origin*, *Crescent* and *Arabian Jazz*.

Fencing With the King, a novel of Middle Eastern intrigue and suspense, will be published in 2022 from W.W. Norton.

Diana teaches at Portland State University and lives in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

JIM AZEVEDO

Jim Azevedo is the marketing director at Smashwords, the largest distributor of self-published ebooks. Since 2008, Smashwords has helped more than 140,000 authors, publishers and literary agents around the world release more than 500,000 titles to ebook retailers, subscription services



and public libraries. Jim, a convert from Silicon Valley's technology industry, brought to Smashwords' indie author ethos 18 years of drumming, recording and touring with a San Francisco Bay Area hard rock band.

TRACY BECKERMAN

Tracy Beckerman is a syndicated columnist and author. Since 2001, she has written the humor column, “Lost in Suburbia,” which is distributed



through Gatehouse Media/Gannett to publications in 47 states with a reach of more than 145 million unique visitors each month. No longer actually living in suburbia, Tracy has returned to the city and now

writes her weekly column about being “Lost in Midlife,” along with a humor tech column for the new Gatehouse/Gannett monthly magazine, *ION*. She has written two books, *Rebel Without a Minivan* and *Lost in Suburbia: A Memoir*, has a new book coming out this year and has contributed to several anthologies, including two *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books: *Laughter is the Best Medicine* and *The Magic of Dogs*.

Tracy has spoken at numerous conferences, schools and women's groups about motherhood, losing your identity and reinventing yourself. She also has spoken about syndication, branding and humor writing at the Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop since 2008, as well as at other industry conferences including The National Society of Newspaper Columnists Conference, The American Society of Journalists and Authors, The Windsor International Writers Conference and more. She has appeared on NBC's *Today*, *CBS This Morning* and many local morning shows around the country. In 2010, she was featured in a segment about Erma Bombeck and the Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop on *CBS Sunday Morning*.

DR. NANCY BERK

Armed with a doctorate from Vanderbilt University and the skills of a therapist, professor and researcher, clinical psychologist Nancy



Berk weaves her traditional training into her insight and humor. An author, entertainment and advice writer and Golden Quill Award-winning columnist, Nancy co-produces and hosts the podcast *Enter-*

taining Insights with Dr. Nancy Berk (formerly *Whine At 9*), featuring celebrity and expert interviews, life lessons, laughs and entertainment ideas. Her genuine conversations with entertainment icons have made the show a popular landing place for Oscar, Grammy and Emmy Award winners and Rock & Roll Hall of Famers. She is also a freelance contributor to *Forbes.com's Hollywood & Entertainment* and *Parade.com*.

Nancy's self-help humor book *College Bound and Gagged*, seen in the 2013 film *Admission* starring Tina Fey and Paul Rudd, coaches parents and teens on their higher education journey. A finalist in the 2016 Stand-Up Pittsburgh comedy competition, Nancy has had national stand-up and speaking engagements, including the American Marketing Association, the Bryant University Women's Summit, the Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop, Wendy Liebman's Locally Grown Comedy, Quilting Comedy and the 2019 Vent Haven International Ventriloquist Convention. She is also an adjunct associate professor at the University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine.

KIM BONGIORNO

Kim Bongiorno, author, freelance writer and award-winning blogger behind "Let Me Start



By Saying," is best known for her parenting humor, whether in 280 characters on Twitter or essay form in a *New York Times* bestseller. She has written thousands of articles for dozens of publications

over the years, appeared in 11 humor anthologies, self-published a collection of short fiction, wrote a middle-grade novel, taught social media classes for writers and small businesses, and creates something new every day. Kim lives in New Jersey with her family, but you can find her on Instagram or Twitter.

DAVID BRAUGHLER

David Braughler is the founder and president of Braughler Books, a hybrid publishing



company headquartered in Dayton, Ohio. He and his team work with authors, organizations and executives to help them turn their stories and expertise into published books. Over the last 10 years,

he's collaborated and worked directly with more than 500 authors on nearly 400 titles. Braughler Books has partnered with authors in North America, Spain and Australia on books ranging from self-help and memoir to business topics and children's titles. He's a frequent speaker at regional and national conferences and is a member of the Independent Book Publishers Association.

LIAN DOLAN

Writer Lian Dolan is the host of *Satellite Sisters*, a podcast she created with her four real sisters



in 2001. On *Satellite Sisters*, she has interviewed personalities from Nora Ephron to Madeleine Albright to Big Bird. She is the author of the newly published novel *The Sweeney Sisters* and two other best-

selling novels, *Helen of Pasadena* and *Elizabeth the First Wife*. She co-authored two collections of essays, *Satellite Sisters' UnCommon Senses* and *You're The Best: A Celebration of Friendship*. She created *The Chaos Chronicles* about her life as a talk show host, mother and serial volunteer. It began as a column in *Working Mother* magazine, then became a podcast and was later developed for TV by Nickelodeon. She has written a regular column for *O, The Oprah Magazine* and is currently a humor columnist for *Pasadena Magazine*. A graduate of Pomona College, she lives in Pasadena, California, with her husband, two sons and a big German shepherd.

ARIELLE ECKSTUT

Arielle Eckstut is a co-founder of The Book Doctors, which has helped hundreds of authors get their books published. She is the author of 10 books, including *The Essential Guide to Getting Your Book Published*. Arielle has been a literary agent for more than 25 years at the Levine Greenberg Rostan Literary Agency. She also is the co-founder of the iconic brand LittleMissMatched. She has been featured in, among others, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post* and on NPR's *Morning Edition*.



ESTELLE ERASMUS

Estelle Erasmus, an award-winning journalist and writing coach, has written for *The New York Times*, *NextTribe*, *Forbes*, *Next Avenue*, *The Washington Post*, *Family Circle* and more. She hosts the podcast *ASJA Direct: Inside Intel on Getting Published and Paid Well*. She is an adjunct writing professor at New York University, teaches writing for *Writer's Digest* and is an ongoing guest editor for *Narratively*.



BARBARA FANT

Barbara Fant has been writing and performing poetry for 13 years. She has represented Columbus, Ohio, in nine National Poetry Slam competitions and placed eighth out of 96 poets in the 2017 Women of the World Poetry Slam. She is a TEDx speaker, a *Columbus Makes Art* Campaign artist, and was named a 2017 *Columbus Alive* People to Watch. Her first poetry collection, *Paint, Inside Out*, was published by Penmanship Books in 2010 when she was awarded the Cora Craig Award for Young Authors. She is the author of several chapbooks, the co-author of two stage productions, and has been commissioned by more than 10 national organizations. Barbara has received residencies from *Idyllwild Arts* in Idyllwild, California, and *Connect Arts* in Havana, Cuba. She holds an MFA from Antioch University Los Angeles and a Master of Theology from the Methodist Theological School in Ohio. Her work has been featured by *Button Poetry* and *Def Poetry Jam*, and published in



Electric Literature, *Harness Magazine* and *The Ohio State University Press*.

Installations of her work can be found in the Columbus Museum of Art and The Columbus Foundation. The founder of Bloom Barb Fant, LLC, she teaches poetry in correctional institutions and schools. Currently, she is the artistic director for Harmony Project, a teaching artist at Transit Arts and co-curator of the reading series *Paging Columbus*. Barbara believes in the transformative power of art and considers poetry her ministry.

BRUCE FERBER

Bruce Ferber is an Emmy-nominated comedy writer and producer whose credits include *Bosom Buddies*, *Growing Pains*, *Sabrina The Teenage Witch*, *Coach*, *Dan Vs.* and *Home Improvement*, where he served as executive producer and showrunner. In addition to being recognized by the television academy, his work has received The



People's Choice, Kid's Choice and Environmental Media Awards. He is the editor of the anthology *The Way We Work: On the Job in Hollywood* and has written two novels, *Elevating Overman* and *Cascade Falls*. *Elevating Overman*, a tragicomic mid-life awakening story, attracted the attention of Jason Alexander, who voiced the audiobook and is currently in discussions for a potential television series. *Cascade Falls* won the Foreword Indie Book of the Year Gold Prize for Humor Fiction and Bronze Prize for General Fiction. This is Bruce's second appearance at the Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop. He served as a keynoter in 2014.

LISA GLOWINSKI

Lisa Glowinski has been director of GateHouse Media's More Content Now service since 2010. Before that, she held several roles at the *Rockford* (Illinois) *Register Star*, including features editor. She was president of the Society for Features Journalism in 2015-16, and in 2009, she was a Poynter McCormick Change Leadership Fellow. She is a graduate of the University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication. She has been a speaker and trainer for the Society for Features Journalism; the Associated Press Media Editors' NewsTrain program; Poynter; and the National Society of Newspaper Columnists.



STACEY GRAHAM

Stacey Graham has worked both sides of the literary door as a humor writer on the wickedly funny "Zombie Tarot" and as an agent with 3 Seas Literary. She is currently looking to expand her list with snappy rom-coms, hilarious middle-grade and weird fiction.



SAM HIYATE

Sam Hiyate worked at the literary magazines *Blood & Aphorisms* and *The Quarterly* in the 1990s. He ran the edgy micropublisher Gutter Press from 1993 to 2002. He launched the literary division of the Lavin Agency in 2003. Sam's projects for The Rights Factory, where he is president and CEO, have been in various categories, including memoir, literary and commercial fiction, narrative nonfiction, lifestyle, self-improvement and graphic novels. He's looking for works of all categories. He loves humor and loves to discover and help new writers prepare their works for the market and build lasting careers with their talent.



BRIAN KILEY

Emmy Award-winning writer Brian Kiley is the head monologue writer for Conan O'Brien and the author of two books, *Maybe Kevin* and *The Astounding Misadventures of Rory Collins*.



A staff writer for O'Brien since 1994, Brian has received 16 Emmy nominations and won the 2007 Emmy Award for Outstanding Writing for a Variety, Music or Comedy Program. He appeared on *The Late Show with David Letterman* seven times; *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* four times; and *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* 12 times. He was even once featured in *The New York Times* Sunday crossword. He has never completed said puzzle.

Brian, who performs regularly at clubs in Los Angeles, has had a recurring role on the Cartoon Network's *Delocated* and has appeared on *The Bonnie Hunt Show*; *Comedy Central Presents*; *Dr. Katz, Professional Therapist*; *CBS This Morning*; *Caroline's Comedy Hour*; *Comedy On The Road*; the Showtime Comedy Club network; and *An Evening at the Improv*.

KATHY KINNEY

Kathy Kinney, who may be known best for her role as Mimi on the hit ABC series *The Drew Carey Show*, has appeared in dozens of TV shows and movies. She is the co-author, along with her friend Cindy Ratzlaff, of three books, *Queen of Your Own Life: The Grown-Up Woman's Guide to Claiming Happiness and Getting the Life You Deserve*; *Queenisms: 101 Jolts of Inspiration*; and *Queen of Your Own Life: If Not Now, When?* She is the star and co-producer of the children's website Mrs. P.com, which promotes creativity, literacy and the joy of reading. With



a background in improvisational comedy, she has performed extensively in Las Vegas at the MGM Grand, Caesars Palace and the Mirage with Drew Carey and the Improv All-Stars. She also has performed on tours with the USO in Saudi Arabia, Iraq and the Persian Gulf.

KATRINA KITTLE

Katrina Kittle is the author of *Traveling Light*, *Two Truths and a Lie*, *The Kindness of Strangers* (winner of the 2006 Great Lakes Book Award for Fiction), *The Blessings of the Animals* and *Reasons to Be Happy*. She is a lecturer in creative writing at the University of Dayton and teaches creative writing workshops through Word's Worth Writing Connections, focusing on craft and motivation (and is especially good at jump-starting stalled writers). She is a public speaker, leading the workshops "Leap and the Net Will Appear" and "Happy Class." Katrina has a thing for goats, gardening and going barefoot; and is addicted to coffee, pedicures and movies.



RIANE KONC

Riane Konc is a Cincinnati-based humor writer and occasional essayist. She's a frequent contributor to *The New Yorker*, and her work also has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *McSweeney's*, *Mad Magazine*, *Reductress*, *Paste Magazine*, *Parents Magazine* and more. *Paste Magazine* recently named her one of the "best humorists writing today." She teaches satire and humor writing online for Second City, and her first book, a "choose your own adventure"-style parody called *Build Your Own Christmas Movie Romance*, came out in 2019.



MARGOT LEITMAN

Margot Leitman is the author of the best-selling book *Long Story Short: The Only Storytell-*



ing Guide You'll Ever Need, What's Your Story? and a comedic memoir, *Gawky: Tales of an Extra Long Awkward Phase*. In 2019, she published a companion to *Long Story Short* called *What's Your Story? A*

Workbook for the Storyteller in All of Us. She has written for DreamWorks TV, the Hallmark Channel and the Pixl Network and was a West Coast story scout for *This American Life*. She is the founder of the storytelling program at the Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre, a five-time winner of the Moth Story Slam and a winner of the Moth GrandSLAM, receiving the program's first perfect 10. She travels all over the world teaching people to tell their stories.

LEIGHANN LORD

Erma favorite Leighann Lord has been seen on Lifetime, Comedy Central, HBO's *Def Comedy*



All-Star Jam and ABC's *The View*. This comedy veteran also has performed for U.S. troops stationed in the Middle East. Her comedy album *I've Got Connections* is played heavily on Sirius Satellite

Radio. Leighann appeared in the George Lucas film *RadioLand Murders* and has been a co-host on the Emmy-nominated *Star Talk Radio* with Neil deGrasse Tyson. A native New Yorker and creator of the popular *People with Parents* podcast, Leighann is the author of several humor books, including *Dict Jokes and Real Women Do It Standing Up: Stories from the Career of a Very Funny Lady*. One of five national finalists in the 2018 American Black Film Festival Comedy Wings competition, she also has been named one of the 35 Most Hilarious Comedians of Diversity and is the winner of the American

Humanist Association's 2019 Humanist Arts Award.

JOEL MADISON

Joel Madison, who started his career as a stand-up comedian, has been a professional



comedy writer for nearly 30 years. He has worked in almost every form of television writing — scripted 30-minute and hour-long shows, animation, late night, variety and reality — as well as feature films. Most

recently, he was a consulting producer on the HBO comedy series *Crashing*. Joel's body of work includes "created by" credits for several TV shows, and he won the prestigious Peabody Award for his work on the original *Roseanne* sitcom. He teaches television scriptwriting at the Columbia College Chicago program in Los Angeles.

LEE MARTIN

Lee Martin is the author of the novels *The Bright Forever*, a finalist for the 2006 Pulitzer



Prize in fiction; *River of Heaven*; *Quakertown*; *Break the Skin*; *Late One Night*; and his newest novel, *Yours, Jean*. He also has published three memoirs — *From Our House*; *Turning Bones*; and *Such a Life* — in

addition to a craft book, *Telling Stories: The Craft of Narrative and the Writing Life*. His first book was the short story collection *The Least You Need To Know*, and his most recent book is another story collection, *The Mutual UFO Network*. He is the co-editor of *Passing the Word: Writers on Their Mentors*. His fiction and nonfiction have appeared in such places as *Harper's Magazine*, *Ms.*, *Creative Nonfiction*, *The Georgia*

Review, The Kenyon Review, Fourth Genre, River Teeth, The Southern Review, Prairie Schooner and Glimmer Train. He is the winner of the Mary McCarthy Prize in Short Fiction and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Ohio Arts Council. He teaches in the Master of Fine Arts program at Ohio State University, where he is a College of Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor and the winner of the 2006 Alumni Award for Distinguished Teaching.

JESS MONTGOMERY

Jess Montgomery is the author of the Kinship Historical Mysteries, including *The Widows* (2019) and *The Hollows* (2020). Under her given name of Sharon Short, she is a newspaper columnist, focusing on the literary life, authors and events of her native Dayton, Ohio, for the *Dayton Daily News*. Her



honors have included a Montgomery County (Ohio) Arts & Cultural District Artist Opportunity Grant (2018); an Individual Excellence Award in Literary Arts from the Ohio Arts Council (2016); and John E. Nance Writer-in-Residence at Thurber House (Columbus, Ohio, 2014). She is a three-time recipient of the OAC's Literary Arts Excellence Award (2012, 2016, 2018) and the author of other published novels, short stories and essays.

PAULA MUNIER

Paula Munier is a literary agent, editor and *USA Today* best-selling author with 25 years' experience acquiring, editing and marketing fiction and nonfiction. She's the Mary Higgins Clark Award-nominated author of *A Borrowing of Bones* and *Blind Search*. She's also written *Plot Perfect*, *The Writer's Guide to Beginnings*, *Writing with Quiet Hands*, the memoir *Fixing Freddie* and *Happier Every Day*:



Simple Ways to Bring More Peace, Contentment and Joy into Your Life. In her fab day job as senior literary agent and content strategist for Talcott Notch Literary, she represents many great writers. Her specialties include women's fiction, book club fiction, crime fiction, middle grade and crossover young adult, high-concept science fiction or fantasy, and nonfiction.

SUSAN POHLMAN

Susan Pohlman is the founder and director of the Phoenix Writers Network. She is a freelance writer, editor and writing coach and the author of the memoirs *A Time to Seek: Meaning, Purpose, and Spirituality at Midlife* and *Halfway to Each Other: How a Year in Italy Brought Our Family Home*. Her essays have been published in a variety of print and online magazines and journals.



CINDY RATZLAFF

Cindy Ratzlaff is a 30-year veteran of the book publishing industry, having held executive positions at Rodale Inc. and Simon & Schuster and created and implemented the launch campaigns for more than 150 *New York Times* best-sellers. She also is an author through both traditional and self-publishing. Cindy's articles on business topics and happiness have been published on *BusinessInsider.com*, *Oprah.com*, *CNN.com* and in other national publications. She speaks internationally on personal branding, marketing strategies, social media community building, marketing platforms and campaign building. *Forbes* named her one of the Top Women Entrepreneurs to Follow on Twitter, and *Ad Age* named her to the *Advertising Age* Marketing 50 list in 2003 for her work on launching The South Beach Diet brand.



REBECCA REGNIER

Rebecca Regnier writes an award-winning weekly newspaper column for the *Monroe* (Michigan) *News*. She spent more than 20 years in television news as a reporter, anchor and talk show host. She was honored with multiple Associated Press awards for her reporting, and her morning show won an Emmy Award. Rebecca's reports and commentary have appeared in the nationally syndicated show *Momseveryday*. In 2018, Rebecca left television news to become a full-time author and podcaster. She is the author of the cozy paranormal mystery series, *Widow's Bay*, and she recently debuted a new thriller novel. Rebecca lives in Michigan with her husband, sons and incredibly handsome dog.



DAVID HENRY STERRY

David Henry Sterry is a co-founder of The Book Doctors. He is the author of 16 books on a wide variety of subjects, from memoir to middle-grade fiction, sports to reference. His work has been translated into more than a dozen languages, optioned by Hollywood, and appeared on the cover of *The New York Times Sunday Book Review*. He contributes to *The Huffington Post*, *Salon*, *The Rumpus* and, most recently, *Narratively*. Before writing professionally, David was a comic and an actor. The *Independent* newspaper of London named his one-man show, based on his memoir *Chicken*, the No. 1 show in the United Kingdom for its entire run at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2003.



JESSICA STRAWSER

Jessica Strawser is editor-at-large at *Writer's Digest*, where she served as editorial director for nearly a decade and became known for her in-depth cover interviews. She is also a bestselling novelist, with four titles and counting from St. Martin's Press: *Almost Missed You* (a Barnes & Noble Best New Fiction pick), *Not That I Could Tell* (a Book of the Month selection), *Forget You Know Me* (a PopSugar best of the season) and *A Million Reasons Why* (coming in March 2021). Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Publishers Weekly* and other fine venues, and she served as the 2019 Writer-in-Residence for the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton (Ohio) County.



DAN ZEVIN

Dan Zevin is a Thurber Prize-winning humorist. His latest book is *Very Modern Mantras: Daily Affirmations for Daily Aggravations*; his others include *Dan Gets a Minivan* and *The Day I Turned Uncool*, both of which Adam Sandler has optioned. Dan has been an award-winning humor columnist for *The New York Times*, a comic commentator for National Public Radio and a contributor to print or digital editions of *The New Yorker*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Rolling Stone*, *Salon*, *Real Simple*, *Parents* and *The Wall Street Journal*. He lives with his family in Westchester, New York, and teaches comic writing at Sarah Lawrence College.



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2020 Erma Bombeck Writing Competition

First-place winners

Here is the best work of writers who entered the 2020 Erma Bombeck Writing Competition. The competition, sponsored every two years by the Washington-Centerville Public Library in Centerville, Ohio, has over the years drawn thousands of hopeful entries, submissions inspired by Erma Bombeck's humor and humanity.

For information, go to www.wclibrary.info/erma.

Cherries in the Snow

By Kathy Shiels Tully

Melrose, Massachusetts

In my teens, as I'd be heading out the door, my mother would call out to me after a quick lookover.

Her comments were never about what I was wearing.

It was what I wasn't wearing.

"Put some lipstick on," she'd say. "You look pale."

I cringed at the thought. Lipstick? Every day? So 1950s.

This went on for decades, even after I became a mother myself. In Mom's mind, there was no occasion that didn't warrant a quick schmear of red wax across my lips.

Me? I was a Bonne Bell girl in the '70s, preferring a light gloss of pale pink, at most. I believed my healthy, young lips didn't need extra embellishment.

My father agreed.

"Boys don't like girls who wear too much makeup," he said.

"You're beautiful as you are."

In college, I had a practical reason. Competing on the varsity swim team, I faced daily double workouts, both mornings and afternoons. Makeup would just wash off, I figured, so why bother?

Yet my mother never abandoned her quest. Once, while she was visiting us, I asked why she persisted telling me to wear lipstick when I clearly wasn't interested, nor cared, except for special occasions? And besides, my husband, like my father, found me beautiful as I was.

She grew silent.

"You think I'm bad?" said my mother. "Grammy (her mother) would put on lipstick before she brushed her teeth every morning!"

"Before...?"

I couldn't imagine it.

“Every morning?”

“Yes,” my mother nodded. “Grammy would wake up early, put on her lipstick, brush her teeth, then sneak back into bed until PopPop (her father) woke up.”

“I only put it on after I brush my teeth,” she said, defensively, “before coming down for breakfast.”

Over the years, the lipstick colors fluctuated, from pinks to reds. Lipstick tubes littered the house — laying on her bedroom bureau, behind bathroom mirrors and on the kitchen windowsill.

Finally, Mom found The One: Revlon’s #440 — Cherries in the Snow. The name seems to imply a winter tone, a bright Santa Claus-suit-red. But with hidden tones of fuschia, it was perfect to wear every season.

I think wearing #440 made my mother feel beautiful. Didn’t she know, I wondered, that she already was without it?

My mother stopped wearing lipstick only once. She was dying. She knew. We five kids knew. In her cramped room, my sisters stood on either side of her hospital bed. I stood by her bureau covered with tubes of #440. I pocketed one. Then another. My sisters did, too.

Days later, we wore it to her funeral.

Now when I go out, I schmear a little #440 on. I look pale, you know.



Inspired by Erma since age 10, Kathy Shiels Tully didn’t head in the “write” direction until she decided to combine two dreams: writing and get married — by proposing for Leap Day to her then-boyfriend on the op-ed page of The Boston Herald in February 1996. She hasn’t stopped writing since. A panelist for 2016 EBWW’s “Speed Dating for Writers,” Kathy is a regular contributor to The Boston Globe. Her stories have appeared in FamilyFun, The Christian Science Monitor, The Writer, Chicken Soup for the Soul (Brothers & Sisters; the Power of Gratitude). Kathy lives with her husband and their two daughters north of Boston, Massachusetts. Follow her at www.kathyshielstully.com.

John Bradley, the Greatest Turkey Who Ever Lived

By Gwen Rosenberg

Kent, Ohio

It was autumn and we were living on four acres with three babies, a dozen chickens, two goats and a dog. My friends had advanced degrees and enjoyed ladies lunches at farm-to-table restaurants, and I was doing laundry, changing diapers and eating frozen turkey for Thanksgiving.

We had a fresh, free-range turkey living in the barn, but when our eyes met moments before I was supposed to swing the axe, I decided our meal could be from someone else's farm to our table.

That year for Christmas, and for reasons known only to her, my mother-in-law gave us a donkey named Willy as a "present." He was supposedly a gentle star of living nativities. In reality he was a TOTAL jackass — he bit and kicked enough that I reconsidered that axe...I won't admit for whom.

My Thanksgiving turkey was eventually officially pardoned and named John Bradley after a fellow used car salesman at ABC Motorcars, where I worked to pay the rising animal care bills.

By February, John Bradley really wasn't well. Maybe it was survivor's guilt, or perhaps an existential crisis. His entire existence was intended to end on a platter, surrounded by delicious side dishes! We just assumed he was going to die and then, inexplicably, he laid an egg.

Feeling much better, that spring John Bradley and Willy would idly wander the pasture together and eventually became inseparable friends. John Bradley would roost on Willy's back at night and on rainy days he would sit on the now chivalrous jackass' back to keep out of the puddles.

They became such a common sight that no one thought it

was strange to see a turkey riding on a donkey's back and we started telling people how clever turkeys actually can be. They aren't stupid and they don't drown in the rain, but sometimes they lay eggs for the hell of it. They make lovely pets.

On any summer day John Bradley and Willy would be together in the pasture listening to the birds, enjoying the sunshine and each other's company.

One day years later, I went in the barn to find John Bradley stuck in a hay bin, his wing severely broken.

The next morning when I saw Willy out in the pasture alone, I knew that we'd lost our John Bradley. I cried when I found him, and again when I buried him in the backyard by the apple tree.

Now I fondly remember John Bradley whenever I encounter turkeys or jackasses. I remind myself that they too may be remarkable, lovely even, if only given the opportunity, and the company of very good friends.



Gwen Rosenberg is a confectioner/small business owner. She occasionally writes about candy for Manufacturing Confectioner Magazine so her four boys get to eat all the candy they want in the name of research. She is hilarious, a liar and a perfect wife and mother.

Not Everyone Should Have Kids

By DeAnne Spicer Todd

Altadena, California

My husband Don and I had “the talk” yesterday about whether or not to have children, and we decided that we weren’t cut out to be parents. The problem is, we should have had this discussion before we had three of them.

On a good day with my kids I feel like I’m the best parent in the world and should write a book imparting my great wisdom to the less-successful moms and dads. On a not-so-good day, I lock myself in the bathroom crying, with a stack of parenting books and a bottle of wine. Once, I forgot a wine glass, but I was already cozy on a stack of towels so I used the toothbrush cup.

Our kids are eighteen years apart, so we’ve been doing this a long time — which our marriage counselor says makes us “experienced,” but we prefer the term “old and tired.” Recently, on her first day of kindergarten, Addie was bursting with excitement while Don and I were trying not to burst into tears when we saw how young the other parents are. It’s not real good for your ego when you introduce yourself to the teacher and she says, “Oh great! We love it when grandparents get involved.”

I have to admit, though, watching my husband try to help Addie with her kindergarten homework at his advanced age is very entertaining. You would think he would have it down by the third kid, but he doesn’t. He yells that he can’t find the crayons, the scissors and glue are missing and that the instructions are unintelligible. Don graduated summa cum laude from a prestigious Southern university. Which part of color, cut, paste don’t you get?

Parents say things like, “It’s the hardest job you’ll ever

love!” And, “It’s all worth it!” The first one is certainly true, and I wouldn’t change being these kids’ mom for anything. But we don’t know yet whether it was all worth it, do we? What if they grow up to be horrible people? Andrew, our oldest, turned out to be a wonderful young man, but also an actor. No one will be giving me a prize for churning out another actor. At least he’s only hurting himself.

We wanted kids, and we got three great ones, and now, apparently, we are legally obligated to raise them. I love them so much it hurts, and I would not like being in a world without them. I would, however, really, really, really like to be in a hotel room without them once in a while, and I would love Don to join me, just as soon as he finishes Addie’s homework.



DeAnne Spicer Todd is a former dancer and doula (not at the same time). It was brought to her attention that she neglected to mention her middle child in the essay and for this she apologizes. Sofie, you are my favorite.

Swimsuit Issues

By Joan Harris

Huron, Ohio

I almost scrapped the idea of joining AquaRobics because it meant buying a swimsuit. Why do dressing rooms have three-way mirrors that provide a panoramic view of every bulge on your personal landscape? Wouldn't it make more financial sense to install funhouse mirrors that stretch corpulent customers into five-foot-ten supermodels? As it happens, I was able to bypass the cellulite confessional because, according to the retail calendar, summer is the off-season for swimsuits. In January, they're plentiful as flies in an outhouse but in July, you either shop online or make do with a Wonder Woman Halloween costume.

Catalog dot.coms offer hundreds of swimsuits modeled by lanky teenagers. You wade and click, wade and click, comparing features and trying to imagine what the suit would look like on an older, flabbier person. They need to create a MIDLIFE section where you can narrow your search by figure flaw, like JELLY BELLY or BUTT REQUIRING ITS OWN ZIP CODE. Or by remedy, such as COMPRESS IT WITH A SPANDEX PANEL, HIDE IT UNDER A SKIRT, or DRAW ATTENTION AWAY FROM IT BY USING BRIGHT COLORS ON THE OPPOSITE HALF OF THE SUIT.

I ordered a navy swim dress with tiny white polka dots. It skimmed over my figure flaws as promised and seemed perfect until I got in the water. Submerged, the skirt had a mind of its own. It floated at armpit level, twisting and tangling. Doing AquaRobics was like wrestling with an umbrella in a monsoon. After class, the sodden skirt sagged to my ankles, having somehow grown three feet while I was in the pool. I exchanged the swim dress for a color block tank designed to divert attention from my behind, a goal it achieved each time a shoulder strap abandoned its post and allowed a breast

to escape. I traded in the tank for a 97 percent Spandex racer-back suit. The top is snug as a mammogram machine and the material in the tummy control panel could be used for building levees. It performed commendably in the water — no tangles, sags or peek-a-boobs.

“How’s the new suit working out?” a classmate asked.

“This one’s a keeper,” I replied. When I hit the showers a few minutes later, I realized truer words had never been spoken. My body heat had vacuum-sealed the wet Spandex to my torso and although the wide, X-shaped straps had gone on with ease, their removal would have flummoxed Houdini himself. After 10 minutes of contortions and tug-of-war, I heard a loud pop and the swimsuit surrendered.

The bad news? I’ll have to buy a new suit. The good news? By the time I finish therapy for my dislocated shoulder, they’ll be back in season.



Joan Harris was the kid who played her 45s on 78. She’s a U.S. Air Force veteran and retired nurse who lives with her husband of 31 years, an orange tomcat named Peaches and two shelter dogs who’ll do tricks for Lee’s Famous Recipe Chicken. For kicks, she parodies classic poetry. Visit her blog at <https://justjoan42.wordpress.com>.

A Hotel Room of One's Own

Liz Kozak, a work-from-home mom and budding screenwriter from Oak Park, Illinois, longs to hole up in a hotel room and write a satirical screenplay about female friendships.

"I work from home, mostly in my bathrobe. I have two small children. This experience was made for me. And if I am ultimately not selected, please bestow it upon another mom who writes from home. She deserves to have someone else make up her bed while she makes up her future," wrote Kozak in her winning application for "A Hotel Room of One's Own: The Erma Bombeck | Anna Lefler Humorist-in-Residence Program."

Kozak, director of editorial and content development at The Second City in Chicago, and fellow winner Tracy Brady, a communications and public relations professional from Carlisle, Massachusetts, are the 2020 winners of a writer's residency that Forbes.com describes as "perhaps the best" in the country.

"Humor writing is my release, and my joy. I write because being funny makes me feel alive, and making people laugh is the best feeling in the world," said Brady, who is developing a "darkly comic novel" about six bored stay-at-home parents recruited by the CIA to become government assassins.

The biennial contest drew applications from 396 hopeful writers from 44 states and seven countries — Belgium, Canada, China, Germany, Spain, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and the United Kingdom. With the help of nearly 50 preliminary judges,

Dave Barry and Adriana Trigiani selected the winners.

Unfortunately, the pandemic has delayed the traditional "robing" of the winners in plush, custom-embroidered bathrobes. Instead, they will be flown as guests to the March 24-26, 2022, workshop, where they will remain at the Marriott at the University of Dayton for another two weeks to work on their writing. The perks? Free room service. A housekeeping staff. An omelette bar. And,



most importantly, the gift of time to write.

Finalists Jen Parsons, Frances Peacock, Rodney Uhler and Jillian Van Hefty received \$250, and honorable mentions Ilene Haddad, Tara Rosenblum, Kate Thompson and Sarah Zimmerman won \$100.

"Congratulations to our winners at all levels, and — honestly — to all of this year's entrants. The field of submissions was outstanding, which is impressive because, as anyone who's tried it knows, humor writing is no joke," said Anna Lefler, a Los Angeles-based comic novelist and writer who underwrote and helped create and launch the program in 2017.

For the love of Nickie

Laughter rises out of tragedy when you need it the most, and rewards you for your courage.
— Erma Bombeck

When Marcia Stewart's sister, Nickie, died eight weeks after being

diagnosed with lung cancer in 2018, she turned her grief into a creative journey to "honor the funniest person" she'd ever known.

"Anyone who has a sister knows it can be one of the closest and most fun relationships of your life," said Stewart, a West Coast writer and editor. "Nickie was an aspiring humor writer stuck in a corporate communications job. Her death motivated me to do something to honor her memory and her love of humor writing."

That's the genesis of Nickie's Prize for Humor Writing.

From coast to coast and far-flung spots around the world, writers sent in funny, joyful, touching essays about their sisters — and soul sisters. In all, the contest drew 263 original essays from writers in 39

states, Washington, D.C., and six countries — Canada, Australia, Kenya, Israel, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Congratulations to the 21 winning writers, who receive \$300 awards, com-

plimentary registrations for the workshop and a video tribute. Their essays are expected to make up the heart of a new book.

"I love the diversity of writing styles and stories — from hilarious childhood memories to the meaning of sisterhood late in life," Stewart said. "My goal from the beginning was to honor my sister and make opportunities available to writers like Nickie — particularly those who

wanted to try their hand at humor writing. Nickie would have loved this contest, and the chance to share her funny stories with others than her family and friends. I'm so pleased with the humor, heart and quality of the essays submitted."



Meet the winners:

- **Diana Aydin**, New City, New York: "Blame It on Mom's Chicken"
- **Theresa Boedecker**, Columbia, Missouri: "Leaving a Trail of More Than Breadcrumbs"
- **Kim Bonner**, Arcadia, Florida: "Conversations in Cars with Sisters"
- **Patricia Wynn Brown**, Columbus, Ohio: "Never Were There Such Devoted Sisters"
- **Karen Bucci**, Xenia, Ohio: "The Babushka Sisters"
- **Sharon DeVellis**, Oakville, Ontario: "How Twitter and a Dead Bird Helped Me Meet My Soul Sister"
- **Mandy Fernandez**, Pensacola, Florida: "Code Word: Hoobasflagen"
- **Mary Kay Fleming**, Crescent Springs, Kentucky: "A Date with Tom Jones"
- **Lee Gaitan**, Lawrenceville, Georgia: "Lost in the Labyrinth of Life"
- **Jase Graves**, Longview, Texas: "The Sisterhood of the Giggling Rants"
- **Caroline Herschbach**, Cross Roads, Texas: "Adventure in a Small-Town Mall"
- **Mary Beth Hoerner**, Chicago, Illinois: "The Glue of Sisterhood"
- **Heidi Horner**, Scottsdale, Arizona: "Scrabble Confessional"
- **Jackie Hostetler**, Edgerton, Kansas: "The Girls"
- **Stacey Langheim**, Waunakee, Wisconsin: "Soul Sisters"
- **Robb Lightfoot**, Chico, California: "My Little Sister's Roller Skates"
- **Colleen Markley**, Chatham, New Jersey: "Unflappably Calm, Occasionally Furious, Ready and Willing to Hide the Bodies"
- **Laurie Stone**, Easton, Connecticut: "A Night to Remember... For All the Wrong Reasons"
- **Irene Tassy**, Oak Park, California: "Dear Sis"
- **Jessica Timmons**, Greenfield, New Hampshire: "Sisterly Love"
- **Jillian Van Hefty**, Waconia, Minnesota: "Be Careful What You Wish For"



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