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## Hello GCWA Members!

Welcome to the refreshed edition of the **GCWA Gazette**! We're thrilled to bring you this updated design and fresh content. A big thanks to those who made this happen — on the technical side and the content side — those who shared their words, ideas, and creativity. This Gazette is more than just updates and articles; it's a space for our members to connect, celebrate, and grow together. Above all, we want this to feel like *your* newsletter—crafted with you, for you, and shaped by the voices that make GCWA such a vibrant organization. — Cheryl Lynn Dratler

## MEMBER MEETING UPDATES

**Saturday, November 15**, is our final in-person GCWA meeting of 2025. [Join us at 10:00 am at St. Hilary's Episcopal Church](#). We'll skip the

Auld Lang Syne sing-along, opting instead to brainstorm and discuss ideas for 2026 and beyond. It will be an opportunity to share with others and identify what our growing membership needs and wants! Afterwards, we gather for lunch at a nearby restaurant.

**The October 18 Meeting's** featured speaker was Dr. Joanna Salapska-Gelleri, from FGCU, who shared her expertise on AI and the many ways writers can leverage it. To view the recording, please contact:

[czarria57@gmail.com](mailto:czarria57@gmail.com)

## GCWA 30th ANNIVERSARY RECAPS

The grand Anniversary Luncheon on November 1, 2025, drew an impressive crowd and received rave reviews. Robert Macomber, the inspiring keynote speaker, has a **Lifetime Membership** in the Gulf Coast Writers Association for his incredible knowledge and inspiration to GCWA.

Read the recaps and view dozens of photos on the GCWA Facebook page.

[Anniversary Event Recap on Facebook](#)

[Honoring Robert Macomber on Facebook](#)

## GCWA CONTINUES TO GROW

GCWA registered 62 new members in 2025, compared to 20 in 2024. We wish a warm welcome to all of our new members in 2025!!

2026 promises to be a banner year for our programming and member offerings. We look forward to personally meeting new members at future meetings and events.

As a GCWA member, you have the exclusive opportunity to add your contact information to the members' directory. It's a great way to get to know others! Log in to [your GCWA account](#) to get started.

[MORE INFO ON MEMBER BENEFITS](#)

## Become A Part Of GCWA, Volunteer



### GCWA SEEKING COMMUNICATIONS VOLUNTEERS

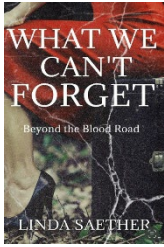
Sheryl Stillman: "It has been my honor to serve GCWA as the VP of Communications. Together with Cheryl Lynn, we've increased awareness of the association and participation by promoting our monthly events and annual writing challenge. Due to personal circumstances, we are seeking volunteers for GCWA's marketing and communications efforts."

Our current direction is to secure multiple volunteers to take on small, even "byte-sized" Communications roles and tasks. If you are interested or would like to learn more, please email: [communications@gulfcoastwriters.org](mailto:communications@gulfcoastwriters.org) or attend the November 15 Member Meeting for 2026 brainstorming and discussion.

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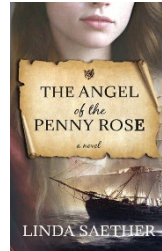
### Member Spotlight: LINDA SAETHER

**Editor's Note:** The Gazette is changing our Member Spotlight feature to a Q&A format, which will make it easier for authors and more consistent for readers. Here, Linda Saether, author of "What We Can't Forget: Beyond the Blood Road" and "The Angel of the Penny Rose," describes her journey as a writer. Linda was the first-place winner of the 2025 GCWA Writers Contest, fiction category, with her story, "Twenty Minutes Until Showtime."



## What We Can't Forget:

Beyond the Blood Road by Linda Saether



## The Angel of The Penny Rose

A Novel by Linda Saether

### **1. When and where did your journey as an author begin?**

Growing up in Norway, I was reluctantly influenced by “Janteloven,” an unwritten cultural rule that discourages standing out and speaking up, which I found stifling as a child who had traveled far more extensively than my peers.

Luckily, I discovered that writing was something my teachers actually approved of, although they were often surprised that when my papers were read aloud, they would start conversations that could spill beyond the classroom, even if I had only described an elevator ride in a skyscraper.

Ironically, I eventually conformed and didn't dare pursue writing as a career until much later in life. But those early experiences showed me that writing was where I could be myself and let my creativity soar.

### **2. What has been your proudest moment as a writer?**

My proudest moment was becoming the first layperson ever granted access to King Henry VIII's love letters to Anne Boleyn from the Vatican archives after months of negotiations. I was able to examine these 500-year-old royal love letters in the Pope's private reading room and write an article about their condition and preservation.

### **3. What has been your toughest challenge as a writer?**

Reaching readers is definitely a challenge. When my first two books were published by a hybrid publisher, I didn't quite grasp that when they said that selling books was a “grass roots effort,” they practically meant for me to get out the plow. I'm definitely looking forward to working with a traditional publishing team that has marketing skills and a distribution plan for my next books.

### **4. What is coming up next for you – what are you (or will you be) working on next?**

I'm exploring a different genre with two new female-driven crime novels set in the South. Both feature complex women navigating dark secrets in atmospheric Southern settings, marking a departure from my previous World War II fiction and historical adventure/romance work. I'm also laying groundwork for a documentary project

exploring Elvis Presley's enduring cultural legacy and what the future holds for the King's influence on American culture.

### 5. What's your best piece of writing advice?

Every genre has something to teach you. My historical fiction taught me research discipline, romance showed me how to build emotional stakes, and now crime fiction is teaching me about pacing and misdirection. Writing is as much a skill as an art--you can learn, improve, and master the craft through practice and persistence. Believe in yourself and never give up, because every story you write makes you a better storyteller.

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## A WRITER'S LIFE

### The Magic of a Writer's Retreat by Amy Pontius

Is a writing retreat worth the investment of both money and time? If you choose the right one, absolutely! I joined Foreword Retreats for a week of writing with bestselling authors Christina Baker Kline (*Orphan Train*) and Paula McLain (*The Paris Wife*). Why did I go? Because there is nothing like the magic infusing the soul when writers gather together.

What to know:

1. *Trust the authors.* While some retreats are spaces for solitary writing, others offer a chance to connect with accomplished authors and literary professionals. If choosing the latter, it is vital to be familiar with the headliner's work. I read every book by Christina and Paula, met them at the Kauai Writers Conference, and knew I would be in good hands with these generous and talented women. Each day we had a three-hour workshop including generative writing exercises, and each participant was given an hour one-on-one consultation.
2. *Research the organization.* Foreword Retreats managing director Carol Johnson is the perfect balance of professional and warm-hearted. She is efficient and willing to assist at every step of the way - important, as her retreats occur in different regions of France. Oh là là!
3. *Know why you're going.* A retreat is *not* the place for oodles of feedback on your work or a pathway to discovery. A retreat is for creating a writing community - learning from each other and sharing work and experiences. It is a safe space for renewing one's purpose in a project. Expect to receive validation and long-term friendships from other writers.
4. *Location.* For me, travel is a muse. Immersing oneself in a unique landscape, culture and cuisine included, helps me tap into a rejuvenating sense of self. Last year our retreat was in Chamonix (the French Alps) and this year - yes, I

went again! - Arcachon (a quaint seaside town southwest of Bordeaux). Being in a beautiful place opens me up to joy and creativity.

5. *Prepare*. Most retreats host varied genres and co-ed participants, but always check. Be open-minded with your expectations - sometimes the best experience is the one you are not expecting.

Where to next? Aloha! I'm back to Kauai for another all-star writing and publishing event with twelve hours of a master class featuring Patti Callahan Henry (*The Story She Left Behind*) and Ariel Lawhon (*The Frozen River*). Christina and Paula will be there - as well as many of my retreat friends. Maybe you'll come too.

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## PETITE PASSAGES

### **My Father's War** by Charley Valera

[Charley Valera](#), a WWII veteran's son, believing his father had no stories to tell, uncovered a hidden past through old roll calls. Determined to preserve others' stories, he interviewed WWII veterans from both theaters of war seeking their human experiences. These poignant interviews with 18 veterans from all U.S. military branches reveal the raw, unfiltered realities of their lives during the conflict. From his book, "My Father's War: Memories from Our Honored WWII Soldiers," here is an excerpt from one of the 18 featured veterans, Corporal Fern Frechette:

"If I'd had to pull the trigger, I don't think I would have been able to," he recalled about his first encounter. "I was shaking so hard... I've never been so afraid in my life. The first German soldier I went up to, with my gun pointing at him... he had a machine gun too. I grabbed his gun and he put his hands up. That's when about 30 more Germans followed him out. This was our first contact with German soldiers and I was never so scared in my whole life." [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charley\\_Valera](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charley_Valera)

**Submit a 250 word excerpt from your work  
to: [communications@gulfcoastwriters.org](mailto:communications@gulfcoastwriters.org)**

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## CRAFT CORNER

### How to Start a Story by Claudia Geagan

Story openings mean everything. The more impactful and intriguing, the better. Here are some suggestions generated by AI, along with an example from me for you to judge for yourself.

#### A good story opening is:

- **Immediate:** Start close to the inciting incident and avoid lengthy introductions. The inciting incident disrupts the status quo and sets the protagonist on a journey.
- **Compelling:** Use action, intriguing questions, or vivid descriptions to draw the reader in.
- **Clear:** Establish the setting, character, and conflict quickly and efficiently.
- **Concise:** Every word should serve a purpose, and the story should move forward quickly.

**Effective short story openings** immediately capture the reader's attention, often through a compelling hook, an intriguing character introduction, or a sense of mystery. They may also plunge the reader directly into the action (in media res), use dialogue to reveal character and conflict, or establish a unique setting with a strong sense of place and atmosphere. Here's an opening line from a famous short story. "The grandmother didn't want to go to Florida."

**Much the same holds for a novel.** The short novel "Waiting" by Ha Jin opens with the intriguing sentence, "Every summer Lin Kong returned to Goose Village to divorce his wife, Shuyu." Or, this famous long novel starts: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."

### **My attempt: How did I succeed or fail?**

“Ah, you’re finally here.” Anton gestured toward my mother, who slept, mouth agape, in the chair next to his. “She’s been crying for three days.”

“MOM?” I touched her knee, and she blinked up at me with rheumy eyes.

“Helen,” Anton barked, “your daughter’s here to see you.”

“Oh, Hi, Sweetie.” She wadded a wet Kleenex in her hand.

“Mama,” I held out my hand, “how ‘bout we take a ride up the mountain?”

**Try writing your own.** In my 2023 GCWA Presentation, “Your First 100 Words,” I presented attendees with samples of story openings for a discussion of strengths and weaknesses. Everyone got time to write their own 100-word opening to a story, given a choice of prompts.

It’s your turn. Pick five random books or stories from your shelf and examine the first 100 words. Which feels most impactful and engaging to you? Why?

**Try writing a quick opening** for a story loosely based on an object that holds special meaning, a memorable place you have been, or a person who has been influential (real or fictitious, living or not).

**Bring your “100 Words” to the next meeting to share with someone as a conversation starter!**

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## **MEMBER GOOD NEWS**

After 8 years, [Charley Valera](#) finished the documentary based on his book, “My Father’s War.” He just hired a designer for his film poster, and he’ll be submitting the film to festivals this month. Watch the documentary trailer: <https://vimeo.com/337313445>.

[Patti M. Walsh](#) has a speaking engagement coming up at Lee Library. Scroll down to Latest at the Libraries for times and addresses.

- “The Oak King and the Holly King: The Celtic Myth of Yuletide,” Friday, December 19, 2025

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## **LATEST AT THE LIBRARIES**

### **Lee Library System**

**North Fort Myers Public Library** - 2001 N. Tamiami Trail, North Fort Myers

[Patti M. Walsh](#) presents **The Oak King and the Holly King: The Celtic Myth of Yuletide**, Friday, December 19, 2025, 2:00 – 3:00pm.

**Writing Workshop** - The Writing Workshop is taking a hiatus. Come to the January GCWA meeting to learn more about Lee Library's offerings for writers.

#### [Online Author Event with Amanda Peters](#)

**Virtual Online Programming** - Thursday, November 13, 2025, 7:00pm–8:00pm

Amanda Peters discusses her bestselling debut novel, "The Berry Pickers" and her poignant short story collection, "Waiting for the Long Night Moon". Drawing on her Mi'kmaq heritage, Peters weaves powerful stories of family, grief, and the enduring ties that connect us. "The Berry Pickers" is an intimate portrait of race, love, and loneliness—and the power of forgiveness. [Register here](#).

Amanda Peters is a mixed-race woman of Mi'kmaq and European ancestry, born and raised in the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia.

#### [Online Author Event with Charles Duhigg](#)

**Virtual Online Programming** - Tuesday, November 18, 2025, 2:00pm–3:00pm

Charles Duhigg, author of "The Power of Habit" and "Smarter Faster Better," presents the ultimate guide on how to communicate and connect with anyone at work, home, and in life in his latest work, "Supercommunicators: How to Unlock the Secret Language of Connection." [Register now](#) to learn how to enhance your everyday conversations.

To see all upcoming author events visit the [online author events website](#).

## [Online Event: Using PERSI for Genealogical Research](#)

**Virtual Online Programming** - Tuesday, November 25, 2025,  
10:00am–11:00am

PERSI is a comprehensive index of most genealogical and family-history oriented periodicals. PERSI enables researchers to locate key information about people and places. It contains over 2.5 million entries from thousands of historical, genealogical and ethnic publications, making it an invaluable, comprehensive family history resource.

Researchers may access articles, photos, and other materials that may be difficult to locate using traditional search methods. This can help to build the historical context around personal research, and the world that our ancestors lived in. This information often provides leads for follow-up investigation.

**Registration is required; seating is limited.** Registration closes November 24.

[Register Here](#)

### [Punta Gorda Library](#)

[Jump Write In](#), **November 18 and December 16** at Punta Gorda Library, 401 Shreve St, Punta Gorda from 6:00 – 8:00. Find tips, new ideas, and helpful hints, while having fun. **\*\*NOTE:** November and December sessions are NOT the second Tuesdays due to scheduling conflicts.

[Write on@The Writing Lab](#), **November 13 and December 4** at Punta Gorda Library from 4:00 – 6:00. The Writing Lab is a monthly session where you can write on your current project or pick up a new one — short stories, novel-in-progress, or poetry. Staff are available to assist. Writers may share work, followed by facilitated discussion and feedback. **\*\*NOTE:** November and December sessions are NOT the second Thursdays due to scheduling conflicts.

### **GCWA**

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