



GCWA Members - Welcome to 2026!

GCWA Meeting Updates

Saturday, January 17, is our first GCWA meeting of 2026. [Join us at 10:00 am at St. Hilary's Episcopal Church](#). We'll ring in 2026 and celebrate our new (or sustained) writing goals together!

Presenters **Bibi Cruz**, Adult Programming Coordinator and Senior Librarian, and **Kristen Marshall**, Electronic Resources Librarian, from the Lee County Library System, will share resources and opportunities for writers.

Afterward, we gather for lunch at a nearby restaurant.

SUBMISSIONS ARE OPEN!

2026 GCWA Writing Contest

One longstanding hallmark of the Gulf Coast Writers Association is its [annual writing contest](#). Submissions are open until March 15, 2026.

Writers may submit work in three genres:

- Fiction

- Nonfiction
- Poetry

First-, second-, and third-place prizes will be awarded in each genre. Writers may submit multiple pieces in one or more genres. Monetary prizes are awarded!

Member Spotlight: Dr. Susan K. Grunin

Our January highlight is GCWA's own [Dr. Susan Grunin](#), an award-winning writer.

She has published three books in the "Little MisFit" series. Her books have garnered multiple awards and widespread recognition, as well as an appearance in New York's Times Square! [Read more here!](#)



Petite Passages

Editor's Note: The following is an excerpt from an unpublished essay, "The Drive." To read the rest and receive a GCWA members-only copy of the essay, contact the author directly at CLDratler@gmail.com.

The Drive by Cheryl Lynn Dratler

I'm driving to Tampa to see my friend. She doesn't live in Tampa, but she's been staying there a lot lately. She'll be going home soon.

She's Lucy, I'm Shelley — cute nicknames between us. That was way back, even before she was my maid of honor 33 years ago.

Lucy will be sleeping when I get there. She's been asleep since Monday.

She isn't going to wake up. I'm going to say good-bye.

I know this highway; I don't need the GPS and its incessant chatter. For 45 years I've driven I-75 through the chapters of my life, nearly every exit is a memory marker.

This exit, Kings Highway, is where my husband and I went to work together for seven years before retirement. Oh yes, the road to the house we bought on Coco Solo Drive. We had fun working to flip it before the market crashed on our unfinished dream. Further north is the off-ramp for the rehab hospital that gave dad a few more precious months. And then the Brazilian restaurant exit — where we had one of many festive office parties. Our small, but mighty team was a 'family' for years; we survived the turmoil of COVID together.

Memories and traffic rush at me — my ex, old jobs, faded friends — and so many times with Lucy.

We're always looking for compelling prose or poetry to highlight our members' talent. Submit a 250-300-word excerpt from your work to: communications@gulfcoastwriters.org



Craft Corner and a Writer's Life

Topics that would be of interest to GCWA members generated by AI

Members say they don't know what to write. So we asked AI. Here are just a few topics AI suggested. **YOU could be the next contributor!** Use one of these or generate your own idea and write a 400-500-word article.

1. **Managing Imposter Syndrome.** Address the common feeling of self-doubt and offer suggestions to minimize doubt and self-judgment.
2. **Realistic Dialogue.** Offer tips on writing natural-sounding speech by using subtext, varying sentence lengths, and avoiding "info-dumping."
3. **Mastering Subtext.** Share tips on writing. Let the real meaning lie beneath the surface to create tension and depth.
4. **Finding Your Writing Community.** Encourage joining critique groups or online forums to find support, share resources, and reduce isolation.

5. **The "Save the Cat" Moment.** Make the protagonist likable by having them perform a small, selfless act early in the story to build empathy.
6. **Sensory Imagery Beyond Sight.** Ground scenes using the five senses to trigger stronger emotional responses in readers.
7. **The Art of the Scene Break.** Discuss chapter and scene endings - "cliffhangers"- that compel readers to stay, in a digital, distractible world.
8. **Establishing a Writing Routine.** Discuss the benefits of consistency over intensity, suggesting that even simple routines can build momentum.
9. **Building a "Digital Garden."** Discuss building a presence online to share works-in-progress, building a community before a book is even finished.
10. **Writing and Self-Care.** Explore physical and emotional tools for writers to disconnect from screens and recharge their creative batteries.

Celebrations

Mike Cantrell's audiobook "Bad JuJu in Cleveland" earned a 2026 Voice Arts Award Nomination in recognition of outstanding audio storytelling and performance.

Latest at The Library

[Punta Gorda Library](#)

[Jump Write In](#), **February 10** at Punta Gorda Library, 401 Shreve St, Punta Gorda from 6:00 – 8:00. Find tips, new ideas, and helpful hints, while having fun. presentations on varied writing topics with writing time to try out new things.

[Write on@The Writing Lab](#), **February 12** at Punta Gorda Library from 4:00 – 6:00. The Writing Lab is a monthly session where writers work on current projects or start a new one — short stories, novel-in-progress, or poetry. Staff are available to assist. Writers may share work, followed by discussion and feedback.

GCWA IS SEEKING COMMUNICATIONS VOLUNTEERS

Our current direction is to secure multiple volunteers to take on small, even "byte-sized" Communications roles and tasks. If you are interested in helping once or regularly with a small role for the newsletter, media contact, or social media, please email: communications@gulfcoastwriters.org.

GCWA

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