



GCWA Members - Exciting Programs

GCWA Meeting Updates

Saturday, February 21 is our next GCWA meeting. [Join us at 10:00 am at St. Hilary's Episcopal Church.](#) Our presenter is **Carol Abrahamson**, founder of Book Award Mastery, who will discuss **Book Awards**: How they work, Submission processes, and the Essentials to win awards.

Afterward, we gather for lunch at a nearby restaurant.

Start planning now for fun and fast moving [Poetry Slam](#), held at our **April 18** meeting! Details and entry information are on the website. Sign up early!

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**. Complete

information and submission form are on the [GCWA website](#).

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: Richard Drummer

With two award-winning spy-fi books under his belt, Richard is aiming higher. Read his Member Spotlight interview on the [GCWA website](#) to learn about the mountain he's climbing now and his advice to others.



Petite Passages

Editor's Note: The following Petite Passage is from "[Salvation](#)", [Kevin Creighton's](#) debut novel set in Southwest Florida. It's an "old school" mystery thriller in the vein of Robert B. Parker and John D. Macdonald.

[Salvation](#) By Kevin Creighton

"So how come your path is so violent, and Laz's isn't?" asked Sandra.

"Don't be too sure about that," I said. "Laz, you want to jump in here?"

Laz set down his drink and thought for a second. "John uses violence for a purpose, to protect others, and that's kind of what I do as well, except mine is more accepting that violence can and does happen rather than participating in it like he does. The goal for both of us, though, is to preserve innocent life. John

uses other means that what I do, but the fact is, honey," he said, turning to his wife, "I would be willing to do just about anything to keep you and our kids safe, and that goes for everyone at this table as well, and I'm pretty certain John would do the same."

"So that's why you called Laz last week to help in the rescue," said Sandra, "You knew he would come, even though if something happened, he might lose his job."

"Yeah," I said, "when the stakes are this high, you either figure out who you can rely on, or you wind up in a world of hurt."

"Have you ever found out someone wasn't reliable?" she asked.

"Yes, but there's always clues that will pop up before it gets to that point. You can see it in how they treat women, or if they get drunk at the wrong time, or if they fail to learn from their mistakes. You see it coming, and you build in a backup plan that you can use if they fail on you at the wrong time."

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



The Anatomy of a Query Letter

What agents look for—and why it works - By Sonia Winesette

A query letter isn't a synopsis or a résumé. It's a precision sales tool designed to spark curiosity fast. Think of it as a one-page anatomy: every part has a job, and if one fails, the whole body collapses.

1. **The Brain: Personalization (1 to 2 lines).**

Purpose: Signals intention and professionalism.

What it does: Shows the writer researched the agent and understands their taste.

Do reference a specific client, Agent's MSWL item, or interview. *"Because you represent X and are seeking Y..."*

Don't use generic praise. *"I admire your agency."*

2. **The Heart: The Hook.**

Purpose: Creates emotional and narrative pull.

What it does: Introduces the protagonist, their problem, and the disruption (inciting incident) that changes everything.

Weak Hook:

"A girl uncovers secrets about her family and herself."

Stronger Hook:

"Seventeen-year-old Mara hears lies as sound—until a new boy tells one that shatters her gift and forces her to question her sanity."

Specificity fuels momentum.

3. **The Spine: Stakes + Choice.**

Purpose: Prove the story can sustain tension.

What it does: Clarifies what the protagonist wants, what stands in the way, and what they risk losing.

Ask:

- What must the protagonist decide?
- What happens if they fail

Stories are choices under pressure—not themes or vibes.

4. **The Skeleton: Housekeeping.**

Purpose: Grounds the pitch in the marketplace.

What it does: Helps agents quickly assess fit.

Include:

- TITLE (caps)
- Genre/category
- Word count (80,000 is the industry standard for a debut novel)
- Two comps (recent, relevant, strategic—avoid blockbusters or classics)

5. **The DNA: Bio (1-2 lines)**

Purpose: Adds context—not validation.

What it does: Offers relevant background or simply identifies the writer as a debut.

Optional, but clean and brief.

Querying Strategy: How to Deploy the Letter

- Build a tiered list of 30 agents
- Query in small batches (5-7)
- Track responses before revising
- Follow submission guidelines *exactly*

Final Thought

A strong query doesn't explain everything. It invites curiosity. If curiosity clicks, agents scroll—and read your pages.

Celebrations

Brian Sluga's Memoir, "[The Shriek I Do Remember](#)," has reached numerous Amazon Bestseller lists while still in pre-order phase until February 13!

#1 Bestseller in Men's Personal Spiritual Growth

#1 Hot New Release in Men's Personal Spiritual Growth

#1 Hot New Release in Cancer

#2 Bestseller in Biography Reference & Collections

#2 Hot New Release in Biography

Read a great summary and get your copy [here](#). Brian's journey from testicular cancer at age 20 is an inspiring blend of struggle and survivorship, hope, faith and celebration of everyday life.

[Southwest Florida Reading Festival](#)

Professionals all agree, to be the best writer you can be...read, read, read. The 27th Annual [Southwest Florida Reading Festival](#) is being held at Fort Myers Regional Library March 7.

Twelve GCWA authors will be in the GCWA tent with their books. Nationally recognized authors from every genre will be on the speaking docket in the presentation areas. Check out the [schedule](#) and attend a lecture by one of your favorite authors and stop at the tent to support our members. Public attendance is always high – do check out the [map and parking](#) information.

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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