



## GCWA Members - Exciting Programs

### GCWA Meeting Updates

**Saturday, May 16**, is our next GCWA meeting. [Join us at 10:00 am at St. Hilary's Episcopal Church](#). Our presenters are **Anne and Robert Jacob**. They will discuss **Professional Collaboration - the Key to Author Success**, providing attendees with an understanding of industry standards, book award scoring processes used by organizations such as the FAPA, and how to find and work with fair, qualified professionals in the industry.

Afterward, we gather for lunch at a nearby restaurant.

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## WINNERS ARE ANNOUNCED

### 2026 GCWA Writing Contest

One longstanding hallmark of the Gulf Coast Writers Association is its [annual writing contest](#).

Winners have been announced for the 2026 Contest in three categories: poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. Congratulations to everyone who took the bold step to enter.

## Special recognition to these winners:

### POETRY

First Place: **Lara Anderson**; Second Place: **Orrin Ladd**; Third Place: **Teresa Hiatt**

### FICTION

First Place: **Richard Drummer (Allen)**; Second Place: **Deborah Garofano**; Third Place: **Bradley Burt**

### NONFICTION

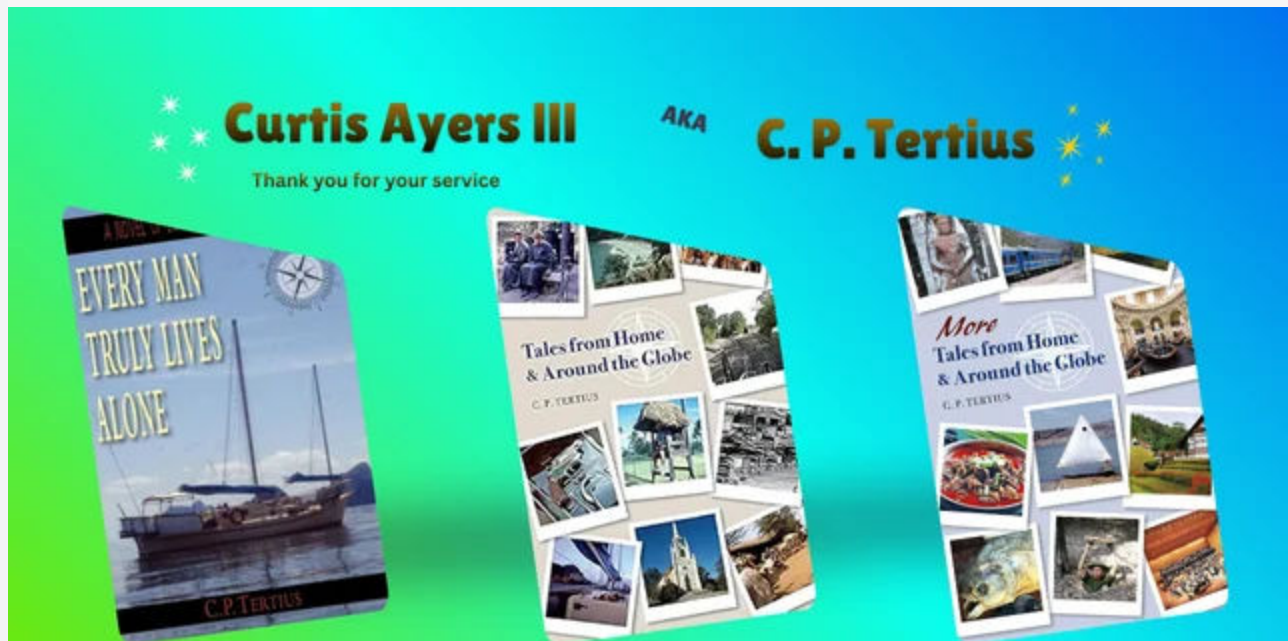
First Place: **Linda Saether**; Second Place: **Cheryl Lynn Dratler**; Third Place: **Christie Zarria**

Check out the [GCWA website](#) to read winning pieces and see the nine Honorable Mention recipients as well.

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## Member Spotlight: Curtis Ayers III

In our Member Spotlight for May is Curtis Ayers III. His novel, "Every Man Is an Island," is a fictionalized version of his observations of life events, in which he weaves adventure, romance, and the transcendence of music in a cross-culturally sensitive work. His short story anthologies are *Tales from Home and Around the Globe* and *More Tales from Home and Around the Globe*. Read his interview on the [GCWA website](#).



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Petite Passages

**Editor's Note:** The following Petite Passage is from "[Salvation](#)", [Kevin Creighton's](#) debut novel set in Southwest Florida.

***Don't Worry, Be Happy!***

***By Mary Beth Leopold***

*"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."* — Matthew 6:34 (NIV)

In 1988, Bobby McFerrin had us singing, "Don't worry, be happy." It was catchy and lighthearted—and surprisingly honest:

"In every life we have some trouble,  
But when you worry, you make it double . . ."

Isn't that the truth?

We all face moments when worry creeps in: about our health, our families, our finances, or the unknowns of tomorrow. Even as believers, worry still knocks on the door. Scripture tells us trouble is inevitable; worry doesn't need to be.

In 2 Kings 19, King Hezekiah faced a looming disaster. The powerful Assyrian army surrounded Jerusalem, and defeat seemed certain. Hezekiah was deeply distressed, but instead of surrendering to fear, he turned to God in prayer.

And God responded: *"That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death one hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp"* — 2 Kings 19:35 (NIV)

Needless to say, the remaining Assyrian's withdrew and Jerusalem was saved. The battle wasn't won by worry; it was won through trust in the Lord.

If we're honest, most of us live somewhere between prayer and panic. We say we trust God, yet we still try to control what only He can handle. Worry feels productive, but it drains our peace and distracts us from Him.

Oswald Chambers said it best: "God should not be our last resort; He should be our first line of defense."

What if we start living that way today?

Instead of replaying the problem . . . we pray.

Instead of trying to fix it on our own . . . we trust.

Instead of doubling our burden by worrying . . . we release it to God.

*"And whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he."* — Proverbs 16:20 (NKJV)

**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](mailto:communications@gulfcoastwriters.org)**

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## Writers Should Always Carry A Notebook

- *By Beth Meyer*

While living in New York City in 2016, I signed up for comedy/improv classes at Gotham Comedy.

The instructor was a seasoned local professional with years of experience. Thirty students gathered, ready to gain the knowledge they needed to improve their game.

The most important tip was simple, but life-changing. Carry a notebook.

From that moment on, I have carried a notebook. Two sizes - a large spiral that fits into a tote with several sharp pencils, and a small one with a pen that fits into my handbag.

The large notebook is great when I'm ensconced at a comfortable outdoor table by the water, ready for inspiration. The small is for those "wow, look at that" moments.

A simple change, but it made a difference in how I create dialogue and find story ideas.

### **Character Development**

Improv is unscripted, unrehearsed dialogue—not just in theater, but in daily life.

Recently, I was at a dive bar in Estero. Early for a meeting, I figured a cocktail and a large notebook would pass the time quickly. Simply having a notebook and pencil generates interest. Several barflies and the bartender asked, "What are you doing? Are you writing about us?" I started asking questions about their lives—are there ghosts in the building? How often do you see UFOs?

I let them "conversate," then write down their stories—careful to mimic their exact verbiage for authentic storytelling and joke material.

Writers benefit from observing and listening to real-world behavior; their notebook becomes a bank of "what if" scenarios.

### **Story Ideas**

Unless I write them down, I forget the stories. The small notebook is quick and easy to grab and jot notes.

"German lady naked at Fort Myers Beach" or "Ghost in South Beach hotel". One of my favorite joke ideas was "Karen the Trailer Park Safety Captain."

Pencil to paper, observing and listening to our surroundings trains us to be writers, providing fodder for our next story.

How many of the ideas are useful? That's your choice as a writer. Perhaps the idea sounded funny or insightful at the time, but now? Humbug.

The joy of the notebook is taking those words and either writing the story or ripping out the page, leaving the optimism of blank lines ready to fill.

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## Celebrations

### **Gold Moonbeam Children's Book Award**

**Deana Plaskon, PhD, LMHC**, won a **Gold Moonbeam Children's Book Award** for excellence in writing, illustration, and publishing for her book *Bella and Bird Explore Anger*. Deana is a SWFL author and new GCWA member. Welcome!

Her first book, *Bella and Bird Explore Anger*, did so well that it is currently out of stock but will be back soon. Her second book, *Bella and Bird Explore Sadness*, is set to release later in 2026. It is available for [pre-order](#) from Barnes & Noble. Deana has a PhD in Education, specializing in human behavior, and two master's degrees.

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### **Ray Carr Radio Show**

**Tom Cossie** was featured Live on the [Ray Carr Radio Show](#), based out of Cleveland, where he discussed his decades in the music industry and the powerful stories behind his 60-year career in the recording industry.

Tom shares his firsthand experiences through his book, *Music Business Stories*, giving readers a rare inside look at the industry from someone who truly lived it.

We are always looking for milestones to celebrate with our GCWA community. If you would like to have a milestone posted on the website under '[Let's Celebrate](#),' please sign in to your members-only area and complete the accomplishments form.

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## GCWA IS SEEKING COMMUNICATIONS VOLUNTEERS

We are looking 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](mailto:communications@gulfcoastwriters.org).

## GCWA IS SEEKING WEBSITE MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEER

GCWA is looking for a volunteer website manager to help maintain and update the website, including page edits, event updates, form submissions, and basic behind-the-scenes tasks. Training will be provided, but the person should be comfortable learning the back end of a website and have some basic website or WordPress experience. Please contact [technical@gulfcoastwriters.org](mailto:technical@gulfcoastwriters.org) for more information

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### **GCWA**

P.O. Box 60444, Fort Myers  
United States of America

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