



IMPORTANT NOTICE

GCWA Meeting Update

Due to circumstances beyond GCWA's control, the monthly meeting will be held one week later, on June 27. It will be at our normal location and time.

Join us June 27 at 10:00 am at St. Hilary's Episcopal Church in Fort Myers. We hope to see everyone there.

Our workshop presenter is GCWA Past President, **Mary Charles**, who will be facilitating "**How to Write a Memoir**." She will provide attendees with an understanding of the craft of the memoir genre, and guide attendees through personal writing exercises during the workshop.

Afterward, we gather for lunch at a nearby restaurant.

WINNERS ARE ANNOUNCED

2026 GCWA Writing Contest

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

We are proud to announce three winners in each category: Poetry, Fiction, and Non-fiction.

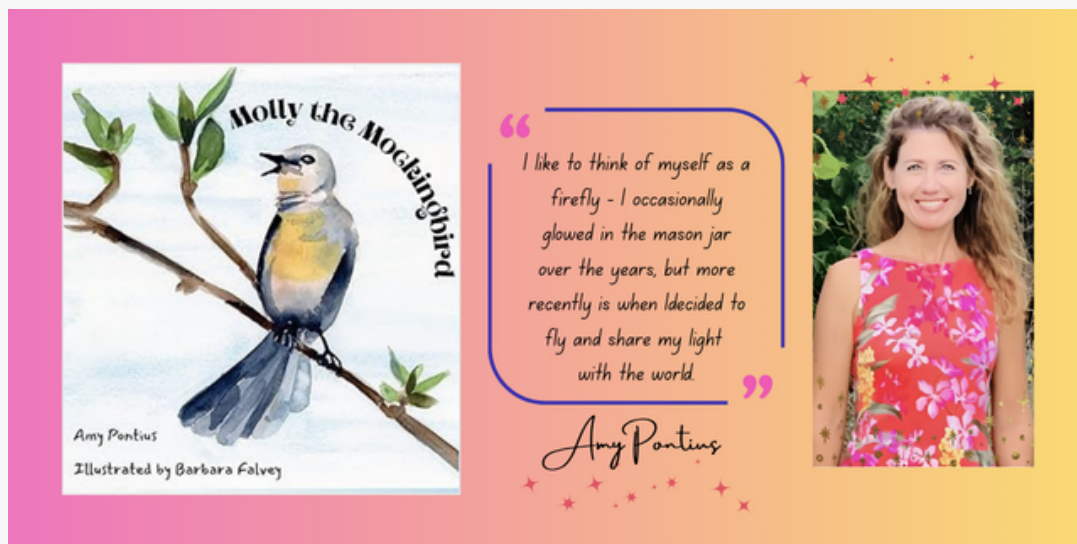
Congratulations to everyone for their dedication to writing and creative ability.

Authors will be reading their winning pieces at the August 15 GCWA meeting.

Don't miss it. Check out the [GCWA website](#) to see list of winners, read winning pieces, and see the nine Honorable Mention recipients.

Member Spotlight: Amy Pontius

[Amy Pontius](#) is a former middle school educator and the author of *Molly the Mockingbird*, a children's book illustrated by Barbara Falvey. Her work has been published with Kaleidoscope™, WoJo Reflections on Women's Journeys, Press 53, Florida Weekly, Gulf Coast Writers Association, Bacopa Literary Review, and Stroll Magazine for Pelican Preserve. Read his interview on the [GCWA website](#).



Petite Passages

Editor's Note: The following excerpt is from Larry Stiles' historical fiction novel.

1804 – the Hunting Party

By Frederick (Larry) Stiles

Leading up to this excerpt, a young Cherokee boy named Kenotetah is on his first hunting trip with his uncle (his mother's brother) named Yonahequah. They are camping overnight in a small cave in the upper part of what is now the New River watershed in east Tennessee.

Around midnight, the showers started. They were gentle at first and they came and passed without disturbing the sleeping hunters. Just before sunrise, the wind picked up and then suddenly shifted. Great walls of rain fell on the valley, but by now the wind was out of the northeast and little water entered the cave. The wind, however, was no longer comforting. Even next to the fire, it was noticeably colder.

The morning could not be used for trapping. Besides being downright unpleasant, the rain would make it too dangerous to set the primitive traps. If the rain let up early, they could set their traps in the afternoon; if the rain persisted, the water would be too high for the many stream crossings that would be necessary. Kenotetah was thankful that the weather had offered a break, for he had many questions and had not found an appropriate time to ask.

"How did you know that a storm was coming?"

"I watched the clouds gather – more clouds each day. When too many gather together they will fight among each other and a storm will surely follow."

"How did you know to pick a cave on the northeast side of the valley?"

"Wind changes with a storm, so gentle breeze from southwest is followed by strong wind from northeast."

"Why did you grow quiet and move so quickly away from the sight of the white man in the valley below Windrock?"

Silence.

The wind played with the small fire and an old pine knot sizzled and popped, scattering a spray of sparks around the cave. A couple of the sparks found a cache of dry leaves which burst into flame for a few seconds before their ashes were carried off by the same cold wind. Silence, again.

Yonahequah did not fully understand his apprehension regarding the whites. Yes, there were specific things he did not like about them such as their tendency to hunt an animal to extinction. But there were other things he had not yet satisfactorily explained to himself. His eyes locked into a penetrating stare, not moving from the glowing embers and yet not fully conscious of them as he turned the question over in his mind. The rocks contained the fire, as the treaties had, for a time, contained the whites and kept them from Cherokee lands. But, the ways of the whites, scattered like sparks among his clever people, would brighten their lives for a moment and in the process would destroy them. No treaty could contain their ways. Cherokee was more than the color of the skin and the relationship by blood. It was also the lessons, the stories, the clans, the hunts and the traditions. Most of all, though, it was the land. Not merely so much dirt, it was the sacred trust that came with the land and the spirits of everything on it. There was not room among the white man's ways for these things. His nephew was not ready for this lesson. He could not answer Kenotetah's question today.

He reached into the second flat basket, withdrew a blanket, and wrapped himself loosely. "How will you take your first deer?" he asked, to change the subject.

We're always looking for compelling prose or poetry to highlight our members' talent.

Submit a 300-425-word excerpt from your work to:

communications@gulfcoastwriters.org



Go To The Next Level - Audiobooks

- By Thekla Fagerlie-Madsen

“Thrilling” was the word to describe when *Bad JuJu in Cleveland*, the audiobook based on our novel (co-written with retired Cleveland police officer Karl Bort) and narrated by Mike Cantrell, was nominated for a 2026 Voice Arts Award, Outstanding Audiobook Narration – Thrillers – Best Voiceover, by the Society of Voice Arts and Sciences (SOVAS™).

The nomination validated that the steps followed to produce a quality recording worked!

Audiobooks are a way to grow your audience and tap into another revenue stream. Following is a brief summary of the path I took from paperback to audiobook.

How Did This Happen?

Karl and I self-published the novel so there was no major publisher or movie-star narrator lining up to produce the audiobook. I consulted several writer friends with audiobooks about their process and what worked for them.

Some people record and produce their own audiobooks. Some use AI narrators, a cheaper option than hiring a live person (but may not have the voice quality). There are also companies who will provide the service for a fee. I chose ACX (Audiobook Creation Exchange) as the production platform based on pricing and usability. My only upfront cost was for the narrator.

ACX allowed me to:

- Create an audition script
- Put out a call for narrator auditions
- Listen to auditions and select a narrator within a price range
- Listen to chapter uploads
- Communicate with the narrator regarding edits
- Approve final audiobook
- Upload audiobook cover

Best Practices

Audition Script

Select several short paragraphs representing characters, dialogue, and action to see how the narrator distinguishes between characters and handles pacing of scenes from tender to dramatic.

If the characters all sound the same or the narrator's tone and pace don't reflect what's happening on the page, move on to the next audition.

The Narrator – Your New Best Friend

If the listener doesn't like the narrator's voice, they won't make it past the first chapter. Narrator Mike Cantrell was clearly the right guy for *Bad JuJu in Cleveland* based on his fabulous voice, emotional range, and ability to differentiate between characters and scenes.

You're able to choose your narrator based on a price range per finished hour, meaning you pay for the actual length of the audio after all edits are made. The average price paid to produce the *Bad JuJu* audiobooks was approximately \$1,300 each at \$200 per finished hour.

I sent Mike a hard copy of the book as a reference (although he preferred to read from an electronic copy) and we spoke on the phone many times throughout the process.

Engaging directly provided both of us with a clear understanding of author/narrator/producer expectations and to talk through any questions.

Mike also handled the production, which included making revisions and adding in sounds like ringing phones and gunshots.

He also narrated the sequel, *Bad JuJu and the Eye of Oya*.

Quality Control

Listen, listen, and listen again for:

- Word(s) missed or added
- Mispronunciations
- Missing sentences or paragraphs
- Break in character

It's the "little things" that make or break the recording.

At the very beginning of the process, I provided Mike with a pronunciation reference, organized by chapter and page, for names and places that were tricky due to different spellings or regional dialects.

I also created a spreadsheet to capture revision items: chapter, book page, paragraph, sentence, timestamp, recording error, and the correction. This tool tracked needed edits, provided the narrator with clear instructions, and served as a checklist to verify corrections were made.

Show Me The Money!

Upon final author approval, the audiobook is distributed to Amazon.com, Audible.com and iTunes. (There's also a non-exclusive distribution option which allows you to distribute your audiobook to other retailers.)

Royalties are paid by monthly direct deposit (after 60-day hold) and depend on whether you select to pay the narrator an hourly fee or split royalties on a 50/50 basis (of course ACX takes

its cut off the top!).

The End

Mike attended the 2026 Voice Arts Awards Gala on January 18 at the Beverly Hilton International Ballroom in Beverly Hills, CA (I was not able to attend). While *Bad JuJu in Cleveland* did not get the win (one of the nominees was “The Secret of Secrets” by Dan Brown with screen, stage, and television voice actor Paul Michael), it truly was an honor to be nominated.

If you’re thinking of turning your novel into an audiobook, do your homework and find what works for you.

Thekla Madsen is co-author of the Detective Nicholas Silvano Crime Thrillers: *Bad JuJu in Cleveland*, *Angry Nurse*, and *Bad JuJu and the Eye of Oya* available in paperback and e-book on [Amazon](#) and Ingram Sparks. *Bad JuJu in Cleveland* and *Bad JuJu and the Eye of Oya* are also available on [audiobook](#).

Celebrations

Featured Documentary Film

Charley Valera wrote *My Father’s War* many years ago. He is now featured in a special Florida documentary film about *My Father’s War*. The film features nine World War II veterans sharing their personal war stories.

Congratulations, Charley, we are so proud of you. It looks like the premiere (120 seats) sold out in less than a month. WOW!

We do have good news: he is offering [a one-time screening](#) in Cape Coral on Sunday, June 14, at 3:30 PM at Marquee Cinemas on Del Prado Blvd.

Let’s all go out to support him in his incredible accomplishment.

Read Harder Challenge

Brian Sluga’s memoir, *The Shriek I Do Remember*, has been successfully added to the 2026 Read Harder Challenge and is officially part of the reading community lineup.

You can view the challenge bookshelf and community page through [the links here](#):

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.

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 WordPress experience. Please contact technical@gulfcoastwriters.org for more information

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.

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GCWA

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