

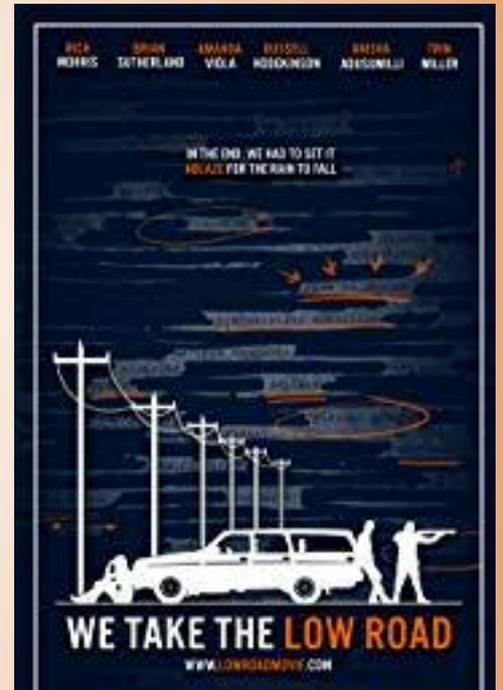
In celebration of storytelling



Vol 10 Issue 5

June 17, 2019

Amanda Viola discusses acting
and her role in the Indie film
We Take The Low Road



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Behind the Pen with N. M. Cedeño and Lois Winston

Drugs, Spies, and a Spot of Milk - The Sinister Side of Tea

Interviews and Book Excerpts

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2019

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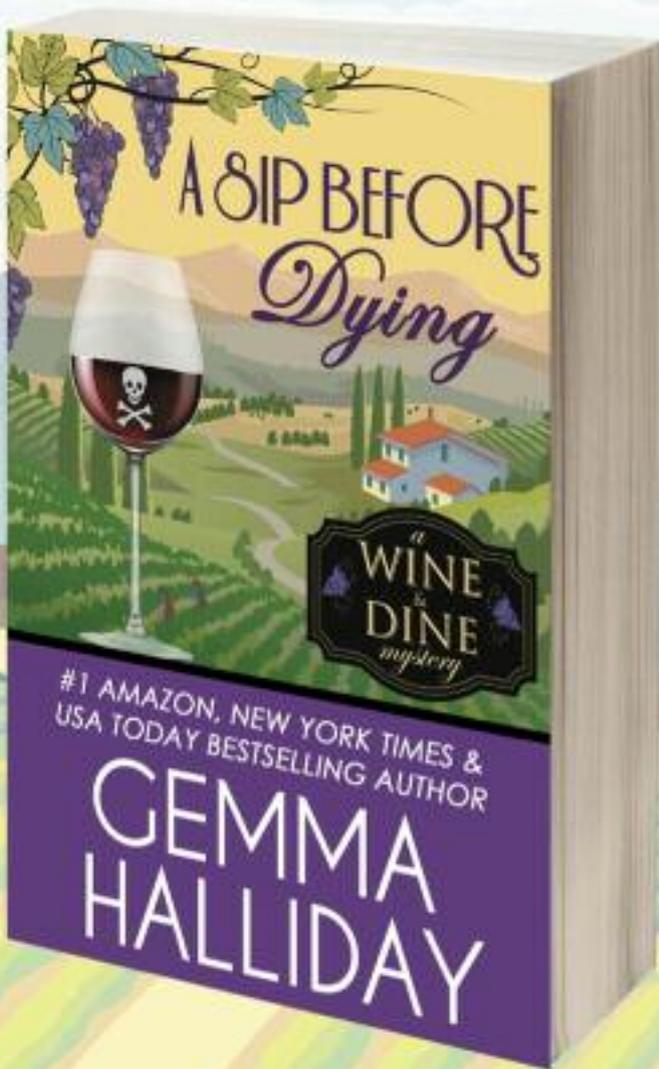
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*READ, PONDER,
REPEAT*



"I enjoyed this delightfully engaging tale and I can't wait to spend more time with Emmy, Ava and their friends."
~ Dru's Book Musings

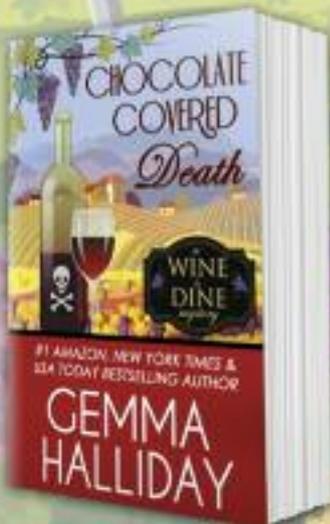
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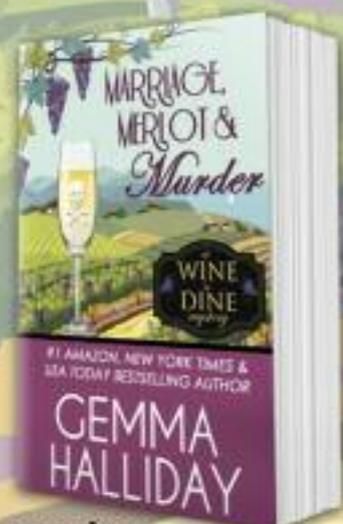
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About Amanda ...

I'm a Los Angeles native (specifically the San Fernando Valley) who started doing community theatre at the age of 7. I consistently developed my skills as a young actor through

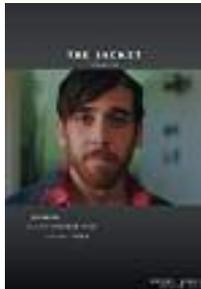
classes offered inside and outside of school.

During my first year of studying theatre in college, I was scouted as a model and started working in that field for several years with top agencies around the world and appearing in major campaigns for Levi's, Wrangler, Abercrombie, Reebok and Vans.



I transitioned out of modeling into the commercial world and have consistently booked nationals year after year. During that time I hustled through the daunting world of theatrical self-submitting and managed to

book several notable projects including Virtual Morality (web series, New Form Digital) Shiny Baby Goats (web series) The Jacket (short) and We Take The Low Road (feature).



I am currently in development with several new projects, some I am producing and writing as well as acting in. In short, acting is as essential to me as the air I breathe. I am passionate, creative and I play well with others. I strive to challenge myself creatively and produce work that I am proud of, no matter what.

Tell us about your latest project, *We Take The Low Road*.

We Take The Low Road is about a fictional event called "Medi-gate" which is an information leak proving that the government and the ceos of medical insurance companies have been colluding to keep people sick by raising medical care costs to amounts that no one can afford. In the leak are the names and addresses of those who are

involved. This creates an uprising of average citizens who have been affected by their actions to take matters into their own hands and execute the people involved. My character, Bobbi, with her two friends, Mason and Thompson, join the movement.

The film explores revenge and the costs that come with it. Politics and violence aside, I believe this movie is actually about family, blood or chosen. Its about what we would do for the people we love and how far we'd go to fight for what we believe is right in the face of tyranny and helplessness.

In your interview Close-Up Culture you refer to acting as "the art of understanding people." In a world of action-centered rather than people-centered blockbusters like Avenger's Endgame how important are the Indie films?

Indie films are important for a lot of reasons. The main one is that indie implies independent (of a studio). Indie film sets don't typically have the luxury of a studio budget but what they get is the luxury of independence in thinking, storytelling, casting. Everyone is there because they love being a part of the filmmaking process. They're not beholden to what a studio wants, which, at the end of the day, is to make a ton of money.

Because of that, studios don't typically take risks which is why we have such an action-centered-comic-book-green-screen phenomenon. Don't get me wrong, these Marvel etc. movies have a significance in our culture today; people want escapism, to see the good defeat the bad, to watch an ordinary person develop super strengths. They are totally valid and valuable entertainment pieces.

However, I believe good film and television are about telling stories that resonate on deeper levels with its audience. Something that makes people really think about themselves and others. They provide incite into worlds we could never imagine, create empathy and expand our horizons.

Storytelling began as a live performance. While movies reach a much larger audience, do you feel they carry the same impact as a live performance?

Around the age of 5, my parents took me to see *Phantom of the Opera* at the Pantages and I was in complete awe. Before then, I had of course seen lots of television and movies and would act out scenes in the living room and play dress up but seeing that live performance truly awakened something in me. I needed to be there. On that stage. Doing whatever those people up there were doing I'm in. How do I do that? I was totally enthralled. I do look back at that as the moment when I first was bit by the bug, as people say.

There is something so incredibly inspiring about live performance. Movies do have a completely different magic to them. Thanks to close ups, we get to see the nuances of the actors performance. We see the single tear well up in someones eye or the slight furrow of their brow. Small facial movements like that can really communicate a lot to an audience which is an experience you can really only get if you're in the first few rows of a theatre.

Are there enough roles for women?

Oh definitely not! There have always been a lot of roles for women but it was quantity, not quality. I do believe there is change happening though. There are more women in writing rooms and behind cameras and the art will reflect that. I have been noticing that there are more diverse female characters as leads, not just with race but with age, socio-economic class, body types, viewpoints. We are seeing more and more female characters being written as flawed but not requiring a man to fix those flaws but rather embracing them.

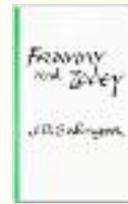
If you could grab onto the rudder of the entertainment industry, which direction would you send it?

I think the trajectory its on is spot on at the moment. There's a massive equality movement going on in Hollywood and I think its fantastic. Especially in television right now. There's a wide range of diverse stories being told, which was not the case even a decade ago. Thanks to so many streaming platforms there's a lot more space for interesting narratives to be seen. Some of my favorite shows currently are *Insecure* (HBO), *Baskets* (FX), *Broad City* (Comedy Central),

Dead To Me (Netflix) and *The OA* (Netflix).

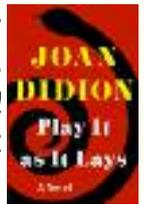
If you could go to dinner with any fictional character from books or movies, who would that be?

I'm going to flip this question a bit and say that I would love to be a fly on the wall at the Glass

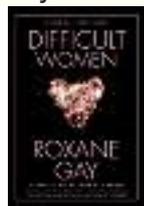
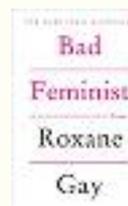


Family house in *Franny and Zooey*, which is my favorite book of all time. Salinger's writing is such a tease because you really feel like you're there and then the book is over and you're on your sofa wishing there was more.

I also really love Joan Didion. I'm pretty close to reading everything she has written. The first time I read *Play It As It Lays*, I finished the book and started it over again immediately.



Another author I can't get enough of is Roxane Gay. I think she's an incredible voice of this generation. Her collection of essays in *Bad Feminist* is truly a must read in this time of "wokeness". *Hunger*, which is a self-image memoir is both beautiful and painful and her short story collection *Difficult Women* is one fascinating tale after another.



What's next for you?

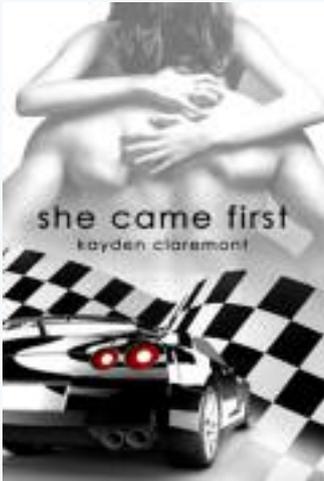
I just wrapped another feature film called *Big Trees* which is a buddy-comedy-drama that centers around the complexities of love and relationships. The characters are in somewhat of a love triangle, complicated by history and friendship. This was an interesting project to work on because the film is almost entirely improvised. The script was basically an outline of beats we needed to hit but it was up to us actors to really live and think as these characters and be in those moments. I also recently co-wrote and acted in a short and we are going to be submitting it to various festivals. I hope to keep writing and doing as many projects as I can. I'm in this because I love it and I love working, no matter the scale.

For more Amanda catch her interview at [Close-up Culture](#).

Erotic Romance

SHE CAME FIRST

by Kayden Claremont



As head mechanic for her family's stock car team, Tracy Hyland is making sure her car is ready for tomorrow's race. If the car comes in first, she can claim her rightful place in the business. She can't afford distractions, especially an ex high school sweetheart, one who broke her heart but

still makes her engine purr.

Racecar driver Delaney P. Jones comes home to drive the Hyland's car and to win back the girl he left behind. To break the iciness between them, he tempts his sexy mechanic into a smoldering dance of passion. His ultimate goal might prove more difficult—getting her across a private finish line.

Meet Kayden

Kayden's sensuous writing style drives the characters in lustful romps. She loves reading stories of lust and love. When she is not crafting erotic romantic stories, she loves to travel.

Kayden is a member of Romance Writers of America, Toronto Romance Writers, and Sisters in Crime.



She hopes you enjoy her other books, Hell's Bounty, Heaven's Watcher, Timeless Passion, Red Hot, and Tartan Temptation, all published by The Wild Rose Press.

Tell us about your new release. What led you to write this book?

SHE CAME FIRST is an erotic romance short story. I wanted to write something out of the box and love the idea the heroine being a blue-collar person. Then I had to have a hero who is her equal on the track and in the sack. She has a

chance to fall in love with her true love again.

Did you have an interesting experience in the research of this book?

This story is based on a holiday experience I had last summer. I love watching car racing, but I've never seen it live.

My daughter got the family a tour of the Charlotte Speedway. I loved every moment but was thrilled when I got a chance to sit in a van as it raced around the track. The driver said she came with the dirt and that was the idea for the story.

I could picture this being the perfect place for a romance, so I set SHE CAME FIRST around the dirt track of the Charlotte Speedway.

What is #1 on your bucket list?

My number one on my bucket list is racing around a track, but my number two is going to Hawaii. My husband, The Professor, will whisk me away for my dream vacation in August.

Do you have a favorite writing place or writing rituals?

I write the first draft sitting in a recliner with a writing blanket on my lap. Silly isn't it? I have a winter blanket and a summer blanket, and I can't tell you why I write like this but I do.

After the first draft is done. I print the pages and go to the mall and sit in the food court and edit. I used to work in a store in a mall, so I'm used to the background noise. Believe it or not it helps me think.

So, if you're in a mall's food court and you see a crazy lady with papers and different colored pens scattered all over the table come over and say "hi".

What's next for you?

I had the privilege to be part of the REAL MEN WEAR KILTS call for The Wild Rose Press.

My book, TARTAN TEMPTATION, is the first book in a series so I'm writing TARTAN DESIRE and TARTAN CRAVINGS. The stories are set in Scotland with sexy wolf shifters and the women who are their perfect match.

I can't wait to share them the readers.

DIVERSE ROMANCE



American Indian • Asian • Caribbean • African • Latinx
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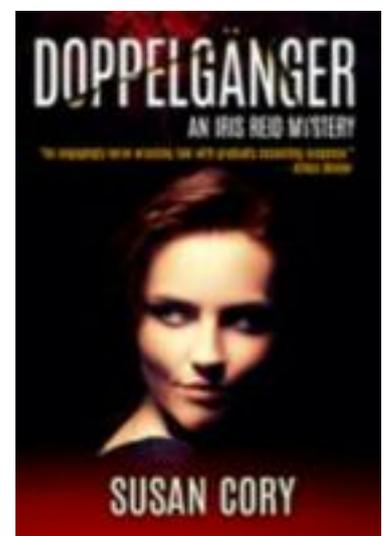
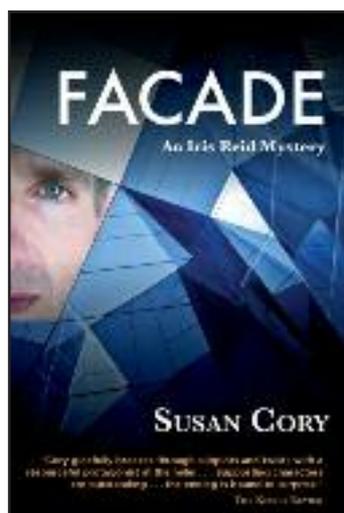
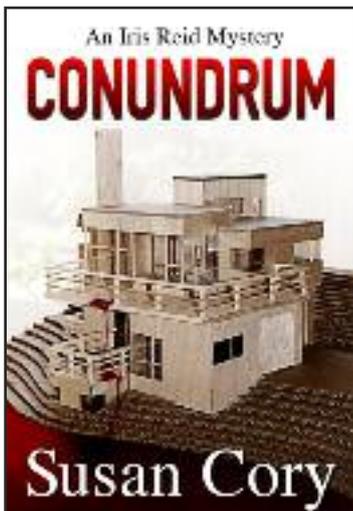
DiverseRomance.com

SUSAN CORY is an award-winning residential architect in Cambridge, Ma.

Her mystery series, beginning with CONUNDRUM, features Iris Reid, also a Cambridge architect, as an amateur sleuth trying to uncover a murderer at her Harvard reunion.

FACADE, finds Iris drawn into a kidnapping scheme while teaching at Harvard.

DOPPELGÄNGER, the third book in the series, features an obsessed con artist who implicates Iris in a crime, then tries to take over her life.



Iris Reid Mysteries

Behind the Pen - A peek into the world of N. M. Cedeño



N. M. Cedeño was born in Houston, grew up in the Dallas Metroplex, and currently lives near Austin, Texas. She is a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin.

Ms. Cedeño writes mystery short stories and novels that are typically set in Texas. Her mysteries vary from traditional to romantic suspense, and from paranormal to science fiction.

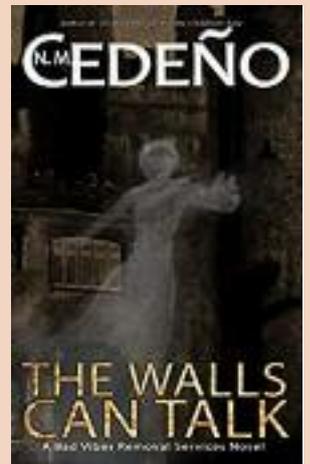
She is active in Sisters in Crime, Heart of Texas Chapter, having served as chapter vice president and president. Currently, Ms. Cedeño is working on a paranormal mystery series called Bad Vibes Removal Services.



Meet Petra, a 50 lb. German Shepherd mix who likes to chase rabbits.

THE WALLS CAN'T TALK.

This paranormal mystery is the first novel in the Bad Vibes Removal Services Series. The series includes multiple short stories and a bonus short story is attached at the back of the novel. An ALA Book Club Central selection for March 2018, Mysteries with an Irish Connection, this suspenseful novel will give you chills and spark discussion.

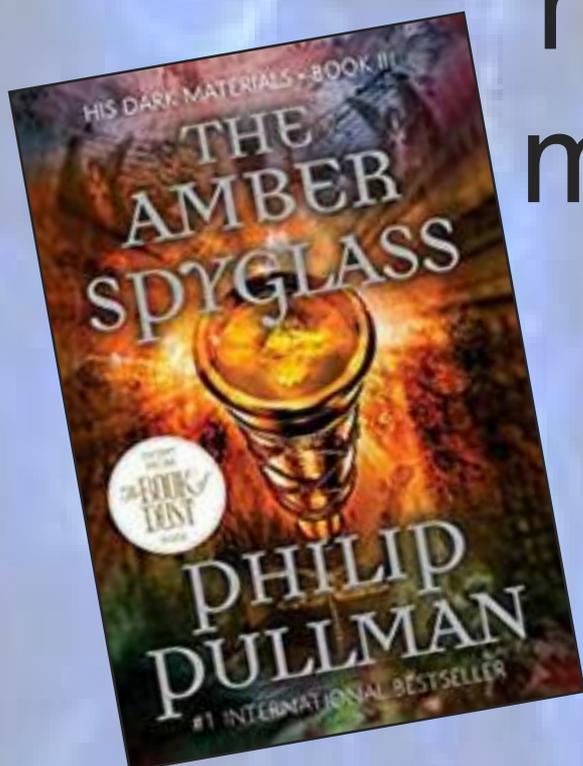
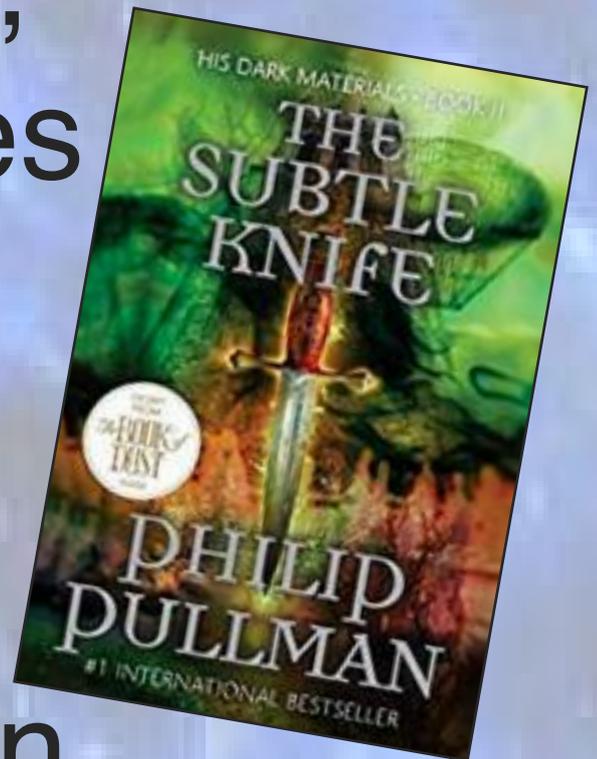
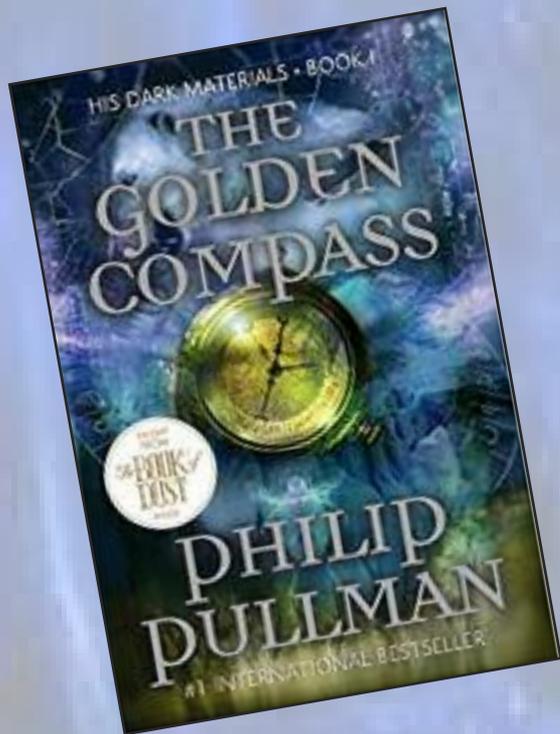


Irises
Effortless beauty
year after year



Cake I once baked and decorated for a child's birthday. I even molded the candy shells and creatures (except for the Swedish fish).

“After nourishment,
shelter and
companionship,
stories
are
the thing we
need
most in
the world.”



Victoria Landis



Victoria Landis is a professional writer and editor—and a veteran member of one of the toughest critique groups to ever grace South Florida. She's been a member of Mystery Writers of America since

graphics—as well as oils on canvas, murals, and special effects.

Book Excerpt from Jordan

“What?” Petra stepped backward. “That lady was right. You are nuts.”

“I tried to tell you,” Jordan said, “I didn't have anything to do with Katia's remission. Maybe now you'll believe me?”

Lori yanked Jordan's arm and immediately dropped it, letting out a shriek. “Damn it.” She rubbed her hand on her white capris. “Pleasant, my ass. That stung. Felt like sharp, hot prickles.” She reeled around and stuck a forefinger in Petra's face. “Something bad is in here. I know it. I've spent time in the Wiccan world. You are into a realm you don't understand, and you are going to hurt people by preventing Jordan from helping them.”

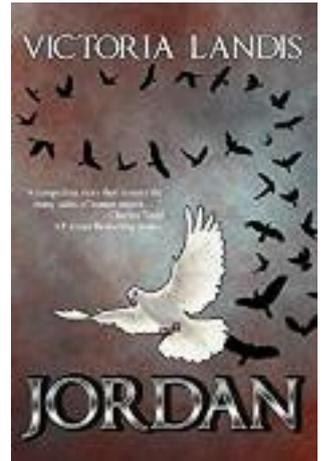
Petra backed up again, threatened and astonished by Lori's overreaction. “What are you talking about?”

“Don't play innocent with me,” Lori said. “You are controlling her, and you know it. She healed my daughter yesterday when you were nowhere near any of us. It's you, and I'm going to make sure people know it.” She pointed to the door. “Mom, let's go. Jordan, why you're hanging out with such a negative person is a mystery. Refusing to help such a sweet woman like my grandmother.”

“I didn't refuse—”

“You're allowing this bitch, Petra, to taint you.

Katia? We're leaving.”



2003 and has served on the board of the Florida Chapter. She has also served as the Co-Chair for FMWA's SleuthFest writers' conference for 2015-2018.

Her newest title, JORDAN, was chosen as a 2019 Distinguished Favorite in general fiction by the Independent Press Awards and a finalist in the 2019 National Indie Excellence Awards. It is the story of a modern-day miracle and how it's received by humankind in our current world of viral social media.

For ten years, she wrote a monthly humor column for The Parklander magazine. She has three novels out. *Blinke It Away*, a suspense set on Oahu, was chosen a BookRooster Reviewer's pick for its consistently high ratings. *Alias: Mitzi & Mack* is a humorous crime novel that takes place in South Florida. *A Little Bit Sideways*, a compendium of humorous essays, elicited the praise, “Victoria Landis is the Erma Bombeck of our times.”

She has conducted workshops at the SleuthFest writers' conference, at the Alvin Sherman Library at Nova Southeastern University, and for the Murder on the Beach Summer Authors' Academy. She especially enjoys the big picture editing—aka ‘book doctoring’.

Victoria is also an artist. She does graphics—book covers, ads, logos, and web-ready

"But you said I could get candy," Katia said.

"We'll get it somewhere else," Lori said. "I don't want to stay here one more second. Petra, you and your little puppet person here are playing a dangerous game. And it's not funny."

The four of them left.

Letting out a deep breath, Petra slumped into a chair at the table closest to the door. "Holy crap on a cracker. Is there a full moon this week?"

Jordan sat as well and buried her head in her hands. "Lori turned so ugly so fast."

"It's more than that," Petra said. "There is something truly off about that woman. The Wiccan world? What is that? Witches? Warlocks? At least they're gone." She smirked when she looked out the window. "Your little birdies still love you."

There were double the number of them than when Lori and her family came in, happily pecking away near the front of the store.

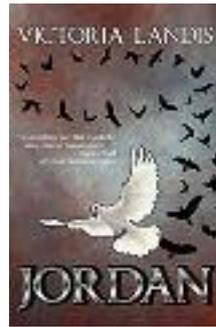
"The thing is . . ." Jordan waved and smiled at the birds, some of which did the hopping and bouncing routine. "The thing is I did try. I imagined poor old Annabelle as sitting up straight and talking and walking. And that other lady, I pictured her perfectly healthy, too."

"I have to confess," Petra said. "Lori was right. I really didn't want it to work. Wait. That sounds awful. Having them get better would be a fantastic thing. But not here in my store." She returned to the register counter and picked up the unbought boxes. "Sometimes, when customers think they're buying, they'll start eating the darn things right out of the box as they shop." She checked the seals. "Nope. These are okay."

"I'm sorry all that fuss cost you a sale."

"Me, too." Petra checked her watch. "It's only eleven-thirty, though. Business will pick up."

Books by Victoria Landis

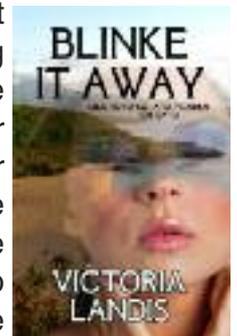


When Petra Simmons and her brother, Andy, help a seemingly homeless woman, it immediately changes their lives forever. Within days, it's clear the woman, Jordan Crissman, possesses an amazing ability - perhaps the most miraculous ability of all.

They realize in the current world of viral social media, they must be careful. How best to employ the miracle without causing havoc? They plot a strategy. Despite their plans, word gets out too fast, and the world comes running - invading and overwhelming South Florida - along with serious danger.

Television talking heads pontificate. Pundits opine. Some claim she's a messiah. Others insist she's the devil. There seems to be nowhere to hide. Horrible rumors take hold. Protest groups march and riot. Mass hysteria reigns - and people are dying.

It's an idyllic day on Oahu until Bess Blinks interrupts a bizarre robbery that ends in homicide. In the following days, she discovers terrible secrets tied to the crime, and her world unravels. When the killer realizes the depth of what she knows and comes after her, she escapes, hides, and plots to reveal the truth and expose the brutal force behind several murders - hoping to do so before they can kill her, too.



A Little Bit Sideways is a collection of humorous essays. From human nature, crazy foods, weird history, romance, and so much more, this book is full of entertaining facts you didn't know you wanted, delivered in fun.

Author Victoria Landis chose from a decade of humor columns and essays to compile this book.

Behind the Pen - a peek into the world of amateur sleuth mystery writer Lois Winston



USA Today bestselling and award-winning author Lois Winston writes mystery, romance, romantic suspense, chick lit, women's fiction, children's chapter books, and nonfiction under her own name and her Emma Carlyle pen name. *Kirkus Reviews* dubbed her critically acclaimed Anastasia Pollack Crafting Mystery series, "North Jersey's more mature answer to Stephanie Plum."

In addition, Lois is a former literary agent and an award-winning craft and needlework designer who often draws much of her source material for both her characters and plots from her experiences in the crafts industry.



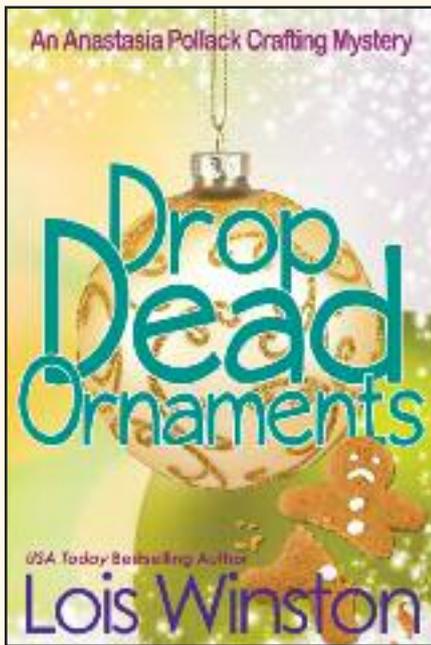
A Favorite Craft: a mop doll I made featuring covers from my first three Anastasia Pollack Crafting Mysteries (these were the original covers from my former publisher.)



My Favorite Place to Go: I'm a true Broadway Baby. I'd rather be attending a play or musical than spending time just about anywhere else.



A Favorite Recipe: Lemon Blueberry Chambord Cake

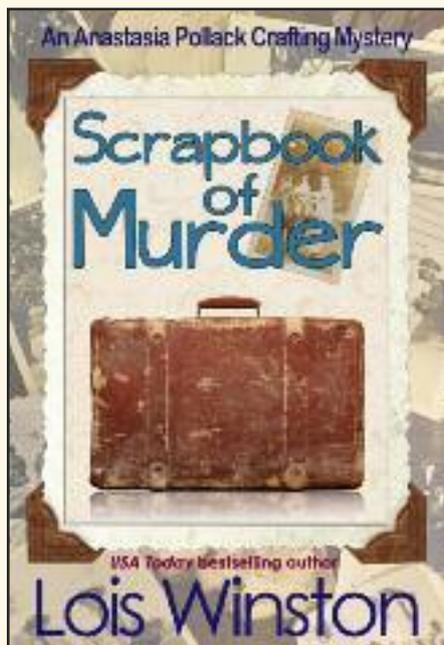
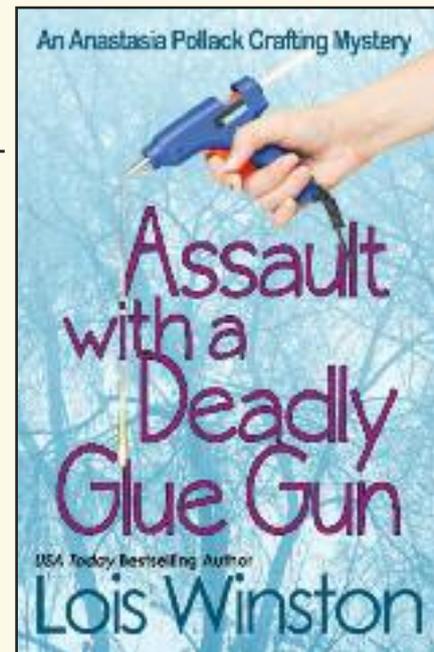


Anastasia Pollack's son Alex is dating Sophie Lambert, the new kid in town. For their community service project, the high school seniors have chosen to raise money for the county food bank. Anastasia taps her craft industry contacts to donate materials for the students to make Christmas ornaments they'll sell at the town's annual Holiday Crafts Fair.

At the fair Anastasia meets Sophie's father, Shane Lambert, who strikes her as a man with secrets. She also notices a woman eavesdropping on their conversation. Later that evening when the woman turns up dead, Sophie's father is arrested for her murder.

Alex and Sophie beg Anastasia to find the real killer, but Anastasia has had her fill of dead bodies. She's also not convinced of Shane's innocence. Besides, she's promised younger son Nick she'll stop risking her life. But how can she say no to Alex?

Anastasia's job as crafts editor at American Woman magazine proves no respite when she discovers a dead body glued to her desk chair. The victim, fashion editor Marlys Vandenburg, collected enemies and ex-lovers like Jimmy Choos on her ruthless climb to editor-in-chief. But when evidence surfaces of an illicit affair between Marlys and Anastasia's husband, Anastasia becomes the prime suspect. Now she's in a race to find the killer, not only to clear her name but before he strikes again.



When the daughter of a murdered neighbor asks Anastasia to create a family scrapbook from old photographs and memorabilia discovered in a battered suitcase, she agrees—not only out of friendship but also from a sense of guilt over the older woman's death. However, as Anastasia begins sorting through the contents of the suitcase, she discovers a letter revealing a fifty-year-old secret, one that unearths a long-buried scandal and unleashes a killer. Suddenly Anastasia is back in sleuthing mode as she races to prevent a suitcase full of trouble from leading to more deaths.

Dwaine Rieves



Dwaine Rieves was born and raised in Monroe County, Mississippi. He worked as a garment plant custodian and Frisco Railroad brakeman before attending Ole

Miss and graduating from the University of Mississippi School of Medicine. He trained in critical care medicine and pulmonary diseases at the National Institutes of Health and Johns Hopkins University. He currently works part-time as a research pharmaceutical scientist, while engrafting his remaining time with poetry. His collection, *When the Eye Forms*, won the 2005 Tupelo Press Prize for Poetry. *Shirtless Men Drink Free* is his first novel.

Tell us about your new release. What led you to write this book?

The book's title, *Shirtless Men Drink Free*, repositions a relatively common gay bar slogan—as in, “After 10 PM, Shirtless Men Drink Free.” The story grew out of my upbringing in the Deep South, a place thick in my mind with strong opinions, furtive ambitions and unimaginable regret. In short, a place encapsulating the gritty audacity that keeps this old world making babies despite every newly birthed world's inevitable failures. Which is a highfalutin way of saying *Shirtless Men Drink Free* is a story of survival.

Long, dark drives from Birmingham, Alabama to Smithville, Mississippi laid the groundwork for the novel. I was flying home at least monthly to help care for my mother, who was undergoing chemotherapy for ovarian cancer. The drugs were not working and yet she persisted. She

cried and asked for more. Whatever it took, even more. The year was 2004, a presidential election year, the night sky filled with convinced voices on Talk Radio. Out of Atlanta, the South needed to protect its people, especially its boys. Values were at stake—the gays were about to take over the nation. Can you believe it—homosexuals getting married? The Massachusetts liberal lesions were spreading, a constitutional amendment essential—Christian values, the family and God-given tradition. Nothing was safe. The disease needed treatment. The South had to protect its borders and especially its boys. Whatever it took, even more.

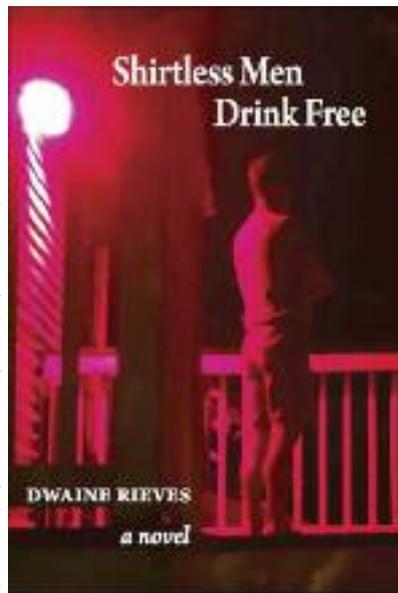
Long story short—the novel evolved as an allegory of the South's Jim Crow evolution—the South self-medicating through a new delivery for the sake of its survival. Homosexuals and immigration, black folks and their changing places, words ordained by God in a red-backed Bible that people give you to help you remember

how the meanings of some words can change like lesions. In short, *Shirtless Men Drink Free*—all others must pay up to keep this home-place going.

Which book impacted you as a teenager?

Every week, on Thursdays during the summer, the county bookmobile parked in the dirt patch beneath a lightning-scarred oak tree next to Dr. Tubb's old office. I'm guessing I was 13 or 14 when I checked out *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a big book that

I wouldn't have tried except in history I'd learned some people thought those words helped start the Civil War. This was the summer when I'd ride my bicycle pretty much anywhere I cared to, which often ended up in little cemeteries up the road, where tombstones for some men were engraved with the letters CSA. As if those letters meant something people needed to remember, even more than the names of the guys or when they died, as if markings in the white marble were



there to memorialize something bigger than the men themselves, how they lost the war and yet the war, like the fine marble that tries to tell a better story, served a monumental purpose.

Life Among the Lowly was the subtitle, and at 13 or 14 on hot afternoons in the front porch glider I pictured the dog teeth within reach of Eliza, a South of whips and demons, cotton in the sacks my mother says she remembers toting as the menfolk left to fight Hitler.

Uncle Tom's Cabin opened my eyes to the power of failure and its stories, its opening magnolia scents and clingy, honeysuckle complexities. Uncle Tom's Cabin was about bad men and a bad South, people buried up the road below CSA spelled out in heavenly white marble. Uncle Tom's Cabin wasn't really about the evils of slavery or a cruel South—I could tell even then—it was a book about me, the people I must contain and dwell among because I was born into a world that was already ticking through its failures.

Can you elaborate more on why you see the novel as an allegory?

When I say allegory, I'm speaking of emblematic, much as those letters CSA are emblematic of a story that could overload a bookmobile if it's told correctly, a story that far surpasses the significance of three letters chiseled into stones surrounded by sassafras sprouts and hiding places for rabbits. Humans are creatures deeply engraved with the need for communication, for saying things directly when we can and even more forcefully when we can't. In 2004, when the Talk Radio callers from Valdosta were ranting about the homosexual agenda, what I heard in the Alabama night were the voices of old soldiers, women threadbare in dusters, boys still barefoot and pedaling past cemeteries where kinfolks died trying.

My South is a land of people yoked by a sense of profound inferiority, a people who know they can smell sweet and also bad within skin of any color, a place where talk has to be taken and shared with the attentiveness of a chained yard

dog that knows it sometimes must bleed about the collar to do the work that goes with life as its place gives and has given. Shirtless Men Drink Free begins with a vision of the soul. It ends in the cigarette smoke that has just left the lips of a better world's body.

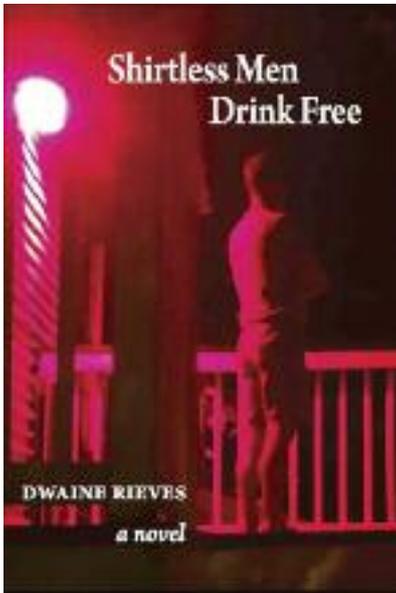
If the book is an allegory on racial relations in the South, why doesn't it address that topic more directly?

Directness is the playground of bad preachers and good armies. Directness is great for bullies and thunder. Directness is when you yell "Stop" to keep your kids from running into traffic. Directness is an ultimatum, a law and date when the book must be returned in an unmarked condition.

Shirtless Men Drink Free wasn't written to be returned, understood like a sign or filed among has-been regulations. The novel is a picture book of people learning to live with each other and the differences that, as they fear, will not die with their bodies. Shirtless Men Drink Free is a plot-driven poem, plot as Eudora Welty defined it—"Emotion acted out." To which, I must add that "acted out" is another way of saying—as Southerners know well—"run like a dog unchained."

What's next for you?

Many folks fear talking about their next project, for fear of jinxing the whole business. Yet, when you're used to failure, you've freed yourself from the chains of self-protection—meaning you've freed your inner yard-dogs to run off if they care to. And my latest yard-dog is a collection of poetry that continues my exploration of stories from Southern cemeteries, particularly the men who want to be remembered for something nobler than the words below which they're buried. It's tentatively called, Men From Screaming, and includes many line breaks defined by fed-up women. I'm also working on a non-fiction project that explores the science of self-being, the mind as it has evolved through history. The dogs here just won't stop barking.



Excerpt from Shirtless Men Drink Free by Dwaine Rieves

A Fact

If pressed, she just might someday describe the experience as a vision, but that word alone would be insufficient, if not false, for what she had seen above the bed was more than apparition, more than a visual thing. There, sitting beside her dying mother, she'd sensed another presence, a new being, energy membrane-bound, translucent and hovering, alive in the air. The sense was volatility, the struggling with a decision, a choice—most definitely a choice—more why than when, more God than science. There, fibrillating above the bed was a soul. It was her mother's soul, the very soul of her mother deliberating its only options: whether to stay or depart, this world or another. And in the instant before it abandoned its literal form, whatever her mother's soul accepted or denied had to have been better than the body below, the face still puffy from chemotherapy, that halo of resurrected hair.

Something else must have mattered in this world, some undone task or rethought decision, something noble in the making, for her soul clearly wanted to stay. But it couldn't. It simply couldn't.

Perhaps revelation would eventually prove a more credible label. Or insight. Regardless of what she might ultimately call it, she wanted to believe the whole episode was a lesson for the scientist within her, a gift for the daughter who had to make sense of the inexplicable she'd seen. No. No one would ever believe she had witnessed such agony above the bed, the struggle between what the body demands and the soul needs.

Such thoughts she knew she must keep to herself, that vision or revelation or insight from a few months back, the soul of her mother wrestling with the air.

Tonight, Doctor Jane Beekman is alone. She sits on the back porch at home, a rocking chair helping to hold her there. The sky is closing in yellow, the world that was almost gone. She is motherless now, the backyard calm in disbelief. In the wake of her mother's final breath, in the air that struggle—why? The question will never disappear and the more she stares, the more the world before her eyes darkens any possible answer.

The air is unsteady, too uncertain. It trembles as if still above the bed, as Jane saw it and forever will. That odorless instant when decision turned gunmetal thin, she will smell it always. The distance between struggle and release, its clamor breathed clean. That morning her husband held her mother's hand, but never did Price waver, never did his eyes leave the body. Her mother's soul had battled the air and Jane, she alone was the witness.

Her body demands a reason. Her soul needs more gin.

“We don't see things as they are,
we see them as we are.”
— Anaïs Nin



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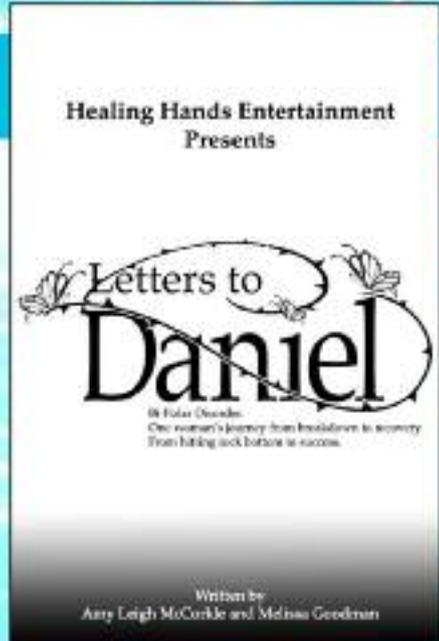


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Mary L. Ball

Mary L. Ball is a multi-published Christian author. She lives in North Carolina and enjoys fishing, reading, and ministering in song with her hubby at functions. Her books are about small-town romance, suspense, and mystery, influenced by the grace of Jesus Christ.

Sunny's Dream

Sunny Kast spends her week fighting cyber-crime, and dreaming of her prince charming.

When a man walks into Celestial Investigations, and introduces himself as Trouble, she's sure he's not her prince, and positive that he lives up to his name.

After Max Trouble finds an important document, his life gets complicated with the know-it-all P.I. hired to track down its owner.

Sunny and Max's relationship grows. She's optimistic that he may be her prince charming, but after her car is sabotaged, and she's almost killed Max's chauvinist ideas of a female investigator surface.

Will she see God's perfect plan, or a not-so-perfect relationship?

"Sunny's Dream," Celestial Investigation, book one. A Christian romantic suspense based on three sisters. Their P.I. skills come in handy in the quaint town of Mercy, North Carolina, a place where romance and mystery unite.



another mistake.

Luna and Kevin become cyber friends, but while their relationship grows, so do her problems.

When her latest case turns deadly, and she finds Kevin in the arms of another woman, Luna's hopes for a peaceful life are once again dashed. Can she stay planted in her belief that God leads those who are faithful?

"Luna's Treasure," Celestial Investigation, book two. A Christian romantic suspense based on three sisters. Their P.I. skills come in handy in the quaint town of Mercy, North Carolina, a place where romance and mystery unite.

Starr's Promise

Starr, the youngest Kast sister is a whiz at Internet tracking and committed to keeping her word.

Chauffeuring a child to Sunday, school seems easy, until she meets the girl's uncle. Resembling a throwback from the fifties, he acts as if promises are something to toss away.



Luke's priority is his niece Winnie, and his garage, the last thing he wants is a pesky blonde butting into their lives.

Starr and Luke are worlds apart, but when Winnie's life is in danger Starr is the only one who can help.

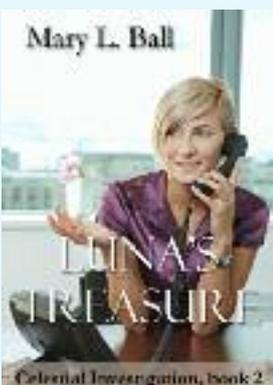
As Starr uncovers secrets, will she also realize God placed Luke in her path for a reason?

"Starr's Promise," the last book in Celestial Investigation Series. A Christian romantic suspense based on three sisters. Their P.I. skills

Luna's Treasure

Luna Kast, surveillance specialist at Celestial Investigation stays one-step away from danger. In her personal life, she treasures tranquility.

She meets Kevin Hollings. He seems shy and levelheaded, but she's been duped before and has no intention of making



another mistake.

come in handy in the quaint town of Mercy, North Carolina, a place where romance and mystery unite.

Interview with Mary

Tell us about your new release. What led you to write this book?

Starr's Promise is my latest release from Forget-Me-Not Publishing (Winged Publications) It's the third and final novella from the Celestial Investigation series. As I was driving one day the idea of three sisters, Sunny, Luna and Starr came to mind. Before I'd gotten home, I had mentally mapped out the series and a basic plot for each sister.

Do you read the same genre you write?

Yes, I enjoy Inspirational/Christian fiction, but I will read any clean romantic or suspense novel.

What inspires you to write?

I am a born-again Christian, with that blessing comes the desire to share the Lord with everyone. However, I don't like being a Bible pusher, so writing Inspirational fiction is my way of hopefully bringing people to the knowledge of the Lord's mercy, or perhaps strengthening someone's faith in God.

How has being a published novelist differed from your expectations of the profession?

Unless an author is with one of the big six publishers, they have little help introducing readers to their novels. Promotion is a constant and the hours a writer puts into their craft usually does not equal the monetary rewards. However, writing is a passion and the desire to write ingrained in an author.

What's next for you?

I have a busy year. Along with promoting older releases from Pelican Book Group. I have a new release with Dancing With Bear Christian Publishing titled, Asheville Hearts, scheduled for

April 10.

I have a novella, Awaken the Past, which will be part of a heroine in danger collection coming sometime in late spring. Also, I'm working on another novella, A Special Christmas. This one is my first Historical book and will be included in Romancing the Christmas Angel boxed set, with Forget-Me-Not Romance.

Last, but not least is a novel for a Tea Time Mysteries set with a middle-aged heroine.

Excerpt- Starr's Promise

Starr rushed to her car, "Anything that can go wrong." She muttered part of a phrase her mother used to say when problems arose. Several times during the night she'd woken with the deed of finding Winnie's stalker on her mind. Out of all the cases, this situation weighed heavy on her heart, she unlocked the car door. Jesus, I need to find this man.



A number of whistled notes filled the air and brought her attention to a nearby Maple tree. A brown and white bird perched on a low limb turned its head sideways. Seeing one of God's creatures gave her pause. No matter what the day held the Lord offered strength.

Starr scooted in her vehicle and started the engine. She backed out of the driveway. A Bible verse lifted her spirit. She repeated part of the scripture, "a cheerful heart. I trust you Lord."

Starr's phone buzzed. She kept a watch on the road while as she answered. "Hello."

"Starr, he's across the road." Amber's hurried words spilled inside the car.

"Amber?" Starr pulled over. "Slow down, I can't

Continued on next page

understand what you're saying."

"Across the street, the guy is sitting on a bench reading and looking toward the house. Luke left early to tow a car." Amber spoke in a whisper. "I don't want Winnie to see him in the park."

"Keep her away from the window. I'm on my way." Starr took the road toward Amber's house and passed a slow vehicle by taking the middle turn lane, an unwise traffic maneuver, but necessary. A marker came into view and announced "Mercy Park, below the big red letters, the phrase. "Relax and enjoy."

She slowed the car, drove past the benches, and examined every rest area, before turning back toward Amber's house.

Amber met her on the porch. "Right after we talked he walked toward the east side of the park. The dog enclosure is over there."

"Go back inside." Starr turned and jogged in the direction of the mini dog park.

She sped up. Maybe, her choice of jeans and athletic shoes would come in handy.

A fast jog in the park, in casual clothes wouldn't draw attention. She scanned the grounds as she ran toward the canine enclosure.

Beside the fence, she stopped, took long breaths and examined the grounds. No sign of the stalker. She put her hand up to shade her face and focused on the paved trails. Nothing.

Starr slowly walked back to Amber's house while keeping a watch on the grounds.

"Starr." Winnie opened the door, ran to her and hugged her legs.

"Hi, princess." She leaned down and cuddled the child.

"Winnie, go eat your cereal. I need to talk to Starr."

"Okay, Mommy." Winnie glanced at Starr. "Can you stay?"

Starr nodded. "For a while, finish your breakfast honey." Starr put some wayward strands of hair in place, pulled her phone out and typed. "Let me tell Luna, I'll be late." She followed Amber into the living room and whispered. "I didn't see him anywhere."

"Oh no." Amber lowered her head.

"Listen." Starr touched Amber's shoulder. "I'll find him."

"Mommy, Starr." Winnie yelled.

"We should go in the kitchen." Amber turned.

Winnie smiled and tipped her bowl sideways, "Ate all of my fruit balls."

"I see." Starr took the seat beside the little girl. "Mommy says I need to stay inside today."

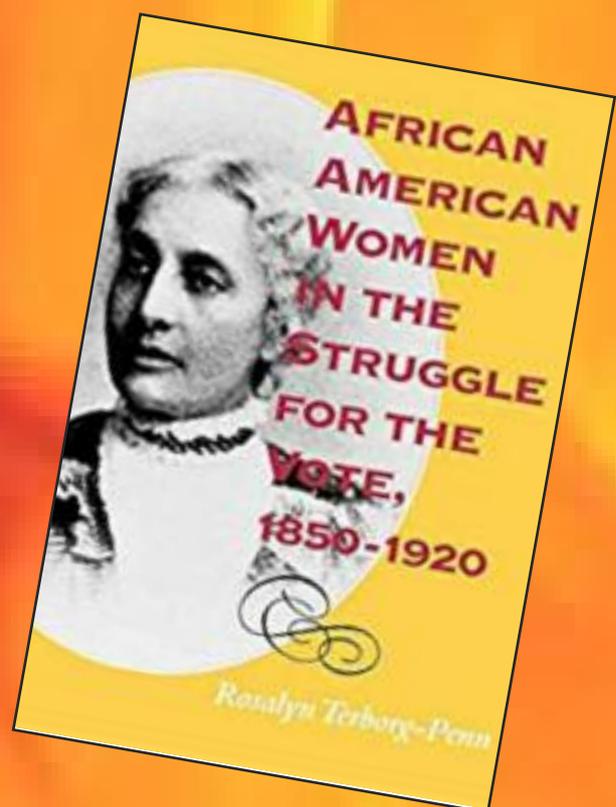
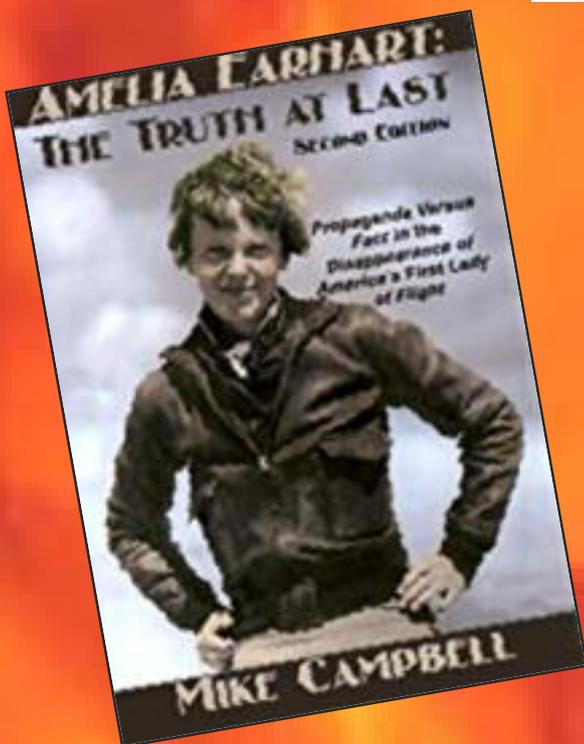
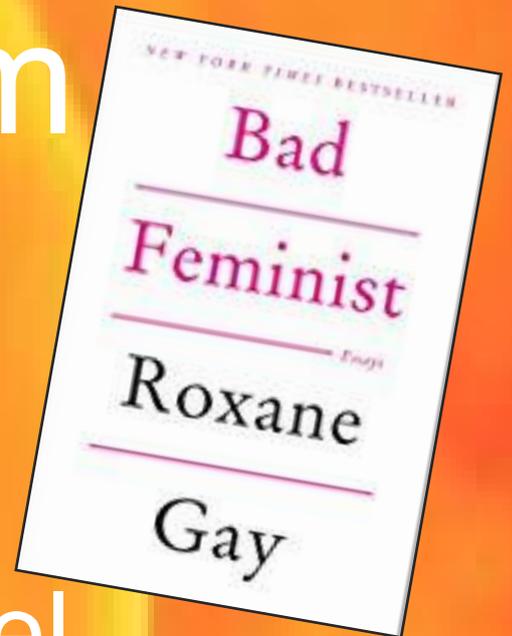
"Mommy is right." Starr kissed the top of Winnie's head. "I'll bring you a milkshake when I get off work."

She glanced at Amber. "If all goes well I'll have news."

"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."
— H. Jackson Brown Jr., P.S. I Love You

“Well-behaved
women
seldom
make
history.”

— Laurel
Thatcher Ulrich



Drugs, Spies and a Spot of Milk

The Sinister Side of Tea



There is a Chinese legend that a gust of wind caught a few tea leaves and blew them into a bowl of freshly boiled water. Shennong, the Emperor of China and inventor of

In a further attempt to control the tea market Robert Fortune, a British man who looked Chinese, was sent to China to learn the secrets of producing tea. He even smuggled a few plants out



which were taken to India and turned into plantations. As production increased prices dropped making it more affordable,

agriculture and Chinese medicine, gave it a try and liked it. Perhaps it is true. Most agree that tea plants have been around for some 3,200 years originating in the Yunnan Province, in China.

Through the centuries tea found its way around the world. The British East India Company is attributed with bringing tea to the



United Kingdom around 1615. Originally viewed as medicinal it wasn't until the late seventeenth century that it was enjoyed as a beverage although primarily by the wealthy. Due to the expense it was usually kept in a locked chest with the lady of the house carrying the key to prevent servants from helping themselves.

As demand grew traders became frustrated that the Chinese would only sell their tea for silver or gold. They weren't interested in trading so the traders devised a plan – find something the Chinese couldn't live without. So in the late 1800's they started sending opium from India and Afghanistan into China and opium dens were born. Desperate addicts sold tea for opium.

Originally the English were primarily coffee drinkers. What caused them to change? The East India Company controlled the tea market and began an advertising campaign to promote the beverage. After all, tea was the beverage of the rich and powerful. Who wouldn't want to get a taste of that? England changed from a nation of coffee drinkers to a nation of tea drinkers over the span of a couple of years and the pockets of the British East India Company bulged.

It was during WWII when German U-Boats surrounded the country that importing tea became a challenge. The government took over and rationed it. They also brought in a lower quality black tea that caused the need to add a spot of milk.

And the rest is not only history but a cultural expectation.

This started out wondering why the British drank tea and it turned into a rather disturbing story of capitalism. How much influence have we allowed the peddlers of products over our lives?

Perhaps it is time to question.