

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2025 GALAXY CONTEST WINNERS! See page 7 for the list.

Norman Galaxy of Writers Formed in March 1969 • Affiliated with Oklahoma Writers Federation, Inc.

WRITELINE

NORMAN GALAXY OF WRITERS, P.O. Box 5581, Norman, OK 73070
Vol. 45, No. 1 • January 10, 2026

“There are only three things you need to write. First, you need something to say. Second, you need the ability to say it. Finally, you need the courage to say it at all.”

— Dr. Maya Angelou,
Quoted from *Writing Creativity and Soul* by Sue Monk Kidd

THE MISSION of Norman Galaxy of Writers is to provide a venue for published and non-published writers to develop and refine their writing skills through quality educational programs, mentoring, and networking with other professional writers.

JANUARY PROGRAM **CONTEST READINGS**



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January 10, 2026

10 a.m. — 12 noon

“The Well” — 210 S. James Garner Ave.

As Galaxy begins its 56th year of monthly meetings, we are re-committing to our vision with a--

**NEW BEGINNING, NEW VOICES, &
NEW HOPE FOR THE FUTURE OF
GALAXY**

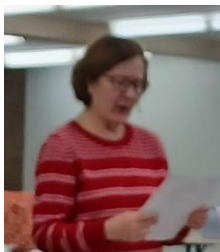
During our January program, we’ll recognize the winners of the 2025 Galaxy contest. The authors will read their winning entries aloud! Starting with the first-place entries, we’ll continue with as many manuscripts as time will allow. If you won any of the awards, please

bring your entries . . . and prepare to be applauded! Come join us. We look forward to seeing you!

CHRISTMAS PARTY A SUCCESS!

Thanks to all our members and guests for making the 2025 Galaxy Christmas party a rousing success! The winners of our annual contest received their certificates and cash prizes. A big thank you goes to Melissa Hearn for chairing our contest. And also thanks to Helen Duchon for printing our contest certificates and taking the pictures of the party. The list of winners can be found on page seven. There was lots of great fun and wonderful camaraderie among our 15 fellow authors who were present. That's priceless! They were: Gwenn Agiapal, Ravi Hall, Mark Robinson, Helen Duchon, Melissa Hearn, Jim Nichols, Sandy Nichols, Mary Spaulding and her friend Steve, Lisbeth McCarty, Linda Basinger, Judith Coker, Dan Snell, Camaron Richards, and Mary Payne.

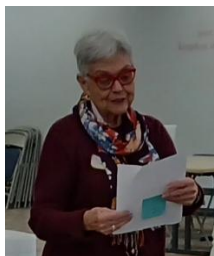
A bonus was the FOOD! It was all delicious. There are some great cooks in our group. Darleen Bailey Beard dropped off a cake for us, but she couldn't stay. (Her husband had a heart attack on Friday before the party, then surgery. He's doing fine)



Mary Spaulding reads a Christmas story.



Jim Nichols reads a short history of St. Nick.



Judith Coker reads the poem "Winter" by Robert Louis Stevenson.

GALAXY CONTEST WINNERS... A HAPPY BUNCH!



Front row (l to r): Mary Payne, Gwenn Agiapal, and Mary Spaulding.

Back row (l to r): Judith Coker, Linda Basinger, Lisbeth McCarty, Jim Nichols, and Mark Robinson. Not pictured: Vickie Riggs, Doug Botner, and Rob Standridge..

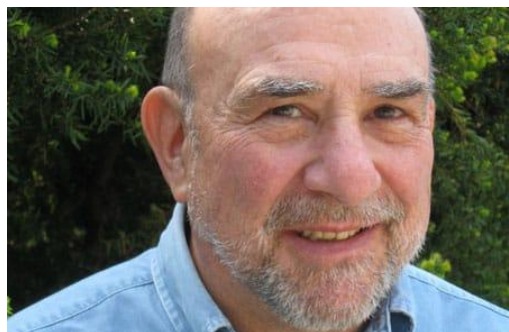
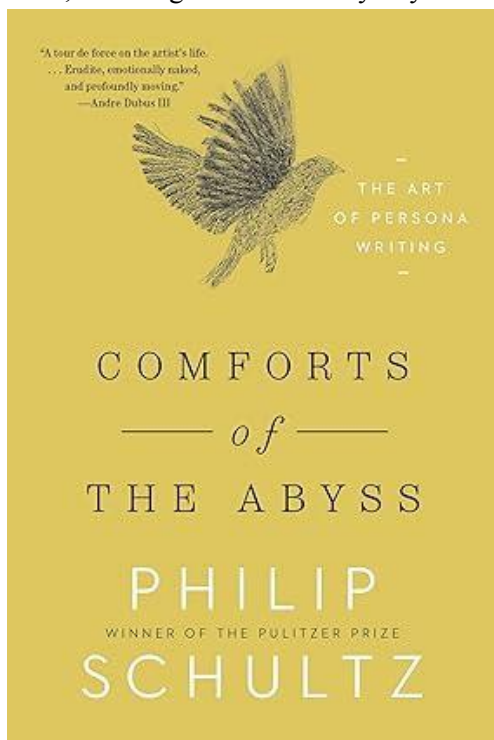
A FEAST WORTHY OF KINGS!



GALAXY OFFICERS FOR 2026



From (l) to (r): President Judith Coker, Treasurer Linda Basinger, Secretary Jim Nichols, President-Elect Dan Snell, and Program Chair Mary Payne



Philip

Schultz



FEBRUARY'S WRITELINE DEADLINE:

JANUARY 26, 2026

Please send all brags, columns, articles, puzzles, etc. for the February 2026 *Write Line* to be received by Jan. 26 to marpayne@netscape.com. If you have changed email addresses, please drop us a note so you don't miss a single issue.

THE WRITER'S BOOKCASE

COMFORTS OF THE ABYSS:

The Art of Persona Writing

By Philip Schultz

Philip Schultz developed the art of persona writing as a defense against his dyslexia and poor self-image that plagued him his whole life. Growing up in an abusive household, he had what he called a 'shitbird' that whispered in his ear about how weird, absurd, and obscene he was. His uncle lived with the family and had a library in the attic. Once Schulz learned to read, he was so taken with Hemingway that he tried to imitate him. Walking, talking, writing. He started reading during his lunch hour, or anytime he had a few extra minutes. "I can't say when I first realized that Hemingway's tough, self-assured narrators reminded me of my father, but they did, in the way they reduced everything... to a simple code of behavior based on success and the shame of failure and cowardice." Schultz wanted to be an author with Hemingway's tough exterior and he found it easier to write when he embodied Heminway in his imagination as he crafted his words.

More memoir than writing craft, Schulz mentions all the different authors he devoured and imitated. He gives a wealth of information with personal anecdotes about each one. The more he could dissolve himself into the persona of the author he wanted to imitate, the less hold the 'shitbird' had over his mind.

Schultz believes that authors must create a mask to be a strong narrator for their novels and poems. In order to do this, Schulz said he had to read an author's words like he looked at van Gogh's paintings, "reading the words over and over again until I could almost taste each syllable and phoneme, each punctuation mark, until I felt I could taste the meaning as something alive and vibrant, wanting to absorb it into my very being." If a writer doesn't have a strong narrative voice, the story turns out to be one-dimensional with autobiographical stick figures who convey factual information but there's no real emotion.... Writers have to discover what a story or poem is really about, what it is underneath all the surface stuff that happens.

He writes about teaching freshman college students and how difficult it is for some of them to get to their core emotions. One student ran away from home as a teenager and couldn't find her way back to her anger—the reason she had left home in the first place. He wrote, "Some, it would seem,

would rather fail at what means most to them--their creative work—(rather) than confront painful truths, anger being, from my experience, the hardest to recognize and acknowledge. The imagination thrives on power emotions, and discovering what we're actually feeling...can be a source of creative inspiration and thinking.” (p.204)

Reading *Comforts of the Abyss* was like snuggling down under a warm blanket. Would that I could give my readers that same feeling. —Mary Payne

PUBLIC DOMAIN DAY

On January 1, 2026, all copyrighted works (books) from 1930 entered the public domain. The most notable are:

Faulker's *As I Lay Dying*

Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*

Christie's *The Murder at the Vicarage*

Piper's *The Little Engine That Could*
(illustrated version)

Eliot's *Ash Wednesday*

Coatsworth's *The Cat Who Went to
Heaven*

Maugham's *Cakes and Ale*

Russell's *The Conquest of Happiness*

Keene's *The Secret of the Old Clock* and
three other Nancy Drew books

Here's the link to the announcement:

https://web.law.duke.edu/cspd/publicdomainday/2026/?mc_cid=edf0024250&mc_4af3d9a4ce.

The fear of rejection is worse than
rejection itself. — Nora Profit
(quoted from *Chicken Soup for the Writer's Soul*)



September C. Fawkes



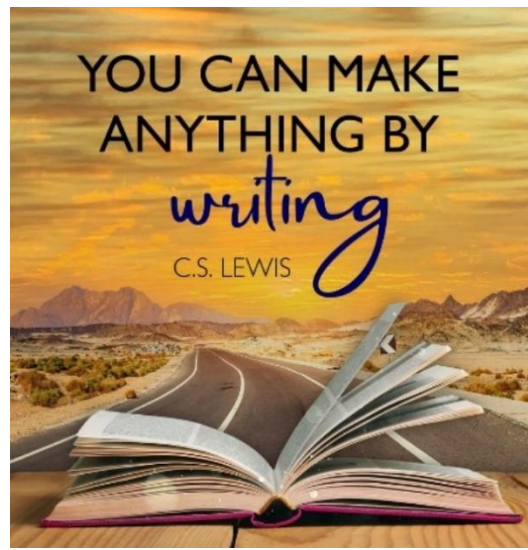
AUTHORSPUBLISH.COM has uploaded two interesting articles about writing. Here they are: Erika Hoffman's article entitled "How to Get Ideas for Stories! Stay Aware and Curious" and Jamie Madden's article, "Sometimes it Works, One Writer's Lesson in Persistence."

You can access these article by clicking on the following addresses:

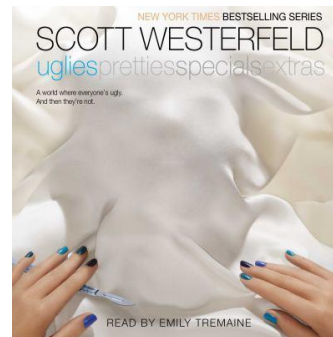
<https://authormagazine.org/articles/2025/11/3/how-to-get-ideas-for-stories-stay-aware-and-curious>

<https://authormagazine.org/articles/2025/11/3/sometimes-it-works-one-writers-lesson-in-persistence>

SEPTEMBER C. FAWKES, developmental editor extraordinaire, recently wrote a blog post detailing the pro's and con's of Stephanie Meyer's book *Twilight*, which turned twenty in December. If you've never heard of it, the story was a sensation in 2005, making the debut author a ton of money. The main plotline is that a girl falls in love with a vampire. The guy, for his part, is stricken with guilt over the relationship. Fawkes analyzes the story structure and character arcs with a surprising analysis. She says the vampire is the protagonist and Bella, the girl, is the viewpoint character. Even if Meyer's genre isn't your cup of tea, this appraisal will add to your knowledge and help you analyze your own characters and their motivations. Here's the web address:
<https://www.septembercfawkes/2025/09/the-story-structure-of-twilight-meyer.html>.



BOOK WITH A HOOK—AND WHAT A HOOK!



OWFI CONTEST OPEN NOW

It's time to edit your Galaxy entries and other manuscripts you've written to send to OWFI. You can enter all 37 categories for one low fee of \$35. The deadline is midnight, February 1, 2026. The categories are listed at <https://www.owfi.org/categories>. The submission guidelines are detailed here: <https://www.owfi.org/contest#SubG>.

GOOD LUCK!!

If you want to read a book with a powerful hook, then read Scott Westerfeld's book, *Uglies*. I ordered a copy after seeing several writing instructors use *Uglies* as a great example of a hook. It didn't disappoint. Westerfeld is also a master at being able to drop back story in as the plot moves along. The protagonist is Tally, a member of a group of ugly kids, who yearns to be sixteen, so she can have surgery to become one of the pretty teens. Her guy best friend is three

months older and has already had the surgery. He's moved to the town where all the pretties live and she misses him. *Uglies* is considered YA, but adults can enjoy it, too. There are three other books in the series: *Pretties*, *Specials*, and *Extras*.

WAY TO GO, GALAXY!

This year the Norman Galaxy of Writers donated \$375.00 to Center for Children and Families Inc. for Christmas. Checks totaled \$325 and cash was \$50.00. Thanks to everyone who contributed, especially at an important time to help a non-profit. It has been a tough year financially for most of us, and the non-profits, too, were affected with lower donations. I dropped off our club's assistance during the day on Christmas Eve and they were appreciative. – Mary A. Spaulding

DECEMBER 2025

Galaxy Treasurer's Report for JANUARY 2026

Writeline

PREVIOUS BALANCE: \$ 1,317.75

INCOME

Agiapal, '26 Dues	25.00
Botner, '26 Dues	25.00
Coker, '26 Dues	25.00
Payne, '26 Dues	25.00
Donations	25.00

TOTAL INCOME 125.00

SUB TOTAL \$ 1,442.75

EXPENSES

Donation to Lutheran University

Church., Ck #1738 50.00

Contest Awards

Cks #1710 - 1737 and 1741 300.00

Judith Coker, Reimbursement,
Ham and water, Ck #1739 41.78

Helen Duchon, Certificate
Reimbursement, Ck #1740 5.00

Mary Payne, Reimbursement,
'25 WL printing, party décor,
etc. Ck#1742 37.18

Mary Payne, (Unspent donation
for Luncheon Meat) possibly
for SUNSHINE FUND 18.22

TOTAL EXPENSE \$ 452.18

CURRENT BALANCE \$ 990.57

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**Allison K. Williams**

**JANUARY 7, 2026, NOON TO 1:30**

**CRAFT TALK ON ZOOM**

Get an extra boost to your writing for 2026! In this 90-minute webinar with Allison K Williams, you'll get clear on your goals and learn how to merge linear planning with creative flexibility to organize your files and your projects. You'll set (doable!) goals that matter and learn patterns to stay focused on your project despite the demands of work, family, and home. You'll get tips and tricks to stay motivated and confident when you're not getting much feedback, and easy, free ways to connect with other writers.

Allison is the author of *Seven Drafts* and a co-creator of Craft Talks with Sharla Yates. Early-bird registration is \$20. Late registration is \$30. Can't make it on January 7? No worries. Sharla sends out a replay within three business days to all registrants. Then you'll have thirty days to view it at your leisure.

Register at

<https://writingcraft.com/event/organize-your-writing-life/>

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### Membership Dues!

Galaxy dues for the membership year 2026 are \$25 and they become due on **January 1, 2026**. Please make your check payable to the Norman Galaxy of Writers.

Mail dues to: Galaxy Treasurer, P. O. Box 5581, Norman, OK 73070.

If you have any questions, please contact Treasurer Linda Basinger at [beammeuptoo@icloud.com](mailto:beammeuptoo@icloud.com)

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2025 NORMAN GALAXY OF WRITERS' CONTEST RESULTS

CRÈME-DE-LA-CRÈME WINNER — "Holding Space for Grace" — Gwenn Agiapal

ADULT SHORT STORY

- 1st Place — "The Bottle" — Rob Standridge
- 2nd Place — "Colored Water" — Mark Robinson
- 3rd Place — "Straddling Two Worlds" — Mary Payne
- Honorable Mention — "He Had Me at Hola!" — Lisbeth McCarty

CHILDREN'S FICTION

- 1st Place — "It's Me—George!" — Mary Ellen Hickman
- 2nd Place — "Charlie and the Crow" — Mary Payne
- 3rd Place — "Roy and the Rainbow" — Lisbeth McCarty

FLASH FICTION

- 1st Place — "Reaching for Mother" — Mary Payne
- 2nd Place — "Stepping Up for a Kiss" — Lisbeth McCarty
- 3rd Place — "Heart Trouble" — Judith Coker
- Honorable Mention — "Assisted Living" — Gwenn Agiapal

NONFICTION FEATURE STORY

- 1st Place — "Trauma and Tools that Heal" — Gwenn Agiapal
- 2nd Place — "Who Killed Homer Collyer" — Lisbeth McCarty
- 3rd Place — "Food for Thought" — Mary Payne

NOSTALGIA

- 1st Place — "Holding Space for Grace" — Gwenn Agiapal
- 2nd Place — "Buttons and Bows" — Judith Coker
- 3rd Place — "Monarchs in the Mimosa" — Lisbeth McCarty
- Honorable Mention — "Helen's Front Porch" — Vickie Riggs

NOVEL

- 1st Place — "Rhonda" — Linda Basinger
- 2nd Place — "A Morning in Barneyville" — Vickie Riggs
- 3rd Place — "Dinner or Donner" — Lisbeth L. McCarty

PERSONAL OPINION ESSAY

- 1st Place — "My Ancestors and Me" — Judith Coker
- 2nd Place — "My Opinion on How to Spot a Liar" — Lisbeth McCarty
- 3rd Place — "Americans Need to Take a Class in Health 101" — Mary Spaulding

RHYMED POETRY

- 1st Place — "No Repentance in a Ring" — Lisbeth McCarty
- 2nd Place — "Cat Yarn" — Douglas Botner
- 3rd Place — "Villanelle to Morning" — Judith Coker

UNRHYMED POETRY

- 1st Place — "Divided Highway"—Douglas Botner
- 2nd Place — "A Life Span"—Gwenn Agiapal

OUTSTANDING LITERARY MAGAZINES OPEN FOR SUBMISSION

A special section in the Nov/Dec 2025 issue of *Poets & Writers Magazine* details a number superb literary magazines that are open for submissions. It is possible that having your work published in one or more of these magazines will help you when you are querying agents/editors. That doesn't mean getting in these magazines is a walk in the park, but it is an avenue to pursue. Many of them charge a reading fee, perhaps \$3. It's recommended that authors follow each magazine's submission rules to the letter. Some offer waivers. Asterisked items have no reading fee. To give your submission a fighting chance, research each journal, possibly through chillsub.com, with “due diligence” before submitting.

Poetry: *Ninth Letter*, *Harbor Review*, * *Split Lip Magazine*, *Foglifter*, * *Bennington Review*, *Mizna*, * *Terrain.org*, * and *Arkansas International*.

Fiction: *The Common*, *Normal School*, *Adroit Journal*, * *Hunger Mountain*, *One Story*, * *Southern Humanities Review*, and *Georgia Review*.

Nonfiction: *Zyzzyva*, * *The Drift*, * *Emergence*, * *The Sun*, *Evergreen Review*, *Agni*, and *Hobart*. *

‘Strange and Unusual:’ *Villain Era*, * *Astrolabe*, * *Short Reads*, *Puerto del Sol*, * and *Complete Sentence*. *

Authors contributing to this section were: Dennis James Sweeney, Talia Lakshmi Kolluri, Marie Mutsuki Mockett, and Ander Monson. Also contributing was agent Natalie Edwards who wrote a column, “The Agent’s Perspective on Literary Magazines.”

Current issues of *Poets and Writers* are available in OU’s Bizzell Memorial Library, PS 128 C63.



“On a book cover, short words act differently than long words—they can be set larger, they look better stacked, they are often more legible in all caps...It’s helpful to think through how titles and subtitles will function geographically—that is, what the words will look like—while you’re still thinking through what those words will be.” --Debbie Berne, author of *The Design of Books*

[In this book, Berne shares more than anyone ever wanted to know about putting books together. However, she makes a good point that no one wants to read a book that’s not put together well and/or isn’t pleasant to hold. The more we learn about how books are designed, geographically and otherwise, the better chance we are giving our

own work-in-progress to see the light of day. I would recommend anyone who is even thinking about designing their own cover and/or formatting their own book to get *The Design of Books*.—Ed.]

CURBSIDE CHRONICLE is an Oklahoma City-based monthly magazine which aims



to eradicate homelessness. Unhoused people can apply to become vendors, selling the magazine on street corners. Articles and ads are of interest to people living in the Oklahoma City area. Each issue includes one big coupon each month. The December coupon allowed one person to tour the First Americans Museum for free any time before February 28, 2026. The selling price for the magazine is \$2. The vendors buy the magazines and they are allowed to keep part of the profit. They also earn points, depending on their sales volume. Vendors with more sales move up faster on the waiting list for the few housing units that are available. It's

one way to gauge how willing an unhoused person is to work.

Vendors are assigned to a street corner and given a green vest to symbolize the *Curbside Chronicle*. If you see an unhoused person on a street corner in a green vest, stop and buy a magazine. They aren't begging. Instead, they are working toward a real job and a place to live. Most need all the help they can get. In my opinion, the magazine is worth more than the two bucks.—Ed.



2025 WORDS OF THE YEAR: “SLOP” OR “PARASOCIAL”

Merriam-Webster analysts have determined the word ‘slop’ received the most lookups on their site during 2025. Slop is defined as ‘digital content of low quality that is produced usually in quantity by means of AI.’ Other words competing with ‘slop’ were gerrymander, performative, six seven (6-7), and touch grass.

Cambridge Dictionary chose the word ‘parasocial,’ which was derived from the number of hits on their site. Parasocial refers to Taylor Swift’s lyrics about dating and heartbreak. —From *USA Today* article published in the *Daily Oklahoman*, 12/18/2025. Author: Fernando Cervantes, Jr.

NORMAN GALAXY OF WRITERS' CRITIQUE-A-THON

Saturday, January 17, 2026

10 a.m. – Noon

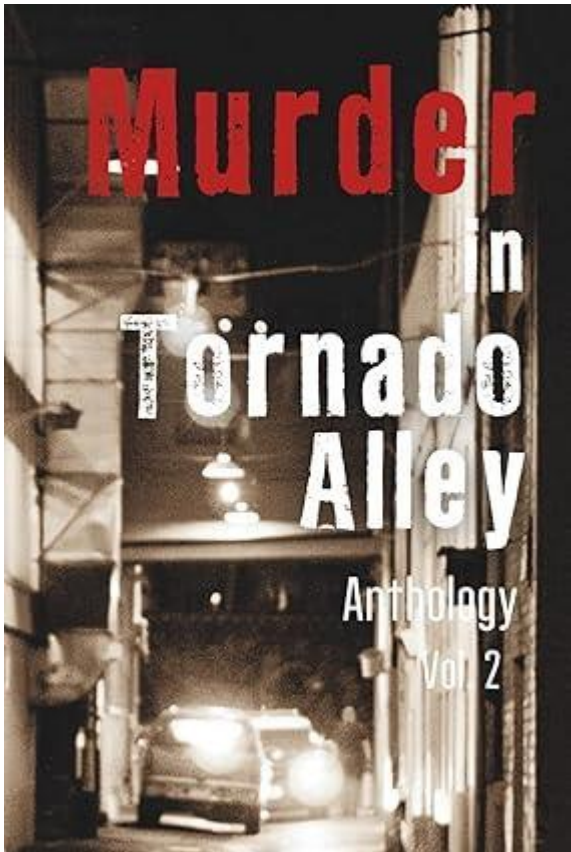
Norman West Library, 300 Center Ct.

(the old Borders' bookstore)

Bring 5 copies of up to 8 pages of your manuscript.

We'll beta read each other's work and you'll get immediate feedback! Come join us. We'd love to have you.

BRAGS

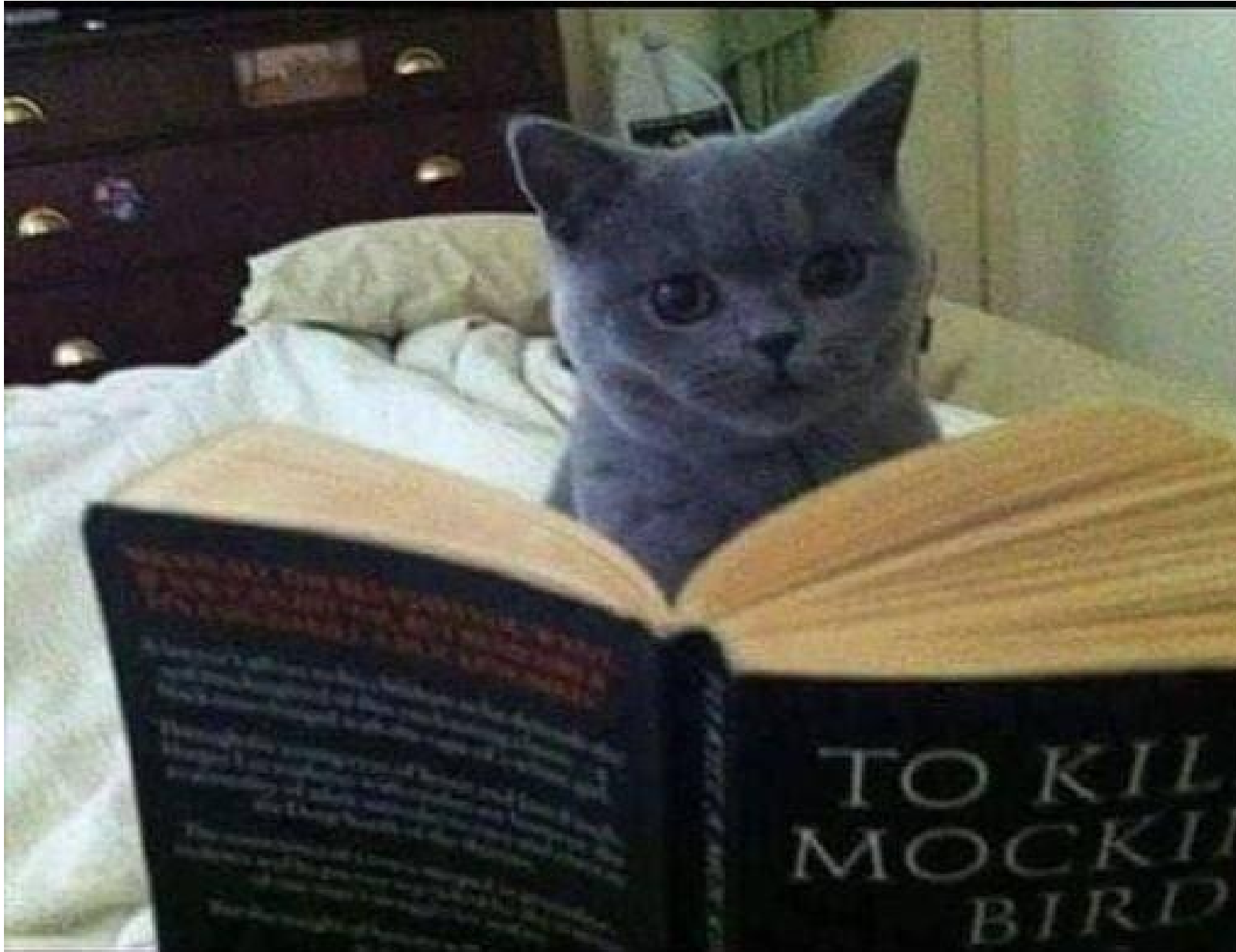


Stories of mystery and murder by Galaxy members **Linda Basinger, J.E. Raney, Peggy Chambers, Lisbeth McCarty**, and the late **Barbara Shepherd** are included in the new Tornado Alley anthology, *Murder in Tornado Alley, Vol. 2*. It's now available on Amazon.com. Here's the link:

<https://a.co/d/2TqmlyT>

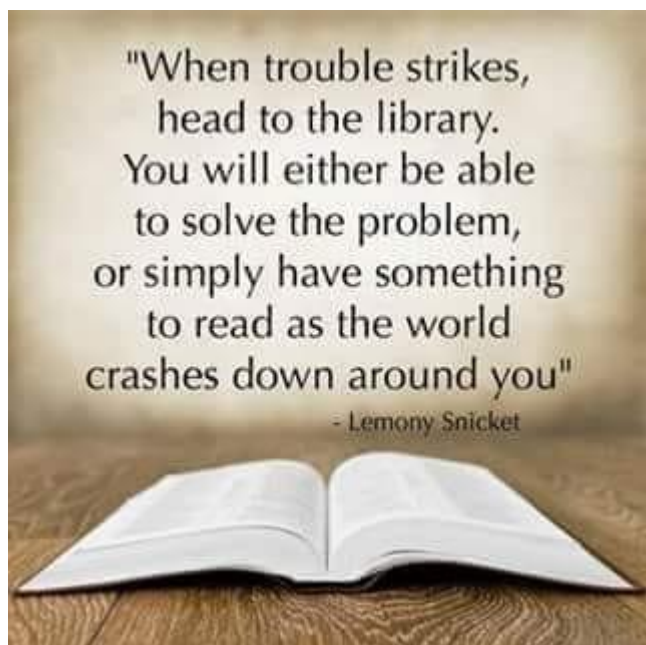


Mary Spaulding's two devotionals, “No One Left Behind” and “Staying Present” have been published in the December 2025 issue of *Strength and Grace*, a subsidiary of *Guideposts Magazine*.



**“Absolutely no information
on killing mocking birds
what so ever.”**

— Author Unknown



CENTRAL LIBRARY INFO!

The *Norman Transcript* (12/17/2025) reported that all parties to the Central Library litigation have agreed to mediation. If you remember, the library closed November 15, 2023, due to mold throughout the building. At issue is who is going to pay for what. Repairs to the building can begin as soon as mediation is complete. The date for mediation will be sometime in January or February 2026. It is estimated to take two-and-a-half years to fix the problems once repairs begin. The *Transcript* article was written by Zack Wright, a staff reporter. There's light at the end of the tunnel!

Smashwords' store adjusts royalty rates for 2026. The Smashwords e-book store (now owned and operated by Draft2Digital) has announced a new royalty rate structure that will go into effect on Jan. 1, 2026. The new payouts will be 75 percent for e-books priced at \$2.99 and higher or 40 percent for e-books priced below \$2.99.

This does mean lower earnings at most price points.
From Jane Friedman's *Bottom Line*.

Good News!!! We're Scheduled!

Rene Fortini, the Well's administrative assistant, has confirmed all of the Galaxy meeting dates for 2026 are on their calendar. They are:

January 10	July 11
February 14	August 8
March 14	September 12
April 11	October 10 (Contest)
May 9	November 14
June 13	December 12 (Holiday Party)

[www.facebook.com/Norman Galaxy](https://www.facebook.com/NormanGalaxy)

WRITELINE Norman Galaxy of Writers

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OWFI Delegates: Lisbeth McCarty, izzieshakespeare55@gmail.com and Linda Basinger, beammeuptoo@icloud.com



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