

Taylor University Professional Writers Conference 2024

Session Detail and Faculty Bios

Session 1 (Friday, 2:00–2:50)

10 Years, 40 Titles, 6 Secrets to Success

Glenys Nellist

Award-winning author Glenys Nellist has written forty books for children in the space of ten years. But her six secrets to success apply to all writers! In this encouraging session, Glenys will talk about her author journey and what she's learned along the way. Prepare to be inspired! (This session will be repeated on Saturday at 4:00 p.m.)

SEO Basics

Grant Patterson

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the study of how the algorithms of websites such as Google, Facebook, and Tik Tok choose which webpages or posts to recommend to users. It is essential knowledge for anyone wanting to market themselves in the modern age. Grant Patterson, the Webmaster at Visit Indiana, discusses the basics SEO and how to use it to market your website.

How to Write a Novel

PeggySue Wells

Get a simple process for a big project including guidelines for word count, genre, and marketing.

Session 2 (Friday, 3:00–3:50)

Practical Creativity: Putting Creativity to Work in Your Writing Life

Ann Byle

Writing is a creative endeavor, but sometimes the slog of coming up with ideas or making a word count can take the *creative* out of your writing. Ann Byle, author of *Chicken Scratch: Lessons on Living Creatively from a Flock of Hens*, offers advice, activities, and a bit of fun as you learn to incorporate more creative magic into your writing and life.

How to Build a Website with SEO in Mind

Grant Patterson

A follow-up session to the SEO Basics presentation, Grant Patterson, webmaster at Visit Indiana, walks attendees through how to build a website of brand marketing using target audiences, keywords, and marketing funnels as guides. This is an applicable presentation of how to apply SEO to a website from the ground up.

How to Create a Memorable Fantasy or Sci-Fi World

Josiah DeGraaf

Your fantastical setting can be so much more than a geographically rearranged Europe or a single climate expanded to fill an entire world. The secret to memorable worldbuilding, however, is to worldbuild *deeply*, not broadly. In this session, Josiah DeGraaf will unpack what the most successful authors of our day do to craft worlds that captivate readers, and how you can replicate that in your own stories. You don't need to take decades like Tolkien to develop a realistic fantasy world!

Roundtable Discussions (Friday, 4:00–4:50)

Join in with this new concept—less teaching, more discussion on the following topics:

Get Serious About Your Goals with a New Style of Writing Group

Writer Chick Society: Donna Cronk, Janet Leonard, Cathy Shouse, Susan M. Sparks

In 2021 four writers of different genres from separate towns were merely acquaintances when they formed a unique writing group. Over the next two years, they boosted one another to new heights in their careers, publishing multiple books among them, snagging a multitude of speaking engagements, and more. Their bond has only grown since then and their accomplishments continue to surprise even them. They were all successful writers but became more so as a unit. Cathy Shouse, Donna Cronk, Janet Hart Leonard, and Susan Sparks will spill the secrets of the Writer Chicks Society in this fun and informative roundtable session.

Finding Success as a Self-Published Author

Sherwood DeVisser

Are you considering self-publishing? Wondering the good, the bad, the ugly, and the wonderful? Come chat with Sherwood DeVisser, author of *Raspberry Wars*, a true story of survival, forgiveness, healing, and redemption.

Why Write Fantasy for the Adult Market?

Josiah DeGraaf

Fantasy isn't just for kids. But why would you want to write fantasy anyway? Come discuss!

Session 3 (Saturday, 10:00–10:50)

Make Money Writing for Specialty Markets

Lin Johnson

A wide variety of markets for freelance writers exists outside of periodicals and books. These include curriculum, Bible study guides, drama, puzzles, games, crafts, tracts, devotions, and greeting cards. In this workshop, you'll gain an introduction to these genres, learn about any special qualifications for writing them, and become acquainted with potential markets for your manuscripts.

Build Strong: Creating an Outline for Your Nonfiction Book

Ann Byle

A strong building begins with strong inner supports, and so does your nonfiction book. We'll look at the infrastructure your project needs—clear purpose and audience, strong message and structure, useful takeaways and more—so you can begin concentrated work on your nonfiction project.

Point of View

PeggySue Wells

Whose view do you use? What is the best POV for the project? The chapter?

Session 4 (Saturday, 11:00–11:50)

Bible Journeys: Teaching the Bible Like a Tour Guide

Sharla Fritz

Discover how to escort your listeners or readers like a tour guide directing a life-changing journey. In this session, Bible study author Sharla Fritz will give you the tools necessary to craft a dynamic talk, article, or book based on a

Bible passage. You will learn how to prepare for the expedition (research the passage), lead the journey (guide readers or listeners through the passage), and return home transformed (apply biblical truths to everyday life).

The First Verb: A Life-Changing Theology of Creativity

Colleen Warren

Rising frustration with her failure to commit to regular practice of her creativity finally resulted in a desperate New Year's resolution that literally changed the trajectory of her life. Colleen Warren shares her story, outlining mindsets and practices that can increase your personal range of creativity, and offering ways to carve out time to develop the creativity God expects you to express.

Research for Novel Writers

Susie Finkbeiner

Information is easier to access than ever before, so it would stand to reason that research for novel writers would be easy! Not exactly. Historical fiction writer Susie Finkbeiner will give tips, tricks and best practices for efficient, effective, and fun research.

Session 5 (Saturday, 1:00–1:50)

Telling a Story that People Want to Read

Janet Hart Leonard

It will be from my experience as well as from my research. Don't just tell the facts. Make people think, but most of all, make them feel! It's all about the emotions your words evoke.

Writing Personal Experience Articles

Lin Johnson

A story is a great way to capture people's attention and teach them biblical truths in an easy-to-swallow fashion. Most people like stories, but not all stories are fiction. Some are true personal experiences—yours or someone else's—that will help readers see God in action and learn to trust Him more.

But I'm Not Funny! Helps to Up the Humor Level in Your Writing

Rachael Phillips

What makes writing funny? Is there a secret to humor writing? What if you don't *feel* like a funny person—can you write comedy? Rachael Phillips has been making people laugh for a lot of years, so she has a few ideas to share with you.

Session 6 (Saturday, 2:00–2:50)

Editorial Budgeting: Which Edits Are Worth the Cost?

Tim Pietz

Editors are great! They're also expensive. Is there a way to cut corners without . . . well . . . cutting corners? As both a freelance editor for self-publishing authors and a submissions reviewer for a traditional fiction publisher, Tim Pietz has seen authors who overpaid, authors who underpaid, and authors who didn't pay at all (and it showed). Whatever your publication goals, this session will help you prioritize your editorial needs and make the most out of your editing budget.

Finding Your Way to Being a Newspaper Columnist

Janet Hart Leonard

How to get your point across in a story. How to find your readers, charm them and leave them wanting more. How to endear yourself to your reader.

Authentic Characterization in Historical Fiction (Rupp 205)

Susie Finkbeiner

Characters can either make or break a novel. This is especially true in historical fiction. But how do we write characters who are not only true to who they are, but also true to the era in which they're set? Susie Finkbeiner has some ideas. Come to this interactive workshop with a pen, paper, and willingness to get some writing done!

Session 7 (Saturday, 3:00–3:50)

7 Things I Wish I Had Known When I Started Speaking

Sharla Fritz

You have your awesome presentation ready. You've practiced it and polished it. Now you just need a place to speak! In this presentation, author and speaker Sharla Fritz will share tips to get you started including creating promotional materials, finding speaking opportunities, and establishing fees. Most of all, you'll be encouraged to leave the outcomes in God's hands.

Fiction Proposal Pitfalls: Common Reasons Publishers Turn Authors Down

Tim Pietz

The rejection letter is too often an enigma. What's going on in those people's minds when they snub your pride and joy with a form letter? Fortunately for you, Tim Pietz is one of "those people," and better yet, he won't be reciting any form letters. Whether you're an aspiring author with a work-in-progress or you've already entered the querying phase, this session will explore some of the common fiction proposal pitfalls and how to avoid them.

Becoming Sherlock and Watson: How to Compose a Mystery or Thriller

Jori Hanna

One of the hardest parts of writing a mystery novel is being smarter than the villain, smarter than the detective, and still having the detective be the smartest person in the room. In this class, we'll look at how to make your detective unique, the natural beats of a mystery or thriller plot, and how pacing affects the impact of your story.

Session 8 (Saturday, 4:00–4:50)

10 Years, 40 Titles, 6 Secrets to Success

Glenys Nellist

Award-winning author Glenys Nellist has written forty books for children in the space of ten years. But her six secrets to success apply to all writers! In this encouraging session, Glenys will talk about her author journey and what she's learned along the way. Prepare to be inspired!

Writing Naturally: Nature Writing as Wonder and Worship

Colleen Warren

This session will explore the ways in which spending time in nature enhances the writing process and offers suggestions, gleaned from the writer's decades of experience in writing and reading about nature, on how to make your nature writing more vivid and purposeful, as well as how to make writing about nature a form of worship that deepens your relationship with God.

Writing the Cozy Mystery

Rachael Phillips

In this session, participants will learn how to keep readers gasping, grinning and turning those pages! Details about creating potent plots, characters, clues and red herrings will be discussed. Attendees will learn the important role of humor in keeping the scary mystery cozy. Finally, samples of a synopsis, event calendar, and murder schedule will be shared, all of which help keep the story on track and prevent a writer from painting her characters—and herself—into a corner. Questions will be welcome!

Faculty Bios

Lynn Austin

Lynn Austin has sold nearly two million copies of her books worldwide. She has won eight Christy Awards for her historical fiction and was one of the first inductees into the Christy Award Hall of Fame. One of her novels, *Hidden Places*, was made into a Hallmark Channel Original movie starring actress Shirley Jones. Lynn and her husband have three grown children and four grandchildren. They make their home in western Michigan. Visit her online at lynnaustin.org.

Ann Byle

Ann Byle is a freelance writer, book and publishing coach, and author of several books including *Chicken Scratch: Lessons on Living Creatively from a Flock of Hens*, which released in 2023. She writes news pieces and features for *Christianity Today*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *Grand Rapids Magazine*, and cowrote *When Angels Fight: My Story of Escaping Sex Trafficking and Leading a Revolt Against the Darkness* and the e-book *The Joy of Working at Home: Embracing the Freedom, Avoiding the Pitfalls*. She and her family live in West Michigan. Find her on Instagram and at www.annbylewriter.com.

Josiah DeGraaf

Josiah DeGraaf is the program director of the Young Writer's Workshop and the marketing director of Story Embers. His passion is for helping Christian writers enthrall readers with honest storytelling. His short story collection, *Visions of Grandeur (and Other Stories)*, features tales about Medieval superheroes who need to decide how far they're willing to go to save lives. He lives in a small river town just north of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. You can find him online at josiahdegraaf.com.

Susie Finkbeiner

Susie Finkbeiner is the author of *Stories That Bind Us*, *The Nature of Small Birds*, and *All Manner of Things*. *The All-American* is her ninth novel. She and her husband live in West Michigan with their three teenaged children. www.susiefinkbeiner.com

Sharla Fritz

Sharla Fritz has been described as an amazing eye-opening speaker and author. Her books *Measured by Grace*, *God's Relentless Love*, *Enough for Now*, *Waiting*, *Soul Spa*, *Divine Design*, and *Bless These Lips* have given thousands of women the tools to dig into Scripture and experience a transformation of their attitudes and heart. With light-hearted stories and thought-provoking applications, she makes Bible studies fun and uplifting. Sharla's articles have appeared at *iBelieve.com*, *incourage.com*, *The Mudroom*, *The Redbud Post*, *Today's Christian Woman*, *Just Between Us*, and *Lutheran Women's Quarterly*. Stitching her messages with humor and honesty, Sharla speaks to hundreds of women each year at retreats, luncheons, and mom's groups. Her home is in the Chicago area where she is also a pastor's wife, mother, grandmother, musician, and confirmed chocoholic. And if she is not sitting at her piano or computer, you might find her stalking fabulous fashion finds at the local resale shop.

Jori Hanna

Jori Hanna is a writer and editor from Centennial, Colorado. She graduated from Taylor University with a Bachelor of Science in Professional Writing and immensely loves the publishing industry. She's moved around the industry from agenting to acquisitions to marketing and cover design and is a true jack-of-all-trades when it comes to book production and sales in both the independent and traditional sides of the industry. In 2020 she dove into online marketing for bestselling and award-winning author Elizabeth Musser, and in 2021 she jumped into publicity and

editorial work full-time with Light Messages Publishing and Torchflame Books. She is now the Director of Marketing and Public Relations for Torchflame Books, a small hybrid publishing house based in California. She works daily with authors across genres to build a community around themselves and create active, effective platforms to help them sell more books in both her job at the publishing company and through her freelance marketing company, Hanna Book Solutions. She is passionate about helping others reach their full potential through writing, editing, design, and platform development, and strives to help the authors she works with produce beautiful, top-quality end products they can be proud of. In her free time, you can find her baking, working out, reading a new suspense novel, or drinking coffee (sometimes all at the same time). She loves anything that will give her an adrenaline rush and is always looking for the next great thriller to curl up with. Visit her online at authorjjhanna.com or hannabooksolutions.wordpress.com, or drop a follow on social media @authorjjhanna and @jjhannaacademy.

Lin Johnson

Lin Johnson is a full-time freelancer, whose business includes editing, writing, proofreading, and training writers. She is the editor-administrator of *The Christian Writers Market Guide*, a proofreader and editor for Friends of Israel and David C. Cook curriculum, and former managing editor of *Christian Communicator* and *Advanced Christian Writer*. Lin also teaches at writers conferences around the world. Author of more than 70 books, Lin specializes in Bible curriculum and is a Gold Medallion Book Award and an Evangelical Press Association Higher Goals award recipient. She has a B.A. in Christian education from Cedarville University, a B.A. in Bible-theology from Moody Bible Institute, and an M.S. in adult and continuing education from National-Louis University. Her website: wordprocommunications.com.

Janet Hart Leonard

In 2006, while selling cars and trucks, Janet Hart Leonard sent her story to a newspaper on a dare and has written a weekly column, *From the Hart*, in the Hamilton County Reporter ever since. She shares her life, opinions, and faith with her readers. After being single for fourteen years, Janet Hart found the love of her life in the waiting room at the car dealership. She and Chuck Leonard have been married for nine years. They live in their 117-year-old house where Janet bakes chocolate cream pies and writes from her kitchen table while watching the birds and flowers where she and Chuck are enjoying their vintage years. In May 2022, Janet published her first book, *When the Hart Speaks: Whimsy and Wisdom from the Little House on the Alley*. Book #2 is a work in progress...stay tuned. Find her at www.janethartleonard.com.

Glenys Nellist

Glenys Nellist was born and raised in a little village in northern England. The author of multiple award-winning children's books, including the bestselling *'Twas the Evening of Christmas*, *The Wonder That is You*, and five popular series: *Love Letters from God*, *Snuggle Time*, *'Twas*, *Good News* and *Little Mole*, her writing reflects a deep passion for helping children discover joy and hope in the world. Glenys lives in Michigan with her husband, David.

Grant Patterson

Grant Patterson graduated Taylor University in 2023 after studying three years to get his degree in professional writing. During his time at Taylor, he found a passion for Search Engine Optimization and Website Design. He ended up studying it and writing a final paper on his findings. After he graduated, he became the webmaster at Visit Indiana, the tourism arm of the state government, and has happily brought his talents back to Taylor University to teach others about SEO and help them market themselves online.

Rachael Phillips

Rachael, a church music director, began her unplanned writing career in the 1990s when the church secretary demanded newsletter articles at gunpoint. A past Erma Bombeck Global Award winner, Rachael laces most of her

works with upbeat, offbeat humor. Since winning a 2007 American Christian Fiction Writers Genesis award and being nominated for a Carol Award for her first novella, she has published two more novellas and 19 novels, with another to release later in 2022. She also has written 800 articles, newspaper columns, devotions and stories, as well as four biographies. She cowrote a *Women of the Bible* reference guide with two other authors. She and husband Steve, a retired doctor and adjunct professor at Taylor University, have been married for 47 years and live in Upland, Indiana. They have three grown children and seven perfect grandchildren.

Tim Pietz

At age 12, Tim Pietz read through Tolkien's *The Return of the King* in a single day. Concerned he would run out of good books if he continued reading at this pace, Tim had no choice but to pursue a career in publishing. Tim currently serves as the publicity manager and acquisitions assistant for [Mountain Brook Ink](#). He is also a certified substantive editor with the Christian Editor Connection (CEC) and has had the privilege of editing for Tyndale House, Wheaton Press, Lighthouse Publishing of the Carolinas, and individual authors. You can learn more about Tim and his editing services at his website, [InkSwordEditing.com](#).

Colleen Warren

Colleen Warren is a professor at Taylor University, where she has taught American literature, literary theory, and composition for over thirty years. She has four grown children and four grandchildren and enjoys hiking, drawing, creating altered books, designing leather journals, and spending time in her Thoreauvian cabin in the woods. She is the author of *Annie Dillard and the Word Made Flesh: An Incarnational Theory of Language* (Lehigh UP, 2010), *Reentering Eden: Christian Meditation in Nature* (Smyth and Helwys, 2022), and the forthcoming *The First Verb: Cultivating Christian Creativity* (Cascade Books, 2024).

James Watkins

James Watkins is an award-winning author and speaker who is 70 years old, although he prefers to think of himself as 30 with 40 years of experience. His latest book, *Praise the Lord and Pass the Prozac*, written with daughter and licensed therapist, Faith A. Watkins, combines biblical and behavioral encouragement and practical tips for dealing with depression, anxiety, stress, and many more issues. Jim began his career speaking with teenagers, but now provides his hope and humor for senior citizens. The Circle of Life. James is the author of 20 traditionally published books and over 2,500 articles in national magazines, as well as being a popular speaker across the United States and overseas. Best of all, he has eight adorable grandchildren!

PeggySue Wells

PeggySue Wells parasails, skydives, snorkels, scuba dives, and has taken (but not passed) pilot training. Solo mom of seven and founder of [SingleMomCircle.com](#), she is the author of 30 books translated into eight languages including *The Ten Best Decisions A Single Mom Can Make*, *Homeless for the Holidays*, *Chasing Sunrise*, and *The Patent*. PeggySue ghostwrites, edits, and coaches writing.

Roundtable Leaders

Sherwood Devisser

Born into a family with special needs in a small, Dutch Michigan town in the early 1960s and raised by his deeply religious grandmother, Sherwood Devisser navigates the horrors of bullying at home and at school. He tries to create safe spaces wherever he goes in attempts to stave off bullying. Sherwood, a native Michigander, survived an astounding true-life story that he put together in his first book titled, *Raspberry Wars*. It is a true story of survival, forgiveness, healing and redemption. He is here to share his encouraging stories with us. Visit [raspberrypwars.com](#).

Writer Chick Society

Donna Cronk

Hoosier Donna Cronk is a career newspaper journalist and author of two inspirational novels: *Sweetland of Liberty Bed & Breakfast* and *That Sweet Place: At Home in the Heartland*. Her most recent book is a memoir, *There's a Clydesdale in the Attic: Reflections on Keeping and Letting Go*. Donna enjoys providing entertaining programs using themes found in her books and life for social and service groups and book clubs. Find her at DonnaCronk.com.

Janet Leonard

Janet has been sharing her life, opinions and faith in her weekly column since 2006, *From the Hart*, in the Hamilton County Reporter. Her first book, *When the Hart Speaks: Whimsy and Wisdom from the Little House on the Alley* was published in 2022. Book #2 is a work in progress...stay tuned. Find her at janethartleonard.com.

Cathy Shouse

Cathy Shouse's stories have appeared in dozens of newspapers and magazines, including *Family Fun* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. A Midwest Writers Workshop Fellow, the debut of Cathy's popular cowboy romance series starring the Galloway sons was funded by the Indiana Arts Commission, which nudged her on to write fiction inspired by living on a farm in "small town" Indiana. Find her at CathyShouse.com.

Susan M. Sparks

After 25 years in newspaper and public affairs writing, Susan Sparks launched her freelance career specializing in non-fiction ghostwriting for entrepreneurs and experts. She has ghostwritten over two dozen books and served as developmental editor and coach for dozens more. She is the author of two books, in two compilations, and promotes plant-exclusive eating through her site, [The Plant Powered Pen](http://ThePlantPoweredPen.com).