JULY 13, 2026

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YOUR GUIDE TO SELF-PUBLISHING

26 New BookLife Titles Published

The Little Indie That Could

An author reflects on the thrill ride of her publishing journey

BY JULIE ANN SIPOS



SIPOS © ADRIANNE MATHIOWETZ

I didn't found a woman-owned micropress because I had a vision. I founded one because I lacked sufficient data.

Had I known anything about margins, promo cliffs, or algorithmic mood swings, I would have hit the #1 new release spot in preorder and retired somewhere in Maine near Stephen King–certain to dine out for life on my KDP-blessed *Misery* cosplay.

I had an unpublished debut novel people were saying good things about. I brought a stubborn sense of humor–and a relatable series heroine who refused to sit down. The only thing missing was a spreadsheet explaining why naming her CEO of my creative life was a terrible idea.

Horrible Women, Wonderful Girls introduces Jaycee Grayson, a disgraced Hollywood executive who follows the hollow promise of sisterhood into a famous Midwest doll empire. Small-town life beckons like a giant welcome pie. The smiles are phony. The rot is real.

Jaycee's defining trait isn't her messiness or her mouth (though both are formidable), but her complete disinterest in asking for permission. Writing her felt like installing a live wire in the manuscript and hoping it didn't burn down the house.

I had to wonder whether Jaycee could survive not only a satirical novel but also a hostile marketplace. Nor did I expect her to move right in and start rearranging the furniture to accommodate a home business.

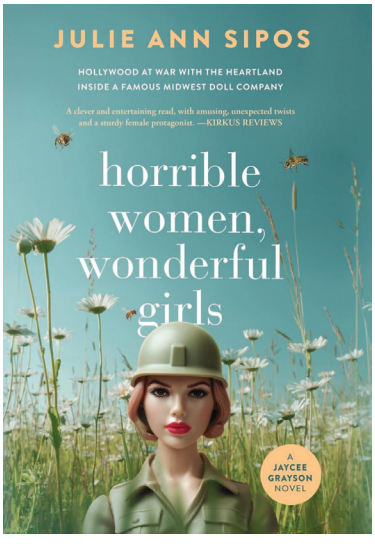
Had I paused to investigate the emotional whiplash of topping the charts for a day or two before vanishing into the Kindle abyss, I'd have shut the MacBook, called my mother to cry, and taken a restorative nap with a bag of Swedish candy. Instead, I hit publish. Then I called IKEA to order a fabulous desk chair. On credit.

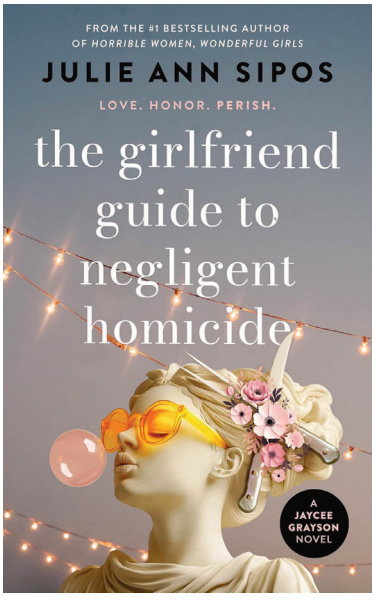
I didn't set out to build a business, but to tell a story of resilience and reinvention, trusting a relentless heroine to light the way for no better reason than she said so.

When your heroine grabs the wheel

Being fictitious, Jaycee's main goal is to shine a light on corporate greed, assessing power, identifying leverage, and moving before the risk is fully calculable—and therefore at its most hilarious. By which I mean she forges faulty alliances, picks the wrong guy, and leans on a colorful band of misfits even more desperate than she is for a life win.

Oh, I can structure some solid drama on the page, but escalating stakes can deliver uncontrolled outcomes here in the real world, where consensus, compliance, and "best practices" govern creative economies for a reason. The traditional path to publishing responds with a series of slow, sensible steps: query, wait, revise expectations downward, repeat. Jaycee doesn't have that kind of free time. She's dealing with a 100-year-old murder and a billion-dollar secret, doing the next right thing against every mounting obstacle.





With Joseph Campbell unavailable for a personal beta read, I had no choice but to seize control of my own destiny. Fortune may favor the bold, but would it reward the ill-informed? Somewhere between trying to scrape together the cash to hire a human being to narrate the audiobook and maybe pick up the latest version of Publisher Rocket, I founded my publishing house Dartmouth Park—without a five-year plan, a safety net, or assets of any kind. (I suppose there's my car, which drips oil in the drive while flashing ominous signs about coolant levels.)

The ride begins

Most indie success stories skip the part where momentum is, by definition, nonlinear. The novel hit #1 during all the coveted newsletter promotions, sitting smugly between Carl Hiaasen and Emily Henry. Then it fell. It climbed. It disappeared again.

What felt like failure turned out to be the thrill of a theme park ride shaped like Freytag's Pyramid with a noisier chain lift and a steeper drop. And, because no one told me you can't build a brand ecosystem around a satirical novel, I escalated instead of retreating around every hairpin turn.

A companion cookbook voiced by the characters charted in Amish and Mennonite cooking. An epistolary postcard book became a top travel guide to a place that doesn't exist. Book two of the series, *The Girlfriend Guide to Negligent Homicide*, publishes July 25, 2026. A merch line sprang up around reader-favorite lines that my summer interns (paid exclusively in enthusiasm) dubbed "Jaycee-isms," while shooting Instagram unboxings starring my rightly suspicious wiener dog.

How it worked

Conventional wisdom tells authors to "find our audience," as if the reader is lost and we're leading some crack literary rescue team nobody called. But our people don't want to be chased, tracked, or optimized. They want to recognize themselves.

Through small giveaways, community-driven merch, and authentic messaging, Bookstagram fell in love with a heroine not engineered to be very likable. A friend arranged a hometown author reading and coveted indie bookstore signing that led to the book fair circuit. Another leveraged her theater background to comb ACX for the voice of Jaycee Grayson, recently debuting on Audible.

And it turns out that Publisher Rocket offers free SEO updates, with reverse ASIN searches revealing that my book was duking it out in the wrong neighborhood. It does best shelved politely between Fredrik Backman and Kristin Hannah, crashing the occasional Kindle stuffing party with Liane Moriarty and the ghost of Nora Ephron.

A Christmas Eve reader review captured the book better than its jacket copy: "Humor isn't used to soften the blow—it sharpens it. The satire lands because it's rooted in emotional truth, not cleverness for its own sake. When the book is funny, it's because laughing is the only reasonable response to the absurdity of systems that destroy people while congratulating themselves for doing it."

These are the lines the interns are currently fighting to put on our logo mugs: "Move first. Apologize never." "The truth has teeth. Satire bites back." "Comedy is tragedy with better lighting." "Success doesn't climb. It spikes." "When in doubt, publish anyway."

I didn't set out to build a business, but to tell a story of resilience and reinvention, trusting a relentless heroine to light the way for no better reason than she said so. The little indie that could isn't a fairy tale. It's a rollercoaster car paused briefly at the top, clicking ominously, giving you just enough time to wonder if you tightened the strap. Then it drops.

Julie Ann Sipos is a screenwriter and entertainment executive.

BookLife Talks with Som Phin

Despite writing in many different genres, all of Phin's works have one thing in common: the inclusion of Cambodian history and mythology. We spoke to Phin about her writing process and goals for her work.



Can you talk a little about your background and how you got into writing?
Growing up Cambodian-American, I rarely encountered Cambodian characters or Khmer mythology in the books I loved. Cambodia often appeared only in discussions of war, while its folklore, history, and everyday humanity remained largely absent. Writing became my way of helping fill that space.

Today, I write across fantasy, literary fiction, historical fiction, and LGBTQ+ fiction because each genre allows me to explore different aspects of the Cambodian experience. Whether I'm writing about ancient kingdoms, modern families, or mythical beings, my goal is the same: to tell stories that feel emotionally authentic while introducing readers to the richness of Khmer culture.

Many of your books feature time travel or transmigration. What draws you to those genres?
I've always been fascinated by the idea that history is never truly behind us. The choices people made generations ago continue to shape who we are today. Time travel and transmigration let me bring the past into direct conversation with the present. Rather than treating history as something distant, they allow characters to experience it personally. They ask questions like: If we could meet our ancestors, would we understand them differently? How do memories, traditions, and inherited experiences influence our lives?

These stories also create opportunities to introduce readers to Cambodian history and mythology in ways that feel immersive rather than instructional.

When planning your books, do you already have a time period or myth in mind? Or does that come later once you've found the characters and their story?
Usually, the historical period or myth comes first. I'll become fascinated by a particular moment in Cambodian history or a piece of Khmer folklore, and then I begin asking what kind of characters could naturally live within that world. Research is an important part of my process, but it always serves the story. I want readers to become invested in the characters first. Once they care about the people, they're often eager to learn about the history, traditions, and beliefs surrounding them.

You've described your work as "preserving culture through storytelling". Why do you think it's important to do this?
Stories are one of the ways cultures endure. They carry language, values, traditions, and memories from one generation to the next. For Cambodia, preserving those stories feels especially meaningful. There is incredible beauty in Khmer mythology, history, dance, food, architecture, and everyday life that deserves to be celebrated alongside the country's more difficult history.

If someone finishes one of my novels wanting to learn more about Cambodia, try Khmer food, visit Angkor, or simply see Cambodian people in a fuller, more human way, then I feel I've accomplished something worthwhile.

What can readers expect next from you?
Readers can expect more stories that continue exploring Cambodian history and mythology across multiple genres. I'm expanding my interconnected Khmer fantasy universe while also writing literary fiction centered on family, identity, and the Cambodian diaspora.

One of my long-term goals is to build one of the most comprehensive catalogs of Khmer-inspired fiction across multiple genres. Whether a reader picks up one of my fantasy novels, a historical romance, or a work of literary fiction, I hope they'll discover something meaningful about Cambodia's history, culture, and people.

No matter the genre, I want each book to tell a compelling story while inviting readers to experience the richness of Khmer culture. If my novels inspire someone to learn more about Cambodia or see it through a new perspective, then I've accomplished what I set out to do.

For more, visit **booklife.com/phin**

booklife REVIEWS

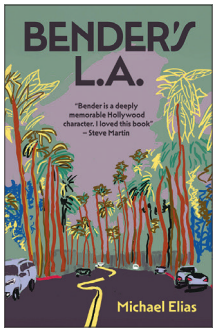
BookLife Reviews are paid reviews of independently published books. A lightning bolt (⚡) indicates an Editor's Pick, a book of outstanding quality.

FICTION

EDITOR'S PICK

Bender's L.A.

Michael Elias | Sticking Place Books
244p, trade paper, $19.99, ISBN 979-8-89976-68-8



Brisk, dishy, and often laugh-out-loud funny, this sharply honed novel from author/screenwriter Elias (*Night Dive*) steeps readers in the everyday life of the cocaine-powered Hollywood 1970s and 80s. Ambitious sitcom writer David Bender is well paid and on the ascent, but he yearns to break into film as he faces anxieties artistic and romantic after his wife asks for a divorce. Still, his career moves through studio meetings and tax brackets, with Bender keeping it together at parties, meetings, and trysts, wondering what he really wants—and worrying even his dreams might be plagiarized.

With crisp scenecraft and quotable dialogue, Elias aces the textures of Hollywood life, pairing a killer instinct for insider detail with surprising, relatable warmth. Bender fears he might be a hack, especially when he's hired to work over an outdated script by Julius (*Casablanca*) Epstein, but Epstein himself dismisses any sense of

Stellar comic novel of surviving in 1970s Hollywood.

Great for fans of Eve Babitz; John Gregory Dunne's *Monster.*

betrayal, saying "If not you, someone else." Even satiric characterization feels drawn from life: highlights include a stoned night out with a regal actor of the golden age; meetings with a high-on-codeine director; and the actress who doesn't want her romance with Bender to go public because "Writers are always trying to sell something." Women move through his ife like players entering/exiting a stage, but the one readers will invest in is teetotaling, scene-stealing Mimi, based on Elias's real-life friend Eve Babitz.

Babitz herself would have relished this exploration of the Hollywood routines and obsessions—tennis, drugs—that help sensitive Bender survive the alienations of his industry. The work itself is almost an afterthought, as readers learn little about the sitcoms that make Bender a mint; his most successful screenplay receives just a paragraph or so, but it's a marvelous idea. Avoiding cliches about tortured screenwriters, the novel abounds with rich but seemingly offhand detail that will convince, amuse, and often move readers.

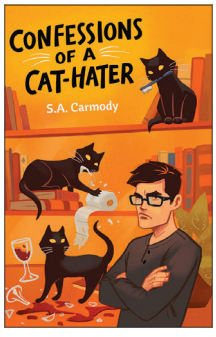
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

FICTION

EDITOR'S PICK

Confessions of a Cat-Hater

S. A. Carmody | KMCS Publishing
404p, mass market, $11.99, ISBN 978-1-918-25942-1



This touching, hilarious send-up from Carmody (*Rocket to the Past*) reveals, with patience and sincerity, how cat ownership can heal. For 34 years, London-based Francis Butler has lived a life of precision and order as a project manager filling out spreadsheets. One day Francis finds a black cat at his door, looking as though it has an appointment. He lets it inside and posts an ad for a lost cat. Overnight, the cat's destruction is apocalyptic, prompting this all-too-relatable question: "What kind of creature produces chaos as a by-product of existing?" The next morning Agnes Landon explains that Hannibal escaped from her aunt's cat rescue, and asks Francis to hold onto Hannibal, who has anxiety and a superiority complex, until she can collect him later. Thus begins a feline odyssey of discovery and connection with laughs as big as its heart.

As Hannibal sheds fur and settles down on Francis's bedroom pillow, Carmody's

Charming, heartfelt story of an unpredictable cat and a troubled young man.

Great for fans of Cleveland Amory's *The Cat Who Came for Christmas*, Gwen Cooper's *Homer's Odyssey.*

begrudging protagonist admits that the cat's purring has a calming influence. But soon an expertly staged comic moment goes viral, prompting more upheaval in Francis's life. But, through therapy, Agnes's gentle prodding, and his surprisingly rich new feline relationship, Francis find the determination to build a new, livelier life. Carmody's prose is as warm as a cat in your lap, and the novel deftly links Francis's opening himself to the cat to helping himself face his problems.

Endearing, laugh-out-loud funny, with droll humor and marvelous quips, the novel provides a nuanced psychological portrait of a tormented man working through his trauma. Francis disliked unpredictability, but cats are unpredictable, which taught him to open himself up to attachments and the opportunities that come with chaos. Cat owners will sympathize with Francis's plight as well as his new bond.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

FICTION

Tao of Life and Death: A Tale

Stephen McDonough
71p, trade paper, $12.99, ISBN 979-8-865-55317-5



Tao of Life and Death unfolds as a multi-narrated allegory that blends Chinese folklore and spiritual development, tracing the delicate interplay between karma and redemption. The tale begins with the tragic descent of Zhong Kui, a brilliant imperial scholar whose swelling pride and drunken affront against Buddhist monks invite a demonic curse that renders him grotesque and drives him to a violent end. From this fall, the narrative shifts to the Ming Dynasty and the quieter ascent of Happy Willow, a 12-year-old boy with a receptive spirit, guided by the enigmatic hermit Gnarled Pine toward scholarship, preparing him to face life's challenges, such as corruption, mortality, and moral testing at the brink of success.

What animates the tale is its clear moral backbone. Zhong Kui's downfall—born of pride, arrogance, and careless speech—stands as a caution on the inevitability of karma, while Happy Willow's steady humility and discipline illustrate the rewards of thoughtful actions. Drawing from the "three treasures"—Confucianism, Taoism,

Ancient wisdom meets vibrant art in this contemplative Taoist tale.

Great for fans of Eva Wong's *Tales of the Taoist Immortals*, Thomas Merton's *The Way of Chuang Tzu.*

and Buddhism—taught by Gnarled Pine to Happy Willow, McDonough explores the discipline required to navigate a world rife with corruption. Zhong Kui's transformation into the Demon Queller carries this insistence on redemption, suggesting that moral failure, when faced with awareness, can be reconstituted into ethical purpose through service.

McDonough's prose carries a faintly antiquarian charm, often slipping into rhythmic passages that echo the cadence of ancient oral storytelling despite occasionally reducing narrative clarity. While some characters serve more as moral guides than well-drawn individuals, the book's simplicity keeps its lessons accessible and direct. Complemented with McDonough's own illustrations of the characters and historical setting—evocative of the spirit of ancient China—the result is a contemplative tale that encourages readers to live with intention, suggesting that a balanced life, guided by Tao teachings on humility and awareness, can gradually alleviate even the weight of past mistakes.

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **B-** | Illustrations: **A** Editing: **B+** | Marketing copy: **A-**

Along Came Hell Or So I Thought



How does one recover after learning that a husband of forty-four years has been molesting their granddaughters?

In "Along Came Hell, or So I Thought," witness a profound journey of spiritual transformation as one woman grapples with the shocking revelation of her husband's betrayal after forty-four years of marriage. This heart-wrenching narrative delves deep into the core of family trauma, shedding light on the dark corners of sexual abuse within a seemingly normal household.

As you turn each page, you'll find yourself walking alongside the author, experiencing her despair, confusion, and anger after finding out about the horrific ordeal.

The author's story illustrates the power of naming one's pain, confronting it head-on, and then handing it over to the higher power of God's love. As you immerse yourself in this powerful account, you'll witness the transformative power of not choosing to bolt but to molt-shedding the layers of pain and emerging renewed and resilient. While everyone's life story differs, this book encapsulates the universal truth that amidst life's most challenging trials, one thing remains constant: God.

This multi-awarded book is an essential addition to the canon of emotional healing books, offering a unique blend of personal narrative and divine inspiration that will touch hearts, stir souls, and inspire minds.

Lois Young

Lois Young is a native Nevadan with a talent for storytelling and poetry. As a mother of three, grandmother of seven, and great grandmother of seven, Lois has shared her creative works with loved ones for years. Her writings have graced various platforms, from her church's newsletter to a three-year blog, and even heartfelt notes and devotional material for women's groups. With a knack for extracting Kingdom insights from everyday life, Lois's stories resonate deeply.

In retirement, Lois found solace and joy in painting, beyond her artistic pursuits, she finds pleasure in cloud-watching, tree-gazing, and conquering word puzzles. Yet, above all, her heart belongs to her cherished family, loyal friends, and unwavering faith in the Lord. Lois Young embodies a life rich in creativity, love, and devotion.







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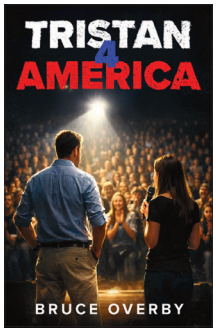
visit my website:
www.loisyoungbooks.com

FICTION

Tristan 4 America

Bruce Overby

223p, trade paper, $15.99, ISBN 978-1-972-19708-0



Incisive, clear-eyed novel of an unconventional political truth teller.

Great for fans of Aimee Hoben's *The Third Way*, Steve Lubliner's *Threeway.*

Outraged, clear-eyed, and surprisingly hopeful, this cathartic political fiction from Overby (*The Cyclone Release*) updates a classic regular-joe-runs-for-office premise for the Trump era, with sharper elbows and more fiery left-y truth telling than readers usually encounter in such stories. At first, Tristan Heller, a "Silicon Valley guy," enters the 2024 presidential election as a lark, having heard that a long-shot candidate quickly scared up $2 million in donations. But soon, in his first TV interview, Tristan spews fire about an inequitable American government and a Republican party captured by billionaires who maintain power by pleasing a religious right of "fools and charlatans, racists and warmongers." This sets in motion a movement—maybe an uprising—that could spin out of control.

Tristan assails "the racist concept of the Electoral College," the "undemocratic U.S. Senate," and GOP policies on "climate, democracy, taxes, and the national defense" in impassioned everyday language. He soon learns that speaking the truth can be dangerous, and Overby has more in mind than just documenting Bay Area political opinions. In brisk scenes and smart but conversational prose, the novel teases out dark questions about power in a too-online America. Political thrillers often center the fear of people willing to kill to silence challenges to the powers that be, but Overby digs deeper, into the unsettling possibility that others may turn to violence *for* those truthtellers.

Overby emphasizes corruption, racial injustice, West Coast white supremacist militias, and the historical trends that have fed the dark moment in which this unlikely campaigner brings some light. Tristan's opponents never get named, though the Republican candidate is unmistakable: "a dangerous, ignorant narcissist" who makes every "global catastrophe nothing more than a chance to draw more attention to himself." Overby's satire will most appeal to readers who cheer those sentiments, but it cuts deeper—and builds to more thoughtful provocations—than the usual partisan punditry.

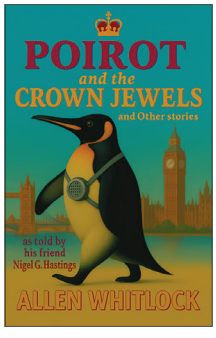
Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

FICTION

Poirot and the Crown Jewels and Other Stories

Allen Whitlock | Allen Whipps

159p, trade paper, $14.95, ISBN 979-8-218-80354-4



Entertaining mix of satire, cozy mystery, and speculative fiction.

Great for fans of James Lever's *Me Cheeta*, Leonie Swann's *Three Bags Full.*

Whitlock's lively collection of episodic short stories takes place in a world where, thanks to scientific advancements, animals can now talk and reason with humans. There, Poirot—a King penguin recently escaped from a tyrannical family who purchased him to act as a butler and their fourth at bridge—and his unwitting new human flatmate, Hastings, embark on a series of misadventures together. Poirot often serves as the instigator, spending each episode trying on different identities while celebrating his enduring love for mackerel. Meanwhile, poor Hastings is just along for the ride, ensuring Poirot doesn't get into too much trouble. Eventually, Poirot discovers a taste for popular mysteries and embarks on a quest to become a wannabe private detective.

Whitlock's stories—each one a self-contained narrative—flow into the next, though his review of the collective backstory with each new offering creates a distraction when the book is read in order. Still, the characters possess that quintessential British charm wrapped up in a sharp repartee that entertains. After he spends a day watching old American TV, Poirot engages in a witty back-and-forth with Hastings on the representation of talking animals in the media, reassuring him that, although Mister Ed featured a talking horse that appeared to own a human pet named Wilbur, "they were not equals as we are." Elsewhere, Hastings refers to Poirot as "old bean" and characterizes Poirot's unusual theories on Bigfoot as "rubbish bordering on codswallop."

Hastings remains a passive bystander for much of the collection, while Poirot pursues outlandish fancies that call to mind children's classics like Curious George. "Poirot the Detective," in which Poirot fulfills his namesake's example and helps solve a rash of burglaries with the help of monkey informants, is a standout, showcasing the satire that fans of Agatha Christie and Hercule Poirot will relish. All told, this humorous collection can feel uneven but it pays off in the end.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **B** | Marketing copy: **B**

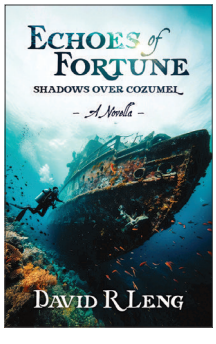
MYSTERY/THRILLER

EDITOR'S PICK

Echoes of Fortune: Shadows Over Cozumel

David R. Leng | White Publishing

88p, e-book, $0.99, ISBN 979-8-991-09315-6



Nail-biting novella of dark secrets, history, and danger in the deep.

Great for fans of Sarah Penner's *The Amalfi Curse*, James Becker's *The Titanic Secret.*

Historian Jack Sullivan returns in Leng's second Echoes of Fortune offering, following the events in The Search for Braddock's Lost Gold. Over the Thanksgiving holiday, Jack, along with his fiancée—and Smithsonian curator—Emma and former Navy SEAL Steve, celebrate with a dive near Cozumel, Mexico, hoping to explore the recently discovered wreck of Civil War era passenger ship La Sombra. But they're also seeking larger fare: rumor has it a sister ship—*Del Rio*, a Confederate vessel transporting gold to Mexico—went down in the same storm as La Sombra—but was never reported. Jack and co. eventually find what they're looking for, along with a host of trouble, including a menacing, well-equipped yacht trailing their every move.

What begins as a cat-and-mouse adventure quickly escalates. Jack discovers a tube of documents hidden on *Del Rio*, a cache of historical evidence that paints a bullseye on his back, and is pursued by brutal hunters desperate to keep the information from making it to the public—by any means necessary. Leng strikes a nice balance between action and plot, building whispered archaeological rumors that history fans will relish: accusations that, following the Civil War, hundreds of prominent Confederate officers—pursued by the American government as war criminals—attempted to relocate to Mexico via the Del Rio. But Jack, Emma, and Steve soon learn that "the dead don't give up their secrets easily," as they enter a tense race for answers that pits them against mercenaries, the sea, and history itself.

Despite the slim page count, Leng delivers vivid descriptions and nail-biting suspense, using brief but evocative imagery to convey action, setting, and character motivations. References to the series' previous adventures will entice readers to seek out the first entry, and fans of historic thrillers will be immersed in Jack's fight to uncover a century and a half of dark history concealed by the sea.

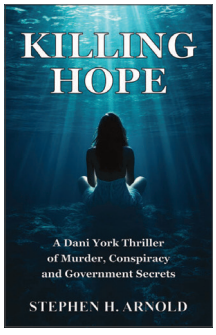
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

MYSTERY/THRILLER

Killing Hope: A Dani York Thriller of Murder, Conspiracy and Government Secrets

Stephen H. Arnold

326p, e-book, $9.99, ASIN B0FGZHJQ88



Strong Southern mystery of dark secrets, jealousy, and surprising twists.

Great for fans of Patricia Sargeant's *Behind the Badge*, Julie Holmes's *Murder in Plane Sight*.

Arnold's debut mystery kicks off in rural Tick County, Tennessee, where the aftermath of a brutal storm leaves Deputy Steve Elliott searching for two local men who disappeared after an afternoon fishing trip. While navigating debris and downed power lines, Elliott stumbles onto the partial remains of one of the men in the shallow waters of Tick Springs Lake, setting in motion a charged investigation to determine if he was murdered—and a desperate search to find the other missing party. Help is quickly summoned from the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation in the form of Special Agent Dani York, a tough, tenacious woman whose dogged determination reassures readers that, despite Arnold's devilish plotting, justice will be served.

Mystery fans will relish Arnold's sharp twists and striking sense of place, though the choice to have some Black characters speak in overwrought dialect is an unfortunate distraction: "When I asks Miz Jenna if Miz Hope comin' down for breakfast, she toles me Miz Hope gone out of town," one says. York stays hot on the trail—until the impossible happens: using divers and sonar, the boat's twisted wreckage is found at the bottom of the lake, along with the fuselage of an airplane buried in it. Even more jaw-dropping is the woman's body buckled into the pilot's seat: Hope Tucker, the wife of Tucker Aviation owner David. That discovery brings in the Feds, of course, including FAA rep Patrick McNeil, an attractive agent who serves as liaison, providing technical know-how for the aviation particulars, and a bit of a love interest for York.

It becomes apparent very quickly that this is not a simple case of two friends caught in a storm. As York and McNeil seek answers, they face opposition from high-powered officials, powerful witnesses, and religious extremists. Arnold hits on a crucial genre requirement that will keep mystery fans invested: no story can be trusted, no one can be protected, and nothing can be taken at face value.

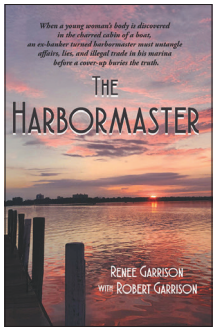
Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A-**

MYSTERY/THRILLER

The Harbormaster

Renee Garrison with Robert Garrison | NRK Designs

133p, trade paper, $15.95, ISBN 979-8-9916874-8-5



Absorbing mystery with lived-in details and convincing lead.

Great for fans of Jackie Sharp's *Murder at the Marina*, Crystal Winters's *Murder at Tropical Cove Marina*.

Renee Garrison and Robert Garrison's *The Harbormaster* opens with a bang, as just off coastal Florida—at the docks of Moss Creek Marina—Baxter McCracken, a harbormaster in his second innings, begins his morning shift with a seemingly empty sailboat bursting into flames. The quaint life at the marina is further disturbed when human remains—belonging to exotic dancer Nikki Smith—are discovered inside the charred boat. Later revealed to be the result of foul play, the explosion draws Baxter into the less visible but tangled side of life at the docks—drugs stashed in cushions, negligent employees, environmental violations, decadent lifestyles, and disgruntled people living too close to the water and too far from stability.

This is not another conventional mystery set against an exotic backdrop. Baxter—who visits strip clubs, meets with forensics experts, and traces phone calls during his bouts of amateur sleuthing—is a man deeply involved in the fragile ecosystem of the marina, allowing the setting to become as important as the crime itself. *The Harbormaster* was inspired by real events, and the Garrisons write with obvious affection for boating communities and marina life, filling the novel with lived-in details about storms, fuel docks, maintenance work, and the unpredictability of life spent near water. At times, these descriptive passages can start to meander, but the authors quickly bring the narrative back into focus.

Despite its grisly central crime, *The Harbormaster* ultimately evokes a genuine sense of warmth and community. Baxter's loving and playful relationship with his wife, Harri, gives the novel an emotional core, while the eccentric dockside characters provide humor and charm. There's something infectious about the calm energy with which Baxter moves through the novel's events. Even after the mystery is solved, what lingers is not the sensational details of the crime, but the desire to inhabit this unhurried world for a little while longer.

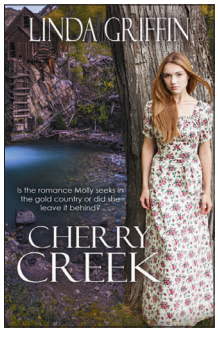
Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

ROMANCE

Cherry Creek

Linda Griffin | The Wild Rose Press

94p, e-book, $2.99, ISBN 978-1-5092-6593-0



Gentle, wholesome romance of independence and enduring love.

Great for fans of Rachael Anderson's *The Rise of Miss Notley*, Maggie Osborne's *Silver Lining*.

A young woman blazes her own path in Griffin's gentle historical romance. Fifteen-year-old Molly is an Irish immigrant living on her family's farm in 1850s Ohio, bordered by the Scottish MacLeiths, who run a local sawmill. When she catches the eye of Andrew MacLeith—set to inherit the family business after his older brother John's death—the two begin courting. Molly believes that marriage to Andrew will mean freedom, but she's soon hit with the harsh realities of living in Andrew's family home and contending with his less-than-hospitable mother. She finds an ally in Andrew's younger brother, Hugh—a dreamer who vows to make his fortune in the Kansas Gold Rush—but when she makes the rash decision to run away with him one night, it flings her headlong into an uncertain future.

The roughneck environment holds both the blessing of independence and the curse of homesickness for Molly, who must find the wits and grit necessary to survive. Though it starts slow, once she arrives in the Kansas Territory (later to become part of Colorado), the novel explodes with life. The world of prospectors is vibrant and absorbing, and Griffin (author of *Reluctant Hearts*) expertly weaves historical elements into the story's tapestry, including the threat of the Civil War, looming like an ominous cloud on the horizon and adding tension to the plot.

Griffin's characters, at times, feel underdeveloped, relying heavily on archetypes—Molly's bullying mother-in-law, Hugh as an irresponsible rake, Andrew's relative blindness to his new wife's experiences—but readers will appreciate Molly's transformation from a self-absorbed teenager to a confident young woman, able to make her way in the world and willing to reevaluate her values. Her journey is much different from what she envisioned, rife with illness, strenuous labor, and loneliness, but it leads her to realize that self-reliance, while exhilarating, can't compare to the bonds of love.

Cover: **B-** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **B+** | Marketing copy: **B**

ROMANCE

Come Back and Haunt Me

Kim Catanzarite | Forster Publishing
294p, e-book, $4.99, ISBN 979-8-991-27613-9



Urgent supernatural suspense as a woman's iffy boyfriend seeks help from beyond.

Great for fans of Simone St. James; Kat Martin's *The Ghost Illusion*.

This urgent, evocative novel of hearts, souls, and a mysterious black box from Catanzarite (*The Moon Children*) explores a love so intense that it continues after death. Veka, a vet technician, meets Brady when he brings his sister's dog into the clinic after it's been hit by a car. They experience an electric connection, finding attraction despite their opposite natures: Veka is logical and calm, while Brady is charming yet impulsive with a hidden dark side. When a tragic accident removes Brady from Veka's life, she becomes inconsolable—"my apartment became a tomb I willingly dedicated myself to." She starts to have mysterious dreams about Brady apologizing and grasping at the air. Eventually, he seems to appear in her apartment, accompanied by flashes of light and garbled sounds.

Catanzarite proves adept at always linking the unsettling supernatural elements to charged, relatable feeling. Veka learns upsetting truths about their relationship, leaving her "horrified and humiliated, hateful and twisted." She also learns the real reason for his spectral visits: he needs Veka's help fighting a high-stakes battle for his soul in the afterlife. As Veka faces all-consuming grief within the gloomy walls of her apartment, *Come Back and Haunt Me* is disorienting, claustrophobic, and powered by hard questions about trust, responsibility, and what we owe each other—especially as Brady expects Veka to rescue him. Readers will understand why Veka struggles to forgive him, even while doing everything she can to help him avoid "eternal damnation."

Catanzarite's version of the afterlife is compelling—Veka converses with a "black onyx screen" like "staring into the pupil of a giant's eye"—and readers will feel her fear and intimidation as she is faced with deciding the course of Brady's fate. The story turns on the truth that "love isn't a choice ... love just is ... it's wonderful and it's bad and it's everything in between." Readers who enjoy science fiction, supernatural suspense, and romance that explores how connections in life shape our experiences after death will appreciate this story.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A**| Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

ROMANCE

Nightshade

Briar Black
379p, e-book, $3.99, ASIN B0DTJ2K9FY



Brooding mystery thriller combines danger and unexpected romance.

Great for fans of Ali Hazelwood's *Problematic Summer Romance*, Ana Huang's *Twisted Love*.

Conservationist, beekeeper, and "eco influencer" Suzie needs to shake up her life. She's completed college, has a successful social media presence, and possesses the uncanny ability to never get stung by her beloved bees. She never expected her next step would take her back to her hometown, but when her best friend Aimee (Black's returning fans will recognize her from the previous Cheshire Set installment, Bane) informs her about an ecological mystery impacting bees on nearby historic estate Delaware Grange—where a tea farm is struggling to survive—Suzie can't help but get involved. Anything to save the bees, right? She quickly learns that there is much more to discover at Delaware Grange: there's hidden resentments, earth-shattering secrets, and a brooding, handsome landowner.

For Hugh Delaware, botanist and "the only son of a baron," the singular hope for the unworkable land he has inherited is to turn it into a tea farm. But just when the new venture is getting off the ground, the crops start failing and the hives start dying. Desperate to keep Delaware Grange from slipping into financial ruin, Hugh is happy to have Suzie's help, in spite of the feelings her presence brings. As Suzie investigates the landscape, the pair are instantly drawn to each other, confiding their personal struggles while developing a deep connection, despite the things keeping them apart—like Hugh's distant and openly unhappy wife, Victoria.

The chemistry between Suzie and Hugh seems to have the makings of a straightforward romance, but readers will find Nightshade packed to the brim with intrigue and a surprising amount of danger. The narration is filled with rich descriptions of the landscape that bring the setting to life before it turns into a stage for the charged, action-packed final act, making this an exciting genre-blender between mystery, thriller, and romance.

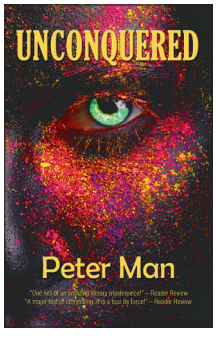
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

SF/FANTASY/HORROR

EDITOR'S PICK

Unconquered: Planet of Perpetual Peace, Book 1

Peter Man
336p, e-book, $4, ISBN 978-1-999-40194-8



Absorbing cross-cultural YA adventure of an ancient, mythic power.

Great for fans of Julie Kagawa's *Shadow of the Fox*, Laini Taylor's *Daughter of Smoke and Bone*.

The adventurous first book in veteran science fiction author Man's Planet of Perpetual Peace series follows Victoria Solana, a Chinese-Canadian teen whose life shatters after a supernatural attack kills her adoptive parents. Guided by her father's deathbed message, she must travel to China from her home in Ontario to uncover the truth about her mysterious background. Along the way, her journey links to ancient Shang warriors and steppe tribes through a recurring cosmic lineage whose genes reappear across history. As modern scientists and military officials decode her mythic ancestry, Victoria emerges as the harbinger of humanity's next evolutionary leap, uniting past, present, and future.

Blending mythology, science, and history, Man creates an ambitious narrative that throws many unexpected obstacles in Victoria's path. The plot interweaves modern Canadian culture with aspects of ancient Chinese and steppe civilizations, creating an absorbing, multilayered story uncommon in YA or fantasy fiction. Young readers in particular will relate to the determined yet contradictory Victoria, who is vulnerable and unsure one moment while also carrying a vast, hidden destiny that quietly reshapes everything around her. Her believability as a protagonist is deepened by the secondary characters who echo her identity across eras. This distinctive, structurally complex story feels fresh and original, merging quantum theory, reincarnation, Chinese mythology, and military history into a unified evolutionary cycle.

Man's writing is rich with surprising details that propel readers into Victoria's curious psyche and hint at her destiny—when she is a teenager, she imagines "transforming her superego into a knight-errant, trekking through time and space to right all wrongs." The narrative occasionally feels bogged down by long expository passages about quantum cycles, reincarnation, and ancient lore, and important plot points and character development can seem overshadowed by these lengthy explanations. Ultimately, though, this exciting intellectual journey will keep readers engaged as they follow Victoria on a time-bending quest full of unexpected twists and turns.

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **C** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **B**

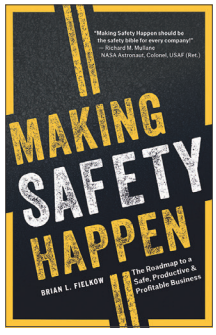
BUSINESS & PERSONAL FINANCE

EDITOR'S PICK

Making Safety Happen: The Roadmap to a Safe, Productive and Profitable Business

Brian L. Fielkow | MCP Books

306p, hardcover, $24.95, ISBN 979-8868531910



Thorough guidebook promotes safety as core company value.

Great for fans of Atul Gawande's *The Checklist Manifesto*, Terry E. McSween and Adam S. Hockman's *The New Values-Based Safety.*

Safety incidents aren't inevitable accidents, argues Fielkow—they're the preventable results of inadequate training, clunky processes, and a business culture that does not "commit[t] to safety as a core value." In *Making Safety Happen*, a thematic follow-up to *Leading People Safely,* Fielkow offers a "how-to manual" for decision-makers in high-consequence industries to measure safety metrics with intention. He opens with some of the personal lessons he's learned while in business ownership—including a catastrophic incident that severely injured an employee—before delving into mindset changes that must occur to make safety the "foundation upon which all other business decisions are made."

As case studies for what not to do, Fielkow packs chapters with breakdowns of incidents where best practices failed: the Boar's Head factory debacle, Deepwater Horizon oil spill, mid-air collisions, among others. He spotlights the "Zero Incidents Mindset" as a foundation, outlining several other practical solutions for leaders that promote safety as an "enterprise-wide responsibility." Companies should be incentivized to track safety metrics and optimize processes, Fielkow asserts—to protect workers, the bottom line, and the corporate reputation.

Making Safety Happen functions primarily as a guidebook to measure safety metrics and implement safety processes, with chapters that can be read consecutively or as self-contained topics. Fielkow includes actionable checklists throughout with step-by-step moves for risk management, and the book closes with appendices stocked with copy-ready survey forms, emergency action plans, and more. Whether discussing how to engage employee families or teaching readers to "lea[d] from any level," this is a polished, comprehensive resource that grounds safety in shared values of trust, discipline, and a commitment to healthy workplace culture.

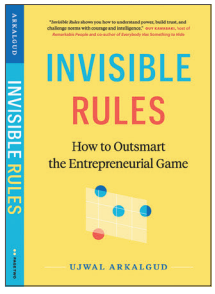
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

BUSINESS & PERSONAL FINANCE

Invisible Rules: How to Outsmart the Entrepreneurial Game

Ujwal Arkalgud | Page Two

279p, e-book, $4.99, ISBN 978-1-774-58687-7



Inspiring guide tackles hidden forces shaping business success.

Great for fans of Jonah Berger's *Invisible Influence*, Clayton M. Christensen's *The Innovator's Dilemma.*

Cultural anthropologist and entrepreneur Arkalgud opens with an intriguing question: "When was the last time you had an idea and talked yourself out of it?" From there, he pulls back the curtain on a clear path to business success for those readers struggling to fit in with the invisible rules that "dictate who can succeed, how success happens, and which paths are considered legitimate." Taking aim at hidden boundaries—those subtle societal norms that prevent unconventional or diverse entrepreneurs from realizing their full potential—Arkalgud delineates a game plan for change: recognize the hidden power structures driving business success, forge a safe space to introduce new concepts, take the time to build lasting credibility, firmly and consistently challenge norms, and nurture an ecosystem for positive change.

While each of Arkalgud's five phases for business success warrant a separate review, when absorbed together, they provide a flexible framework for cracking the status quo and achieving a successful business plan followed by a fulfilling life. His advice is refreshingly direct, with chapter-closing summaries that maintain focus, and he acknowledges throughout that adapting to changing circumstances and unexpected developments should go hand in hand with innovation. He encourages budding entrepreneurs to welcome the ambiguity "between who we are and who the world expects us to be" while devising their own way forward, arguing that the outside forces shaping beliefs and actions should never be allowed to thwart creative outcomes. "Once we see the invisible architecture that shapes success," he writes, "we gain the ability to move through it strategically, turning potential obstacles into opportunities."

The key, Arkalgud contends, is action: harness tension and be willing to let go of what's going well to build something even better. Ultimately, he urges readers to understand that true success "isn't about choosing between your vision and reality... it's about learning to live productively in the space between them."

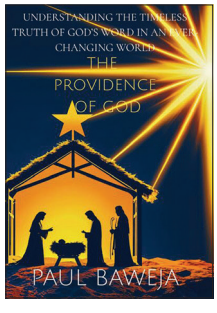
Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

OTHER NONFICTION

The Providence of God: Understanding the Timeless Truth of God's Word in an Ever-Changing World

Paul Baweja

522p, hardcover, $44, ISBN 978-0-648-98187-9



Fresh survey of the message of each book of the Bible, for believers.

Great for fans of Peter J. Gentry's *How to Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets*, Dan G. McCartney's *Let the Reader Understand.*

Baweja continues his fresh readings of great works with this study of each book of both Testaments of the Bible, a project undertaken with the author's established open-mindedness and just-the-text approach. As with his readings of Milton and the Bard, Baweja comes to his own conclusions, refusing received wisdom. Here, Baweja reports on what he discovers—lessons, insights, points of inspiration—in the New International Version of the Bible. On the journey from Genesis to Revelation, Baweja, a Christian, finds much to celebrate ("The Book of Hosea repeatedly demonstrates that God's love is everlasting, compassionate, and righteous") and much to strive to live up to ("Believers must advance reconciliation and unity among humanity"), bringing a spirit of love to the endeavor.

In chapters of just a couple of pages, Baweja distills the teachings of each book, drawing conclusions exclusively from the words on the page rather than outside authorities. His considerations tend toward reported analysis rather than thorough summaries—he won't guide readers through each beat of the stories of Job, Jonah, Esther, and Jesus. Like the Bible itself, Baweja's text can be repetitious—a paragraph on the genealogies in 1 Chronicles makes the same basic point in five separate sentences, and his book-by-book structure and starting-from-basics ethos encourages formulaic language that discourages reading his findings straight through.

What most fascinates are Baweja's conclusions about what the plain text reveals about what the Old Testament God and later Jesus and Paul want from believers. In Luke's gospel, Baweja hears a call to "personify ... cosmopolitan and egalitarian values in our life"; in the Pauline letters, he finds evidence that Christianity should transcend divisions like "ethnicity, race, sex, wealth, political affiliation, colour, nationality, gender." Where some evangelicals see a call for wifely submission, Baweja finds evidence that Paul believed marriage must be built upon "trust, intimacy, communication, forgiveness, equality, respect" and more. Baweja reports what he finds, and what he believes, with clarity, conviction, and welcome humility.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **B+**

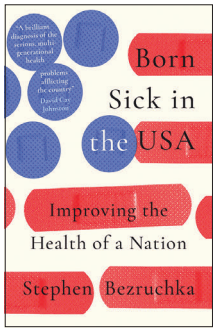
POLITICAL & SOCIAL SCIENCES

EDITOR'S PICK

Born Sick in the USA: Improving the Health of a Nation

Stephen Bezruchka

250p, hardcover, $28.95, ISBN 978-1-009-57370-2



Convincing call-to-action for American healthcare reform.

Great for fans of Michael Marmot's *The Health Gap*, Damon Tweedy's *Black Man in a White Coat*.

Physician Bezruchka (*Inequality Kills*) opens this thoughtful missive with a stark observation: "The health of people living in the United States is worse than that of people in all the other rich nations... because we've made political choices that have placed us at the bottom of high-income countries when it comes to our health, and our lifespan." Noting that the U.S. is the only developed country without universal healthcare, he argues that the American health system is fundamentally flawed—an industry driven by lobbyists, drug companies, and private equity firms. As a result, he asserts, Americans live shorter, less healthy lives, primarily due to economic inequalities and limited socioeconomic support for early life.

Healthcare represents nearly 18% of the United States's gross domestic product, and Bezruchka spotlights how the medical care industry has a vested interest in continuing that income. Americans get little bang for their buck when it comes to medical prevention and treatment, he argues, delving into the myriad ways that inequality, gender, geography, and racism contribute to healthcare disparities. He also underscores the crucial impacts of stress on American wellbeing—how stress during pregnancy changes fetal development, the rising rates of suicide in younger people, high incidences of obesity.

Bezruchka's authority as a practicing physician imbues his words with significant weight, as he exposes system inequities and suggests action steps. "Action and activism are the antidote to despair," he opines, encouraging readers to become advocates—especially for women and people of color. Suggested steps include reforming and strengthening labor unions, working with local organizations, volunteering with national groups, and engaging in health conversations on personal levels. Meticulously footnoted and thoroughly researched, Bezruchka's work presents a convincing argument that "change has to occur nationally, rather than by dealing with individual behaviors."

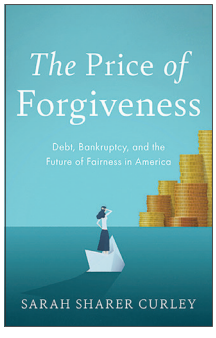
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

POLITICAL & SOCIAL SCIENCES

The Price of Forgiveness: Debt, Bankruptcy, and the Future of Fairness in America

Sarah Sharer Curley

271p, hardcover, $17.99, ASIN B0CX9YR8GT



Informed, passionate insights on U.S. bankruptcy court.

Great for fans of Ronald J. Mann's *Bankruptcy and the U.S. Supreme Court*, Melissa B. Jacoby's *Unjust Debts*.

Federal bankruptcy judge Curley reframes the narrative surrounding debt, finances, and bankruptcy in this educational debut. As the first woman appointed to the Arizona bankruptcy court, she provides readers with behind-the-scenes insights on bankruptcy cases and laws, arguing for the removal of stigma and shame often associated with the need for such legal proceedings. Spotlighting high profile and rare cases from her career, Curley makes a convincing case that "bankruptcy affects everyone," referring to bankruptcy court as the "emergency room of the law." It's clear her mission is to provide readers with the tools and knowledge to impact change in the system while bringing awareness to the complex areas that cause many to file for bankruptcy.

Curley provides remarkable and informative insights, not just on bankruptcy cases, but on the judicial system (including eye-opening perspectives on funding and staffing for federal courts), corporate manipulations, and possible solutions for change. From cases of identity theft, unforgiving student debt loan laws, or those settled as far abroad as Asia, her writing overflows with heartbreaking anecdotes of client suffering: overwhelming medical debt, tragic endings for clients with no legal recourse, and more, bringing into focus how devastating financial strain can be on an individual's quality of life. Throughout, Curley passionately advocates for individuals in need while highlighting that bankruptcy is far from a black and white process.

Readers will find Curley's writing both informative and historically rich, chronicling her professional rise in the system alongside the background of bankruptcy court in the United States—including laws as far back as the original Bankruptcy Act of 1800 as well as shakeups in the 1980s and their impacts on later cases. She closes with proposed solutions to "make our system fairer and more responsive to all," highlighting the need for more educational programs and "cooperative legal and political action" to improve future financial conditions for all generations.

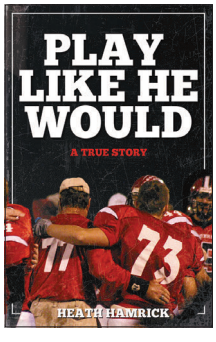
Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

SPORTS

Play Like He Would: A True Story

Heath Hamrick | Stoney Creek Publishing

192p, mass market, $23.95, ISBN 978-1965766491



Moving sports narrative explores grief, loss, and community.

Great for fans of H.G. Bissinger's *Friday Night Lights*, Nick Schuyler and Jeré Longman's *Not Without Hope*.

Hamrick's moving sports narrative is a story of loss—both the loss of a game and a player who won the hearts of a small Texas town. When 16-year-old Jason Yancy goes down on the football field, no one realizes he will never return. "[He] wasn't a soldier on some foreign battlefield or an innocent bystander caught in a gangland crossfire. He was a sophomore in high school, a chubby, smiling kid playing a game," Hamrick notes. Jason's tragic death shakes his family, teammates, and peers, leaving them scared and adrift. In the aftermath, Jerry "Slugger" Hamrick—the team's head coach and the author's father—determines to turn the team around and help them "make sense of the senseless."

Hamrick explores the team's redemption and his father's inspiring tenure as coach through collected interviews with Jason's teammates, family members, and friends. He also relies on his own firsthand memories, having been a freshman at the time. The town's love for Jason and collective grief surrounding his death underscore the power of high school sports—particularly in small towns, where games often serve as social highlights and friendships forged between teammates can last for life. Slugger encourages the team to adopt a new mantra—"play like he would"—reminding them of the heart, skill, and dedication Jason brought to the field.

While the Bremond Tigers may be at the heart of this story, Slugger serves as their mentor and guide, motivating them to rally together to honor the life of their fallen teammate. He discusses the tragedy with unsentimental honesty, holding space for his team's grief while also pushing them to continue putting their best foot forward. "I know you're hurting," he tells them. "There's nothing I can say to make it right." A touching story of grief and resilience, *Play Like He Would* highlights what may be the biggest wins on the field: friendship, community, and life lessons.

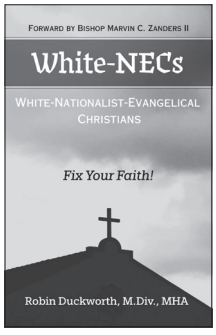
Cover: **B+** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

SPIRITUALITY/INSPIRATIONAL

White-NECs: White Nationalist Evangelical Christians, Fix Your Faith!

Robin Duckworth

198p, e-book, $10.98, ISBN 979-8-90329-290-5



A chaplain's call for evangelical Christians to eschew hateful politics.

Great for fans of Ronald J. Sider's *The Spiritual Danger of Trump*, Sarah Posner's *Unholy.*

Warning that a faith has been "co-opted for purposes other than God's glory," Duckworth, a trauma center chaplain, endeavors to pull blinders from the eyes of the white American evangelical Christians who, he argues, have abandoned basic principles of Christianity, like treating neighbors as themselves. Citing scripture and both fresh and timeless moral arguments, Duckworth lambasts modern-day "Sadducees" who place contemporary politics over Christian principles, creating a "transactional relationship aimed at gaining power" from President Trump and the Republican Party. Duckworth calls this relationship "about as ungodly as it gets," counseling that the "Bible is clear" that Christians should have nothing to do with "greedy ... boastful ... brutal" people.

Despite that sharp language and his bold interrogation of what "whiteness" means to contemporary evangelicals, Duckworth writes for an audience of believers, urging readers away from the assumptions that drive white nationalism and grievance politics. Instead, he encourages returning to the "true and living word of God, found in the Bible." Duckworth digs into biblical prophecy, reminding readers that Paul warned of the church "falling away" from the teachings of Christ and "the emergence" of a "wicked and lawless person."

Duckworth writes with both charged directness—"Racism and evangelical Christianity were, at one time, preached from the pulpit"—and a spirit of outrage at hypocrisy, as well as welcome understanding of why some readers may be uncomfortable by such declarations. Duckworth always makes clear that there is a path back, however, even when he examines controversies historic (white evangelical Christians' historic involvement in the Ku Klux Klan and Nazi movements) and current, like ICE's treatment of undocumented immigrants. He asks whether adherents of such philosophies can truly count themselves Christian. Duckworth's faith-grounded advice will appeal to Christian readers open to challenges to nationalist identities and politics.

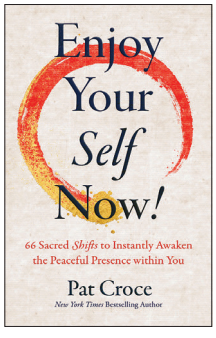
Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **B+** | Marketing copy: **B+**

SPIRITUALITY/INSPIRATIONAL

Enjoy Your Self Now!: 66 Sacred Shifts to Awaken the Peaceful Presence within You

Pat Croce | Meditation Hill Press

352p, hardcover, $29.95, ISBN 979-8-218-83518-7



Enlightening spiritual guide to finding peace, joy in the present.

Great for fans of Vex King's *Good Vibes, Good Life*, Michael A. Singer's *The Untethered Soul.*

Founder of Meditation Hill Sangha Croce enlightens readers with 66 spiritual shifts, gleaned from his own experiences, to move from "the ordinary objective realm of experience to the extraordinary transcendental realm of pure experiencing." To open a pathway to the peace and joy that come with recognizing the true Self, he shares personal anecdotes, along with established theories, practices, and techniques that range from recognizing and understanding mystical signs to refusing to wallow in regret to nurturing gratitude when times get tough. Easy to follow—and offering brief explanations of the ideology behind each shift—this inspirational resource explores the simpler things in life and offers a variety of ways to incorporate impactful habits into everyday living.

Croce (author of *I Feel Great and You Will Too!*) writes in an inviting tone that draws readers in while highlighting the importance of analytical activities such as reading educational material, journaling, exercising the "Let Me Go Muscle" ("Reality is being tainted and translated by your ego's formidable footholds of comparisons and expectations," Croce declares), and finding a sacred space for meditation or solitude. The guide's tasks are creative and refreshing, tapping into skills like writing a haiku to capture the present moment or incorporating the RAIN practice of recognizing, allowing, investigating, and nurturing when painful emotions arise. Several humorous life stories sprinkled throughout break up the sometimes-complex material, and Croce references spiritual leaders—Buddha, Jesus, Rumi, and others—to help readers explore diverse teachings while building their own foundation.

Reflective, engaging, and thought-provoking, Croce's guide ultimately invites readers to look within, declaring that "the true spiritual path is like playing in a sandbox of paradox." Though the process is challenging, he reassures readers that, with focused work, persistence, and an open mind, they can experience the "nature of ever-present Peace, crazy Love, and causeless Happiness." In today's climate, that's an alluring promise indeed.

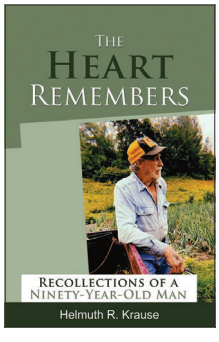
Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **A**

MEMOIR

The Heart Remembers: Recollections of a Ninety-Year-Old Man

Helmuth R. Krause | Dorrance Publishing

336p, trade paper, $24, ISBN 979-8-890-27236-2



No-frills, true-to-life memoir of working-class American.

Great for fans of Sarah Smarsh's *Heartland*, Jesmyn Ward's *Men We Reaped.*

Krause delivers an unsentimental memoir detailing his childhood, experiences with farming, and later-in-life travels with his wife Ruth, giving readers an insider's glimpse into the many encounters of a near-centenarian. Born in Wisconsin in 1932, he and his five siblings worked his parents' farm to help make ends meet during the Great Depression. His career included stints in the Air Force and an automobile factory, among other jobs, though it's farming that formed the beating heart of his livelihood. The narrative abounds with specifics on gardening, hog raising, syrup-making, and other related pursuits, dotted with the challenges—foremost among which is his ongoing land dispute with a neighbor—Krause experienced along the way.

Krause subtitles his memoir *Recollections of a Ninety-Year-Old Man*, and it's an appropriate one, substantively and stylistically. Without the benefit of chapters to offer a semblance of structure, *The Heart Remembers* exudes the feel of one-on-one dictation of a life story, with occasional off-the-cuff digressions into broader social and historical context—such as the aftereffects of President Carter's 1980 grain embargo against Russia for American corn farmers. The no-frills prose is similarly unassuming, recounting stories that history lovers will find intriguing in a straightforward, unexacting tone sometimes enlivened by witty side comments: "By the way," he writes, "racoon, rattlesnake, and woodchuck are rather tasty, but the beaver is not so good."

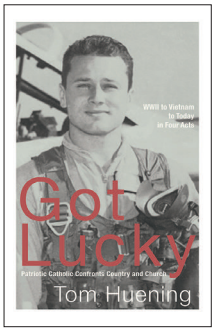
The downside to that deliberately pared-down style is a sense of routine that eventually sets in, detracting from Krause's more provocative reflections—especially regarding his experiences of racism due to his Winnebago ancestry. Throughout, he champions justice and equality, recounting the oppression he has both experienced and observed, from incidents during his military service to the many people who treated him and his family as "undesirable." *The Heart Remembers* offers a window into the kind of working-class American existence that threatens to get lost amid today's heated political rhetoric.

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **B-** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **C** | Marketing copy: **B-**

MEMOIR

Got Lucky: Patriotic Catholic Confronts Country and Church

Tom Huening | Spiritual Choice Publishing
255p, hardcover, $19.95, ISBN 978-1-964740-25-6



Lively, as-it-was memoir of a lucky American life.

Great for fans of W.D. Ehrhart's *Passing Time*, A.B. Facey's *A Fortunate Life.*

Huening (*Spiritual Choices*) delivers an archetypical story of a high-spirited Chicago boy made good in this entertaining memoir, setting the scene with a lively intro: young Huening running from the police with his buddy after trying to steal tires from a Shell service station. That misdeed doesn't slow him down, moving into a life of rowdy hijinks, minor sins ("Ah, but Confession," writes the Catholic-raised Huening, "Five Hail Mary's and Our Fathers... and then I was good to go again"), and a satisfying career as a military and commercial airline pilot—and, later, real estate salesman. From his time in the Navy to marriage and parenthood to his decision to pursue spirituality outside of organized religion, Huening consistently reflects on the unearned "luck" he's received.

Fans of candid, life-as-it-was memoirs will find Huening's writing a cheerful mix of history, life lessons, and personal development. He details his early joy in flight—and later disillusionment with the Vietnam War—alongside a lifelong desire to keep learning that drives his eventual decision to obtain a "through-the-mail" law degree, pass the California Bar on his first attempt, and engage in public service. His spiritual odyssey is equally lively, starting with his childhood Catholic family and later transforming into "beauty and practicality without human doctrine or gotchas."

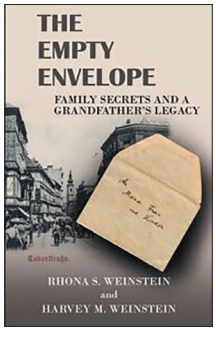
Huening's life illustrates major themes in American history, including his exposure to the Jim Crow South, his experiences in Vietnam, and his active engagement with California politics. He risks alienating contemporary readers with prose that embraces the frank, sometimes insensitive language of the time—his Catholic-sponsored marriage counseling was conducted by "apparently still (renegade) nuns, probably gay"—and sometimes lapses into caricature, as when his attempt to find off-base housing in Japan was met by a Japanese agent who, Huening states, informed him "We have rists (lists)... pretty soon you get house." That said, Huening captures emotional truths and experiences that resonate.

Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **B** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **B-** | Marketing copy: **B**

MEMOIR

The Empty Envelope: Family Secrets and a Grandfather's Legacy

Rhona S. Weinstein and Harvey M. Weinstein |
Advanced Publishing, LLC
300p, trade paper, $24.95, ISBN 978-1-63132-277-8



Trauma reshapes into resilience, forgiveness in this stirring memoir.

Great for fans of Helen Knott's *In My Own Moccasins*, Dani Shapiro's *Inheritance.*

Husband and wife duo Rhona Weinstein and Harvey Weinstein reveal a hybrid work of family memoir, historical reconstruction, and psychological inquiry into the tragic life and death of Eisig Lubetzky, Rhona's maternal grandfather. The narrative springs from a moment in 1969 Cincinnati, when Rhona's mother Lotte, later in life, confides that her father Eisig did not die of natural causes but by suicide, a truth long concealed within the family. Around 1998, the authors initiated an archival investigation, tracing documents, letters, and literary fragments across continents in search of clarity, understanding, and legacy.

Eisig—a child prodigy born in the late 19th century—emerges as a precocious intellectual and singer in Turets, Belarussia, as he leaves the confines of his traditional Jewish life and moves across European cities: studying music in Milan, teaching in Lithuania, and eventually settling in Vienna. His rejection of religious orthodoxy parallels his desire for cultural belonging, yet he remains marginalized within a society marked by antisemitism. Navigating a literary career that is prolific but inconsistently received, Eisig's family life with his wife Musa deteriorates, characterized by emotional distance, conflict, and uneven relationships with his children—Max, Lotte, and Hedy. Underlying these struggles is his mental illness, manifesting in instability and despair, which eventually culminates in his suicide.

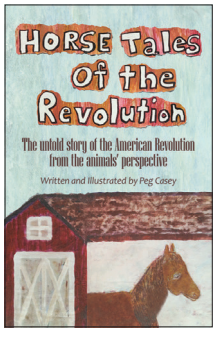
This memoir is a testament to how unspoken trauma is transmitted through relationships and behavior, shaping identity and emotional inheritance long after the original event. Lotte's eventual emigration to Montreal, Canada brings change but further underscores the stigma surrounding mental illness—and the long term, devastating impacts of discrimination. Cultural bereavement, displacement, grief, and unresolved trauma emerge as powerful themes, but the authors carefully and lovingly transform those experiences into a new legacy: resilience, individual agency, and an understanding that self-forgiveness is often the precursor to lasting peace.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: **A** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

MIDDLE GRADE

Horse Tales of the Revolution: The Untold Story of the American Revolution from the Animals' Perspective

Peg Casey
64p, trade paper, $17.76, ISBN 978-1-733-36121-7



Animals reminisce about the American Revolution with detailed observations.

Great for fans of Susan Hood's *Brothers in Arms*, Mark Greenwood's *Midnight.*

Casey's charming contribution to the United States Semiquincentennial celebration is an enthusiastic retelling of key events leading up to the signing of the Declaration of Independence—as remembered by animal participants and observers. This lively middle-grade historical fiction does focus on the recollections of three horses, but also incorporates the memories of other domesticated animals, their woodland brethren, and numerous birds (who make great stealth operatives). The cumulative effect of all these perspectives is the idea that animals are intensely interested in scrutinizing human activity, and that they form opinions on large-scale proceedings and how they affect individual lives.

Brown Beauty reminds her fellow creatures that the American Revolution affected not only the men who joined regional militias like the Sons of Liberty, and were later organized into the Continental Army, but also their families, whose homes were now in war zones. She tells the animals gathered in a Massachusetts barn that "they knew fighting for their Freedom could cost them their lives and they were prepared for that possibility." Revere rode the borrowed Brown Beauty, and Casey gives the famous Chestnut mare a prominent role, while not forgetting the other horses of that pivotal Midnight Ride on April 18, 1775: Lady and Murray.

Casey (author of *Mystic River Mermaid*) weaves together a ride timeline, starting with Winny the Gossiping Goat, who watched a blacksmith forge special horseshoes to help the steeds achieve incredible speed. Trumpeter swans witness Revere silently rowing past a British naval ship, and Danny the Deer was impressed by colonists ringing church bells to spread the word ("The British are coming!"). Illustrated with Casey's naïve art paintings, which pair simple forms and blunt brushwork with vital color and personality, Horse Tales of the Revolution infuses history with childlike warmth and wonder. Casey pulls young readers into American history while introducing the mind-altering concept that as you watch animals, they are watching you back.

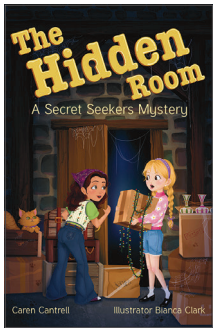
Cover: **B** | Design & typography: **B+** | Illustrations: **A** Editing: **A-** | Marketing copy: **B**

MIDDLE GRADE

The Hidden Room: A Secret Seekers Mystery

Caren Cantrell | 102nd Place, LLC

105p, trade paper, $9.99, ISBN 978-1-950943-40-1



Tween sleuths unravel in-house mystery that widens their perspective.

Great for fans of Stuart Gibbs's *Spy School*, Kelly Yang's *Front Desk*.

Cantrell's middle-grade series encourages curiosity, and she launches the Secret Seekers mysteries with a rainy day adventure that both introduces her determined 10-year-old detectives and shows how uncovering the past can be as absorbing as a treasure hunt. Best friends since they were five, Riley Wrenner and Ava Swift met when the Swifts moved into Veil Crest Manor, a mansion that's been converted into high-end apartments, where Riley's mom works as the live-in manager. They've explored the building together, so when their neighbor's cat, Snooker, goes missing, they offer to track down the sneaky feline.

Following Snooker's persistent meowing, they head into the basement, the only unchanged area of the former mansion. Riley and Ava find the cat, but they also discover a hidden door, one that "looks like someone painted over it." Instead of the storage area they expected, this secret room ends up a cozy refuge with a bookshelf and wingback chairs. It also contains a chest full of 1970s clothes alongside a diary, photo album, and locket with the initials JK. Based on the clothing size and books (*The Babysitter's Club, Judy Moody*), Riley and Ava conclude that JK was around their age.

These intelligent and empathetic girls immediately work together to uncover the mystery behind JK and why her belongings were left in the basement. Not only do they discover historical facts about their home, but they also learn more about their neighbors, especially Snooker's owner, who's connected to the mansion's family. Cantrell introduces young readers to investigative procedures, with methodical Ava employing her computer skills and the inquisitive Riley pushing them toward a resolution. The result? Research becomes a fun and informative process, with tangible and satisfying results. *The Hidden Room* is a close-to-home mystery that transforms questions into action, and Cantrell winningly encourages young readers to find their own puzzles to solve.

Cover: **A** | Design & typography: **A** | Illustrations: **A** Editing: **A** | Marketing copy: **A**

YOUNG ADULT

Lucky Day: We Could All Use a Little Luck

Cary Snowden | Snowydancer Productions

305p, e-book, $4.99, ISBN 979-8-9929631-3-7



Frenzied but compulsive family survival adventure.

Great for fans of Adrian McKinty's *The Island*, Sarah Lotz's *Day Four*.

Snowden's debut family survival thriller builds character through small, precise moments of domestic comedy, set against a natural disaster that morphs into a full-fledged zombie apocalypse. When the Thompson family—Mark, an engineer; school counselor Lisa; and 14-year-old Jake and his 12-year-old sister Emma—arrive at Hawaii's North Shore on what Emma is already cataloguing as a lucky day, Jake tellingly observes, "the odds of getting a free upgrade and then having perfect weather are statistically improbable." That not-so-subtle foreshadowing is followed by a rapid dismantling of the family's fortunes, starting with a catastrophic tsunami that arrives before they've even had a chance to settle in.

Snowden employs pitch perfect dramatic timing, moving the story through a string of escalating obstacles—a tilting stairwell, a buckled floor, a flooded exit—that must be solved through the family's specific skill sets. Moments like Emma's gymnast reflexes aiding her in several impressive physical near-misses, or Mark's engineering instincts overriding their hotel's shelter-in-place guidance, result in a procedural problem-solving storyline that stays both controlled and credible. The late genre shift—from tsunami survival to zombie outbreak—is a risky structural choice that sees an experimental virus escaping from a BSL-4 lab when the tsunami breaches its airlock, scattering cryogenic vials across a university campus. Snowden lays out the mechanics of that shift with enough specificity to make the transition earned rather than arbitrary: the zombies follow internal rules, including a "ninety-minute biological timer," that keep the survival logic intact.

The writing stays propulsive, launching one no-holds-barred sequence after another. In a particularly frenetic scene, the Thompsons are featured dashing across knife-like lava rock in search of shelter—with zombies in hot pursuit—before careening into the ocean one at a time, while Mark wryly observes, "First a tsunami, and now this... What a lucky day." Readers drawn to unrestrained survival adventure will find that sentiment irresistible.

Cover: **A-** | Design & typography: **A-** | Illustrations: **–** Editing: **B+** | Marketing copy: **A**



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