



**WRITERS  
GUILD  
INITIATIVE**  
of The WGAE Foundation

What's your story?  
Find your voice.  
Tell it.

# Fall Update

November 2019



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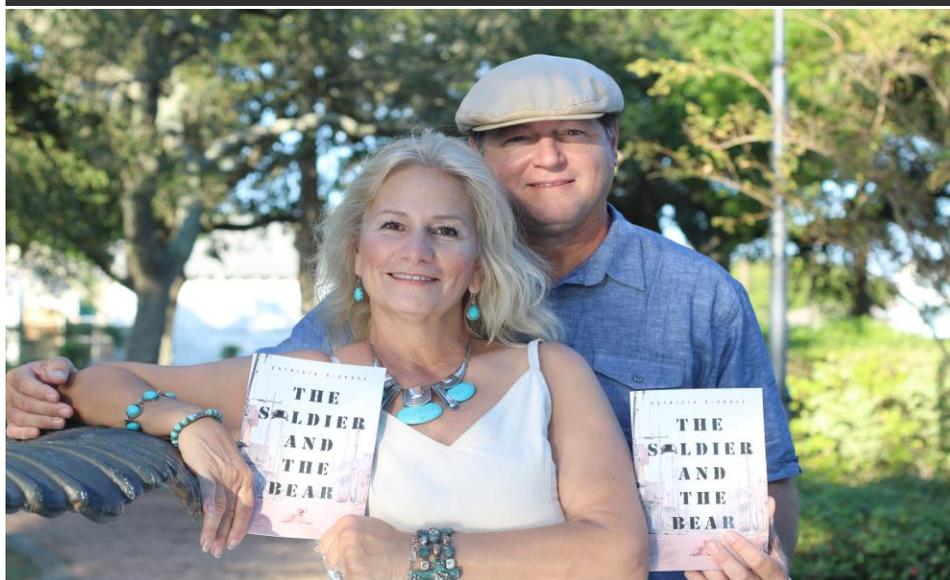
Dear Friends,

As the seasons change and the weather gets chilly, I'm reminded that fall can also be the start of new beginnings. We, here at the Writers Guild Initiative, kick off our programming season in the fall. Just as children start a new school year, we return to the work of amplifying voices of underserved communities and creating opportunities for them to tell their stories. We've launched our third year of our Online Writing Workshops -- our "graduate school" -- where our workshop alumni have the opportunity for mentoring and engagement online. We've connected with a new partner, No Vet Alone, advancing their mission of empowering resilience in veterans, first responders, and their families to end the PTSD suicide crisis. We're also excited to begin our second-year partnership with United We Dream serving immigrant youth.

There is much to do, but none of it would be possible without your support. I hope as we move into the holiday season, that you'll consider giving to us, as a showing that you value these communities and these stories that need to be shared and heard. I'm grateful for what this season holds, the new stories that we'll hear, and for the work of building these stories together.

Sincerely,

Jenna Jackson



## Participant Stories: Patricia DeGrace

Patricia DeGrace (pictured with her husband), a participant in our Caregivers Workshops in 2012-13 and our Online Workshops in 2018 has just published her first book, "The Soldier and the Bear". We interviewed her to discuss her story, and how the workshops helped her writing process.

**Q: What led you to participate in the WGI workshops?**

A: I heard about it through Wounded Warrior Project. I have always had a desire to write but never had the guidance or confidence to do so professionally. So, I was very excited to participate.

**Q: Had you written before the workshops?**

A: Yes. I did, but nothing I felt was worthy of publishing. I'd already started 3 books but lacked the belief that I could successfully become an author. But after my time with the WGI, this changed completely.

**Q: How did participation in the workshops help you in the various stages of the writing process?**

A: For me, writing at its core is bringing my vision to life through words crafted very carefully, and doing this takes patience, time management, and creative "out of the box" thinking. The mentors were instrumental in helping me understand just how important those things are. The way they guided me on how to flow a story and bring the reader along was instrumental in building my confidence. Their constant encouragement pulled me from a place of not feeling like "I'm good enough to measure up to other

authors" to a place of "I don't have to measure up. I just need to be me".

**Q: What was the publishing process like for you?**

A: Insightful and exciting to say the least! Seeing my name on an actual book, with my photo on the author's page, was mind blowing. My greatest desire is to help others through my writing, and I believe I'm on the road to accomplishing that.

**Q: What are you working on now?**

A: I'm working on a children's book series called "Bear Tracks" and a novel called "Kaleidoscope." "Bear Tracks" focuses on teaching kids about service dogs through the perspective of a service dog named Bear. "Kaleidoscope" is a conglomeration of my life stories: a beautiful picture of how beauty can be found in some of the most broken places.

**Q: Have the WGI workshops impacted your life in ways other than writing, if so, how?**

A: Absolutely! The confidence I walked away with has poured out into my family life as well as my community relationships. I truly feel unstoppable.



# Why I'm Honored to be a Mentor

By: Kia Corthron, WGI Mentor

*"I was very much moved by [the participants'] efforts toward self-improvement and fulfillment, an astonishing and inspiring optimism."*

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When I first learned about the Writers Guild Initiative workshops, I was drawn both to their focus on underserved communities and WGI's awareness that, in populations where trauma is involved, caretakers are also operating under acute stress and thus are also invited to participate.

My first WGI experience was just such a situation: in Philadelphia working with the partners of death row exonerees, the exonerees themselves writing in adjacent rooms. The participants were welcome to write in any form and to delve into any content of their choice, be it fiction or nonfiction. I was floored by some of the horrifying autobiographical stories, many related to death row exoneration, showing that a community already under siege is primed for such a miscarriage of justice.

My next workshop was with men incarcerated in the maximum-security unit of the Pendleton Correctional Facility outside of Indianapolis. Participants wrote in memory of days fishing in rural backwoods and of mistakes made as youths that put them behind bars for decades. I was very much moved by their efforts toward self-improvement and fulfillment, an astonishing and inspiring optimism.

Most recently I worked in New York with war veterans. During one session, a controversial issue arose regarding rules of engagement and responsibility for "enemy" wounded. I'll never forget one veteran, a forever-smiling young man who was struggling with severe PTSD depression, expressing that the experience taught him *compassion*. Trauma is a torturous phenomenon, a tower of affliction-built brick by brick that requires the same painstaking process to be broken down. If a WGI weekend can provide for even one participant the removal of just one of those bricks, then that workshop was mightily worth it, and I'm honored to be a part of it.

# Notes from the Field

## No Vet Alone

By: David Tucker, WGI Mentor



David Tucker (2<sup>nd</sup> from left) with mentors and a participant from No Vet Alone workshop.

On October 2<sup>nd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the Writers Guild Initiative with No Vet Alone, ConnectBend (in Bend, OR) brought in veterans and first responders from four states as well as the local area. The five-day event was organized by Javier Romo, a former Marine and previous participant in both WGI and No Vet Alone events. Romo's work was presented at WGI's 2016 Gala and the Kennedy Center's Writing Truth in November 2015.

During ConnectBend, each day consisted of three hours of mountain biking in the morning (we biked in the snow!), two hours of writing workshops in the afternoon, followed by group discussions on trauma and mental relaxation techniques hosted by the Red Cross. The combination of mountain biking and writing was a perfect teaming of physical and mental activities, each providing challenges and successes for participating military veterans and first responders. Conducting the writing workshops within the limits of six cumulative hours focused the work and got the participants writing quickly. Their work made rapid strides and their enthusiasm was palpable. Many planned on continuing their writing efforts and attending future events.

This was a new workshop model for WGI, combining physical activity with writing. This gave us a greater understanding of how we can be flexible in the future and expand opportunities to offer writing practice with more potential collaborators.



### Support WGI

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*Writers Guild Initiative programs are made possible by your generous support. Your donation enables us to provide transformative writing workshops to underserved populations with powerful stories to tell. We thank you for your support!*

<http://www.writersguildinitiative.org/support-the-wgi/donate>

# THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING

Don't miss the Writers Guild Initiative's 2020 Gala Benefit Dinner! On March 9, 2020, join writers, actors, producers, and the beneficiaries of the WGI's writing workshops in an evening-long celebration supporting the powerful work of the WGI. Details to come -- we look forward to seeing you there!

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