Double-Dipping? You Bet!

Promote Your Book with Short Articles & Literary Essays

**Nonfiction Craft & Criticism**

What if we told you that instead of spending thousands on a publicist, you could promote your books and find your ideal readers while building your writing portfolio and earning a paycheck? In this panel, we'll talk about how we've perfected the art of identifying key themes and topics in our published books and writing about them for newspapers, magazines, and literary journals. We'll teach you how to do the same with personal essays, book reviews, profiles, how-to pieces, and feature articles.

**Event Moderator:**

- Melissa Hart

**Event Participants:**

- Juanita Mantz Pelaez
- George Estreich
- Tanya Ward Goodman
- Andrea Ross

**Introduction:**

So many AWP attendees have authored books, yet few of you realize you can find your ideal readers by placing short thematical- and/or topic-related pieces in newspapers, magazines, and journals. On this panel, we're all experts at generating this type of publicity for our books, and we're eager to share the benefits which range from book sales to networking opportunities to sizeable paychecks from periodicals which pay $1-plus a word. You'll leave today with a solid idea of how you can start doing the same.
Participant Bios


Juanita E. Mantz (“JEM”) is a writer, a podcaster, a performer and a deputy public defender from the Inland Empire region of Southern California. She has been published widely in literary journals, newspapers and magazines including in Aljazeera, Entropy, The Riverside Press Enterprise and the Riverside Lawyer. She has two books, a memoir titled “Tales of an Inland Empire Girl” (Los Nietos Press 2022) about her route from punk rock high school dropout to USC educated lawyer and a chapbook “Portrait of a Deputy Public Defender, or how I became a punk rock lawyer” (Bamboo Dart Press 2021) which won the best first book nonfiction English award at the Latino International Book Awards. On her Life of JEM podcast she interviews writers and she is currently working on adapting her books to the stage and screen.


Tanya Ward Goodman: I grew up in the mountains of New Mexico, and currently live in Los Angeles, California. Following stints in waitressing, traffic school teaching, television
writing and advertising, I spent time raising a son and daughter. A distaste for desks and schedules propelled me into a freelance career where I write often about travel, art, and caregiving. My essays, interviews and articles have appeared in numerous publications, including The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times, Atlas Obscura, Luxe Magazine, Variable West. My essay, "What Life Does," originally published in Fourth River, was listed as notable in the 2019 Best American Science and Nature Writing.

My award winning memoir, “Leaving Tinkertown,” (University of New Mexico Press,) chronicles the experience of caring for my beloved artist father after his diagnosis with younger onset Alzheimer’s. I am currently at work on a second memoir about motherhood and the way travel cultivates a willing acceptance of uncertainty.

**Andrea Ross's** memoir, *Unnatural Selection*, about her years as a wilderness guide searching for her biological family, was published by CavanKerry Press in 2021. Her writing has appeared in *Ploughshares Blog, The Huffington Post, Terrain, The Conversation, Bay Nature, Mountain Gazette*, and many other outlets. During the 1980s and 1990s, Andrea worked throughout the American West as a wilderness guide, a National Park Service Ranger, and a backcountry Search and Rescue leader. She is on the faculty of the University Writing Program at UC Davis.

**Question and Answer Session**

**Melissa:** Juanita, how have your essays for Riverside Press-Enterprise helped to create an audience for your book-length work? (Feel free to tell us about these two pieces, and other short written pieces, plus reader responses . . . whatever you want is fine.

**Juanita:** My articles help me market my books. And promote my performances as well as give me opportunities to perform.
The goal in everything I do is to promote my books and my voice and message, whether that's performing at a theater like Beyond Baroque, at a school, or even in my podcasting where in promoting other writers, I am promoting myself through helping them.

I am very lucky because the Press Enterprise is very receptive to my essays which I write quarterly or at least twice a year. I write those as part of my board membership as the VP on the board of the Inlandia Institute, which is a literary organization that serves the Inland Empire. I have had a wonderful response to these essays which are all memoir in form and have dealt with topics like time management, the difficulty in capturing family truths and even about the importance of nurturing young voices. I have had young writers email me and older, burgeoning writers message me on Instagram about how much my story of resilience and tenacity has inspired them.

I also write a monthly essay for the Riverside Lawyer Magazine which I serve as an editor on and that reaches a totally different audience of lawyers and judges and law students. As a writer and a lawyer, for me it is all about the intersections. I first started writing about my career for Aljazeera after Covid hit about how my clients were at high risk and suffering in the jails. For me, it is always about the intersections of my writing career and my law career. I had resisted for many years. Only when I merged the two did the magic happen.

**Melissa:** George, how have your short literary essays including "I Don't Speak for Laura" and "Reflections on an Icon" helped to create an audience for your book-length works? (Feel free to tell us about these two pieces, and others, and reader responses--whatever you want is fine.)

**George:** The answer depends on the short piece and where it was published. The ones published in *The New York Times*, like the personal essay “I Don’t Speak for Laura,” or *Salon*, like “When my Daughter was Diagnosed” (not my title), reached many readers who might not have been invested in the topic. I don’t have numbers, but I do know of people who first heard about my writing through an opinion piece and then bought *Fables and Futures* or *The Shape of the Eye*. 
Other short articles or blog posts were in smaller and more specialized outlets, which tend to reach fewer readers, but ones who were much more interested in the topics I wrote about. For a long time, I wrote blog posts for the Center for Genetics and Society, looking at aspects of reproductive technology for an audience that was largely progressive, concerned with abuses of technology and hype, and so on. I also wrote a piece for the AMA Journal of Ethics, aimed specifically at medical students, challenging them to consider their own possible biases regarding intellectual disability.

From a practical point of view, I think it’s useful to write pieces for different outlets—literary and nonliterary, specialized and mass market. Each brings you different readers who might connect with your book on a different level, and in a different way. Some people, reading *The Shape of the Eye*, were mainly interested in it as a literary memoir; others were interested in the Down syndrome part, because they were parents; others were interested in medical humanities.

I’m happy to write short pieces when a book comes out. But I think the key is to find an angle that really interests you. That’ll make for a better piece, and the end result is more likely to read to other writing. In a couple of cases, a short piece I wrote fairly quickly wound up leading to a book idea, or became part of a book. The Salon piece, for example, was an outtake from my memoir: it described driving out to the desert after my younger daughter’s Down syndrome diagnosis had been confirmed. It (or a chopped-up version of it) became part of the next book, *Fables and Futures*. To me, this suggests not only the value of keeping stray parts around; it suggests the way the same experiences mean different things to us as we age, and that it may take awhile for those experiences to find a home in a book.

**Melissa:** Tanya, how have your short literary essays including "The Case for Visiting Small Museums and Attractions" and "How Fiction and Poetry Can Help Caregivers" helped to create an audience for your book-length works? (Feel free to tell us about these two pieces, and others, and reader responses . . . whatever you want is fine.)
**Tanya:** Writing short pieces that kind of branch off from your book is a great way to keep your story alive and relevant. A topic like dementia is, unfortunately evergreen, but so, too, is travel. I wrote the piece about small museums when the pandemic was still keeping things pretty locked down. I was looking for ways to expand my own experience without going too far from home when I visited the Velaslavasay Panorama. I was immediately transported and began to think of other ways you might travel without really going too far. In addition, I knew from experience that the pandemic was particularly rough on small businesses and I wanted to support them.

My Dad was a huge fan of small museums and roadside attractions. Many of my childhood road trips included stops at hand built castles, visits to sculpture gardens, corn mazes, and giant concrete dinosaurs. In my book, the museum my father built around our house functions not only as a setting, but as a metaphor for his dementia. Conducting interviews for the Small Museum piece was especially delightful because many of the people I spoke with had known my father. As a result, the short piece serves as an introduction to him as a character that people might want to know a little better. This might nudge them to buy my book. After the piece was published, readers reached out to me to recommend other museums and attractions. The second piece sprung out of a list of book recommendations I’d created for a new site called Shepherd. I wanted, frankly, to turn my writing for free into some writing for funds. I started thinking about the books and stories that had been important to me during my time as a caregiver. When driving home to visit my parents, I’d picked up “The Notebook” in a truck stop books on tape bin outside Gallup New Mexico. Listening to that book nudged me to consider dementia as the cause of my father’s strange behavior. Wanting the piece to expand beyond my own experience, I spoke with Norman E. Rosenthal, a psychiatric researcher and clinician about the use of poetry in his own practice. This piece was shared on a number of dementia related sites and sparked a conversation with another author about co-editing an anthology. Both of these pieces are related to my book by topic, but on a larger level they relate to the curiosity and broad approach to subject matter that I inherited from my dad. Both essays can also link forward to works in progress, which is something I think about a lot. How can all the work you do create a kind of web of interest? How can you braid
together your interests to create hybrid essays and articles? I am always looking for ways to overlap.

**Melissa:** Andrea, how have your essays for *Huffpost* and *The Conversation* helped to create an audience for *Unnatural Selection*? (Feel free to tell us about these two pieces, and other short written pieces, plus reader responses . . . whatever you want is fine.

**Andrea:** I focused on themes of adoption for the Huffington Post. I pitched them in advance of my pub date, and they ran an essay called “This is What No one Tells You About Adoption” just before my book came out. It garnered a lot of response—I heard from people via email, social media, etc., mostly other adoptees telling me their story. It made me realize that people were really hungry to be heard, so I started the “Adoption Story Project” on my blog; I interviewed people about their experiences and developed their answers into short pieces. I featured 3 a week for all of November, 2021—Nov. Is National Adoption Awareness Month. Another thing that came out of that HuffPo article was that they contacted me a year or so after the article ran and asked if they could make a TikTok out of it to post on their TT site (https://www.tiktok.com/@huffpost/video/7190603676564688171). They did that, and it just went up a few weeks ago—TT, Insta, and FB.

The other adoption-related piece I wrote for HuffPo was *I Was Adopted Before Roe v. Wade. I Wish My Mother Had Been Given A Choice*, which arose from my outrage about the overturn of Roe. Again, since this is such a hot-button issue, it attracted a lot of readership. It didn’t hurt that they ran in on the front page. The audience both of these garnered for my book was evidenced in a few ways: direct messages to me via email and social media, an uptick in my followers on social media.

With regard to the Conversation, I wrote a piece for them about adoption as well, *(Adoptees Nationwide May Soon Gain Access to their Original Birth Certificates)* and I asked them to run it during National Adoption Awareness Month, which they did. The Conversation is a completely different kind of publication than HuffPo; “Academic rigor, journalistic flair...To be published by The Conversation you must be currently employed as a researcher or academic with a university or research institution.” The
Conversation’s global network draws 21.5 million monthly unique users to theconversation.com, with a total monthly audience of **64.2 million** reads including through republication. My article got picked up in numerous newspapers around the US. (yahoo news, etc) and posted on social media by various organizations.

**Melissa:** Juanita, you have a particular interest in the U.S. criminal system, and in punk rock; in what ways have you explored these topics in both short-form and long-form personal narrative, to bring attention to injustice in the criminal system?

**Juanita:** As a writer and a lawyer, for me it is all about the intersections. I first started writing about my job as a criminal defense attorney for the most mentally ill during Covid. Prior to that time, I had mostly written about my young adult years in memoir stories but had resisted addressing my current occupation. It was only when I connected my resilience stemming from my chaotic childhood and dropout story and working my way to USC Law that I realized that my magic wand was my own personal story. As Ru Paul says, take what you are most ashamed about and make it your super power.

So in writing my hybrid book in essay, poetry and memoir about the horrors of mass incarceration and the intersection between that and blue collar life and the intersection with punk rock, ie dehumanization and fighting the “system”, I was able to merge all of my passions. So I deal with this issues at length now in both short and long form. I use this intersection between music and writing and criminal justice in everything I do.

My chapbook is the best example of this intersection, but I have also written articles for magazines and websites about social justice and music, and I had a short stint as a radio DJ with a show I called Changes where I highlighted the music and social justice issues concurrently.

But I also use these connections in my podcast and in the classes I teach. I recently taught as a writer in residence at a community college, and the students all connected
with the music and justice theme. Especially those who had been system impacted, for them it was everything. As a result of that, I helped the Inlandia Institute create a workshop for system impacted writers to help them tell their own stories which will be anthologized.

Ultimately, I hope to build a writing and performing platform where I can raise social awareness about the horrors of mass incarceration and intersect that with the music part too and where it can be monetized more effectively, maybe as a non profit organization perhaps? That monetization for me is the hardest part, maybe because I have a day job and a stable income that pays the bills, but I am working on that part for when I retire from public defense.

I do think it’s important that we get paid for the writing and performing work we do. I also curate events and I eventually hope to curate a festival one day and I always try and get funds to pay writers who read/perform.

**Melissa:** George, you have a particular interest in human-directed biotechnology; in what ways have you explored this topic in both short-form and long-form personal narrative, to bring attention to the theme of belonging.

**George:** I’ll talk about the short form first, then the long form, but first a little context.

By “human-directed biotechnology,” I mean the technologies that can either select or change what humans will be. That includes present technologies, like prenatal testing for conditions and disorders, and future ones, like altering the genes of an embryo in order to prevent disease or introduce deliberate changes into future people.

Technologies that can change what people will be inherently raise questions of belonging. The act of altering future minds and bodies implies that some bodies and minds are more desirable than others. Because I have a daughter with Down syndrome, and because my ideal is—as the late disability rights activist Marsha Saxton wrote—“a world where everyone is welcome,” I think it is worth thinking about human-directed
biotech while keeping all people in mind—particularly when the main selling point of the technology is the prevention of disability.

In short form essays and articles, I’ve talked about being Laura’s dad to make her real to people. One problem with talking about biotech is that the people affected tend to be abstractions, so to let Laura speak for herself is a way of reminding readers that Down syndrome is not one thing, that the people who have it are not one uniform population, and that they deserve the dimensionality we grant to ourselves. Narrative can help do that. In other short pieces, I’ve focused on the technology, maybe mentioning along the way that I have a daughter with Down syndrome. The risk, of course, is of being dismissed for that alone. But there’s an interesting question there about which experiences give authority to talk about what, though that’s too much for us to get into here.

In long form (i.e. books), I’ve taken two different approaches. My memoir, *The Shape of the Eye*, was mainly narrative, but with excursions into thinking about technology. My book *Fables and Futures* was more general nonfiction with narrative spliced in: it went more deeply into the technology, and even more specifically into the way we talk about it, especially the persuasion attached to it.

My own goal, in either book, was not persuasive—at least not in the traditional sense. I wanted, by portraying my daughter Laura, to show her as irreducibly herself, as a complex person far beyond anything I could portray. By doing so I wanted to raise difficult questions for which I myself have no answer, but to assert that the values we bring to the technology, and that are embedded in the technology itself, are more significant than any detail of the technology itself.

**Melissa:** Tanya, you have a particular interest in dementia and caregiving; in what ways have you explored this topic in both short-form and long-form personal narrative, to bring attention to families affected by Alzheimer’s?
**Tanya:** I helped to care for both my father and my grandmother when they received near simultaneous diagnoses with Alzheimer's disease. This was over twenty-years ago and resources were not as plentiful as they are today. As a family, we came up with many strategies on our own. It was a difficult time, but I remain grateful for the deep experience I had with my Dad and Gran and for the way their unique manifestations of dementia united our family.

I began writing my book in order to slow down a particularly chaotic period of my life. I needed to see what happened. I kept writing my book because it was a way for me to stay close to my father. I worried that if I stopped writing, I might not be able to hear his voice again. I did not realize that the book would, in a way, keep him alive. That Dad continues to make friends in this world through my pages is a great joy.

Over the years, I've processed my own grief in what has turned out to be an ongoing conversation with others in the field of dementia. I interviewed Kim Campbell and wrote about overcoming my fear of watching “I'll Be Me,” the documentary film about her husband, singer/songwriter, Glen Campbell. Filmmaker Michelle Memran, director of “The Rest I Make Up,” has shared with me not only her experience with playwright Maria Irene Fornes, but also her own ongoing dedication to patient-centered care. My own caregiving experience was shaped by reading and so I shared those books that were valuable to me and encouraged readers to find their own companions in art, literature and poetry.

I’ve written about how my experience with my Dad influenced my parenting and about the struggles inherent to the so-called “sandwich generation.”

More recently, I’ve been speaking directly with people experiencing Alzheimer’s and other dementias. While there is no cure for dementia, the diagnosis does not have to be seen as an end. Many, many people continue to work, advocate and live rich and complex lives.
Just three years shy of the age of my father at his diagnosis, speaking with these individuals gives me a new level of comfort. I'm beginning to write more about aging and our unending capacity for growth, compassion, and flexibility.

**Melissa:** Andrea, you have a particular interest in ensuring access for all in the wilderness; in what ways have you explored this topic in both short-form and long-form nonfiction?

**Andrea:** In short form, I've published with Bay Nature, *Circumambulating in COVID Times*: *Joy and Solace on Mt. Tam During the Pandemic*, Ploughshares: *A Feminist Look at Edward Abbey's Conservationist Writings* and *Effects of the Edge*.

I'd also argue that my book, *Unnatural Selection* argues for the idea that access to wilderness is important for all people.

**Melissa:** Juanita, what advice do you have for audience members interested in writing articles and essays to build an audience for their book-length works?

**Juanita:** I can only tell you how I did it. With both of my books, I started out piece by piece and submitted the stand alone pieces to lit journals and magazines. Then later, I collated the social justice essays, poetry and a few memoir pieces for my chapbook and edited and updated the law issues in them to create my *Punk Rock Public Defender chapbook*.

With my memoir I did the same over a much longer, 12 year period, and I then had to put all the short stories together to flow and reedit them for repetition and to find the narrative thread. The memoir was very hard to collate and reedit, that took two years. But in the end, the books are exactly how I wanted them to be. So find what works for you.

By publishing your stand alone pieces, you are by the very nature of it, creating your audience and platform for your books. And start a blog. I have 500 plus essays on my blog and I get at least 1200 readers for each piece. That builds your platform and you are memorializing your life. You’ll be grateful when you’re in your fifties and cannot remember your forties sometimes, that you put it on your blog.
It is pretty simple. You must write and you must submit. Paid or unpaid at first. Do not let rejection get you down, because if you’re submitting, and putting yourself out there, you’re succeeding. You’re a writer!

Melissa: George, what advice do you have for audience members interested in writing articles and essays to build an audience for their book-length works?

George: I think there are two factors to think about here. The first is “audience,” and what we mean by that. The first is timing: are we talking about a manuscript in process, when the book may be a year or more away? Or in the few months before or after the pub date?

“Audience” is complex. People come to books for many reasons. They like memoir as a genre; they’re interested in the specific topic, either as an intellectual matter, or because it connects to their own lives in some way. So in my case, I’ve connected with readers of literary memoir; specialists and therapists who deal with disability; teachers; doctors; people interested in narrative medicine and/or medical humanities; readers interested in biotechnology; and parents of children with disabilities. That’s the short list, but if you reverse engineer this and think about things from the outlet end, each of those readers will likely look to different publications. Parents of children with Down syndrome might not read AGNI, but they might read Exceptional Parent. Doctors might not read Exceptional Parent, but they might read the AMA Journal of Ethics. And so on.

As for timing, I think that writing short pieces always helps, even if the book is won’t come out for some time. But the main thing I discovered, once I began publishing books, is that when a book is about to come out, the publisher can help connect you with outlets for short articles and essays. That’s how I came to write for the New York Times, The Conversation, and other places. So I would advise working with the publisher to place either a new piece on something timely and related to the book, or an excerpt from the book itself.
Melissa: Tanya, what advice do you have for audience members interested in writing articles and essays to build an audience for their book-length works?

Tanya: Let your mind radiate outwards. Think about the topic of your book and then brainstorm new angles on this topic. How might your book relate to food or travel or fashion? Is there a way you might link your book to another book or a film? Can you teach your book? Are there particular dates or anniversaries that connect to your book? Who else is writing about the topic? Can you have a conversation around the topic? If you have questions about your topic, to whom might you turn for answers?

It’s also useful to keep a list of places to share these articles. Start a collection of organizations, businesses and hashtags for twitter/Instagram that pertain to your book. In doing this, you might find people you’d like to interview or learn new things about your topic that you’d like to share with the world.

Melissa: Andrea, what advice do you have for audience members interested in writing articles and essays to build an audience for their book-length works?

First identify your main themes/topics “buckets”: mine are adoption and wilderness and chronic illness.

Then figure out what outlets might be good for this: internet search/ Who pays writers/other resources.

Questions from the Audience