AWP 2024 EVENT OUTLINE

EVENT TITLE:
I Published My First Book After Age 50: A Reading and Conversation

EVENT DESCRIPTION:
The publishing world can be discouraging for middle-aged beginners or vocational pivoters—but also for those who’ve been writing diligently for a long time and still don’t have a book. This panel will showcase four writers who published their first book after age fifty, with a short reading of these debut works (poetry and fiction) followed by a discussion of the advantages/challenges of debuting as an older writer.

ORGANIZER AND MODERATOR:
Anne Elliott: Anne Elliott is the author of The Artstars: Stories. Her short fiction can be found in A Public Space, STORY, Crab Orchard Review, Witness, Hobart, and other journals. Honors include the Blue Light Books Prize, the Story Foundation Prize, and a grant from the Elizabeth George foundation.

PANELISTS:
Karen Schubert: Karen Schubert holds an MFA from the Northeast Ohio Master of Fine Arts and is the author of The Compost Reader (Accents Publishing) and five poetry chapbooks. Executive director and co-founder of literary arts nonprofit Lit Youngstown, she has taught in numerous academic and community settings.

LeTonia Jones: LeTonia Jones is a social justice advocate, author, poet, copy writer, editor, writing teacher, and a former newspaper columnist. Jones published her debut book, Black Girl at the Intersection, in 2023 at age 51. This book represents her belief in the power of witnessing and being witnessed.

Louise Marburg: Louise Marburg is the author of three award winning collections of stories, The Truth About Me, No Diving Allowed, and You Have Reached Your Destination. The Truth About Me, her debut collection,
was published after age 50, and went on to win an Independent Press Award for short story collections.

Jimin Han: Jimin Han is the author of the novels, *The Apology* and *A Small Revolution*. She teaches at The Writing Institute at Sarah Lawrence College, Pace University, and community writing centers.

HOUSEKEEPING REMARKS:
Welcome to *I Published My First Book After Age 50: A Reading and Conversation*. A few reminders before we begin:

- For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let the moderator of the panel, Anne Elliott, know, and a printed copy will be delivered to you.
- Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.
- Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
- Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products.
- Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone’s use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.
- Given the Covid numbers, if others are masked near you, I encourage you to assume they need the mask to protect themselves or loved ones and to mirror their actions. We want everyone to feel welcome in this session, and we don’t want to send anyone home with that particular souvenir.

OPENING REMARKS (LIKELY WILL RIFF ON THIS):
Writing is hard work, publication even harder—and the whole undertaking can get more discouraging with age, as time heaps up the rejection slips and taps creative reserves. The mainstream publishing industry seeks to launch long careers for fresh young voices, but we older folks still have something to say. This session seeks to inspire long-haulers who hope to find audience.
I published my first book after I had basically given up. It was the fourth book for which I sought publication. In my late forties, I decided to stop chasing the New York publishing apparatus and applied for an MFA program. I also parted ways with a fantastic agent who was nevertheless unable to sell my manuscripts. I started sending to book contests—and within a year had a publisher for my short story collection. The other three books remain in the drawer.

My debut went into print just before I turned 53, and coincidentally just before the pandemic made in-person marketing impossible. There is so much about this process that is out of our control.

But I’d like this conversation to first consider the thing that is absolutely in our control—the writing itself! So before we start talking about the publication process, let’s hear a little work from each of our panelists all of whom really have something to say.

I’ll introduce each panelist with her short bio and then each will read for five minutes from her debut work. Following the reading, I will then ask the panel a few prepared questions. If the conversation moves in a beautiful and unexpected direction I will follow it there.

PREPARED QUESTIONS FOR PANEL:

• How many of you worked with an agent to place your debut work?
• If you did work with an agent, how did you obtain that agent?
• If you did not work with an agent, what was your path to publication?
• Is this the first book you wrote? Or, are there apprentice manuscripts in your drawer?
• What, if any, are the gifts of publishing your first book after age 50?
• What, if any, are the limitations?
• Do you have more books, and if so, are they available at the conference?

AUDIENCE Q&A:
We will allocate at least 10 minutes to audience questions.