EVENT OUTLINE

Title: The Long and Winding Road: How to Persevere When Your Book Takes Forever
Number: F171
Date/Time: 12:10pm - 1:25pm on Friday February 9, 2024
Location: Room 2207, Kansas City Convention Center, Street Level

OPENING REMARKS:
Welcome to “The Long and Winding Road: How to Persevere When Your Book Takes Forever.” 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, (identify moderator), 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.

Event Description:
How does a writer maintain hope, energy and belief when their book takes longer than they ever expected to complete and publish? This panel of “long-haul” fiction and nonfiction writers will discuss how they persevered in the face of industry obstacles and everyday life, and share how and why they didn’t give up and
ultimately succeeded. Audience members are encouraged to share their own challenges and solutions in a moderated conversation with panelists who kept going until publication.

**Event Agenda:**

The moderator will begin by introducing the panelists who will introduce their own work and describe their experiences of writing and publishing their books. After a 30 minute moderated discussion among the panelists, the audience will be invited to engage in the topic through a series of prepared activities and discussion prompts for about 30 minutes, followed by a summary and wrap-up by the panel and moderator.

**Introduction of Panelists:**

**Event Organizer & Moderator:**

**Susan Ito:**
Susan Ito is the author of the memoir, I Would Meet You Anywhere, published by the Ohio State University Press. She co-edited the literary anthology A Ghost At Heart’s Edge: Stories & Poems of Adoption. Her work has appeared in The Writer, Hyphen, Literary Mama, Catapult, Hyphen, The Bellevue Literary Review, Agni, Guernica, and elsewhere. She has been awarded residencies at the MacDowell Colony, The Mesa Refuge, Hedgebrook and Blue Mountain Center.

**Event Participants:**

**Terry Tierney** is the author of a poetry collection, *The Poet’s Garage*, and the novels, *Lucky Ride*, a sixties road novel, and most recently, *The Bridge on Beer River*, a rust belt romance set in upstate New York. Each book took over forty years to write, though they were not written consecutively. Terry’s poems and stories have appeared in *The Bellevue Literary Review, Remington Review, Reed*
Terry's second poetry book, *Why Trees Stay Outside*, which he completed in just six years, will be published in October 2024. He lives in the SF Bay Area with his family, including two fluffy cats and an enthusiastic Golden Retriever.

**Susanne Pari:**
Susanne Pari’s most recent novel, *In the Time of Our History*, examines the entangled lives of an Iranian American family grappling with generational culture clashes and the rebellion of its women. It was an IndieNext pick, Target Book Club pick, 2023 Women’s National Book Association Group Reads Selection, a Book Browse 2023 best books selection, and a Hoopla Spotlight Selection. Her first novel, *The Fortune Catcher*, about the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, was first published in 1997 and translated into six languages. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and *NPR*. She is a member of the National Book Critics Circle, PEN America, the Author's Guild, and the San Francisco Writers’ Grotto.

**Sejal Shah** is a writer, interdisciplinary artist, and educator. She is the author of the forthcoming debut story collection *How to Make Your Mother Cry: fictions* (West Virginia University Press, May 2024). Her debut essay collection, *This Is One Way to Dance*, was an NPR Best Book of 2020 and included in over thirty most-anticipated or best-of lists including *Electric Literature*, *Lit Hub*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Millions*, *Ms. Magazine*, and *PEN America*. Her first book took her 20 years to write and publish. Her second book took her 26. She lives in Rochester, New York.

**Sari Botton:** Sari will be joining us remotely via Zoom.

Sari Botton's memoir in essays, *And You May Find Yourself...Confessions of a Late-Blooming Gen-X Weirdo*, took her more than fifteen years to finish and publish. The book was chosen by *Poets & Writers* magazine for the 2022 edition of
its annual "5 Over 50" feature. For five years, she was the Essays Editor at Longreads. She edited the bestselling anthologies Goodbye to All That: Writers on Loving and Leaving New York and Never Can Say Goodbye: Writers on Their Unshakable Love for New York. She publishes Oldster Magazine, Memoir Land, and Adventures in Journalism. She was the Writer in Residence in the creative writing department at SUNY New Paltz for Spring, 2023.

Opening Remarks and Housekeeping Announcements

Hello everyone, and welcome to “The Long and Winding Road: How to Persevere When Your Book Takes Forever.” I was inspired to put this panel together when my memoir was published this year, 30 years after I started it as an MFA thesis back in 1993. I never dreamed (or had a nightmare!) that it would take me this long, but ultimately the book, titled I Would Meet You Anywhere, came to life this past November. I wasn’t sure whether to be proud, or embarrassed. Who takes 3 decades to write a 275 page book? Apparently, me. And as I began talking about it, I realized I was not alone. And surprisingly, there turned out to be some advantages to taking so long. For one, I was writing a memoir with a long arc, and as it turned out, I needed those final years to happen for the story to come to a satisfying close. It would have felt abrupt or random to end it any sooner than I did, which is why I could never come to an ending. Also, during that time I think I really strengthened my craft. I became a better, more experienced writer. And during that long time I truly cultivated and strengthened my community of both writers and readers. When I finally had my book launch in November, 240 people showed up, which would not have happened 30 years ago. A LOT of people had asked me, “How’s that book coming?” and I think many of them were as shocked as I was when it finally happened.

Some authors can whip out a book in a year, and I have such admiration for them, but this was not my path, and it was not the path for my fellow panelists either. We are here as testimony to the long-haul book, the book you can’t let go of even as the years tick by.
I’d like to start by having each of our panelists briefly introduce themselves and their writing process, and to address the various obstacles you faced in your writing and publishing journey.

**PANELIST QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION**

What are your main obstacles? What types?

1. Internal - “fear is the fungus of avoidance”
2. Life/family/demands/
3. Industry

Solutions and remedies to these things

Does anybody have a part of their book to share that illustrates this?

**AUDIENCE CONVERSATION:**

We will then invite the audience to turn to someone sitting near them and to spend 3-4 minutes each discussing the same questions - what sorts of obstacles have you faced, and what have you found helpful? We will then invite pairs to pose questions or comments to the panelists, and engage in a dynamic conversation between audience members and panelists.

**WRAP-UP and CONCLUSIONS:**

The panel and moderators will summarize what we have discussed during this session and then we will wrap up the session.