What I Wish I Would Have Known: Considerations for First Books and Far Beyond

AWP Kansas City 2024

Number: T195
Date/Time: 1:45pm - 3:00pm on Thursday February 8, 2024
Location: Room 2103C, Kansas City Convention Center, Street Level

Event Description
How do you find the right publisher—and what happens next? Five writers who’ve published in different models, genres, and eras will discuss in frank terms what they wish they would have known on the publishing journey. Topics include relationships with publishers, how the money works, and will encompass how to manage expectations against realistic outlooks. With an overall goal of transparency, this panel will help writers at every stage ask questions that will best serve their projects.

Event Category
Artistic and Professional Development

Event Organizer & Moderator
Wendy J. Fox (she/her) is the author of four books of fiction, including What If We Were Somewhere Else (Santa Fe Writers Project, 2021), received a star from Booklist for excellence in the genre of short stories and won the Colorado Book Award for literary fiction. Two of the included stories received Pushcart Prize nominations. Buzzfeed Books listed her novel If the Ice Had Held (Santa Fe Writers Project, 2019) as a most anticipated book, and the audio was named a top pick by LitHub. In addition, she has written for national outlets, including Ms. Magazine and Business Insider; and for industry media like The Rumpus, Electric Literature, and Catapult.

Event Participants
Gregory Spatz (he/him) has published three novels and three short fiction collections, most recently Inukshuk, Half as Happy, and What Could Be Saved. Recipient of a 2012 NEA Literature Fellowship and a Washington State Book Award, he teaches in and directs the MFA program at Eastern Washington University.

Leland Cheuk (he/him) is the author of three books of fiction, most recently No Good Very Bad Asian. His work as appeared in the Washington Post, NPR, the San Francisco Chronicle, Salon, and elsewhere. He runs the indie press 7.13 Books and is on the advisory board of The Gertrude Conference.

Aisha Sharif (she/her) is the author of To Keep from Undressing, a collection of poems addressing her life as an African American Muslim woman. Aisha’s poetry has been nominated for Pushcart Prizes and published in Crab Orchard Review and Rattle. She holds an MFA in poetry and is a Cave Canem fellow.
Morgan Christie (she/her) is the author of *Boolean Logic*, the Howling Bird Press Nonfiction Prize winner, *These Bodies* (Tolsun Books, 2020), a Hurston Wright Legacy Award nominee, and four poetry chapbooks. She was awarded the 2022 Arc Poem of the Year prize and Digging Press’s Chapbook Series Prize.

**Panel Agenda**
- Welcome
- Short panelist reading
- Panelist discussion of moderator questions (please see below)
- Audience Questions

**Opening Remarks**

**Wendy J. Fox**

In 2014, my first book was published by a small press specializing in short stories and poetry. I was so relieved; my greatest fear was to be a writer without a book. Yet, when I finished my first novel, the specialization of the press meant I had to shop again. While I still may have published with them knowing what I know now, I definitely also might have waited to find a press who handles both novels and short stories so that I didn’t have to start completely from scratch the second time around. Of course, there is no guarantee that a publisher or agent who takes one of your books to market will want subsequent titles, but if you work in more than one format, it’s worth considering trying to find a house who can handle both.

**Gregory Spatz**

[[Statement to come]]

**Leland Cheuk**

[[Statement to come]]

**Aisha Shariff**

My book was released in 2019 by a small press out of Nebraska. I had a wonderful working relationship with the press and feel that they did a great job in promoting my book based on their reach and capabilities. But I what I did not fully understand about this process was how much I would have to come out of my introverted shell to promote the book. I had to take a lot of risks in making connections and hype myself up a lot more than I am used to. I realized that publishing my book was a lesson in not just promoting a book but how to promote myself.

**Morgan Christie**

[[Statement to come]]

**Moderator Questions**

1. When you think back to your debut, what do you wish you would have known about the marketing effort required to promote your work, and how has this changed from then to now?
2. How did you know that your press was the right one to publish your book? What made you say, “Yes!,” to the press?

3. What do you think is the most important aspect of the relationship between your publisher/agent/editorial team is?

4. Were there any stipulations or clarifications that you advocated for in your book contract? If so, what were some of them? Did the contract need to be revised upon review?

5. How do you advocate for your work