

# 2026 Terroir Creative Writing Festival

## Session Descriptions

**Daniel Pollack-Pelzner: What I Learned About Writing from Lin-Manuel Miranda** While researching his recent biography, *Lin-Manuel Miranda: The Education of An Artist* (Simon & Schuster, 2025), Pollack-Pelzner found himself not only learning about his subject's life, but learning from his subject about how to pursue a healthy, joyous writing life—how to overcome the inertia of starting a project, how to handle feedback and rejection, how to embrace collaboration and revision, and how to create from your fullest sense of self and community. He'll share these lessons, illustrated by stories from the Miranda biography, in this keynote.

**Margaret Chula: Let It All Go: Writing Haibun as Catharsis** In Greek catharsis means “cleansing” – releasing repressed emotions to bring clarity and leave us feeling calmer. In this workshop, we'll look at examples of how poets have transformed emotions like grief, anger, and fear into positive change through the creative act of writing. Haibun, with its interplay of prose and haiku, is an excellent vehicle for blending story with poetry for emotional resonance and resolution. There will be time to write, so bring a notebook and writing implement.

**Alex Dang: Poetry and Performance** This workshop will give participants a variety of ways to think about their stage presence and how they can best serve their work. It will include performance exercises that will put participants on their feet (think warm-ups and exercises that a stage actor or improv comedian would use). This session will demonstrate how the performance of one's poetry can affect the final product.

**Emmeline Duncan: Murder, But Make It Cozy: Writing a Cozy Mystery** Wait—cozy mystery? Isn't that a contradiction in terms? In this interactive session, you'll build a cozy mystery from the ground up. Along the way, you'll explore the genre's key elements, from irresistible protagonists to complicated villains – and uncover the tropes readers can't get enough of.

**Kristen Hall-Geisler: Sci-Fi in Reverse: Writing Relevant Historical Fiction from Any Era, for Any Era** The critic James Wood once called historical fiction “science fiction in reverse.” He meant it as an insult, but it's actually a useful framework for constructing historical fiction that is relevant to your readers. Most authors of historical fiction already love and know how to do research, so this presentation will focus on deploying that research to evoke an era without overwhelming the reader, to create characters that connect, and to build a believable historical world. There will be time for Q&A at the end.

**Melissa Hart: Tell Your Story: Write Personal Essays for Periodicals** Hundreds of magazines and newspapers publish personal essays. In this workshop, veteran essayist Melissa Hart will teach you to identify a wealth of topics for your personal essays and then show you how to craft your ideas into compelling short pieces for readers. We'll talk about the components of personal essays and touch on the ethics of writing about friends and family. You'll learn how to submit your work professionally, and how to promote your essays once they're published. Writers will receive a robust bibliography so you can hit the ground running after the conference!

**Mike Haukom: What You Can Steal from Screenwriters: Writing That Moves** Screenwriting assumes attention is fragile. If an audience gets bored, the entire story collapses, and millions of dollars are wasted. Thus, scenes are designed to earn attention continuously. Readers abandon books just as quickly. In this workshop, Haukom will share screenwriting tools for momentum, tension, and engagement you can incorporate into your own writing. The goal is not to make your writing more cinematic, but to make it irresistible.

**J.B. Kish: Project Managing Your Novel: How to Write a Book in Ten Months** Finishing a novel on time requires more than dreaming big. It's about understanding the fundamentals of project planning, as well as your unique goals and motivations. This interactive workshop will help clarify your goals and what motivates you to do your best work. You'll create a road map tailored to your life, allowing you to make consistent progress on your novel without sacrificing family, work, or, most importantly, sleep. In order to start a novel, you need inspiration. But in order to finish a novel, you need a plan.

**Elisa Saphier: How (and Why) to Pitch to a Literary Agent** What does a literary agent do and why do you (or not) need one? What is a pitch, and what is expected from you and your manuscript (fiction) or proposal (nonfiction) when you pitch or query a literary agent? Agent Elisa Saphier will tell you what to mention (or avoid) in your query letter, and will answer questions about the querying process.

**Paul Warmbier: The Power of Perhaps** Through creative non-fiction, we strive to find the objective truth of an event or relationship in our lives, but objective history does not always align with our perception of the event or our emotional interpretation. This session will help you identify the emotional truth of a situation, incorporating perception and feeling into reality, sometimes clashing, sometimes disrupting, always dramatic, creating a larger sense of how we live our lives and write about our experiences with broader permission to tell that which is true, but, well, it's complicated.

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**C.B. Mason: Tackling “Big Themes” in YA Fiction** Young-adult fiction often explores the big issues readers face—identity, justice, power, belonging, and moral responsibility—yet the success of the theme lies not in its scale but in how it is experienced through the emotional lens of a teen protagonist. This workshop will cover how to translate the big theme into personal stakes, relationship choices, and emotions without overwhelming the story or losing the immediacy of the teen perspective.

**Paths to Self-Publishing Panel** Self-publishing has evolved from a fringe alternative to a powerful publishing pathway. This panel will explore today’s tools, platforms, and distribution models, examining how authors can retain creative control, earn higher royalties, reach global audiences, and build direct reader relationships while navigating discoverability, marketing demands, and a rapidly shifting literary marketplace. Panelists include Karen Berkey Huntsberger, J.B. Kish, and Erin Hall.

### Speaker Bios

**Karen Berkey Huntsberger** has self-published three titles. Both nonfiction books *Waiting for Peace – The Journals & Correspondence of a WWII Medic* (2015) and *I’ll Be Seeing You – Letters Home from a Navy Girl* (2018) were financed through Kickstarter campaigns. She published her debut historical novel, *Dear Nora*, in 2025. karenberkeyhuntsberger.com

**Margaret Chula** has been writing and teaching haiku and related forms for more than forty years. She has published over a dozen books, including *Clothes To Go Out In*, a collection of haibun. Maggie has served as President of the Tanka Society of America and as Poet Laureate for the Friends of Chamber Music.

**Alex Dang** is a poet from Portland, Ore. A former TEDx speaker, Dang competed at the National Poetry Slam, was a Portland and Eugene Poetry Slam Champion, and has performed in seven countries. He has strong opinions about burgers. He wants to know what your favorite song is. alexdangpoetry.com

**Emmeline Duncan’s** cozy mysteries feature PNW-settings and quirky characters that feel like they could sit down next to you in a Portland coffee shop. As Kelly Garrett, she was an Oregon Book Awards finalist for her YA thriller *The Last to Die* and received an Oregon Literary Fellowship in 2020. EmmelineDuncan.com

**Kristen Hall-Geisler** is a freelance editor and author whose work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Heavy Feather*, and the *Pittsburgh Review of Books*, among others. She has a master's degree in English Language and Literature, and she loves editing, reading, and writing historical fiction. kristenhallgeisler.com

**Erin Hall** is the author of *Dear Sylvia*, *Love Jane*, as well as short stories and essays. She serves on the board of Gather Repertory Theatre and the planning committee for the Terroir Creative Writing Festival. Erin teaches writing and marketing classes and works a day job as a content strategist. erinhallwrites.com

**Melissa Hart** is the author of eight books; her newest is *Down Syndrome Out Loud: 20+ Stories of Disability & Determination*. Her personal essays have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Washington Post*, CNN, *Salon*, *Orion*, *Real Simple*, and numerous other publications. She lives in Eugene. melissahart.com

**Mike Haukom** is an Emmy-nominated television writer and producer with over two decades of experience on some of network TV’s most iconic comedy series. He got his start on *Everybody Loves Raymond*, and went on to write and produce for *The Late Show with David Letterman*, *Rules of Engagement*, *Last Man Standing*, and many more. mikehaukom.carrd.co

**J.B. Kish** is a horror author in the Pacific Northwest. He is the former co-chair of the Oregon HWA, and his writing has been published in *Nightmare Magazine*, *Skull & Laurel*, *Metaphorosis’ Best of ’22*, and others. He’s a milestone book coach that helps authors leverage project management to accomplish their writing goals. jbkish.com

**CB Mason**, a lover of dystopian tales and strong female characters, recognizes the written word’s potential to drive social change. Her debut novel, *Shattered*, and forthcoming sequel, *Merged*, follow a brave heroine’s journey of resilience and self-discovery. When not writing, she enjoys yoga, SUP adventures, and weekend getaways (someplace warm). bycbmason.com

**Daniel Pollack-Pelzner** has written about theater and contemporary culture for *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, and *The New York Times*. Born and raised in Oregon, he received his B.A. from Yale and his Ph.D. from Harvard, and he now teaches theater history at Portland State University. He lives in Portland with his wife, whom he met in a fifth-grade production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and their two children. He is author of the Lin-Manuel Miranda creative biography *Lin-Manuel Miranda: The Education of an Artist*. danielpollackpelzner.com

**Elisa Saphier** is a bookseller and literary agent with MacGregor & Luedeke. She represents upper-middle-grade through adult fiction and nonfiction authors and is especially eager to work with marginalized writers to help equalize the publishing

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industry and get their stories into the world for others to read (#representationmatters). She lives in Portland, Ore., with her wife and son, where she is always behind on queries but is constantly reading. [macgregorliterary.com](http://macgregorliterary.com)

**Paul Warmbier** is an essayist and educator. He has spent the last decade and a half in public schools, teaching middle school to university-level writing. As an essayist and memoirist, he focuses on our interactions and experiences in nature, examining how they affect us and our place in the world. [paulwarmbier.com](http://paulwarmbier.com)