

SUMMER 2020



The Quarterly Magazine of the Women's Fiction Writers Association

WRITE ON!

MESSY MIDDLES



HOW TO FIX A SAGGING MIDDLE

NOW YOU'RE PUBLISHED: PARTY ON!

IN THEIR WORDS: WILLIAM SCHREIBER

**+ RISING STAR
CONTEST 2020**

IN THEIR WORDS

By Kay Arthur

We had the pleasure of interviewing William “Bill” Schreiber, 2019 Rising Star Winner and author of *Someone to Watch Over*.

■ Why did you write the book?

The initial seed of Someone to Watch Over—two adult siblings who set aside their decades-long estrangement to honor their recently deceased father by retracing a childhood vacation—grew out of my family asking me to write my Dad’s eulogy. I felt overwhelmed, crushed by the realization that I didn’t know him. I knew him as “Dad,” whose life I came into when he was 30 years old. But I didn’t know his life’s journey. What were his dreams as a boy? Did life turn out the way he thought it would? I didn’t have any of these answers because I was busy building my own life, and we always think there will be time.

I found my way into writing his eulogy by recalling us five kids with our parents in a station wagon visiting Old Florida roadside tourist spots. I wrote the story originally as a screenplay. It resonated at film festival competitions, winning multiple best screenplay awards, so I adapted it into a book.

■ Is there an area in the book that you struggled with?

When I wrote the screenplay, I didn’t outline. Something was pent up in me that poured out, so I just rode the wave where Lennie and her brother, John, took me. It was a structural mess. I knew the beginning, and I knew how I wanted it to end. The problem was act two, that daunting desert we have to cross in the middle that comprises roughly fifty percent of a three-act story.

I broke act two into manageable chunks. I worked out major structural points where complications, twists, setbacks, and reversals of fortune forced Lennie and John to make decisions to deepen their emotional stakes. I wrote from tentpole to tentpole, allowing myself room for creative wanderings and discovery. Because I put the structural work in, I was able to use the screenplay as an outline for the book.



MY PATH STARTED WITH A RECOGNITION THAT I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO WRITE A NOVEL.

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FEATURE

■ Once the book was revised and ready, what was your publishing path?

My path started with a recognition that I didn't know how to write a novel. I was certain the first draft would be a mess, and I didn't disappoint! I worked with a wonderful editor who taught me how to transition from screenwriter to novelist as I deepened the characters and story beyond what I could do within the constraints of a screenplay.

Once the manuscript was ready, I looked for a community of supportive, like-minded writers, and discovered WFWA while also researching and querying agents. I was in the middle of my rejection phase (a phase everyone must go through) when I was named a finalist for the Rising Star Award last summer.

Meanwhile, I attended the Willamette Writers Conference in Portland. I networked, listened, and continued to learn about publishing. I met and pitched my future publisher there, Benjamin Gorman. I was able to lead with the Rising Star Finalist credential and, his interest piqued, he requested the manuscript. I was fortunate to win a Rising Star Award and sign with Ben at Not A Pipe Publishing. Someone to Watch Over was published on May 26, 2020.

■ Did the publisher have you change anything major with the book?

Ben was interested in the paranormal aspect of the story, and he asked me to sprinkle the presence of Lennie's deceased mom into the story in a nuanced way that fit with the story's tone.

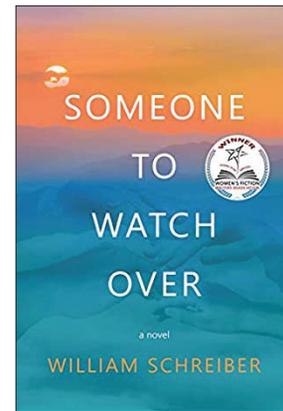
As originally written, I revealed the family's mother, Roselyn, died when Lennie and her brother were young, but I didn't reveal how Roselyn died. I went back into the manuscript and discovered Lennie's mom died giving birth to her. This ember of guilt Lennie has carried her entire life grew into an inferno of determination to find the child she gave up two decades ago. Remaining open to suggested changes added what I think is one of the deepest, most emotionally poignant aspects of the book. I would have missed that had I not been willing to listen.

■ Advice to new writers

Enjoy the creative journey. Celebrate the small victories. Scream into your pillow every rejection milestone—10, 20, 50, 100—just don't take it personally. Resist the urge to chase the market, because by the time you get there, it will change.

Don't rush into writing; give your imagination time to work first. Figure out the big plot moments, the frame over which the story will stretch. Write from point to point (it's less scary than facing the entire storyscape at once), wandering at will in between. Allow for sideways thinking; that is, let your mind roam. The story's bits and pieces coalesce when you're not thinking directly about them, even while you sleep!

Life experience provides a rich well of story possibilities, and the longer we live, the more we go through, the more people we meet, the deeper that well gets. As strange as it may sound, I never felt more alive than after writing this story inspired by my father's death. It's a story only I could have written. We all have stories within us. Tell yours.



CHAPTER ONE

What do I look like? She couldn't remember. And she'd given up on mirrors long ago. Consarned things never revealed anybody's true self anyhow. Folks would be better off ponderin' themselves in the surface of Chickamauga Lake during a Spring blow. The wavering image looking back at them from its wind-whipped water was more likely to reflect the peculiar forces at work on them every day of their natural-born lives.

She held fast to the notion that folks' bodies were the least interesting thing about them, mere pickle jars to the sprouts of life within. There was some comfort in that because she could no longer perceive her physical self. She couldn't remember the last time she'd felt the skin of another human being brush hers. Or had been aware of her age.

She could be eight. Or twenty. Or fifty-seven. What did it matter? She was all of them at once, carried all the years of her life inside, along with the emotional baggage that had always fed the gossip mill, until folks had nothing left to whisper about. No, ma'am. Age made no nevermind, especially in these grinding foothills of Tennessee's Great Smoky Mountains. Souls around here had their hands full merely bearing up under the circumstances with which the yoke of strenuous living had burdened them. This she knew.

Some were brave enough—some would say foolhardy enough—to stand their ground against a surefire destiny of deprivation. They squared off and schemed to get out. Others simply rolled over. Folks here either surrendered to fate or fought their way out of the corner into which it had jammed them.

She hadn't expected to come back to this place, but maybe it was fitting. After all, it held her beginnings . . . as well as her end. Without a sound, she made her way through the foggy dawn toward a sagging car cloaked in a muted gray akin to sodden field cotton. The decrepit station wagon slumped all catawampus in front of the town's lovely bookstore; the former antebellum church, now home to a landmark bell steeple, brought a gust of memories, here and then gone. The historic cobblestone town square of red-brick buildings stood as it had years and years ago, but she barely noticed it—she couldn't take her eyes off the car.