



## November Tornado Alley Meeting

**M**isty Simon is known for her kind heart and her laughter. She is a romcozy writer, with several series under her belt including her newest, the Sunny Side Up Mysteries and The Charmed Inn mysteries. She is a member of National Sisters in Crime, where you can usually find her on Tuesday and Friday evening Write Ins with great stories and prompts to get you through the hour.

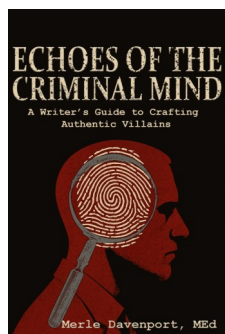
Join us on Zoom at 7 p.m. on November 10th when Misty will chat with us about Finding Time to Write.

## Mystery Writer of the Month

**F**or twenty-five years, **Merle Davenport** has taught prison inmates in Michigan and Oklahoma, who were studying to get their GED. During that time, he served as president for the Michigan Council on Learning for Adults for nearly a decade, as a board member for the Michigan Reading Association, and as a member of the executive board for the Michigan Adult and Continuing Education.

Merle has a Master's Degree in Education and all but his dissertation for a PhD in Education Administration. The focus of his graduate studies was inmate behavior and reducing recidivism.

He discovered his love of storytelling in the mid-90s, when his children insisted on nightly tales made up on the spot—especially their favorites featuring a princess and a bear. When they eventually asked him to write the stories down, he agreed, not realizing it would spark a life-long passion for writing.



His first book, *Echoes of the Criminal Mind: A Writer's Guide to Crafting Authentic Villains*, is now available on [mkdavenport.com](http://mkdavenport.com). After teaching behind prison walls and doing extensive research on recidivism and rehabilitation, he created a book that breaks down the criminal personality with charts on how to create villains who think like criminals.

Currently, Merle is president of the Tulsa NightWriters and writes historical romances with his wife Karen. Their collaboration is a creative extension of their own love story. If he should ever have a bit of spare time, he enjoys woodworking and DIY projects around the house. He is also an unapologetic fan of Dad jokes—the groan-worthy, eye-roll-inducing kind. 📖



## Member News & Activities

(Send your news to [marcia@marcia-preston.com](mailto:marcia@marcia-preston.com) for inclusion)

**Donna Le** has several writing pieces in a new anthology, *Celebrating Route 66: Stories Along the Way*. The anthology is a project of Wordwrights Christian Writing group which regularly meets at a Route 66 location in Oklahoma City. The book is available on Amazon.

**Ellen Withers** is happy to announce her novella is one-fourth of a romantic comedy collection being released in paperback and digital format by Scrivenings Press in February 2026. The collection title is *Romancing the Elements*. Each novella features one of the four elements (fire, wind, water, and earth). Ellen's novella is titled "Melting the Ice."

**Amy Shojai's** thriller #9, *Trick or Treat*, is now available for preorder (ebook) at her author direct store on Amazon and everywhere else. The book releases on November 9 at her store, and everywhere else on November 23.

**Marty Ludlum** spoke at the DFW Con in October on "The Power of Mystery." He's also celebrating that book two in his *Disco Divas* series is in the final-edits stage.

Congratulations to **Mark Jones**, whose "Alone in Warsaw" won first place in the short mystery/crime/thriller fiction category in the Southwest Writers Group 2025 contest. It will be published in the anthology, *Beyond Boundaries*.

### Tornado Alley Mystery Writers Podcast

**Episode 50: Interview with Vanessa Lillie**

**Date: Friday, November 14, 2025**

**Vanessa Lillie**, who grew up in Oklahoma, is an enrolled member of the Cherokee tribe and a member of Sisters in Crime. She is the USA Today bestselling author of *Blood Sisters*, the first in a new series centered on the stories of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. It was awarded best mystery of the year from *The Washington Post*, Amazon editors, and *Reader's Digest*. The sequel, *The Bone Thief*, will be released October 28, 2025. Her other bestselling thrillers are *Little Voices* and *For the Best*. She lives in Providence, RI, but returns to visit Oklahoma from time to time. Link up to hear her read a selection from her latest novel.

Find this episode on Buzzsprout, Spotify, and Apple Podcasts.

## Waiting for the Magic by Marcia Preston

**O**ne of my two favorite quotes about writing a novel is attributed to W. Somerset Maugham: "There are three rules for writing a novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are." I love this quotation because it reminds me I'm in good company as I struggle along on my newest novel. It keeps me from taking myself too seriously. I like to think of old W.S.M. delivering this line with a twinkle in his eye, perhaps to some worrier like me who asked him to explain the unexplainable.

Years ago, when my granddaughter Jessica read Maugham's words next to my computer, she couldn't bear to think of me adrift in a sea of words without some rules to follow. So she did her best to help me out. Here are the three rules for writing a novel, according to eight-year-old Jessica: "1. Resurch. 2. Put your time into it. 3. Re-read what you write."

Pretty smart kid. (The spelling thing would come later.) All three of Jessica's suggestions are necessary, without a doubt, and number two accounts for ninety percent of the battle. There's just no substitute for showing up, for putting your time into it.

My friend Carolyn Hart, who had 30 or 40 mysteries to her credit at the time, once told me that writing a novel never gets easier. But if she just kept showing up at the desk and putting in the time, eventually magic would happen. And that magic would let her finish the book.

Now that is a happy ending.

Storytellers may operate under the illusion that they're in control of their work,

but sooner or later, if they immerse themselves deeply enough into the story and the characters, something else takes over. Magic is as good a name as any for this phenomenon, and it's the moment every fiction writer lives for. But first we have to believe in the magic and keep showing up no matter how long it takes.

My other favorite quotation about novel writing is from E. L. Doctorow. Doctorow said that writing a novel is like driving a car at night. You can see ahead only as far as your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way.

It takes a hefty measure of faith to keep on driving into the dark on an unknown road. Faith that there's still a road ahead even when we can't see it; faith that eventually the road will lead somewhere we want to go. And besides the faith, it takes a constant foot on the pedal and a hand on the steering wheel. I re-tell myself Doctorow's wisdom as I blunder along my particular road, following the lights in my head into unknown territory.

Nobody knows the rules for writing a novel. All we have are theories and faith. I suppose my theory of fiction writing is an amalgam of W. Somerset Maugham, E. L. Doctorow, Carolyn Hart, and Jessica.

Put your time into it. And wait for the magic to happen. 📖



## 2026 WRITERS CONFERENCE



**MARCH 21**

9:00-4:00 **CDT**

**Where:** ST. THOMAS MORE CATHOLIC CHURCH, NORMAN, OK

**FREE LUNCH, SNACKS, AND SOFT DRINKS**



**Vanessa Lillie**

Oklahoma Native and Best-Selling Author

Join us at the 2026 Tornado Alley Writers Conference for a vibrant creative experience! Meet Vanessa Lillie, author of *Blood Sisters*, which highlights the stories of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. A proud Cherokee Nation citizen from Miami, Oklahoma, Vanessa's acclaimed novel has received numerous accolades, including recognition from Target and The Washington Post.

The conference features workshops, panel discussions, and networking opportunities with talented authors, creating a community for writers to share ideas and inspiration. Don't miss this chance to enhance your creative journey in an exhilarating environment!

[more information  
http://tornadoalleysinc.org/](http://tornadoalleysinc.org/)