



Authors
of the
Pacific **N**orthwest

EPIISODE 108

Vikki J. Carter | [The Author's Librarian](#)

Episode 108: Episode 108: Monica Devin: A Women Writing the West Literary Award Winning Alaskan Memoir Author

Vikki: Welcome to the podcast Authors of the Pacific Northwest, where I connect authors with their readers. We also talk all about the authors inspiration, their journey to publication, and the authors will educate me and you the listener all about the business of writing. I'm your host Vikki, J Carter also known as The Author's Librarian. Hi there listeners. It's the host of producer. Vikki J Carter, her of this podcast, the authors of the Pacific Northwest. And before we jump into the episode, I wanted to stop real quickly and share with you the newest project that I'm working on. If you are an author, I think you might be interested in it. I have a YouTube channel that I just launched called the Author's librarian on YouTube. And on that YouTube channel, I am going to share with you free, accessible resources that you can use to help you with researching. I'm going to give you tips. I'm also interviewing librarians and I'm writing a book to help authors with researching. So you hope you find me there on that YouTube channel. You can find the link in the show notes. Now let's get to the program coming back to the office.

Monica: Hi everyone. I'm glad to be here. Thank you so much, Vikki,

Vikki: Where are you located Monica.

Monica: I am located in Eagle River, Alaska and I have been here at the same location for about 40 years. Oh, wow. So

Vikki: You were originally from there?

Monica: No, I came up in 1978 after graduate school in speech and language pathology. I applied to three places, Wyoming, Montana and Alaska. And Alaska just happened to be the place that called me first. But, I don't know if this was conscious at the time, but all three of those places have really wide sweeping light landscapes. Yeah. And, you know, 20 below temperatures, the windshield factors. And for some reason, you know, I come from winter people I'm from Michigan. So in my bones I can, you know, handle that and actually even enjoy it. So yeah,

Vikki: I was going to say, you must like it cold in the wilderness because you picked three.

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Monica: Right. And that's what it was because my initial location was Fairbanks and Fairbanks is even colder than it is in Eagle river and it's, you know, in the interior. So, you know, it doesn't get the light that we get down here. So you actually moving from Fairbanks down to Eagle River was a really choice because it opened up our, recreational opportunities in a huge way. where, you know, you can be out in the mountains here in a few minutes and you can be in the wilderness pretty quick. And I'll also out on Prince William Sound on the water where we go shrimping. So things changed when we moved, down south, we're more centrally located and I liked that a lot better.

Vikki: Well, yeah, that sounds a lot better. But you still get a long winter and those are good for writing?

Monica: Well, we do. Yes, actually, they are really good for writing a little bit more about your background, what you went there for work.

Vikki: Are you currently still working or are you retired and writing full-time?

Monica: I am retired. I've been retired for actually quite a while and I'm also an artist and I work with, ceramic clay and figurative ceramics. And most of my work is a combination of women and animals. And I usually get inspiration to build a sculpture from either a poem that I've written or from something else that I've read that sort of inspires me to make something around it. So, I'm just, you know, really into doing that. I think it helps a lot to do something with my hands. I enjoy working with my hands and not always in my head cause I can get kind of lost in my head, but it's a good outlet for that for sure. So, and then I do a little bit of painting too, but, and pretty much, around here, you know, there's lots of hiking trails and Anchorage. The city has such great coastal trails and there's, skiing, downhill skiing and cross country skiing. So there's a lot to do here in the outdoors if you like the outdoors.

Vikki: Yeah. I think you would have to like the outdoors. Like the Northwest, you know, you have to be able to get out and enjoy it and go hiking and go kayaking and go skiing. Those are all the big things fishing, you know?

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Monica: Oh yeah, yeah. We have a fish wheel on the Copper River. It's about three hours away from here. We have a cabin and every year we go in June and catch fish to, you know, have for the winter and store it up and smoke it and so forth. Yeah. We have a lot in common with all you people in Washington and Oregon.

Vikki: You're definitely the same region except is colder up there, I think way colder.

Monica: Yes. Yep.

Vikki: Tell our listeners a little bit about what you're writing, or what you write. So I know you do different kinds of writing different genres, but kind of break it out for those that don't know you, which is probably majority of my listeners.

Monica: Okay. Well write across genres and so, I've written five books for children and in 1997, a couple of them came out from Perfection Learning Corporation in Iowa. And one of them's called The Iditarod . And it's about a girl who runs the Iditarod race, which is the thousand miles sled dog race across Alaska. You probably know about. And the other one is called Mountain Climbing. And it's about a boy and his dad who scaled Mount Denali. And the interesting thing about these two is that they are in teachers' catalogs and you know, they've been used in schools and they are the ones that have done a lot better as far as income than my other picture books, the regular picture books. So I have a few other ones. One of them is called Panda Bear's Christmas, and Carry Me Mama two are also from the same publisher, it's a Canadian publisher and they're called Frizhenry and Whiteside.

Monica: And then the most recent one is called Kayak Girl. It's published by University of Alaska Press. Their imprint is Snowy Owl Books. And, so a couple of these were also pretty much inspired by my traveling in bush villages. I went to over 60 villages, Indian and Eskimo villages for my work to work in special education and to do evaluations and so forth. And so, you know, it was just observing people and their way of life and especially the kids, cause that was always fun. And you know, coming home and putting those stories down on paper and I've got so many ideas and things that I haven't published yet. And I know that you've talked about in one of your questions was if people self-publish and I haven't done that yet, but I really want to do that because I want to do things my way usually

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Monica: True, not really great. But yeah, couple of times they, didn't my very first book in 1991, which was called Baby Talk. It's a book for parents nonfiction and it's it's came out of my profession. So it's all about the speech and language development of children from birth to three and then, you know, activities for parents and their milestones and stuff. But they had font that looked Arabic and I thought what this? It does not even, this is not good. I didn't like it at all. And when I expressed that, they basically said, "Well, we have a graphic arts department and we don't want your input." So I was like stuck with that and I never liked it. But, a good thing that happened was my most recent book for adults, which is called Water Mask, that I hope to read from today. University of Alaska Press Published that in 2019.

Monica: And I saw some paintings by a Canadian artist named, Dominique Fortin and I loved her work so much. She had like, again, combining the women with animals, you know, she had women or girls, young girls on caribou, you know, beautifully, beautifully done mixed media. And then she had one with a girl looking into a mirror and there's a birds on the mirror and it's, so it looked self reflective, which is what my book is kind of contemplative. And so I contacted her immediately and she said, "Oh, I would love to do that." And University of Alaska Press contacted her. And so I was really grateful to UA press for that.

Vikki: Fantastic. Well, I'll wrap back a little bit about some of the things that you talked about, but first thing I want to ask about was getting your book in that teachers, the magazine for teachers was that a deal with a publishing company you're working with, is that how you got that? Because that's an interesting venue for children's book authors, or young adults and their writing, write kind of books. And I think that that's not something that I've had anybody talk about.

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Monica: Well basically, I queried, this publisher they're called Perfection Learning and that's all they do. All they do is publish books for teachers. And so that was one, I queried so many publishers children's book publishers, and they were the ones that came back and said, "You know, this would be really great for our collection." They have a collection for our reluctant readers where they basically asked me if they could shorten my sentences and make it more appealing for readers who were having trouble. And I said, absolutely. And I'm so glad I did because I get letters from schools and students and stuff around the country. But that's, that's all that Perfection Learning does. And in just about every subject matter, you can imagine the other book. So a matter of querying, you know, the regular picture book market.

Vikki: Yeah. Yeah. So you can have an agent, you did it all yourself?

Monica: No, I didn't have an agent and I'm kind of thinking for my next project. I might want to pursue that. I haven't done that yet and I'm not sure, but until the book is completely finished, I won't even go there because I, you know, I kind of hear the pros and the cons of both good people in my writing world. So I have, belong to a writing group. There's five of us and they're so great because they make you accountable every month you come in with something, it might not be any good, but at least you've got something, you know. So several of them are self-published and they also are traditionally published. So we get a mix of opinions and experiences over the last 10, 20 years.

Vikki: That's fantastic. And you mentioned about your thinking, the idea of doing publishing, for it, particularly that one that does sound very interesting for you to rework it for how you want it for adults, you know, non-fiction for it all you have to sell the market. And so do you have the rights? I am curious, they held the rights or do you have them back for it, so you can do that?

Monica: I do. I have the rights back and I don't know if I ever will, because there's so many more interesting, exciting things to do right now that I can, I can't. So I just, I have those, but I can't see doing that at least in the near future because there are so many other things on my plate right now.

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Vikki: I totally get it. And you know, what's so beautiful about the publishing industry we think of that you don't have to stay in one lane, you can do a hybrid version, you know, you could be traditional for some things you can be self published for other things . You know, that was the whole start of this podcast with me asking author how they got published because I was undecided what I wanted to do. And then I finally published my first book. I'm like, great, I enjoyed it. But I also would love to try having, you know, I don't know if I'd have one agent because I've done so much marketing myself from the podcast now for my book that I think I'm okay. But I think for, you know, other genres, it'd be interesting to explore other publishing with other, you know, publishing houses and stuff . So, but it feels like you have a good background as far as what you've already done some things, I mean, I would love to see you try self publishing. If it's really, you've already done a few things like marketing and negotiation and you have probably a really good graphic design you, cause that is important. You already have connections with great artists for illustration. So, you're a shoe-in for self publishing. And you get to keep all the royalties.

Monica: Yeah, exactly. And I think the hybrid two is really great. I've known a couple of people who have gone with She Writes Press .

Vikki: Oh, They're great.

Monica: And they're both women, they're both up here in Alaska and their books are doing really well and they're beautiful books. So yeah, I definitely want to look into that. But I do want more control over what's going on.

Vikki: That's kind of where I feel like majority of authors are going towards these days. A lot of them, not everybody. She Writes Press, I've had a huge handful of Pacific Northwest, authors on She Writes Press on the podcasts. So I totally know them and they're fantastic, great group to work with. Tell us a little bit about your writing process for inspiration. So, you do you get ideas and then you sit down and you write one project at a time. Do you have to outline, how does that work for you?

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Monica: Well, I'm working on fiction right now, so this is my first novel. It's called *The Memory of Geese*. And, right now I'm, I'm feeling really a lot freer because with fiction, I don't feel like I have to outline everything and I don't have to, I don't know exactly how it's going to end and I don't know how parts are going to fit together yet, but the way that I'm writing fiction, I'm having so much more fun because I don't have to do a thousand... a bibliography and all these fact checks, I'm just making stuff up as I go. And that's really interesting and fun. but I'm, I'm writing scenes, you know, I'm just writing scenes. I don't exactly know how they're going to go together, but I'll think about a scene and then I'll get down to writing it. And then later on, see how this relates to what came previously or what's going to come after.

Monica: And I find it so stimulating and exciting to do. And then I'm also thinking about another book after that. If I can, if I survive this, that is also, would be called *A Year of Breathing* and I've for that one, I've just compiled notes. Every time I hear something interesting about impermanence, about aging, about, illness. My, my character is so far going to be a woman who's reflecting back she's in her eighties. And she has a defining moment in her life where she is in charge of a grandchild who actually dies while she's taking care of it. And so that's something that haunts her, her entire life. And so it makes me think about some of those black holes that we have to live with, or we try to climb out of. And how do we do that How do people have resilience and how do they, how do they get out of those types of, situations where their mind takes them to the dark place?

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Monica: Yeah. So yeah, so I think those ideas just come in. I'm always carrying around a notebook. So sometimes in coffee shops, you know, I, you probably do this too, but I watch people and then I write down what they say and listen to dialogue and think, oh, this is really interesting. And then some of the other books that I'm reading, there's that one, olive Kittridge, olive Kittredge by Elizabeth Strout. And that's a really great novel. I'm reading novels so that I can learn. I'm looking at it, not from a reader's point of view, but now from a writer's point of view, like how well she uses dialogue and just a couple of lines of dialogue can tell me so much about a person's character. It's, it's amazing. Yeah. So that's kind of the way I'm thinking about novels now, and I'm also starting to do audible and I really liked that to hear all these, how authors put things together, which I hadn't thought about before, but, I think it's going to be very useful. And my husband always did audible because he always had trouble reading when he was in school and he actually quote unquote reads way more books than I do.

Monica: So I needed to catch up with him. And I think audible is the way to go.

Vikki: Well, I tell you being in education, you probably know this, that I pushed, audio books with my students. I work with adult students. And so, and I'm dyslexic. So for me, reading and writing is a very slow process. But when I discovered using audio, anything for variety or audio for reading, my, my whole world opened up and I do consume a lot of books a lot faster than if I was reading them, even though I enjoy the process of reading. So then the cognitive skill that is, it gets, very, it's so much more helpful for individuals that have some dyslexia like that. They can move a lot faster. Yeah.

Monica: Oh definitely.

Vikki: And my husband, he commutes a lot. He's not a reader. So I got him years ago on audio tapes or CDs from the library when I worked there and he consumed so many books it's hilarious, so great. So

Monica: I can see this, we're going to be driving outside, in August. And so we are both going to be plugged into our audio books. He'll have his, I'll have mine and that's four straight days of driving. So we'll get a reading during the day.

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Vikki: I love it. So let's do this. So I'll make sure that, the show notes will have your website because I believe I looked at your website, I believe he had almost all your titles listed there and your book that you have, and you also got a beautiful photographs and your artwork that you do too. So listeners definitely check out the website. But let's why don't you tell us a little bit about the titles that you you're going to share with us today and give us the background to what you're going to read. You kind of give us a story of maybe how you created this or how it came about or any background you want to share around the reading. And then you go right into the reading and I'm going to go on mute, my dogs have been barking non-stop . So we'll see if they come along on this podcast with us. I'm going to go on mute while you do that Monica, so we do not have barking.

Monica: Okay. Oh, that sounds great. Should I go ahead and read as well?

Vikki: Yes, Please.

Monica: Okay. Sounds good. All right. So, when I started traveling in the bush in Alaska for my work, I kept a journal. I wrote down thoughts and observations and eventually these turned into stories that make up, my latest book called Water Mask. And it's a collection of 15 nonfiction stories drawn from living and working in Alaska for about 25 years. A few of the stories, take place in Alaskan villages. So first I would like to respectfully acknowledge the Yup'ik and Inupiat and Athabascan people who illuminated my path as I traveled in the villages for my job. And, I mean, at every turn, people were so kind and they freely shared their stories and their homes and their lives with me. So I'm really grateful to them.

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Monica: So I'm going to just maybe first, this is not just all about Alaska. There is, other chapters and I'll just name a few of those before I actually go into a reading. But there's a couple other chapters, one of them is called, On the Edge of Ice, and it is about actually going with a whaling crew up, on the Beaufort Sea. Also one called, Things Fall Apart. And that takes into consideration the cultural differences of a person like myself, going into a new beatin Athabaskan villages and youth villages, and working with kids that are, have a different culture than my own. Water Mask is the name of the book. And it comes from a poem actually by Jim Harrison. He's one of my favorite writers. He's from Michigan, and so am I, so I love his books because especially in his book True North, he, he uses all these place names of all these places I know and love in the upper peninsula of Michigan.

Monica: So I have a connection to that, his writing, but, he used the words water mask in a poem about death. And it was a poem that I read when my when we spread my mother's ashes. So water mask in this book, the story is about my mother's death and sorta juxtaposed with, we're fishing, the fish wheel on the copper river and watching the, wheel turn and harvesting fish. Let's see, oh, A Month Alone is, is a story about, well, you know, when ever you go to writing conferences, people always talk about your process or they ask about your process. So this story is about a month that I spent alone in Albuquerque, New Mexico at Ghost Ranch, where I had no car and no people around. So it was great because I was able to get most of this book finished in that period of time.

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Monica: And so it speaks to, you know, what it's like when your come up against. And also I'm really interested in how the mind works and how it turns, and sometimes can be a menace rather than where you want to go with it. You know, you, you get all kinds of thoughts on their unbidden thoughts. And so I, I do, document my struggle with staying on task and keeping my mind going in the direction that I wanted it to. And then let's see, oh, The Inside Passage is about coming up to Alaska in, in the inside passage on a friend's boat. Cold Departures is a chapter that's about my dad's death and so on and so forth. So my reading, I thought I would read from the first, the lead story and it's called Mission of Motherhood. And, I think in Alaska, you know, I brought my boys up here and they, they do, you know, there was a little element of risk anyway, as far as bringing kids up in the outdoors, but at least compare it to, if I had stayed in Michigan and lived in a suburb. Mission of Motherhood is a story about a woman who loses her baby. And so I think I'd like to read a part of this. Yeah.

Monica: So it's called Mission of Motherhood.

Monica: "I do not know much about gods. But I think that the river is a strong brown god." T.S. Eliot.

Monica: I used to carry my baby like that. Just like the young woman did in the story Agnes told. I carried him in a pack on my back. An internal frame pack we used on camping trips to carry sleeping bags and gear. My husband fashioned it into a baby carrier by cutting holes in the nylon fabric where our little boy poked his chubby legs through.

Monica: Riding high, up off the ground my baby would hold onto the tubing at the top of the pack and pushed down with his feet at my hips. He babbled and jumped up and down when I caught a batch of fish in our dip net. Hearing him was easy. I was young and lean my arms and legs strong.

Monica: He was never too heavy to shoulder, not like the 70 plus pounds of fish we hauled out of the canyon in army surplus packs.

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Monica: I first heard the story from Agnes at the Mendeltna Creek Lodge . A road house, where I often stopped for lunch on my way to our cabin in Tazlina. Agnes, a stranger then sat at the bar, eating a bowl of soup. She was up a thin, wiry built with long gray hair roped into a braid that hung clear to her waist. Her voice was thick and gravelly, like she had smoked away her years. She spoke of the two kids who recently drowned in the icy waters of Long Lake. When their mother lost controller for car on the steep snow blown mountain road.

Monica: "Deaths like that that happened a lot out this way," she said. "There were those two little kids who were caught in a sweeping fire that burned down their cabin one winter, when it hit close to 30 below."

Monica: Agnes lean to one side on the bar stool, stretching out her back. She tore off a piece of bread and chewed it slowly. Recalling children who had died over the years she said, "The little ones are those you don't forget. They never had a chance. Never got a proper hook on life." And she began another story about a young woman dip netting on the Copper River with her baby on her back.

Monica: "It's necessary. If you're going to place a net in the river to watch the water and get familiar with its ways. Be aware of the current, The likely path the fish are taking, how much debris is in the water. Take note of the water level and the condition of the bank. You have to watch how the wind disturbs the surface so you know where to cleanly place your net down deep, way below the riffles."

Monica: The Athabascan Indian women knew these things by heart. They fished the Copper River and the Tazlina, Tonsina , Gulkana, and Klutina Rivers. Na' means water or river. For hundreds of years, they knew where the good fish runs were, how to scan and gut a salmon. How to prepare it for drawing on racks in the sun. How to preserve the meat in their smokehouses.

Monica: But women took their babies everywhere they went and all kinds of weather. While fishing, they securely strapped their babies and cradles made from the strong branches of Birch trees.

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Monica: "It happened a long time ago. A long time ago," Agnes said. I sensed a sadness bloom around her. A deep hurt that floated somewhere behind her eyes.

Monica: She continued, "The young couple from Anchorage was fishing the river for the first time, learning how to dip their nets by watching others in the canyon. The woman cared for her baby tenderly, pulling her arms through a warm sheepskin coat and covering her feet with wool socks. It can get cold in the canyon. Even when the light is riding high in the sky in the sky, the sun is riding high. She bundled her baby into her backpack and stepped onto a huge rock that jutted into the fast water. She reached over the rocks and eased her long pole with its large round net into the current. Soothed by the smell and the rhythm of the river she held her net steady and waited.

Monica: It wasn't long before she felt a bump in the net. Hand over hand, she pulled the pole toward her feeling her arms burn with each pull. Her baby clapped her hands and made happy babble sounds, craning her neck to watch her mom pull in the fish. Before taking the fish out of the net the woman bumped them over the head with her fish hopper to settle them down a bit. They flopped around her feet straining against the net, their gills pumping in the cool dry air.

Monica: With a few swift cuts she sliced the gills, flip the fish over and bled them out. Then she slid the pole back into the water and waited. Her husband stood a little ways down river. She and the baby always in his peripheral vision. As he too worked his pole dipping for fish.

Monica: Sometimes things happen with such swiftness you wonder if they really happened at all. There's a hazy line between one instance of reality and another. Where one begins and ends is lost to you.

Monica: She was screaming though her husband couldn't hear her cries above the roar of the river. He could just see her arms flung out in front of her. Her hands reaching toward the muddy water. Then she fell to the ground and held onto the rocks as the shock, like lightning, course through her trembling body. Her screaming turned into deep, heavy sobs, and it was only that her husband realized what had happened.

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Monica: Her backpack was empty. When she bent over to pull her pole in on another sweep of the eddy their baby slid headfirst out of the pack and splashed into the roaring hydraulics of the current, suck down instantly by silt. He scanned down river and saw no trace of their baby girl. Then scrambled over the rocks to reach his wife.

Monica: I used to carry my baby like that, in a pack on my back, fishing from a rock in the canyon."

Vikki: Oh my goodness. That is amazing. And there's more, there's to that story ... is that there more. Yeah? So you're kind of in the middle of a section there.

Monica: Yeah. I just picked out a section cause I didn't know, as far as time.

Vikki: No it was wonderful. And, and so, so how, how did you start? Did you have conversations with individual and others telling their stories and you're like, oh, I need to write these.

Monica: Exactly. And I also saw myself in this person's exact position. I was down there at the same, in the same area, where you have to climb down this pretty steep bank of rocks just to get to the river. And the canyon is very steep and I had a baby on my back. And at the time I'm thinking, this is no big deal. You just do what you do. But then when I heard that story and I looked back, I thought, oh, you know, maybe sometimes we do put our kids in, you know, they're under our protective wing, we think, but maybe sometimes some of the things we do is a little bit, risky. I had another situation where, we were skiing and my son was a year old and he was on my back, but he was so quiet that I didn't think much of it.

Monica: So I just kept skiing. It was a beautiful day, it was sunny out. And then he started screaming and crying and I couldn't stop him from crying. And I was just felt so guilty because he was cold. He, you know, your temperature drops when you sleep. And he was sleeping then. So I took them off my back and I tried to warm him and put him on my chest, but he just kept crying. And of course I limped my way back to the trail head. But it was those kinds of times where I thought, Hmm, sometimes things could happen and thank goodness they didn't.

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Vikki: And it's nice to get to reflect back that they didn't happen, but to take another approach to invite the full story of what could have happened.

Monica: I know. And you know, what else is really funny is I'm a grandmother now and I'm so paranoid with my grandchildren. I just don't want my kids doing all this stuff. And of course they do. I just don't want to hear about it.

Vikki: Wow, yes as grandparents we change a lot. We are so busy as parents, into the busyness of life and doing things and you know, trying to make the best of it. Then becoming a grandparent, you've already reflected back. I've never done that. We see your kids do. And you're like... no!

Monica: Oh, Vikki, that's such a good point. That's, that's exactly what it is. And I didn't really realize that until you said that.

Vikki: Yeah, I'm a grandmother. A lot of people are surprised, but I am a grandmother. Well, they are step grandchildren, but we have been around them enough that I have been able to reflect on that whole aspect of, you know, when you're a parent you're so busy, it's hard to enjoy every moment. But when they're grandkids, you get to enjoy every little detail and it's so fantastic.

Monica: That's great. That it's so true that you're just busy. You're just busy taking care of stuff all day.

Vikki: Yeah, yeah. All the time. Well, you talked a little bit about the support groups. So you have a writers group, which I'm glad you mentioned because the writers that I got involved with has changed my writing life all together. We meet every two weeks even during COVID I got them on Zoom so that we can all be on Zoom. And it really does change your writer's life when you're in a good writing group. Good... And I say good writers group because there are horror stories about writers groups. So I endorse people leaving a writing group that's not productive or helpful for them. Are you part of any other associations or organizations or suggestions that you might be able to give listeners that are working on the process of writing that, you would like to share?

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Monica: Yeah, well, some people do a beta readers and I can not do that, but some people will put their work out to 30 or 40 different people. And I really cannot imagine getting 30 manuscripts back with all these different, so much different input. I think I couldn't do it. I just couldn't do that. I have to work in small spaces with four or five people, but I also belong to a poetry group that meets once a week. And I poetry, I love poetry and it really feeds my writing. It feeds fiction. It feeds, things that I build with my hands. And so I think if you can find those groups that really feel feed you and create situations where you're being inspired, then that's what I would do. I met my writing group actually at Kachemak Bay Writers conference in Homer probably three or four years ago. And boy I've been grateful ever since. And then the poetry group, I also found online and their past MFA, University of Alaska Fairbanks. I mean, Anchorage graduates. So I get their input too. And with Zoom, oh my gosh, I've taken classes, from different people around the United States and that has opened up another whole world. That was one good thing.

Vikki: Yeah. It's like you and I were emailing back and forth today. It was funny because I started to record podcasts since June of 2000, late 17, early 18. And I could not get author to come on camera with me, which was fine, but you know, I was like, it's a much better experience for recording to have people come on camera even though I don't use the footage. So, I, I like it. It's a much better engagement. So now, and I has coach people and how to get on Zoom, how to use it. Now it's like, "oh you use Zoom. I can jump on camera." And it's so much better. We have to be able to meet with so many different avenues of learning and people all over the United States and the world. It opened that up a lot for people.

Monica: Yeah, it does. I took a class from Ellen Bass and she is a fantastic poet. She's from Santa Cruz, California. And for years I thought, okay, I'm going to go to Santa Cruz to one of her workshops, you know, and I'd have to get a hotel and airfare and all that. And I took a Zoom class with her. That was just fantastic. And I learned so much from her and I knew I would, but I would not have been available before. And she's, she loves it too, because she has opened up to people globally. Yeah.

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Vikki: It's, it's absolutely wonderful. So you're going to get news Monica on this podcast that I have not announced yet, but I actually have been invited for my first book to be a speaker presenter, speaker at [Self Publishing Con](#), which is in London. And so that'll be out hopefully in October I think is when that whole conferences. And it's a huge conference. I've been going to it following it, but that I could ask to do it. So I'm kind of excited, but I probably would not have put my bid in or say yes to do it right out of the gate, if I knew I was gonna have to fly to London right away, then get on stage versus doing it in my comfort zone of online. I'm like, sure, I'll do that. I haven't renounced it yet. You know. So now everybody here, this is going to happen. But you know from the podcast. When people that I have told are like, "Wait, do you get to go to London?"

Monica: Well, Vikki, congratulations on that. That'll be great. It's another, get your foot in the door with those. So many more people that much more knowledge and experience. I'm sure you've probably heard of Joanna Penn?

Vikki: I have. I am going to be on her podcast too.

Monica: That's so great because I listened to her podcast all the time. So I will see you there.

Vikki: I had a wild goal, you know, to get this book out. And so for those of you know, it's not about me, it's supposed to be about Monica, but I don't want to deviate too much, but you know, I've been following Joanna Penn. She's actually the one who inspired me to do this podcast from listening to her and write a lot. Mostly I listen to her podcast. So it's my favorite podcast. And then she's so fantastic. I mean, if you are ever going to model yourself after somebody, she responds to email all the time and she doesn't have a team of people that does that for her, she'll respond to you on Twitter, mostly Twitter. And so I just sent her a couple of "Thank yous.... this book was great. That helped me on this and this." And so in December I got a hold of her Author's Business Plan because I decided I want to do this and launch myself between retirement as a business, not just, you know, writing. And so I did her that book. I listened to it audible and I emailed her right away telling her that this book is perfect for me in December. And she said like, "well, when you get your book out, let me know." Cause she knew I'd been playing with the idea of writing a book to help authors with research...and I'm a librarian and I'm like, oh, I wasn't even thinking about book yet.

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Monica: Oh. And she has such a wide audience.

Vikki: And so the cool thing was that that spurred me on. So I went from December, September, and October, oh, working on the idea and getting it off. So what came out in March I let her know, "Hey, my book came out in March," and she's like, "Okay, I'll book you for coming to in the fall for coming on the podcast." And I'm like, okay, this is like surreal when your mentor from afar that you're totally fangirl about, you're going to get on her podcast. It was pretty exciting. So that's another big announcement that I haven't told everybody yet, ...

Monica: Well, you shouldn't tell them right now. You just did!

Vikki: Starting to get their word out and stuff. It's just a little bit exiting and overwhelming, but also like, you know, you get that feeling like, oh my gosh, what did I step myself into? Can I handle a it?

Monica: Right. And her bench is so deep. I mean, oh my gosh, her knowledge, her wealth of knowledge is incredible. You know, I listened to her while I'm working on my clay projects.

Vikki: I listen to her every Monday. So, you know, she puts them out on the weekends. I, I basically listened to her. She's like my, my, author's news that I listened to in the morning on Monday when I'm getting ready for work. And, it's pretty big and I love her genuineness. That's the part that I love most, she truly is an example that all authors should be like, in the sense that she loves her... she loves the people that, that email her. And she doesn't take anything for granted as far as where she comes. So I am pretty excited. So you got to hear the news first. And the conference comes from this conference that it's an alliance that she's told me they get into and it comes from all that. So it's, it's all been because of Joanna Penn . I started the podcast, I'm writing. I will tell her that when I am on the podcast. So I am fan girling. And so

Monica: Yes. And then, and then when that happens, of course, you're going to send out everything, right? You're going to let emails and social media so y'all know. Okay. Yeah,

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Vikki: Yeah. Everybody's going to hear about it. I'm starting to get the word out to the people that are on my newsletter. Now they're going to start hearing about it.

Vikki: The conference is very cool because there's going to be three free days and they're having a huge, heavy hitters. I don't know how it happened that they picked me, but they're having, and it's going to be all about the craft this year of writing. And so there's going to be some really great speakers. So I'm pretty excited because I'll get to go to the conference and listen to everybody's work and stuff. And so it's a good idea. It's going to be a good fall for me.

Monica: Sounds like a great one. Yeah. We will definitely follow you on that.

Vikki: So anyways, support groups and finding mentors and all that, it's still very important. And even doing from afar, we were talking about how this year has opened up our ability to do that internationally which has been so life giving to me at least.

Monica: Yeah. And I think also touching into regional groups, like, you know, like I'm trying, like you, I, I was trying to find where are people in the Pacific Northwest? Those are my people, where are they? Who are they? And with Water Mask, I'm really proud to say that I was a finalist in their WILLA Award for creative non-fiction in 2020 from the Women Writing the West. Yeah. And, and, but, you know, I thought, well, that's the west, where are my Pacific Northwest people?

Vikki: [Willamette Writers](#) is a huge group. And they have a website. They do conferences. I don't know we're going to do a conference this year face to face, but they, it's a huge, huge group that has chapters all over Oregon, Idaho, Washington. And also look at [Author 2Author](#). He's from Seattle. And he has a podcast and a huge group of people. I'm going to be on his podcast too here this summer. And he writes, his name is Bill Knower. He writes, he has had three books out, one it's Fearless Writing about writing through your fears. The latest one is about self-doubt and how to deal with self-doubt as an author or an artist, any kind of work that you're putting your soul out. Right. So that's his latest book. And he had the huge following.

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Vikki: He writes in Writer's Digest as well. So he, know really great resources. And he has huge connections. So Author2Author is his podcast, too. So check that out because that will give you some connections in the Pacific Northwest.

Vikki: And then on my website, I have, on each of the podcasts, when an author mentions something, or I'll ask them about an organization. I usually link that in show notes. So my website is full, SquishPen.com, is full of resources. So I bet you can find from other groups too.

Monica: Oh yes, I will. I will definitely go there. Thank you.

Vikki: The website is so large that I can barely manage it anymore with all the resources I have put on. Because I am a librarian, I can't help myself that give back the resources to everybody.

Monica: Yeah. It's natural for you. I appreciate that.

Vikki: Let's finish off the podcast. What keeps you going as a writer?

Monica: You know, my husband asks me that he, because he sees how frustrated I get sometimes and he says, "Why do you do this?" And I just, you know, I'm, I don't know. There's a strong compulsion. I don't know, like this next book that I'm working on. I, I feel really compelled to tell this story and it is about a native boy who's coming of age and ends up going through lots of, traumatic events in his life. And, you know, there are some compulsion to write that story. So that's all I, I maybe also, because I really like to be in my head. Yeah. I am being in my head. I enjoy thinking about things and meditating and being in a contemplative state of mind. And I feel like during those times you're kind of in this flow and it feels good and it's rewarding in that way. It's definitely not rewarding. monetarily, but that's what I do a lot.

Vikki: I hear you on that one.

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Vikki: Love it. Well, and that's so funny. Cause my our youngest daughter's 24 that year and he was over here visiting with me before she went to work and kind of give me the rundown, some things that I'm doing this week. Cause it's a lot each and even week. It's a week by week thing because I'm still working full-time and doing all those stuff. She stopped and asked me "Why do you work hard? It's like, I just don't get why you have to work so hard?" I told her I'm at the stage where I'm ready to launch into my retirement. So can you just do that and garden?

Monica: Isn't that funny, "Why can't you just retire and garden?" No, there's so many interesting things to do.

Vikki: I Know. I'm like, no, I have this mission for myself . I can see myself doing all of this in retirement.

Vikki: So thank you so much, Monica for being here, it's been a blast getting to know you. Listeners, please, please go to Monica's website and buy your book and email her, let her know or our social media, let her know you've heard her from thea podcast. It makes our day we know that you've heard from our authors on the podcast and they also love to know what you hear from them. And if you buy her book, you go on and write a review because that is our lifeblood.

Monica: Please do that. It's only a three or four sentences will do. It's easy on Amazon. It really is. So it as well on Goodreads.

Vikki: Yeah. Yeah. My two favorite places to do it . Hey Monica, thank you so much for being here. I look forward to talking to you again.

Monica: Great to meet you. My, my website, Monicadivine.com. Gmail is Monicadivine at Gmail. Let's see. I don't really like Twitter, so I don't do that. I used to, but Instagram is Monica divine.art, and I hope to see you there.

Vikki: And we'll say I'm an Instagram fanatic. I love Instagram. I have Facebook and Twitter, but those are my least likely loves. I love Instagram because it's visual.

Monica: Oh I do too. It's great.

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Vikki: Thank you for being here.

Monica: Thanks. Thanks to you, Vikki. Nice to meet you and we'll see you again soon.

Vikki: Thank you for listening to the podcast. I hope you enjoyed it as much as we did. Make sure you jump on the show notes and find the author, buy their books, write a review. And most importantly, you can find out more about me on my projects at one of my two websites, www.squishpen.com or theauthorslibrarian.com. And until next time, this is Vikki J Carter, The Author's Librarian signing off.



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