

JUNGLE RED



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Spencer Fleming



Lucy
Burdette



Hallie
Ephron



Rhys
Bowen



Hank
Phillippi Ryan



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Crombie



Jenn
McKinlay

Jungle Red Writers

7 smart and sassy crime fiction writers dish on writing and life. It's The View. With bodies.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2024

Getting Back on the Creativity Road

HANK PHILLIPPI RYAN: Have you ever doubted yourself? Before you answer, here's another question.

Have you read *The God of the Woods* by Liz Moore? I confess it is on my nightstand, ready and waiting. But you all probably know it's been lauded and applauded and named number one on so many best of 2024 lists.

So I was— gosh, what word should I use— *reassured* to see an interview with the author in the New York Times the other day. In which she said, and I quote: "Every time I write, I convince myself that I can't possibly stick the landing, and that I've written myself into a corner."

Reds and Readers, I have used those very words. In exactly that same situation. And I just said them, recently, about my book 17. I say: THIS IS NOT GOING TO WORK!

But I recognize it now! *You always think this*, I say to myself. *You always think this way! And it's always fine.* So, I suggest to myself, *why don't you just skip the worry part and go onto the fun. Just let it happen.*

Today's wonderful essay by the brilliant [Amy Bernstein](#) goes along that road as well. See what you think.

Short-Circuiting Phobias Through Creativity

By Amy L. Bernstein



It was the summer of 1977 and Jimmy Buffett's "Margaritaville" was one of the carefree hits playing several times a day on the FM radio dial. But I was not carefree. I was driving my parents' Pontiac station wagon northward on an unfamiliar highway in Minnesota. The unnervingly straight blacktop seemed to stretch toward infinity as the signs for Fargo reminded me I had strayed far from familiar turf.

My destination was a summer temp job between college semesters. All I remember from that particular day was that I arrived at the job shaking like a leaf. The drive had unnerved me. **I never told a soul about my phobia, yet was forced to admit to myself that driving anywhere I had not been before, where I did not already know the route by heart, completely terrified me—even in broad daylight.**



Over the decades, this feeling abated—but never completely disappeared. Earlier this very week, I had to bring our car to a new

service dealership. I followed GPS scrupulously, but the nerves kicked in yet again when I thought I might have taken a wrong turn. I didn't, but I was on edge, nevertheless.

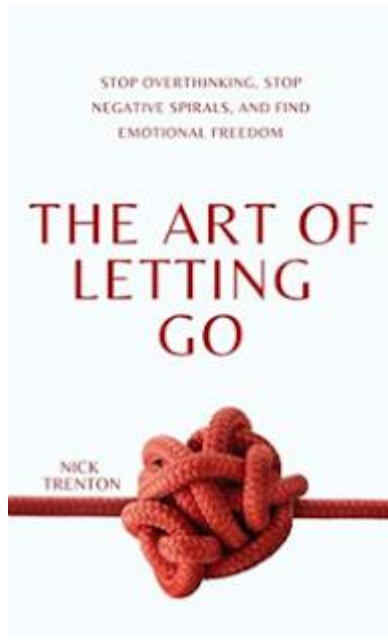
What is this about? As a writer, I'm constantly taking all sorts of risks— creatively, emotionally, pushing at the boundaries of craft, experimenting with structure and format, putting my vulnerabilities on the page and also putting myself “out there.”

But in the external world, I'm a bit of a mess. In addition to my driving phobia, I have a lifelong spider phobia (which extends to bugs in general) and an irrational fear of drowning. (I'm terrified of sailboats because I'm convinced we'll capsized and I'll get trapped beneath the boat and drown.) Oh, and I almost forgot to mention a bone-rattling fear of steep

inclines—on foot or wheels.

When you've lived with certain fears long enough, you can't imagine living without them. They become part of your temperament. Perhaps I compensate for these, uh, quirks by spending considerable time counseling other people on how to manage their fears and self-doubts around expressing their artistic side, so they may joyfully throw themselves into their creative passions.

Put another way, I seek to normalize fears I'm confident I can get a handle on, while accepting those that will always have a handle on me.



“Even when we know our thought patterns aren’t helping, it is so incredibly hard to think differently...,” writes Nick Trenton in [The Art of Letting Go](#).

As a writer, I give myself permission to think differently—to step outside as many boxes as I can. That helps me to strike a balance with the perceived treacherousness of the physical world.

I will undoubtedly panic again when I lose

my way on the road. But when it comes to losing myself in my imagination—and encouraging others to do likewise—I feel right at home.

Readers, do you have any life-long phobias, and if so, what are your tricks for compensating for them, or at least managing so they don't interfere with your goals?

HANK: Oh, I cannot wait to hear your answers!



Amy L. Bernstein's new book is for self-doubting creatives, [Wrangling the Doubt Monster: Fighting Fears, Finding Inspiration](#). Learn more about Amy's books, creative workshops, and book coaching business [here](#).



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"Embrace doubt and use this gentle book to find your way forward." —JENNIE NASH, CEO of Author Accelerator

AMY L. BERNSTEIN