

## Christine Lemmon's Notes from GCWA February meeting

Self-publishing three novels (*Sanibel Scribbles*, *Portion of the Sea*, and *Sand in My Eyes*), as well as the gift book *Whisper from the Ocean* has been a passionate journey. Below are a few of the things I learned along the way.

- Writing originates in the mind; not as the pen hits the paper. I enjoy discovering little “islands” of my own—moments alone where I can think my own thoughts and tune out the distractions of the world. Something magical takes place in these moments—my imagination kicks in and I can hardly wait to grab a pen and paper and jot it all down.
- Never let writing become “homework.” To me, writing is a form of play. It reminds me of when I was a little girl and would open the doors of my dollhouse and then dress my dolls the way I wanted them to look, give them names, and create for them unique voices and dramas. When I think of writing as play, I always find joy in it.
- Writing in a journal is a fantastic way to learn how to write without the fear of grammatical cops pulling you over after each sentence. Journal writing also helps writers to come into their voice, and develops writing as a daily habit.
- Writers have a special compelling that not everyone has. They often feel “compelled” to write. They might not know what they want to write; just that they have a story in them that needs to come out. Listen to this compelling. I’m glad I did.
- Be open to changing your title. You might feel passionate about your title. It might be the title you had from the very start. But do consider in the end all other titles. Some titles are powerful and some are not. During the writing and publishing process, my first novel went from being called *Insomnia* to *Till Midnight* to *Tablecloth Scribbles* to *Sanibel Scribbles*. My second novel went from being *Seasons on Sanibel* to *Portion of the Sea*. My third went from *Mrs. Aurelio Knocking at My Door* to the very night before going to press, *Sand in My Eyes*. I am so glad I thought of that one last minute!
- After making the decision to self-publish, go to the bookstore and spend time in the section for writers/publishers. There are countless books on this topic. My husband and I spent three months daily reading everything we could find about the self-publishing process from A to Z. There are books that walk you step-by-step through every decision a self-publisher must make.
- Covers are often what set local novels apart from national. Spend money and get a great cover—one that doesn’t look ‘local.’ You can Google book jacket designers online and view their portfolios. Go with someone who specializes specifically in designing book covers.
- Be careful when working with printers. They will give you a cost and you can work it down. Negotiate!

- When placing your books at stores, be flexible. At first, we offered our books on a “consignment basis.” If our books sold; then they could pay us. They sold and we didn’t have to do that for long.
- Space for storeowners is limited. Create unique displays that hold your books. We created white painted, wooden beach chairs—both large for the floor and small for the counters. They are also eye-catching!
- As writers, we have natural resources placed within us as abundant as the sea, but if we don’t believe and don’t tap into those resources, they’ll lie dormant and our lives will never change.
- Life enhances writing so do not wait for a “better time” in life to write. Write through it all—just show up at your computer daily. I like two-hour chunks of time either from 5 to 7 a.m. or from 9 to 11 p.m.
- It doesn’t matter whether or not you have a glamorous writing room. If you are truly into your story you will not notice or care about the room in which you are writing. I’ve written in my laundry room, my pantry and even on the bathroom floor with the fan on to tune out the lively noise of my children.
- Writing a novel—completing it—sometimes means sacrifice. I gave up television years ago. I don’t want to waste thousands of hours of my life watching television when I could instead be creating stories that will last forever.
- When editing, take the creative hat off and put the critic hat on. I print and go off to a special location. I don’t like to edit in the same room that I write in. I need a fresh perspective. My favorite spot to read my printed manuscript is on a bench under a tree at the cemetery beside Chapel by the Sea on Captiva. There is no better place to sit when cutting out chunks of my writing—pages that I’ve written but no longer need.
- Don’t feel bad when you cut large chunks of your writing. It’s like playing the piano. All those hours of solitude spent typing away on your computer were not of waste. They were practice and have only made your writing better. No one hears all the times the pianist’s fingers hit the keys. They only hear the concert. It’s the same for us writers. They only read our books.