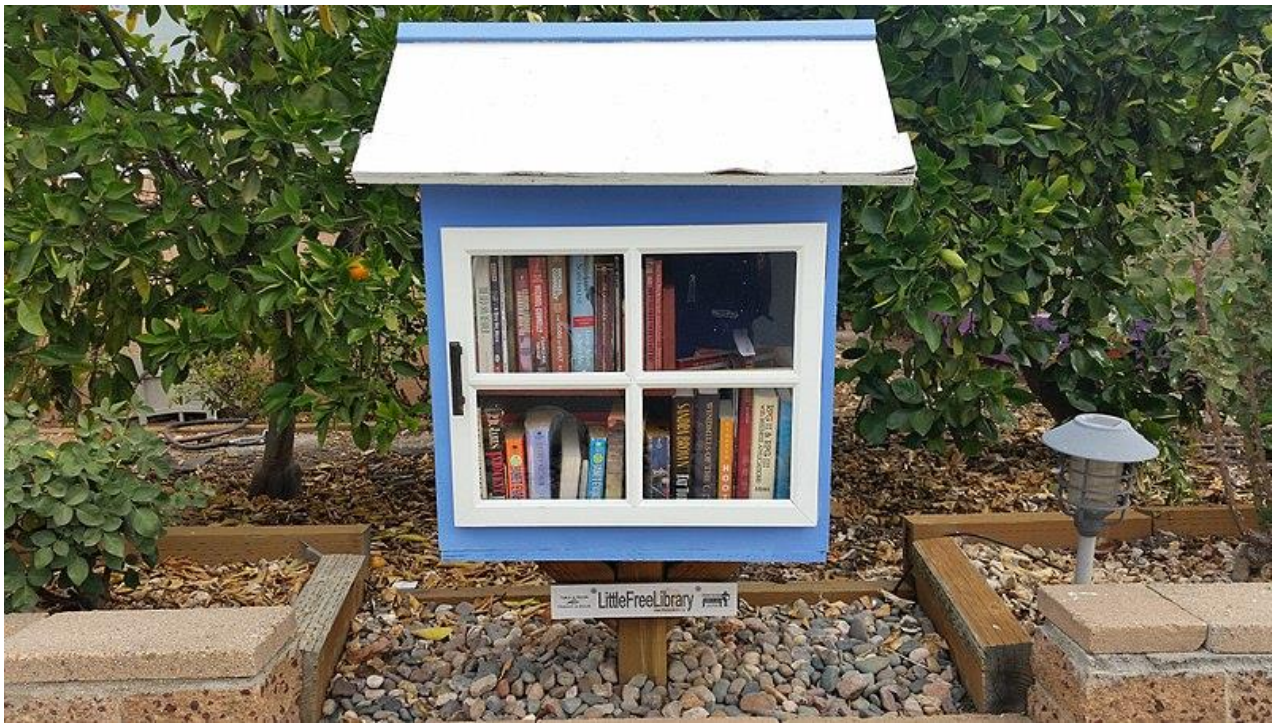


Writing Tips from Ellen Cassedy

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Positive Reinforcement in the 'Hood? Rate your community



Do you live in a community that supports writing and writers, reading and readers? Use this checklist to assess your community – and get ideas about how the place you live can sustain you as a writer. Takoma Park, MD, where I lived for 18 years, provides an excellent model.

- **Poet laureate.** Every two years, Takoma Parkers choose a new poet laureate. The laureate hosts Third Thursday poetry readings, and also curates a rotating public display of poems (some famous, some not), which

appear around town, at eye-level, in frames on poles. Local art students design the posters.

- **Little free libraries.** Have you seen the little book exchange boxes shaped like birdhouses? Anyone can donate a book or take a book – for free. Check them out at www.LittleFreeLibrary.org.
- **Annual authors' fair.** Every December, local authors set out stacks of their books inside a local business. Restaurants donate wine and cheese. The event grows bigger every year.
- **Library support.** Our town library hosts book talks and displays local authors' books on a special shelf. Twice a year, there's an outdoor sale where we all bring our used books, browse through the books our neighbors have brought, and buy some for a dollar apiece.
- **Book store.** Our local independent bookstore closed 15 years ago, but a local bookstore chain called Busboys and Poets opened a new one on our main street.
- **Book clubs.** The nation's capital region has an extraordinary concentration of book clubs. Many invite local authors to speak.
- **Book talks.** We have regular author talks in our community center – plus concerts by local musicians and films by local cinematographers.
- **List serves.** Authors announce their new publications and book talks on our neighborhood list serves.

- **Writers' group.** A local restaurant hosts a monthly lunchtime writers' group. Over bowls of soup, we share the joys and sorrows of the writing life. One member explained why he values the opportunity to meet with others. "I spend every day in my basement with my dog," he said.

Ellen Cassedy is the author of *We Are Here: Memories of the Lithuanian Holocaust* (Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2012). To see all of her Writing Tips, visit her website at www.ellencassedy.com.