

# My Writing Life



Dear Friends,

Summer is winding to a lazy end in New England, although the energetic butterflies soaring every day in my garden don't seem to have gotten the message. They plunge from the heights of our tall oaks and then reverse direction and surge across the grass to climb again in an exuberant dance. As you may be able to tell, I'm easily distracted by the natural world. I defend my wandering attention by telling myself those butterflies will end up in a book of mine someday.

I've been out in the garden observing butterflies because I write the first draft of my novels by hand, which means that I can write anywhere and do not have to be tethered to a computer. This summer I was fortunate to spend part of my writing time at Cape Cod as the guest of a friend with a large and hospitable extended family who share a rambling house on Cotuit Bay. My desk was a drop-leaf table positioned in front of a window overlooking the beach pictured above. The overturned Sunfish on the sand is my husband's. He's had the boat since he received it as a high school graduation present. It's got a patched hull and a new sail, but it continues to be the source of much pleasure, satisfaction and adventure for him.

Pleasure, satisfaction and adventure are also words I use to describe the boat I sail--my writing life. Read on to see where it took me in the last several months...



# A Woman of the Renaissance

To her father, the warrior Fabrizio Colonna, she was the daughter whose marriage sealed a political alliance.

To Costanza D'Avalos, Duchess of Francavilla, she was the young girl Costanza educated to be a woman molded after herself--independent, curious and passionate.

To her husband, Ferrante D'Avalos, she was the woman who adored him and whom he betrayed.

To the literary aristocracy in Italy, she was the most accomplished and most famous poet of her age.

To four popes, she was a voice of wisdom and influence to whom they turned in times of conflict.

To the community of reformers within the Church, she was a powerful force--and the only woman--giving voice to their fervent message.

To the Italian Inquisition, she was a suspected heretic.

And to Michelangelo, she was the only woman he ever loved.

She was Vittoria Colonna, The Poet.

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His eyes showed my heart the way to his soul,  
and I found all that mattered lay in him,  
in his keeping.

*Vittoria Colonna, for Michelangelo*

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## How I Came to Write *The Poet*

In the winter of 2010, the woman who has nurtured and guided my literary career suggested that I consider writing historical fiction. All of my work to that point, although set in the 20th and 21st centuries, had been imbued with a strong sense of place and time. I believe that the events taking place in the world in which my characters live have an important role to play, and I've always done research to inform my stories. From the Lawrence Mill Strike of 1912 to the Vietnam "Baby Lift," recounting history through story has been one of my joys.

I embraced the suggestion to go deeper into history and began my search for a character, which is where all my stories begin. I knew I wanted her to be Italian, and that was my jumping off point. What followed was a fascinating journey that began at the National Museum of Women in the Arts. The museum had mounted an exhibition of Italian women artists from Renaissance to Baroque and produced a lush catalog rich with biographical detail. It was in the catalog that I discovered Vittoria Colonna, not an artist herself but a patron of the arts who had commissioned, among other works, a painting by Titian of Mary Magdalene.



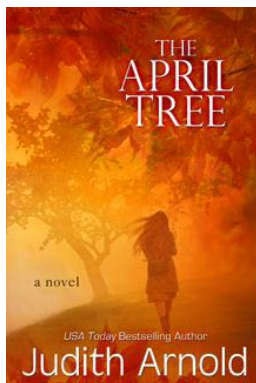
*Vittoria Colonna, from a painting in the Church of Sant'Antonio di Padova, Ischia*

Over the course of the last two and a half years I have explored Vittoria's life and times in over forty books and countless scholarly articles; traveled to Ischia to walk in her footsteps on the volcanic island that was her home for most of her life; visited museums that house artwork Michelangelo drew for her; and read the poetry Vittoria and Michelangelo wrote and shared with one another. I have become a Renaissance geek, totally immersed in the Cinquecento.

I finished writing *The Poet* two days ago. Vittoria Colonna has consumed me. I hope, when *The Poet* reaches bookstores, that she will consume you as well.

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## Friends with Books



Judith Arnold is an extraordinary storyteller who explores women's lives with insight, honesty and lyrical language. She writes compelling stories about characters I truly care about. I consider her a role model, and enjoy her company as much as I enjoy her books.

Her latest, *The April Tree*, is a powerful exploration of how we come to terms with devastating tragedy, and I urge you to read it.

## What's Next?

Now that I have emerged from 16th-century Italy, inquiring minds are asking, what will you do next? I took a day off to clean my house and return my dining room table to its usual function. For the last two months it has been manuscript central, piled with books, my research files, my dictionary and thesaurus, a writing lamp, stacks of notepads, blister packs of pens, my cup warmer and my timer. Fortunately, our porch has stood in for the dining room over the summer but, as they say on *Game of Thrones*, "Winter is coming."

My to-do list has been simmering on the back of my writer's "stove" along with the chicken stock I brewed yesterday. In addition to the events listed below, here's what I've got planned for the next few months while my agent takes *The Poet* on the road:

- Complete a short story called "Fiammetta's Earrings," about a jeweler in early-20th century Italy.
- Continue work on a novel set on a remote island off the coast of Massachusetts.
- Prepare a set of workshops on the writing craft with the [Three Glindas](#) that we hope to present to writers' groups and RWA chapters.

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## Upcoming Events

**October 2, 2013**

Book Club Discussion  
Longmeadow, Massachusetts

**November 4, 2013**

Book Club Discussion  
Wake Forest, North Carolina

**November 16, 2013**

Panel on Historical Fiction  
with Donna Russo Morin and Bee Ridgway  
WriteAngles Conference  
Mt. Holyoke College  
South Hadley, Massachusetts

**April 1, 2014**

Dinner Speaker  
Greater Lawrence Italian Women's Club  
Andover, Massachusetts

**If your book club or group is interested in having me speak or offer a workshop, please contact me at [linda@lindacardillo.com](mailto:linda@lindacardillo.com) or P.O. Box 298, Enfield, CT 06083!**

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