

This is the first installment of our series about independent Florida publishers.



Bringing Marginalized Voices into the Mainstream

by Darlyn Finch Kuhn

Joan Leggitt gets a gleam in her eye when she talks about the seeds of Twisted Road Publications. "I remember asking myself as a nine-year old child, how amazing would it be to have in my hands a story that no one had ever seen, and to make it come to life."

Most children who love books dream of becoming writers, but you can forgive Leggitt for dreaming of publishing, instead, when you realize she was born with printer's ink in her veins. Her mother, uncle, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all publishers. In fact, family lore says that when great-grandfather David Washington Boliver moved his family from Kentucky to Texas in the mid-1800s, the printing press rode in the wagon, while his sons walked. One of those sons, Edward C. Boliver, earned his living as a printer's devil and journeyman printer on a series of newspapers. Joan's mother, Pauline Boliver Leggitt, pulled and set type at her uncle's newspaper.

Joan Leggitt's road to becoming a publisher took a few twists along the way, including working as a graphic artist, book distributor, and freelance editor.

Changes in the publishing industry drove Leggitt to start her own independent press in 2014. She noticed talented writers encountering impossible barriers blocking their road to publication. The huge corporate publishers seemed to let their marketing directors run the show, with policies of exclusiveness that shut out fresh voices.

Twisted Road wants to publish gifted writers those corporate marketing departments have overlooked. Its stated purpose is "bringing marginalized voices into the mainstream."

Leggitt has a straightforward, simple selection process. "If we're blown away by the quality of the work, and its intent isn't racist, homophobic, elitist, sexist or erotic for

the sake of erotica—although we like sex and welcome its inclusion—then you are well on our way with us."

The submission process is likewise simple and straightforward. The website submission page invites writers to send an email "telling us something about yourself and your work and attach the first 50 pages of your manuscript as a Word document."

Submissions are reviewed by Leggitt herself, and she keeps the process casual. "If we want to publish your work, we'll make you an offer. If it is an offer you choose not to accept, we're cool with that."

For her debut 2014-2015 catalog, Leggitt found six authors whose work, she says, "set her hair on fire." The books, by authors you may not yet have heard all that much about—Sandra Gail Lambert, Pat Spears, Glenda Bailey-Mershon, Nance Van Winckel, Susan Rukeyser, and yours truly—are blurbed by authors you've heard plenty about, including Connie May Fowler, Dorothy Allison, Diana Abu-Jaber, Diane Lefer, and Sena Jeter Naslund.

One reason that the writers in the first list, who garnered positive attention from the writers in the second list, choose Twisted Road Publications and Joan Leggitt, has to do with the hands-on support Leggitt offers, both pre- and post-publication. With a sharp eye honed by freelance editing experience, Leggitt helps her authors trim the fat and maximize the story and character arcs in their work. She travels extensively to deliver a talk to writers called "How to Make Your Manuscript Publication-Ready."

This is no vanity press. Joan pays her authors advances and actively markets their subsidiary rights.

But her work isn't done once the finished books are stacked in the warehouse and on the shelves of libraries and bookstores. Leggitt collaborates with Brad Kuhn &

Associates, LLC to provide video book trailers and author collateral such as bookmarks, postcards, and banners so that Twisted Road authors stand out at readings, signings, and book fairs. (You can view the videos at [youtube.com/BradKuhnPR](https://www.youtube.com/BradKuhnPR).) The Twisted Road catalog professionally showcases each book and author, and is available in print and also online and in video format. She hits the big conferences around the country, often taking some of her authors along. She is a member of the Association of Writers and Writing Professionals, Southern Independent Booksellers Association, and the Independent Book Publishers Association.

All four of the books published in 2014 have made the Small Press Distributors Best Seller List.

Having said that, the main challenge for any small press, and Twisted Road Publications is no exception, is making the connection between their books and readers. Going against conventional wisdom about what sells makes it even more challenging to connect with those who love to read what Joan loves to publish.

As this article goes to press, Twisted Road Publications is preparing to launch a Southern Gothic story-writing contest, with a celebrity author judge to be announced at April's AWP conference in Minneapolis. Publication in an anthology to be released next winter is the grand prize, along with \$500 cash. The aim is to spark a New Southern Gothic movement—one that captures the social sensibilities of old Southern Gothic, but with modern issues, and modern voices. Instead of dwelling on the supernatural and suspense, as in traditional gothic writing, there is dark humor in Southern Gothic stories that expose problems of society through the development of complex characters. The behavior of these strange, disturbed (and disturbing) characters, as well as their dialect, personalities, and habits reveal the moral shortcomings and fragility of their culture. Ironic events surrounding racism, violence, and poverty are common elements as the characters (some dark, some innocent, all flawed, and therefore thoroughly human) try to make sense of the world in which they live.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, William Faulkner, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor, Harper Lee, and Tennessee Williams made Southern Gothic a fascinating sub-genre of literary fiction. Joan Leggitt hopes you'll join Twisted Road Publications for a Southern Gothic revival.

Quick Facts

Twisted Road Publications

1400 Village Square Blvd., Suite 3-234

Tallahassee, FL 32312

<https://twistedroadpublications.com/>

info@twistedroadpublications.com

- Four titles published annually
- Seeks literary fiction from sharp-eyed truth-tellers with a gift for creating fully-rendered characters that get under our skin and expose our deepest humanity
- Un-agented manuscripts accepted
- Publishes in print and e-book formats



In addition to her two poetry collections (*Red Wax Rose* and *Three Houses*) **Darlyn Finch Kuhn's** work has appeared in literary journals, newspapers, magazines and online. Her poems have been featured on *Poetic Logic* on the local NPR affiliate, and been read by Garrison Keillor on the *Writers Almanac*. She was interviewed on World Radio Paris. Kuhn is the eponymous "Scribbler," of the *Scribbles* literary e-newsletter. She produces book trailer videos with her husband at Brad Kuhn & Associates in Orlando, Florida. Her debut novel, *Sewing Holes*, is available now from Twisted Road Publications, Amazon, and wherever books are sold.