

Journey to the Heart of Nonfiction:
The 2017 AWP Conference in Washington, D.C.
By Cynthia Bezinque

For four days, from roughly 8:00 in the morning to 8:00 at night; writers, readers, editors, students, teachers and publishers in nonfiction from around the country gathered at the Washington Convention Center and Washington Marriott Marquis for the Association of Writers & Writing Programs' 50th anniversary. It was a chance to hear the latest in writing innovations from speakers, a chance to increase a signed book collection from prominent nonfiction writers, a time to catch up with colleagues and network with multiple literary magazines and publications.

From my experience at this year's conference I have four tips to enjoying the experience:

1. Plan for panels ahead of time

There are *a lot* of panels at AWP. Many of them are discussions but there were also readings and speakers that had information about everything from publishing to writer-editor relations. For the first day, I had about eight panels I wanted to go to, but I cut back to five that I *could not* miss: Know Your Place: Great Lakes Literary Arts Organization on the Impact of Location, Leashing the Beast: Humanizing Fictional Monsters, A Field Guide for the Craft of Fiction: Finding Structure, Mommy Dearest/Daughter Darling: Putting Words in Her Mouth and Variations on Audionarrative: The Next Wave of Literary Podcasting. And those were just day one. Each event runs for an hour and fifteen minutes with only fifteen minutes to get from panel A to panel B. It was a challenge on a couple of the days because I was new to the conference center.

2. Remember a suitcase

It doesn't have to be a *big* suitcase, but on Saturday many-if not all of the booths- were selling books and gear at discounted prices if not entirely free. No one wants to bring home leftover materials, so it was a great opportunity to get a ton of literary swag and some neat books, journals, magazines and chapbooks. I also recommend getting as many bags as possible: many of the booths handed them out for free, only a couple required purchases of other merchandise. *Pro tip: if you hang around until the final clean up hour, some booths completely abandon some gear and merch since they can't always take it home. Easy pickings!*

3. Map out the book fair

This would also be useful for getting free stuff. I forgot to mention how *huge* the convention center was. It was massive and packed full of aisles of booths. On the first day it was pretty hard to take it all in, but by the third day I was 65% sure I knew how to get to my booth without hassle. I kid, I was 90% because the walkways would fill up with people browsing graduate program booths. If you've been to AWP in the past, there's a good chance you already knew what tables to hit up, but I was new and I hadn't done enough research. A couple of my fellow interns *did* have an idea on what booths they wanted to hit up, so I would recommend following

their path. Unlike you're like me, and you like to wander around and explore new places on your own terms- then have at it!

4. Try a new restaurant each night

At the end of each day, we usually had a game plan to go out and try a new place for some *fantastic* food. Washington D.C. is, of course, a major city with a plethora of options on where to eat. For us, we had a favorite right from the get-go: Mulebone. It served southern fare foods in a snazzy decorated space. Murals lined all of the walls and ambiance was to perfection. The food was a good range of quality taste, including some bites for our vegetarian. 10/10 would recommend going at least once on your next trip to D.C., but feel free to take advantage of recommended food places from native D.C. residents and anyone else you meet at the conference. But, do be mindful that while in the city, the prices can be a bit of a stretch on the wallet!