

NOVEMBER MUSINGS

SHARON VIRT



## **Balancing Truth with Fiction**

### **My Goldilocks Paradigm**

For me, one of the major challenges in writing historical fiction is balancing my intellectual need to stay true to the facts of the real-life events that inspire my stories with my desire to write page-turning novels that are relatable to audiences today. Often I find myself walking this treacherous path of what to leave in, what to change, or what to leave out.

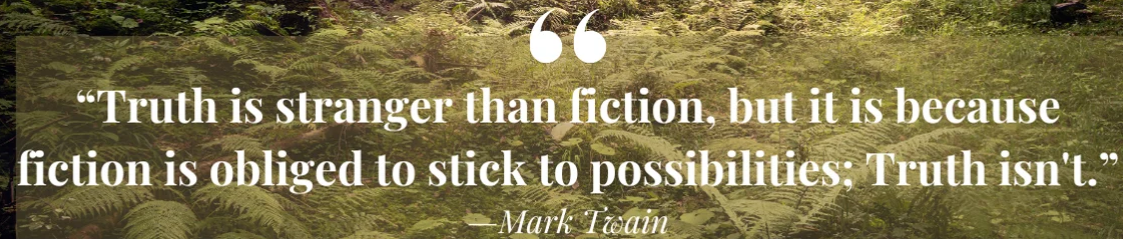
This is my Goldilocks Paradigm: not overwriting nor underwriting, but getting the scenes "just right." Just like Goldilocks in the fairytale, I need to "try it out" before I know whether I've got the balance between fiction and truth correct. This often means writing a scene and letting it settle in both my mind and on paper, then going back to it later to gauge how it feels. Is there too much detail? Or not enough to feel authentic?

For example, just as many of us are discussing the results of the recent election, my characters in *The Grays of Truth* were most likely talking about President Johnson's impeachment trial in 1868. Initially, I completely overwrote that scene in Chapter 26, going into entirely too much detail about impeachment procedures in both the dialog and the narrative. After letting the scene settle for a bit, I took a hatchet to it. I made the trial reference in the dialog much more casual, which served to authenticate the conversation at the supper table (and to immerse the reader into the time period) without bogging down the story.

Another big challenge is deciding which real-life people to exclude from my version of events, and whether or not to create composite characters to represent those people. In *Veil of Doubt*, Maggie Greene was one of those composite figures that I struggled with initially. At first, she played her real life self: a woman that Powell was romantically involved with while in Staunton. In my dramatization, I decided to have her follow Powell to Leesburg, allowing their relationship to continue and compromise his marriage to Janet (which was not true in real-life). When I realized this entanglement might infuriate my readers (and Powell's descendants), I changed the nature of their relationship and decided to "merge" Maggie with the widow of Powell's friend who died at Gettysburg. The next change came when I decided to combine two of the witnesses at Emily Lloyd's trial into Maggie's character. None of

these women played a significant role in the true story and including all of these characters individually in the book would have overwhelmed the reader. But when I combined them into a single "Maggie" character, she became an interesting persona, adding texture and tension to the plot.

My rule in writing historical fiction is to stay true to the *spirit* of the story. This does not mean that every aspect of the story is historically accurate. That's the role of non-fiction. When I change real-life details to escalate stakes and improve pacing, I am careful not to compromise the overall integrity of the story. This is not easy. But by giving myself permission to sometimes deviate from the truth, I am able to bring the past alive and make it relevant and relatable to the modern reader—you!



“Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn't.”  
—Mark Twain

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## **The Grays of Truth**

**From Signings and Talks to Podcasts and Morning Shows--We've been in the NEWS!**



From the Midwest to Midlothian, *The Grays of Truth* has been the talk of many towns. Here is a sampling of some of the podcasts and interviews that I have done the past few weeks!

Television: [FOX17 The Morning Mix](#)  
[WTVR Virginia This Morning](#)

Radio: [Breakfast With Barry-WINC FM](#)  
[WGVR- NPR](#)

Podcasts: [Bookish Flights](#)

Interviews : [Loudoun Times Mirror](#)  
[Q&A with Deborah Kalb](#)  
[The Nerd Daily](#)

## Have Me Join Your Book Club Discussion!

I'm also delighted to offer something special for book clubs. If your club chooses *The Grays of Truth* for an upcoming read, I would be thrilled to join your discussion, either virtually or in person if possible. It's a wonderful chance to dive deep into the themes and characters of the book together.

As part of our Book Club Program, your members will receive a 25% discount on their copy of *The Grays of Truth*. The order must include 10 or more books and be mailed from my publisher to one member's address.

Please use the button below to tell me more about your group and availability. I will respond immediately with the link to purchase your books and the discount code.

[I Want Sharon to Join My Book Club Discussion!](#)

## Zoom Book Discussions

You don't have to be in a book club to join the conversation! Join me tomorrow night or on December 11 via ZOOM **if you have read the book** and want to discuss your

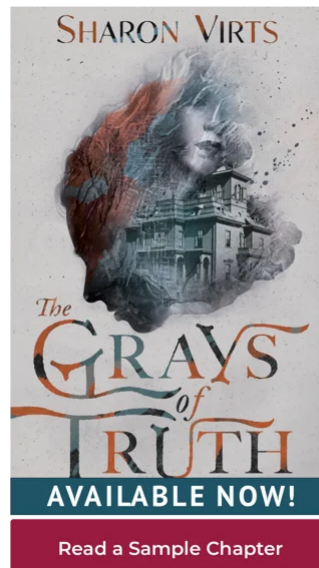
thoughts. (Yes, there will be spoilers in the convo!) Just sign up at one of the links below and I'll send you the ZOOM link.

December 11 7PM

November 19 7PM

### **Haven't bought your copy *The Grays of Truth*?**

No better time than now, especially if you want a hardcover copy as we only print a limited number and inventory is already running low. Once the hardcovers are sold out, they are gone for good!



[Buy a Hardcover](#)

[Buy a Paperback](#)

[Buy Now on Kindle](#)

[Click Here to Read a Chapter](#)

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## Awards and More ...



***Veil of Doubt***  
**2024 Finalist in the**  
**Best Book Awards**

Good news all around; not only did *The Grays of Truth* reach bestseller status on the day it launched, but *Veil of Doubt* was honored the same week as a 2024 Finalist for BEST HISTORICAL FICTION by **Best Book Awards** Sponsored by American Book Fest.

## ***Veil of Doubt* is a Finalist in the 2024 IAN Book of the Year Awards!**

Judges are experienced reviewers, authors, publishers, and editors who judge the books based on vibrant covers, attention-grabbing openings, memorable characters, crisp dialogue, captivating and original plots, and climactic, memorable endings.

*Veil of Doubt* was selected as a finalist in the category of “Historical Fiction: Pre 20th Century.”







## Loudoun History Award

I was honored to receive the [2024 Loudoun History Award](#) for my work in historical preservation and for my writing. A big thank you to the [Thomas Balch Library](#) for the recognition.

You can read the news story that was printed in the Loudoun Times Mirror about the award recipients. [<READ>](#)

## Historical Novel Society

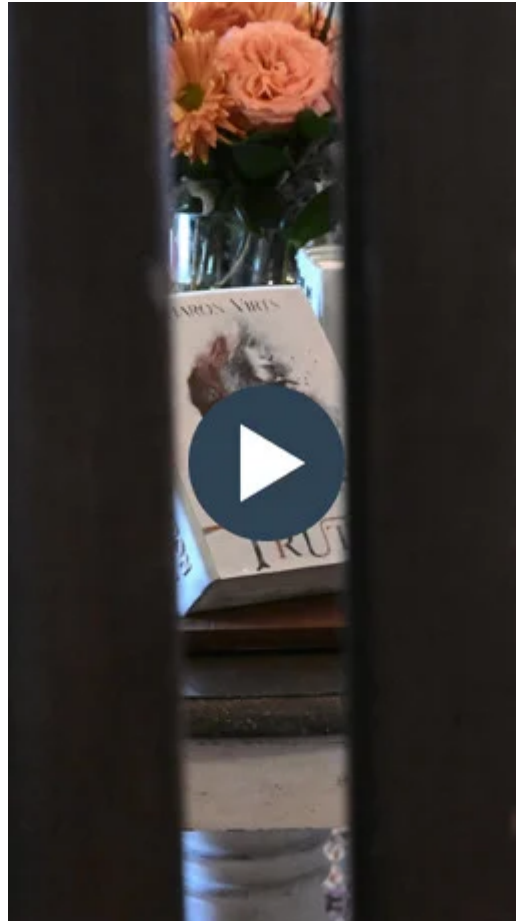
The [Historical Novel Society](#) shared their praise for *The Grays of Truth*, calling it “A fascinating historical true-crime story...” I am so grateful for this recognition and deeply touched by their kind words. This novel has been a journey of passion, research, and storytelling, and to see it resonate with experts alike means the world to me. [<READ>](#)



"A fascinating  
historical true-  
crime story..."

-Historical Novel Society

## Launch Party Photo Gallery



[View the Entire Photo Gallery](#)

Thank you to everyone who joined me for the launch party of *The Grays of Truth*! It was a magical evening filled with wonderful conversations, a lively book discussion, and a special sneak peek into my next novel.

We enjoyed a delicious meal from [Roots 657 Cafe & Local Market](#) that kept us all fueled for the night. And, the cake ... Chef Jason Reaves from [The Conche](#) did it again. He created a breathtaking cake that was as beautiful as it was delicious!

I'm so grateful to each of you for making this night unforgettable—your support and excitement mean the world to me. Here's to many more stories shared together!

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## **#ReadWithSharon**

### **Historical Fiction Book Club**

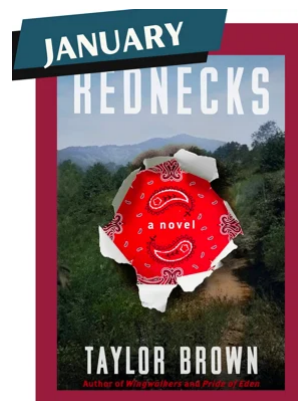
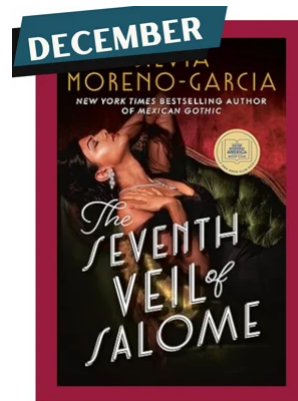
Get ready for an awesome line up in my [#ReadWithSharon](#) book club. On Thursday, November 21st at 7pm eastern, we will discuss our November read, *Queens of London* with author Heather Webb who will be joining us this month!

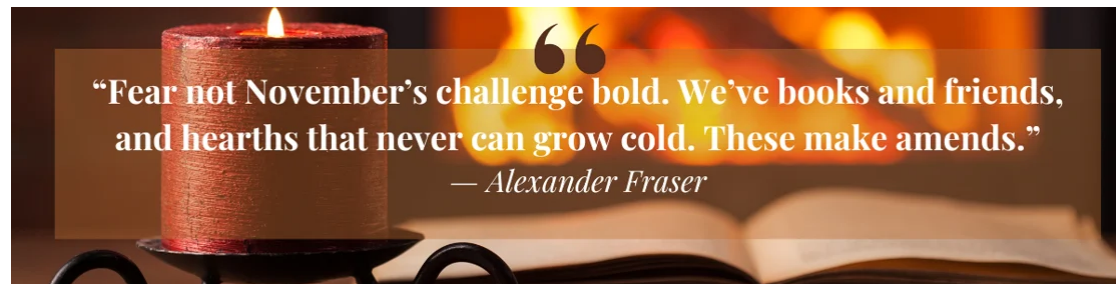


The #ReadWithSharon book club only reads current release (within the last year) historical fiction and I do my best to pre-read every selection before making the

pick. Most months, the author joins us via zoom and you are able to ask questions during the discussion. Meetings are the fourth Thursday of the month at 7pm eastern (except for November and December to avoid the holidays), and never go longer than an hour. For meetings you miss, you can access our zoom discussions with the authors on my [YouTube Channel](#).

If you love stories from the past, this club is for you. You can sign up for free [HERE](#)





Hope you have a wonderful Thanksgiving!



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