



Pages of the Past

CELEBRATING
HISTORICAL FICTION

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From the Editor

Hello and Happy Friday my historical fiction lover friends!

I hope all is healthy and happy and safe in your worlds. It's a crazy time we're living in right now. But think of the fodder it gives us for future tales. And since many of us here write historical fiction, think how much emotion and perspective this can give us for writing tales set during the Flu Epidemic of 1918.

A thought just crossed my mind. Currently, everyone is calling this a pandemic. I noticed when I went to look up some things of that period a few weeks ago, that people were calling this time from a hundred years ago a pandemic also. But I've always heard of it referred to as an Epidemic. Pandemic (to my mind at least) seems to be a more common term. Hmmmm...now I'm not sure. I think I'm off to Google to go research this tidbit and find out when the term 'pandemic' came into use.

Thinking of researching and stories, this week I'm sharing something I wrote last year about story ideas. Not that most of you need any help with that subject. I have a feeling almost all the authors here have a huge backlog of story ideas that you never have time to research and write. You probably don't need any help in coming up with new ideas. But just in case...

Join us this week as we chat with author Tiffani Angus about her recently released book, *Threading the Labyrinth*. Stay tuned for future issues –In the weeks ahead we have author interviews scheduled with Edith Maxwell, Riana Everly, Heather Osborne, Sophie Schiller, Hannah Byron, and a lot more!

Trisha

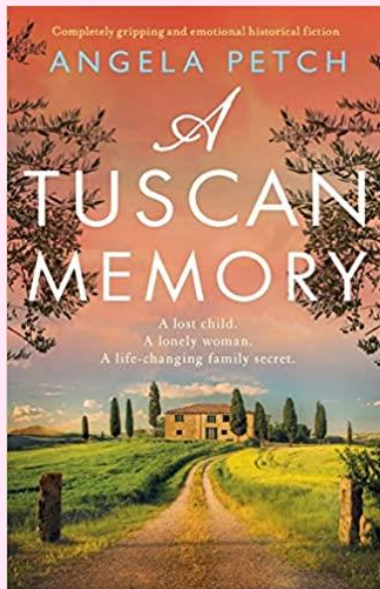
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New Releases

[A Tuscan Memory](#)

Angela Petch



In a tiny hamlet nestled in the Tuscan mountains, farmers gather after a hard day in the meadows, and children's laughter rings across the square: but one little boy does not join in their play. Behind his deep brown eyes, hides a heartbreaking secret...

Ninety years later. When elderly Giselda Chiozzi discovers a lost little boy, curled up asleep in the beech forest outside her grand but empty home, she can't help but take pity on him. It's been a long time since she had a visitor. Waking up to her kind smile and the warming smell of Italian hot chocolate, Davide soon blurts out what drove him into the cold Tuscan night: he's different from everyone else, he's never belonged anywhere, and now his beloved mother is ill.

With her heart full of sadness for this lost child, Giselda promises to help Davide trace his family history – she knows better than anyone that connecting with your roots can ground you in the present, and hopes it will make Davide realise that home is where he truly belongs.

Together the unlikely pair discover the story of Davide's great-grandfather, Giuseppe Starnucci, a young boy who spent his days milking cows, helping with the harvest, and hammering horseshoes in the forge. But after a terrible incident that changed his life forever, Giuseppe also ran away. Forced to become a man before his time, Giuseppe joined the treacherous pilgrimage all Tuscan farmers must make from the mountains to the plains, sacrificing everything to ensure the survival of their families.

Engrossed in the story, Davide is slowly starting to heal when he and Giselda discover a shocking secret which Giuseppe took to his grave – and which now threatens to tear apart Davide's family for good. Will Davide let the pain of the past determine his future, or can he find the courage, love and loyalty within him to return home... and even if Davide himself finds peace, will it be too late for Giselda?

Inspired by true stories of rural Italian life, this absolutely stunning historical read is perfect for fans of Dinah Jeffries, Rhys Bowen, and anyone who's ever longed to stroll beneath the cypress trees and taste the fresh mountain air of Tuscany.

Ideas for Your Stories



The elusive story ideas – where do they lay in wait, ready to spring forth and germinate? They surround us. Ideas for historical stories, too. For what is historical fiction but a story that's set in the past instead of current or future times.

Many writers I talk to have an abundance of story ideas. They complain instead of not having enough time to write the stories they want to. I commiserate with them. I, too, have more ideas in mind than I'll probably ever finish. About three years ago I finally put them together in a document and named it 'Backburner Books'. A lady I spoke with last week keeps her ideas on index cards. And the massive pile of cards is threatening to collapse.

But yet, there are times when despite the wealth of ideas that swirls in an eddy around our existence, we have trouble coming up with an idea. Here's a few places where I find ideas for plots, characters, or settings.

Cemeteries: I love visiting cemeteries. The older the better. Often as I'm wandering through the graves, I'll spot an intriguing name that leads down the path to a story. I met Mittie Ann at Medlin Cemetery in Trophy Club, Texas. I've wanted to write her story since, and I have a notebook full of Medlin research. I've written some short stories and articles about her, yet the book remains on my 'Backburner' list. Through my research I also discovered other fascinating women that I'd love to write about. Some day.

Vintage Items: A trip to an antique store, museum, or merely perusing all the collectibles and antiques that fill my shelves hands me more story ideas that I can write in a year. I finger the embroidered dishtowels made from feed sacks and wonder about the woman that made them so many years ago. 'Don't Call my Handiwork Frivolous' won first place and got me a \$50 Barnes & Noble gift card at our local writer's conference last year. A name on a flyleaf in a vintage book lead to another story. A depression-era milk glass candy dish started off another tale. Old cookbooks – I've written more than one story using a vintage cookbook as the jumping off point to start a new tale.

Photographs and Postcards: That's all I need is a handful of old photographs and postcards and I'm off and running. An added plus is that they're in my budget. But with the internet now, you don't even need to actually purchase them. All you need is for the photos or postcards to spark an idea.

Research: Ah, the rabbit hole of research – so much fun. When I surface sometimes days later, I not only have the research I was after for my current idea (sometimes, often I'm still lacking and need more!), but I come out with another handful of ideas for *other* stories or books.

Chance or overheard conversations: Sometimes all you need is a chance conversation, or an overheard snippet, and *whammo* you're off and running. What if....? If he or she said....

Old Publications: Old newspapers or magazines provide awesome story ideas. I had a copy of some 1904 issues of Horticulture magazine. When I was browsing through them, I found a fascinating report of a Mr. Lawson that feigned grief over his wife's demise to get a floral pillow delivered. Imagine the florist's surprise when a very much alive Mrs. Lawson opened the door. Mr. Lawson was sentenced to a month in the House of Correction over the charge of the larceny of one bunch of Lawson pinks. I couldn't get this idea out of my mind and a short story, William's Blunder, was born.

Television Shows or Movies: Sometimes one scene or one line will prompt a whole scenario in your brain. Not a replica of the show or movie that you're watching, but an idea can germinate from your entertainment. One of my favorites is Josh Gates in Expedition Unknown. Oh my! The fascinating snippets of information that he unearths and the unique places he visits, and amazing people that he finds. After watching one of his hour-long shows I have another few leads to either write about, or work into one of my current works in some way. I often joke that I want his job. Until we reach an episode where he's eating bugs or other drinking some unimaginable concoction – or diving in frigid water that will kill you in less than a number of minutes if you didn't have the proper gear. Then, I'm perfectly fine sitting at home behind my computer writing stories about people, places, and items from the past.

Here's a link with some wonderful writing prompts and ideas for historical fiction writers. I haven't used any of these yet, but there's easily a half dozen photographs that I'm dying to use in some way.

<https://thejohnfox.com/2016/06/historical-fiction-writing-prompts-and-ideas/>

Ana Howard wrote a nice article – 5 Tips: Gathering Ideas for Historical Fiction

<https://www.editing-writing.com/5-tips-historical-fiction-writing/>

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Author Spotlight: Tiffani Angus

This week we welcome author Tiffani Angus to Pages of the Past to chat about her exciting debut novel, *Threading the Labyrinth*. Keep reading to find out about Tiffani's researching and writing journey, and how walled gardens works their way into much of her writing.



We're excited to talk to you today, Tiffani. Although *Threading the Labyrinth* is your first historical fiction work, you're not a stranger to writing. What drew you to tell this story?

I love multi-generational stories, where you get to read about two or three generations of the same family, because I always want to know what happens next. A decade ago, I was planning to do a PhD in Creative Writing and I was coming up with an idea to research. I considered writing about a house and its changes through the centuries, but realized that houses don't change as much as gardens do: I could write about the same garden over the centuries and place people in it and maybe somehow link social changes and gardening changes. As I worked on this more, I realized that I wanted to tell stories about the people—mainly the women—who worked in the garden because too often we read about the landowners, the gentry and aristocracy, but the great majority of us (if we did our genealogy) would find servants in our family trees. As I did more research, I realized that so often gardens in children's fantasy are time travel

devices: think *Tom's Midnight Garden* or *The Children of Green Knowe*. But you don't find that much in adult fantasy; instead if a garden is a main setting in an adult book it's a place where betrayal and adultery and even murder happen. So I wanted to use that trope of the garden as a time-travel device to look at the layers of time that build up in one place—in a garden—and explore the lives of the people who were linked most closely with it: the gardeners, weeding women, Land Girls, etc.

Your main character, Toni, has a gallery in New Mexico, USA, before she inherits an old English manor house in Herfordshire. It seems that your protagonist, Toni, has some similarities to your own life. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Well, it definitely wasn't intentional! Toni's section of the book—the most recent chronologically—was the part that I focused on the least because it didn't require a bunch of research. So, I wrote about someone who was similar to me in that she was from the same general area of the US and her ancestry was British, but she was very different in her career. She just sort of happened. And then, as I was finishing the novel, it dawned on me how similar she was to me in some ways; I said as much to one of my PhD supervisors as I was nearing the finish line, and she said "Yeah, I was wondering when you'd figure that out!" There are a few details of her life that are taken from my life, but for the most part she's fictional. I've never owned an art gallery, for example, but her voice is mine, just watered down a bit.

The walled garden features significantly in your book. What made you set the ghosts from the past in the walled garden instead of in the old manor as many usually do?

Those kids' books I mentioned above in which gardens are the main setting use time travel or time slips to explore the past; the garden is the place where the ghosts are, and walled gardens for me are an important part of that idea. Here in Britain, walled gardens—truly old ones—are rare. There are really no extant Tudor gardens left because the English landscape style popular in the 18th century meant that everything before it was ripped out. So we have this idea—this daydream—of what the gardens from before then looked like, and some have been re-created from old records.

Gardens are gardens because they have borders (or walls) and are controlled; anything outside those borders is wilderness. That control is by human hands; it makes sense to me, then, that the inside of a walled garden, which are sometimes pleasure gardens and sometimes for growing food, will be the most controlled part of a larger garden and will have “absorbed” the most energy from the human attendants who planned it, planted it, cared for it. So a walled garden is like a house, just outside. If ghosts can haunt a house, they for sure can haunt a walled garden! And a walled garden is where the people on a manor will intersect: the owners and the workers and the guests all have access to this single place, so they will all haunt it in some way.

I was reading the beginning of *Threading the Labyrinth* and I have to compliment you on the way you pull the reader right into the story. I have to say that one of my favorite early parts was when Toni flew to the UK to check out her inheritance. As she arrived and was checking out ‘The Remains’ as she calls the site, when she first stepped into the walled garden I wanted to be there right beside her – for real and not just via the pages in a book. How were you able to capture the feel of the garden so well?

When I was doing my research for the book, I got to travel all over Britain to visit gardens—from Sissinghurst to Biddulph Grange to the Hampton Court Palace gardens to Hatfield House, plus so many more. I ended up with thousands of photographs and pages and pages of notes, so I had a lot to work with, and I basically I *love* walled gardens—they're my favorite part of historical gardens to visit—so I searched those out and tried to visit as many as I could. Also, when I lived in the US I had a large backyard garden that I tended throughout the seasons, from the first peeks of spring to “mosquito season” to “I am sick of weeds” to “Yay autumn” to winter, when it all went to sleep. So, I was able to combine my experience of tending a garden with the trips I did to create the feeling of being in a garden that and turn it up to 11. To take a controlled space like a walled garden and amp up the sensations—the smells and colours and sounds—was a lot of fun.

Most authors writing a story from the past have one era to research. Researching on its own can consume countless hours. In your book, you touch the past in four different eras (1620s, 1770s, 1860s, and 1940s) What was it like trying to research these four periods of time from the past?

It was a bit mad, to be honest! I spent nearly 5 years writing the book (as well as a 40,000-word dissertation of space and time in gardens, both fictional and real), and over those years I didn't do things in any clear order. I jumped from time period to time period in my research and in my writing. I ended up with different piles of books and notes—and different Pinterest boards!—for each. I've got Ministry of Food recipe books, books about 16th and 17th-century gardening books, the collection of *Victorian Farm*, etc. (books from the BBC series in which historians replicate a time period and run a farm for a year), books about the Tradescants and Culpeper—just shelves and shelves of garden history books as

well as fiction (mainly fantasy) that is set in gardens. Luckily the garden was the one constant, so no matter what was going on socially or politically or whatever in each time period, all of the characters were linked by this single place, which made research a bit easier than if the characters had been traveling all over.

I started with the 1620s because when I first started writing the novel it was chronological. But I soon started visiting other time periods as the mood took me and as I found good sources or visited certain houses/gardens or museum exhibits that related. In the end I had a pile of stuff that didn't end up on the page but that helped me know who these characters were and the world they lived in. But there were some things I didn't research, such as the sea battle. When I first got to that spot in the book, I put brackets where it happened [put a ship battle here] and planned to do some research; I realized, however, during a later draft that I didn't need details and could just "handwave" what happened! It was a relief!

Out of the different eras you had to research, was there one that had more challenges than the others?

The earliest, the 1620s, was the most challenging because it's the furthest back in history and because I decided to write that section from the point of view of someone—a weeding woman—who didn't leave her own records behind. What we know about these women is pretty thin, so I had to research around her and find what I could on gardens and gardeners of that time. Her name, Joan Cookstole, is a combination of the names of two weeding women in the records from the Hampton Court Palace garden from Henry VIII's time. She also shifted from being written in first-person POV to third-person and back to first-person, which changed how I wrote her. Joan wasn't easy!

Of the different periods, which was your favorite?

That's the hardest question because I loved them all, but for different reasons. I loved getting to know Joan and how she would have lived from season to season; I was excited about the 1770s because as shallow as it sounds I really wanted to write about the fashion (I am an unrepentant lover of costume drama!); the Victorian era attracted me because I love how on the surface things seemed straight-laced and strict but beneath that veneer was an art scene that was full of decadence, and because of how some women bucked tradition to do as they pleased; and, finally, who doesn't love a Land Girl?

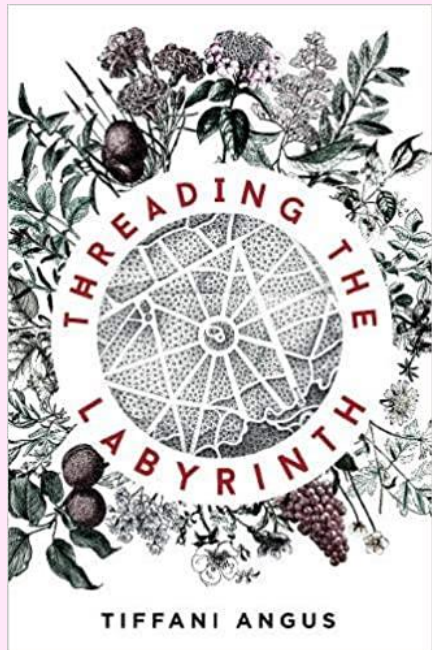
With all the research you had to do for *Threading the Labyrinth*, the writing of it took many years (which is a common denominator of many books). If you were starting the project now, with all you've learned in the process, would you go about it any differently?

I don't think I would because the end product is really reflective of the process of creating it. The original version I turned in for the PhD is in chronological order and, while it worked for that purpose, it didn't work for a marketable novel and didn't truly show the "labyrinth" of time that I was trying to explore. The final version now, with its 2010 frame story and out-of-order nested novellas, better represents the idea of how time is threaded together and how we "encounter" history, in bits and pieces, only able to make connections after we trip over a lucky find. I wrote it much the same way. I had a plan at first and discovered quickly that it wasn't going to work out that way; the first drafts of the 1620s and the 2010 sections are completely different from how they ended up. The book needed to grow organically.

Granted, my next historical fiction novel, which is in very, very early planning, will stick to one time period so will be much easier to tackle!

Thank you for joining us today, Tiffani. It's been a pleasure learning more about you and *Threading the Labyrinth*. Please leave a few links where our readers can find you and your books and we'll go follow and friend you.

Thank you so much for the interesting questions! One final note: If anyone purchases the paperback, they can contact me via social media to request a signed bookplate (since there are no in-person signings happening this year) that I will post worldwide.



You can find *Threading the Labyrinth* here:

Amazon US ([Kindle](#) and [paperback](#))

[Amazon UK](#) (Kindle and paperback)

[Book Depository](#) (free worldwide shipping of paperback)

[Unsung Stories](#) (paperback, ebook and Kindle)

You can find Tiffani Angus here:

Twitter: @tiffaniangus <https://twitter.com/tiffaniangus>

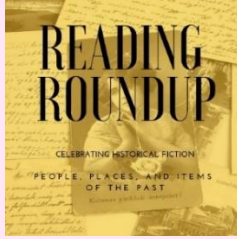
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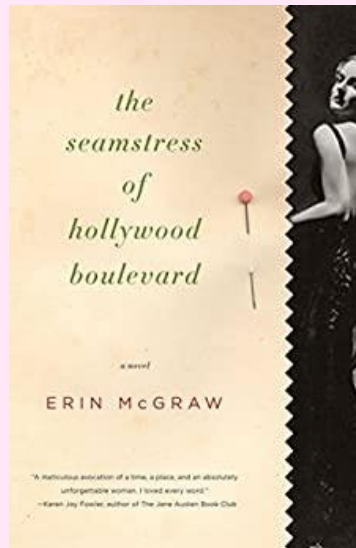
BIO: Tiffani Angus was born in North Hollywood and grew up in Las Vegas but left the desert behind and ended up in England, drawn by the lure of lush, green gardens, where she teaches creative writing and publishing at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge. She currently doesn't have a garden, but that's okay because she'd rather geek out in gardens other people have planted than deal with weeds and bugs. Her short fiction—much of it historical fantasy about people from gardening history—has been published at *Strange Horizons* in and several anthologies. She's currently working on a novel about an apocalypse (started way before the pandemic!) and is considering expanding the *Threading* garden in some short fiction.

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The 1900s/1910s



The Seamstress of Hollywood Boulevard

Erin McGraw

At age seventeen, Nell Plat is an unhappily married woman, quick with her needle and wit, but ill-suited to wifely duties like cooking, mothering, and tending to her boorish husband. Unable to shake her dreams of glamour and excitement, she abandons her family and quiet life in Kansas for the hustle, bustle, and glittering lights of Los Angeles.

Among the wannabes and celebrities of the silver screen, Nell reinvents herself as Madame Annelle, seamstress to the stars. But just as she begins stitching her way to success, her past shows up on her doorstep, threatening to unravel her carefully crafted ruse.

“Meticulously researched” (The A.V. Club) and “vibrant with historical accuracy” (SFGate)—based on the true story of the author’s grandmother—*The Seamstress of Hollywood Boulevard* is a fascinating look at old Hollywood glamour, gender roles, and the ever-evolving American dream.