

Recognizing My Limits

I have long a history of signing up to do things I don't know how to do, and figuring it out as I go. I remember doing this for the first time when I was about 7 or 8 years old. I'd taken a week-long swim class sometime around the age of 5, but didn't actually learn how to swim. After a couple of years stuck in the shallow end of the pool at the Boys and Girls Club, occasionally venturing into the deep end, clinging onto the wall for dear life and hoping the life guards didn't notice I wasn't supposed to be there, I'd had enough. I was going to learn how to swim once and for all.

So I jumped off the diving board, hit the water, and figured it out.

A decade and a half later I embellished my resume enough to land a job preparing the United States Air Force for a NATO audit. I had some college work but no degree, and a little secretarial and bookkeeping assistant

experience, but nothing to prepare me for this. I had eight weeks to figure it out.



[I used to have a different name, but that's still me.]

I did, and the NATO auditors requested that I prepare the next audit because things went so smoothly.

Two and a half decades later, I accepted the position of Aerospace and Space Science Teacher at my kids' middle school. I'd indicated an interest in working for the school, but I didn't have a teaching certification or any experience in aerospace or space science (beyond the audit prep I'd done for the Air Force, which really doesn't count). But their previous teacher had quit two weeks before school began, and they were desperate and I was willing. I didn't find out until the end of the first day of school that there was no set curriculum and no lesson plans for me; I had to come up with all of that myself. For the first semester, I was at most a day or two ahead of the

students in learning the material I was teaching, and sometimes not even that.

But I did it, and was invited back to teach the next year.

I declined.

I was beginning to focus more on what I wanted to do, rather than what I could do, and what I wanted to do was write.

Two years after declining to renew my teaching contract, I published *Virtuous Women*. And since then, I've been doing **all the things** to get this book into the world.

- I launched this newsletter
- I got active on Twitter
- I set up an author page on Facebook
- I set up an Instagram account
- I posted on all of those regularly
- I killed my Twitter account
- I signed up for Threads
- I killed my Threads account
- I stopped posting much on Facebook and Instagram
- I set up a Substack with a weekly posting schedule
- I've been writing my next book

And I'm exhausted. And frustrated, because writing the next book is at the bottom of that list. I love writing fiction. But I'm spending too much time **doing all the things**, and I don't have enough time left to write. Especially right now, when my personal life is in a serious state of upheaval.

Now I'm recognizing my limits. I'll post every once in a while on my Facebook Author Page and/or Instagram. I don't care about working the algorithm or maximizing my reach. If I have something to say, I'll say it. If I don't, I won't. And I've decided to delete my Substack. I enjoy publishing on there, but it's taking too much time away from my novel, and I'd much rather be a novelist than a blogger.

So if you want to keep up to date with what's going on with me, this is the place to be. I intend to keep to a monthly schedule, but sometimes I'm going to give myself the grace to skip a month.

For example, this is a combination April / May newsletter. You won't hear from me again until June. Why? Because my family and I have been spending the latter part of this winter in someone's summer house, and we have to be out by the end of May. We're still lining up our next temporary lodging, and still trying to figure out a more permanent situation before the kids start school in late August or early September. We're exploring several options, and expect to have some clarity by the middle of July. But May is going to be a crazy month, and I'm going to cut myself some slack. I appreciate your understanding.

Beta Readers vs. Advance Readers

Also, I'm down to the last two chapters of my next book, and then I've got a minor rewrite of some earlier chapters and some other editing before I start looking for beta readers. And this is the first place I'm going to look for those!

I'll also be looking for Advance Readers, which is different from beta readers.

Beta readers will go through an earlier draft of the book and identify what works for them, what doesn't, and give feedback on how I can make the book better. I'll have some guidance on what type of feedback I'm looking for. You don't have to be a writer, just an avid reader with a good understanding of what makes a story work. I'll consider that feedback as I work to improve the manuscript before publishing it. (I say 'consider' rather than 'implement' because beta readers often have differing opinions from each other. I evaluate all feedback and make the final determination about what needs to be changed.)

I'll be looking for 3-4 beta readers.

Advance readers are the ones who will read the final version of the book before it's released to the public. At that point it's too late for feedback

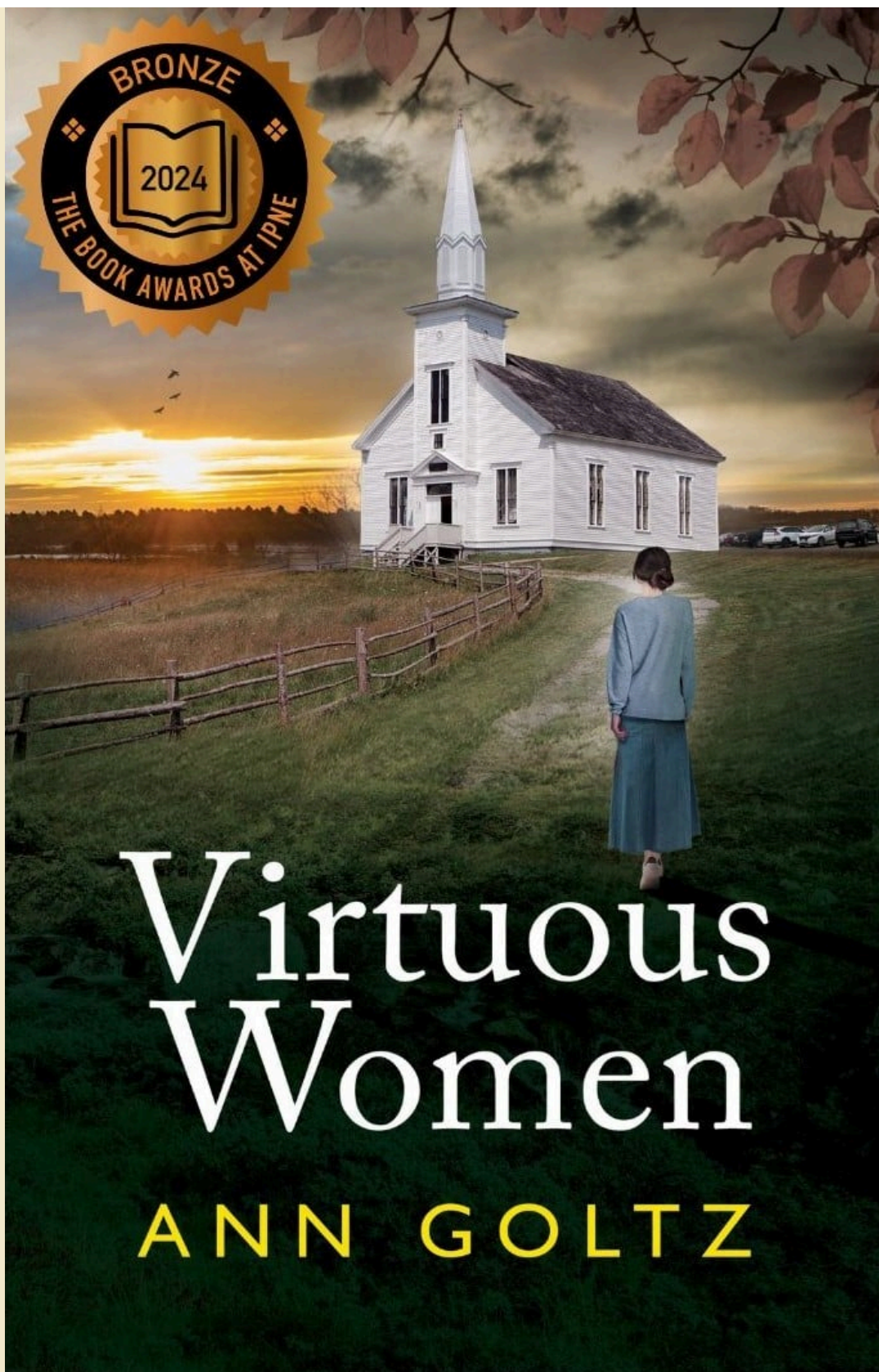
(unless you find something glaring and catastrophic, like a character's name changing or a serious plot hole that somehow got past everyone else). I'll ask those readers to write reviews on Amazon and Goodreads, and talk about my book on their own social media. I'll be looking for as many of those as possible. Most of the Advance Reader Copies will be ebooks, but I will have a limited number of paperbacks to send to people who are interested in photographing themselves reading my book "in the wild" and posting it online.

In June's newsletter, I'll have a survey for you to fill out if you want to be a beta reader and/or an advance reader.

I'll also have a description of the book. In the meantime, I'll tell you the title:

What Happened to Zinnia

This book has nothing to do with religious patriarchy, but, like *Virtuous Women*, focuses on complicated family dynamics and women's identity. Tune in next month for more details!



[Bookshop.org](https://www.bookshop.org)* (paperback)

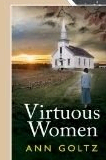
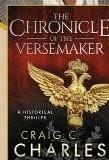
[Amazon](https://www.amazon.com) (paperback/ebook)

Events

I've been hard at work getting the word out about *Virtuous Women*. Earlier this week I recorded a brief interview for the [**Bookish Roadtrip Facebook page**](#), which will show up there later in May. I'll also be featured on [**Author Confessions: The Facts Behind the Fiction**](#) on May 13.

And finally, I'm doing an in-person event **THIS SATURDAY, MAY 3** at Toadstool Bookstore in Keene, NH. If you're anywhere near the area, please consider joining me and two other New Hampshire writers as we discuss surviving trying times, a theme that all three of us have in our books. Don't miss it!

Three Important Stories about Trying Times



**A Panel Discussion with New Hampshire Authors
Elizabeth Gauffreau, Craig C. Charles, and Ann Goltz,
Moderated by Pat Hammond**

When: Saturday, May 3rd, 2:00 p.m.

Where: Toadstool Bookshop
12 Emerald Street, Keene NH



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