

But for Brandeis and so many other writers who participate in NaNoWriMo, the event is not just a fun creative challenge. It is also a celebration of the power of stories to enrich our lives.

"Novels really are empathy bombs," Brandeis said. "They allow us to look deeply into the life of someone other than ourselves, and that can open our hearts and minds and help us feel more connected to humanity."

Her forthcoming book, *Many Restless Concerns*, a novel in poems told from the collective voice of the more than 600 women and girls killed

by the Hungarian Countess Elizabeth Bathory, is an exercise in this kind of sustained empathy.

"Something about this story lodged in me, and I was thinking, 'Who were all these girls and women she killed?'" Brandeis said. "There's been a lot written about her but nothing that really centered her victims, and they just started talking to me in this choral, weird voice."

Brandeis hopes readers will walk away from this new book understanding "that justice is possible if we tell our stories."

The room is quiet as we write, and at the end of the night, we celebrate all the words we added to the pile: 900 for one person, 1,100 for another.

On my way out the door, I snag a bookmark with the bookstore's name-sake quote printed across it, a line from Margaret Atwood that reminds me what I already know is true: "A word after a word after a word is power." □

Gayle Brandeis' novel *Many Restless Concerns: The Victims of Countess Bathory Speak in Chorus* will be released Feb. 14, 2020. Word After Word Books, 10118 Donner Pass Road, Truckee, hosts the Writing Series every second and fourth Wednesday of the month from 6:30 to 8 p.m. One session costs \$15, or you can buy a four pack for \$50. Writing Series participants also receive 10 percent off all in-store purchases.

"Constraint can be, maybe paradoxically, very freeing," Brandeis said. "We can be pretty wild within whatever constraint we give ourselves, and it creates a frame for us to play within."



Author Gayle Brandeis participates in NaNoWriMo every November.

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