



Gayle Brandeis has written an unusual novel-meets-poetry book for her latest work. COURTESY/GAYLE BRANDEIS, CAMERA RAW PHOTOGRAPHY

Poetic justice

Gayle Brandeis

Intense feelings while writing are likely

typical for authors who delve into macabre subject matter, whether it is fictional or reportage. For Incline Village author Gayle Brandeis, her latest work gives voice to the victims of the infamous Countess Elizabeth Bathory, who killed hundreds of women and young girls in 1700s Hungary.

"It was definitely hard to write about such grisly stuff, because I'm a very peaceful person," Brandeis said. "I don't seek out gruesome stories at all, and I tend to flinch away from them."

Once Brandeis came up with the idea of telling the story of Bathory's victims in their own voices—and to mix poetry with prose—it became a compelling reason to press on. And, it all stemmed from her daughter's book collection.

"When my daughter was a teenager, she had a *Notorious Women of History* book that featured women who were considered outlaws," Brandeis said. "I happened upon the chapter on Countess Bathory and the fact that she was one of the worst serial killers in history. I had heard her story, especially the fact that she's a woman and that she killed up to 650 girls and women. I found myself haunted by these lost voices, so I started writing poems and then did a bunch of research."

The result is *Many Restless Concerns: The Victims of Countess Bathory Speak in Chorus (a testimony)*, one of the most ambitious books of Brandeis' career, which doesn't really follow your usual trajectory. Writing since she was just 4, Brandeis has written books of poetry, inspirational

non-fiction works about writing, novels and books for younger readers. She also earned acclaim for her 2017 memoir, *The Art of Misdiagnosis: Surviving My Mother's Suicide*.

"I think my mom's suicide and writing about that helped me be able to face difficult things more," Brandeis said. "It left my heart open to write about other pain in the world, and I felt it was important to be able to see suffering with clear eyes and not shy away from it."

For *Restless Concerns*, the writing process was intuitive, as it was with all of Brandeis' works. "I started out with three to five poems, but then these voices, they wanted more, and I thought they deserved more than just a few poems," she said. "It really became this act of reclamation, an act of justice for these lost girls and women and it felt urgent to me to write about them and to give it as much space as it needed."

Once it is rescheduled, keep an eye out for Brandeis' reading from *Restless Concerns*, which will be as unusual as the book itself. Since the book features multiple characters, Brandeis is planning to have audience members read from it along with her.

"I feel like there needs to be more than just my voice in the room," Brandeis said. Brandeis shares her knowledge about writing as a professor at Sierra Nevada University in Incline Village. She was first a visiting writer-in-residence there in 2014 for what was supposed to be a one-year appointment, but she and her family liked the area so much that she moved from Southern California. She teaches at least one class a semester, from fiction to creative writing to poetry or literature.

"It's really exciting for me to watch students step into their own voices and develop," Brandeis said about her teaching work. "It's really gratifying to be there when they realize that their voices matter. I had writing professors or different writers who gave me permission to step into my own bravery, and I just wanted to provide that positivity." □

A reading and event for *Many Restless Concerns* scheduled for March 19 at Lake Tahoe Community College in Incline Village has been postponed. Find out more details about Brandeis at gaylebrandeis.com.

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