

## Travel Writers Exchange Interview: Maralyn D. Hill, IFWTWA

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**Interviewee:** Maralyn Hill, President - IFWTWA

**Interviewer:** Trisha Miller, President - Travel Writers Exchange

**Trisha:** Welcome everyone; I'm Trisha Miller, President of Travel-Writers-Exchange.com. We are the online community for experienced and aspiring travel writers, bloggers, and journalists. We're very fortunate that we have with us today Maralyn Hill who is the President of The International Food, Wine, and Travel Writers Association. Maralyn welcome to our podcast.

**Maralyn:** I'm happy to be here Trisha. Thank you for inviting me.

**Trisha:** Well, welcome today. Listeners, you'll be able to read Maralyn's biography on our website at Travel-Writers-Exchange and there you'll also find a link to The International Food, Wine, and Travel Writers Association website as well.

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**Trisha:** So Maralyn, before we dig into really any of the tough questions, can you just give me a brief history of the Association and your role in it?

**Maralyn:** Well, the Association was founded in Paris in 1954. And, it's a global network of journalists who cover the hospitality and lifestyle fields and the people who promote them. The International Food, Wine, and Travel Writers Association is a non-profit organization. It's run by and for the benefit of its members. I served on the board of directors for 2-years when I was elected President, and I consider myself a change agent, moving the organization forward -- in other words, keeping our members up-to-date on marketing their skills online. We also focus on generating more writing opportunities and professional development in this ever changing media world.

**Trisha:** Wow! And I had no idea that it had been around that long. That's amazing.

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**Trisha:** So can you tell me a little about, what the IFWTWA would offer to writers that is unique from other writers organization?

**Maralyn:** Well, we're the only organization to cover a combination of food, wine, and travel. And we are non-profit, so we keep our costs to a minimum.

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**Trisha:** That is good because my next question is, what is the cost for a write to join your organization and what benefits do they get from that membership fee?

**Maralyn:** Ok, there's a lot of benefits. And the cost is reasonable. It's \$120, plus a \$50 one-time registration fee for regular members, and associate members pay \$235, plus a \$50 fee, so it's reasonable all the way around.

**Maralyn:** Our newest feature which I'm excited about is our membership profile page. This just went up a couple of months ago and it lists your name, your websites, your blogs, your bio, any books you've authored with links to purchase them. Ah, you've got accounts to go through wherever you want to make the purchase, and it lists any articles that our members have published in our online magazine, Global Writes, as well as giving all of our members an opportunity to upload their clips to this page. So it's a wonderful page for the members to utilize for PR people because when they say "what are your credentials?" you can just give them one link and it's going to have everything there.

Many members are private and don't want as much out there, so they have the choice to make their profile public or private, but it's exciting, I worked hard on that one and that really excites me. Our press card is something that everyone values, and before we had this membership profile page, I would say, for me personally and many members I know, our monthly newsletter Press Pass which keeps all members up-to-date, provides editorial leads, press trip information.....that in itself was worth the membership because if you work the leads that are in there you can keep an income streaming. We have an online magazine called Global Writes, which will publish our members articles, and Travel Media and Food Media -- we've just formed an alliance with them -- so that they will send out press releases on every post to Global Writes, and those go to over 10,000 journalists.

We have an annual conference at sea with professional development, and our media trips are becoming more frequent. And as I said they cover food, wine, and travel. We've got a couple of blogs that allow questions, and one that focuses on saying "thank you" about various perks. And for Associate Members, in addition to direct communication with our members, they get 30% off their Travel Media and Food for Media membership as well as discounted rates to advertise on our website.

Members have access to the board and our encouraged to get involved. We want participation, we want involvement from the membership.

**Trisha:** Wow! Those are some terrific benefits.

**Maralyn:** Yeah, I think so. (Chuckle)

**Trisha:** And it sounds like a very small and reasonable cost to get that many benefits.

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**Trisha:** Well Maralyn, tell me just a little about the members that you do have. Are they like, spread out all around the world? I noticed that it says "International" in the title, and just give me a feel for the demographic of your members.

**Maralyn:** Ok, our members cover a wide variety of ages and locations. The youngest are college students, there's a few of those. And the oldest have been established journalists for years. Ah, and there used to be the way things were and it's important that, you know, there up-to-date to the way things are. They cover all aspects of Food, Wine, and Travel Writing and some Adventure Writing and the memberships that come in are really worldwide. The greatest percentage is in the U.S. and Canada, but 20% would be from around the world. I mean the one press trip to Southern Oregon had someone from the UK on it. We've got members in Australia; we've got members in India. You know we've got some members in Italy. The UK and Italy and Germany are the highest outside memberships and then the other ones are a few here and there.

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**Trisha:** One of the things that you know is so important to writers is the ability to network and get together, because I always find that I get ideas from other writers, and you never know who you are going

to meet that can help you in your career. So what kind of networking opportunities would be available to your members?

**Maralyn:** Well, in addition to our media trips and conferences, which are just really the best; in January we started online groups on LinkedIn, Facebook, and finally Twitter, and through these groups which are open to people who aren't members as well as those that are, so if you've got an interest in travel writing you're welcome to join these groups and we're encouraging regional luncheons -- Trisha that's where I met you, at a luncheon.

**Trisha:** Right, that's where we met, and we actually connected on Facebook.

**Maralyn:** Yes, yes, and with many of our members -- and we're getting a lot of younger members -- they want to communicate online, on LinkedIn or Facebook. And if that's where they want to communicate with us, that's where will communicate. And then a lot of members communicate between each other. And all the board members, our email addresses are available for communication.

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**Trisha:** You know, what you've probably seen with your organization, there are a lot of people that are new to this, that are coming into this industry, brand new to writing and travel writing, and of course, food writing and all of that, so can we talk a little bit about what types of educational or training opportunities that you let your members know about or make available to them?

**Maralyn:** Well at the present time, we have professional development at our conference as well as having local speakers at least one morning on our media trips. At our last conference we had speakers to cover websites, blogs, publishing, advertorials, wine, and as well as a guest chef. So that was the most professional development they've had, and through cruises, and just last week with a cruise for next year, while we're working on the details, but we'll have the same type professional development.

I'm someone that...my background is organizational development and training, and I highly believe in professional development, and my column in Press Pass tends to push that more than I think anyone is used to, but it's something that I'm very much in favor of, and we're considering some online courses. The other thing is we're going to be offering a scholarship this year. We're in the midst of finding sponsors to host it with us so we can make the scholarship a higher amount, in order to provide a writer an opportunity to take part in our conference or take a class if they really want. I'm really excited about that.

**Trisha:** That's sounds like a terrific program -- a scholarship program. I will be sure to follow up with you because I would like to do another interview with you, a separate one just on that program, so I'm definitely going to be following up with you on that.

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**Trisha:** You know you touched on this before with some of the, I think you called them the Associate Members that would be able to offer discounted travel packages to people that were going on media trips. What about if people are maybe not going on a media trip but want to travel in order to write about it, would they still be able to get some travel discount opportunities there?

**Maralyn:** Well, our press card gets a lot of discounts -- showing that gets a lot of discounts. It's a nice one, you know, plastic and embossed with the number and all of that kind of stuff. But, unfortunately the airlines aren't discounting at the present time, that's a writer's biggest expense. But we do publish every month in Press Pass suppliers who are looking to host writers. They want you to come. And I just

finished with one location in Canada who has three or four separate media trips set up for the year, where they want writers. I said “well, you know, if you want us to publish those let us know and we’ll publish those in there, and we’re also going to do a media trip that’s exclusively for members there next year. But, we have an editor of Press Pass that really goes out to find these phenomenal opportunities and we publish once a month, the first week of the month and so it’s current and if you work it they’re there and there’s a lot of opportunities there. Like I said before that, I used to say before our website was more current -- the way it is now -- that just Press Pass alone was worth the dues because there’s so much material in it.

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**Trisha:** Absolutely.... so it sounds like there’s a lot of travel opportunities and some potential to get discounts in particular if they’re going on these media trips. But let’s talk about other kinds of writing jobs. So if somebody joins the Association, will they also be able to find other types of writing jobs, freelance or maybe somebody that’s looking to hire a staff writer. Do you make those kinds of opportunities available to members?

**Maralyn:** When, on occasion, associates will say that they’re looking for something and that is published in Press Pass. If you say to me “are there a lot?” No....there’s many more writers than there are jobs available, and it’s a case that people need to learn to market themselves. One of the things that we do have that we’ve found quite beneficial is that our writers, if they go on a trip and they write about it, but they don’t have an outlet, it can be published in Global Writes. And even though Global Writes doesn’t pay, at least you’re getting your story out there for someone whose hosted you, and in a well respected publication, that can help you get paying jobs. I mean, if you say to me, “well I don’t write for free”,.... I don’t *like* to write for free, but probably 50% of my writing is for free and the other 50% I get paid for, but if I didn’t write for free I wouldn’t get the part that I get paid for.

**Trisha:** Very true because you wouldn’t have something out there to be published to point to say that I’m a published author, I’m a writer. So there are times when we all have to do that and it does benefit us in, in umpteen ways.

**Maralyn:** But we try and help each other and we recommend people, you know I came across someone and I sent their resume to one, an associate member that I knew -- they had lost a particular employee and I said, “you know this person, if you’re looking to replace him, you might want to interview this individual.”

So there is a lot of camaraderie between our members. But like any organization that’s so large -- I mean we’re not that large, we’re small in comparison to many -- but when you cover such a broad spectrum of area -- when you say “worldwide” -- there’s a limit to the amount of talking face-to-face, but with the computer, with being able to go online and use the blogs and LinkedIn and Facebook, it’s making that world much smaller to where you can assist people. And we’ve had writers on LinkedIn that have asked for contacts in different countries and different things, and people have just been very forward with it.

**Trisha:** That’s the wonderful thing about belonging to this type of organization, a group of people, everybody does reach out to help everybody else.

**Maralyn:** Yeah, they do. I mean that’s sort of what it’s about. It’s a wonderful position, and for young writers starting, I would not give up my day job. I’d have a day job and look at this as an avocation as your building. I recently read an article in The Writer or Writer’s Digest, I don’t remember which one, a John Jakes interview, and he wrote advertising copy and marketing copy and disciplined himself to write three nights a week for two or three hours, and that lead into his series of books, The Kent Family Chronicles. So, it’s the norm.

**Trisha:** I think that most writers do that. I bet everybody that's a successful and published writer has a similar story. It's good advice.

**Maralyn:** I think so, but I wrote advertising and marketing copy when I needed to support my children let me tell you, but this isn't as high paying, but it is....it's rewarding, it's fun and the perks.....are terrific. You need to remember that, though.

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**Trisha:** Well, let's talk about those perks. I know you just got back from a trip, I just got back from a trip, a media trip and umm, you went on a lovely 2-week cruise, and I went on a 4-day trip to Cozumel but, umm, so that's I think the question we get asked the most often is "what about those media trips?" And, umm, so can you just tell me a little bit about how often the Association makes these types of media trips available to its members?

**Maralyn:** Well for a couple of years they have slowed down, but I volunteered for that position when I went on the board and this year my Vice President Michelle Winter is co-chairman of the committee. But, in 2008 we had two media trips and in 2009 we started with a Conference at Sea in January, we have a trip to Vermont in May, and we have another trip that will be announced shortly, as well as one a little later in the year. And we're going to kick-off 2010 with another Conference at Sea. You know our goal is to have three media trips a year plus a conference. That's a lot because if you write the stories that go with those trips.....I mean I've written over 20 stories on the Southern Oregon trip and there are still more to come (chuckle)...you have to know from Cozumel, they show you so many things and there's so many stories that goes with a trip...

**Trisha:** Absolutely, I'm still writing, and I'll be writing for the next week or two on this one.

**Maralyn:** Yeah!

**Trisha:** Yep, absolutely. Well, Maralyn we again thank you for taking the time to speak with us and for educating us on your organization, The International Food, Wine, and Travel Writers Association which can be found online at [www.ifwtwa.org](http://www.ifwtwa.org) and thank you again Maralyn.

**Maralyn:** Thanks for having me.