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IBPA Member Spotlight: Katrina Shawver

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Posted by: Christopher Locke

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Katrina Shawver Honored With 2018 Polish Heritage Award for Her Novel About Holocaust Survivor Henry Zguda



Author Katrina Shawver (left) holds her 2018 Polish Heritage Award alongside Polish American Congress of Arizona President Elizabeth Matej-Horchem

"Winning the 2018 Polish Heritage Award from the Polish American Congress of Arizona [for *HENRY: A Polish Swimmer's True Story of Friendship from Auschwitz to America*] will always be the most special and treasured award I receive," says indie author **Katrina Shawver** (<https://katrinashawver.com/>). "It is a huge public 'thank you' for writing this book and learning their culture, and the

ultimate acknowledgment from Poles that when it comes to Poland and Polish history 'I got it right.'"

Katrina was presented with the award in person at the 44th Annual Polish Heritage Ball in Phoenix, Arizona, in front of a crowd of almost 200 people. This moment was the culmination of a long journey writing and publishing this book.

Katrina met Henry Zguda in 2002, and after hearing his incredible story of surviving the Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps she knew that she had to write a biography about his life. She then spent 15 years researching World War II, Poland, Auschwitz, and the Holocaust. When it came time to publish the novel she chose **Köehler Books** (<http://www.koehlerbooks.com/book/henry-a-polish-swimmers-true-story-of-friendship-from-auschwitz-to-america/>) (also an IBPA member).

"They came highly recommended and offer multiple publishing options," says Katrina. "The company was founded in 2010 and to date has published more than 400 books, many of which have been winners of multiple awards. The relationship has worked extremely well for both of us. Köehler Books designed a brilliant book cover and layout, has guided me as a new author, and handles the business side of publishing so I can focus on being an author and marketing my book. The hybrid version of indie publishing has been a winning combination for me. I consider myself 'indie-published' but not 'self-published.'"

Since the book's publication in November 2017 it has won multiple awards, including winning silver in the "Biography" category of the **IBPA Benjamin Franklin Awards** (<http://ibpabenjaminfranklinawards.com/>). It has also been endorsed by the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland – Los Angeles, and is available through the Library of Congress/National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Disabled to any U.S. citizen around the world who qualifies for the program. Both programs are highly selective.

"Henry Zguda did not live to see the book finally published in November 2017," says Katrina, "but I know he is smiling down very proud and raising a toast of good Polish vodka."

Two Questions With Author Katrina Shawver

IBPA: What drew you to publishing your book through an independent publisher instead of a large publishing house?

Katrina Shawver (KS): I believe indie publishing offers far more opportunities for newer authors, and is where the rise of publishing is definitely headed. In joining IBPA, I became even more aware of the huge collaborative community within the indie publishing world.

Time to publication was also a key factor for me. I began my book in 2002. I had a polished, edited manuscript ready in November 2016. I knew inherently it was good and I literally wanted to hold the finished book in my hands before I died. I am not that old, but life is, well, uncertain and I passionately wanted my story out in the world. The idea of spending years searching for an agent, possibly getting a contract, and then waiting out the traditional publishing schedule of two years with a large publishing house was not on my agenda.

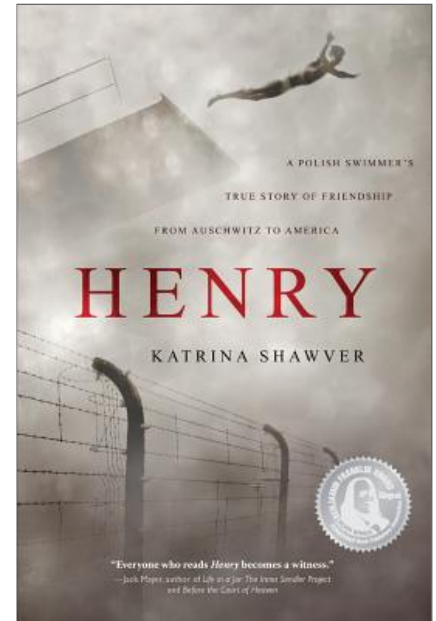
Acceptance by a major agent or publishing house held the same odds as the lottery ticket I buy with my groceries. The large houses are more interested in big names or anyone with a huge following on social media, not necessarily the writing or story. I am neither, and nonfiction WWII history is not at the top of most agents' wish lists. Many literary agents report they receive 80,000 queries a year, only to narrow down to a possible four new clients a year and the hurdles continue from there.

Good Indie publishers are also very selective in what books they accept but are more willing to take a chance on new authors. They have strict guidelines for quality, and turn out gorgeous books. I think many indie publishers enter the business because they want more authors to be published—so are already in the encouragement mindset.

IBPA: As an indie author, what marketing channels have you found the most success with?

KS: My approach has been to try almost anything once, and continually build visibility. As an author with no marketing background it has been a huge learning curve and a constant hustle to get my book noticed amidst the wave of new books entering the market every day. I have spent far more time and money in marketing than I had budgeted or predicted, and have yet to recoup my investment. One of the best investments I made was to hire IBPA member Shari Stauch of **Where Writers Win** (<https://writerswin.com/>) for the first four months to get everything in place and point me in the right directions.

I began blogging on my story five years ago. Today my website is polished and has five years of solid content, including more than 350 blog posts, book trailers and other resources. I still blog and now I also publish a monthly newsletter. Growing an email list is the true gold of marketing.



HENRY: A Polish Swimmer's True Story of Friendship from Auschwitz to America by Katrina Shawver

Early on I 'claimed my internet real estate' by creating a profile on every platform under my name, even if I was not ready to use them. Today, I am most active on Facebook and have great success connecting with many influencers through specific Facebook groups. My readers tend to be older, history or WWII enthusiasts, the Polish-American community, and anyone interested in Holocaust studies or accounts. By sharing posts from my own Facebook page with specific groups, I have reached thousands of views on a single post. I check LinkedIn once daily and use the Groups feature there. Right now I am learning Twitter but would love a simple class entitled "How to Manage Twitter in only 15 Minutes a Day."

I updated my author profiles on both Amazon and Goodreads as soon as I had my ISBNs and the book was available for preorders. Because my book has international appeal, I also posted my author profile to Amazon Canada, UK, France, and Germany. I tried **IBPA's NetGalley Program** (<https://www.ibpa-online.org/store/ListProducts.aspx?catid=619785>) with some success.

I registered my book with every online book community where there are readers. My author profile on each site includes links to my website and social media. Members of these online communities often review books and can choose to follow you as an author, like GoodReads but on a smaller scale. Some of these sites include: BookBub, booksonline.best, librarything.com, onlinebookclub.org, booklover.com, askdavid.com and more. My website has received a lot of traffic from some of these. A few charge to list your book for a set period of time, but I find those charges minimal in the big picture.

I held two GoodReads giveaways when they were still free. Results were negligible in terms of sales and I only received one book review. However, more than 1,300 people added it to their "to read" shelf. As of January 9, 2018 GoodReads began charging \$119 (or \$599 for premium) for the privilege of giving your books away for free, so I have not held one since. Giveaways are also now limited to the United States. I have not tried giveaways on Amazon yet.

Media and readers are finding me online organically more and more. Every blog post, media article, website page, book review, event, and online profile is a unique URL, and Google somehow knows I am regularly putting out new content. In short, I can be found.

IBPA: Thank you, Katrina, for sharing your story with the IBPA community!

Read more about indie author Katrina Shawver here. (<https://katrinashawver.com/>)

Share your own publishing news with the IBPA community! Send news about events or accomplishments to **christopher@ibpa-online.org** (<mailto:christopher@ibpa-online.org>). Keep in mind that we reserve Spotlights for major news (you're a cookbook author who won a national cooking competition), unique news (you wrote a book about cycling and now you're riding a bike across the U.S. for your book tour), or human interest stories (you visit shelters every weekend to read books to the dogs and cats there).

Though launching a new book isn't the focus of our Spotlights articles, IBPA is happy to share that exciting news on social media. Please contact **christopher@ibpa-online.org** (<mailto:christopher@ibpa-online.org>) with the launch date, your book cover, your book title, a link to where readers can learn more about your book, and your Twitter handle.

For good news in general about your publishing company (your book received a wonderful editorial review, you have an upcoming speaking engagement, etc.), use the hashtag #IBPAmemberGoodNews on Twitter and IBPA will amplify your good news!

Whether you have news or not, all of us at IBPA are cheering you on!

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