

## **Giacomo background info**

### **Executive Summary**

Author/member Jacqueline “Angel” Giacomo accused the awards directors of unethical behavior in several emails. She was reacting to a decision we made to delay the acceptance of her fifth book this season. Once the “unethical” description was used, we had every reason to expect this author would again resort to painting our entire program with this brush.

We decided to decline any future books from this author, which forces the board to reconsider her membership status (expulsion or “downgrade” to associate member) and any resultant prorated refund of dues.

### **Author’s accusations**

*For details, the emails are posted at the end of this document.*

We unfairly denied her book entry

- We weren’t “denying” the book, we were delaying its entry to the next season.
- Reasons for the delay of this author’s book:
  - She had already submitted four books at the start of the season (possibly denying “equal access” to other authors).
  - We had trouble finding volunteer reviewers for the books she had already submitted—the books were not particularly well-written and lengthy.
- With this in mind, Betsy decided to provide an honest explanation of her decision to postpone acceptance of Giacomo’s fifth book this season (and 9th in the past two seasons).

We changed the rules mid-season

- The “rule” (restricting authors to three books per season, to be implemented officially next year) is not listed on the website because we never anticipated that one author would enter five books in one season.
- Giacomo is correct in this regard.
- However, we can’t think of every possible scenario and provide a “rule” ahead of time.
  - Our website doesn’t mention that we won’t accept books from authors convicted of treason or other high crimes and misdemeanors. That doesn’t mean we wouldn’t be able to refuse such a book.
  - Our website didn’t have a recency of publication restriction until an author-member submitted a book originally published in the 19th century.
- We DO (and will) need to add, “MWSA reserves the right to refuse a book for any reason” to the website to cover this type of situation in the future.

She stated: “For a group supposed to be representing the honor and duty of the military you don’t follow what it represents.

- Is an *ex post facto* rule unethical (or unmilitary)?
  - Had Giacomo surfaced her concerns or objections with less hyperbole, we might have been able to address the decision’s fairness or advisability. But once she accused us of unethical or unmilitary behavior, she painted us into an unacceptable corner.
  - Notwithstanding the above, it’s worth pointing out how inappropriate and counterproductive it is to hurl such accusations against a group of volunteers whom you expect to evaluate your next book.
- She has, in effect, dared us to do something; we should take her up on the offer.

### **Member background and books already submitted and accepted**

- Wild Apricot member listing is Jacqueline Giacomo. Angel appears to be her pen name.
- Ms. Giacomo joined MWSA for the 2022 season and has not been active in any way other than to use us as advertising for her multitude of books. She has published 14 books in 2.5 years.
- The scoring and reviews for all four of her previously-submitted 2023-season books are complete.
- The situation is further complicated by the fact that one of her books from this season scored high enough for an award.
  - Our website currently explains that award-winning authors must be members in good standing at the time of award presentation. However, we expect that the board will vote so that she’s not a member, effective on the date of our board meeting (5/10).

### **The way ahead and complications**

- It would be unwise (to put it mildly) to accept a book into our system from an author who questions our ethics *a priori* (repeatedly and in writing).
- For this reason, Betsy and I will not accept any further books submitted by this author—either through the review and awards program or a free library listing.
- Since this decision involves removing two of the benefits of MWSA membership, it forces the board to consider whether her continued membership in our organization is warranted.
- We do not support or recommend any retroactive actions regarding books already submitted and accepted into our system.

- We do not plan to remove any of her books from our website, but we are now unwilling to add any more, which means we have to retract the offer of a library listing—representing a further dilution of her member benefits.
- Other decisions and recommendations by awards directors:
  - As co-MCs of the awards ceremony, we will not present this author with an award—member or not.
  - Furthermore, we don't think it's advisable to allow her to register for the conference or for the banquet. (*see third board action item below*)
  - We have decided to mail her awards packet since she's already paid her \$40 submission fee, which was meant to cover the cost of that package. To avoid any further correspondence, we will pay the cost of shipping the package—to avoid the almost-inevitable back-and-forth emailing by asking her to pay the postage costs (as we do for all award-winning authors who don't attend the awards banquet).

### **Board action required**

- Given the above, it does not make sense to have this person continue as a member with restricted/withheld member benefits.
- **We recommend that the board vote to cancel (*or at least downgrade*) her membership and refund her dues prorated from the date of cancellation to her existing dues expiration date of Oct 14, 2023.**
- **We need a system to record and track membership decisions.**
  - **Case in point: several years ago, the board voted to remove a member from our roles [Lee Boyland]. Not only was the “corporate memory” for this decision lost/forgotten, but this person was recently nominated to serve on the MWSA board!**
  - **I suggest that the secretary and/or membership secretary keep a list of expulsions and or notes of problematic members. At the very least, the nominating committee needs access to this type of information.**

## **Emails (in chronological order)**

----- **Betsy's initial email informing the author of the decision to delay acceptance**

On Thursday, May 4, 2023, 11:04 AM, MWSA Awards <mwsaawardsdirectors@gmail.com> wrote:

Angel, due to overwhelming response, we need to limit the number of books each author is allowed to submit. Our reviewers are all volunteers, so we are ourselves limited to their available time since many of them work, teach, or are active military. Starting next year, each author will be allowed three entries. This year, we have already completed four of your books, so we are declining to add a fifth for the 2023 season. Please resubmit this book next year. In the meantime, each author is allowed one free library listing per year. If you have not already used this option, let me know if you would like this book to have a free library listing. It will get its own page, but will not have a pending review.

Thank you for your understanding,

Betsy

----- **Author's first response**

On Thursday, May 4, 2023, 11:31 AM, Angel <angelgiacomo1@gmail.com> wrote:

So you are denying it for something NOT listed in your current rules. How ethical is that?

Angel Giacomo

----- **Author's second response**

On Thu, May 4, 2023 at 12:39 PM Angel <angelgiacomo1@gmail.com> wrote:

For a group supposed to be representing the honor and duty of the military you don't follow what it represents.

----- **Betsy's response**

On Thursday, May 4, 2023 at 12:05:30 PM CDT, MWSA Awards <mwsaawardsdirectors@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Angel Giacomo,

I am truly sorry you feel that way. We have been inundated this season, and we are still a month away from the season closing. Normally we can handle about 80 books per season. This year we are well over 100. I don't know that we will be able to finish the ones already ahead of yours. But it seems to me that we need to represent as many military authors as possible, and not just a few authors. Only four other authors (out of 106 books) submitted multiple books, and they each submitted only two books.

There is really no way we could know that we needed to establish some boundaries until the problem arose. Because you had entered four books, we had no idea that you would enter another one toward the end of our season, or we likely would have added something to the website. We do have a responsibility to finish the books of authors who have only submitted one book, so we can debate the ethics of allowing equal access to all authors as well.

Again, if you want this book to be a free library listing with its own page on the website, let me know.

Sincerely,

Betsy

PS I take issue with your assessment that we don't represent the honor and duty of the military. Our volunteer reviewers take at least 10 hours per book and give quality feedback. Most of them are prior military members or family members. In my case, my only son was killed in action in Iraq, which is why I spend 15 to 20 hours a week volunteering to run this program.

----- **Author's response**

On Thu, May 4, 2023 at 1:26 PM Angel <[angelgiacomo1@gmail.com](mailto:angelgiacomo1@gmail.com)> wrote:

I am sorry for your loss, but you are not the only one that has lost someone.

I wasn't planning on entering another book this year. I came up with an idea and contacted a few acquaintances who served at Evac hospitals in Vietnam, and they told me stories. I used those stories as the basis for the new book by weaving them into the series, and the book came together.

My friends have read the book and loved it so much one of them, who was a nurse at an Evac hospital wrote the foreword. The cover image is a photograph taken at the 47th Combat Hospital and given to me. The medic who read it has already endorsed it on the evac hospital's Facebook page.

Excuse me for being protective and appalled at it not being allowed in a military writer's contest. Of all the books I have written in this series, I am proud of this one for who and what it represents.

Angel Giacomo

----- **Betsy's response**

On Thursday, May 4, 2023 at 12:28:59 PM CDT, MWSA Awards <[mwsaawardsdirectors@gmail.com](mailto:mwsaawardsdirectors@gmail.com)> wrote:

Do you want a library listing until next year when we can look forward to entering your book?

----- **Author's final response**

On Thu, May 4, 2023 at 3:25 PM Angel <[angelgiacomo1@gmail.com](mailto:angelgiacomo1@gmail.com)> wrote:

Sure, but I still say holding me to a different standard and making up a rule in the middle of a contest is unethical.