

Janet M. Stiegler

Janet M. Stiegler grew up in Franklin Square, Long Island and attended college at SUNY Albany. She wasn't sure what she wanted to do with her life, and ended up majoring in German, with a minor in Russian linguistics. She even spent her junior year abroad improving her language skills in Würzburg, Germany, and went on to get a masters in Russian linguistics. She lived in Moscow for four months during her graduate program. As she says, "I never really used my Russian, but it got me a career and a husband." She met Paul in graduate school, and they both joined the CIA and lived for 32 years in Northern Virginia.

At the CIA, Janet worked the first 13 years as an analyst and branch chief in the Directorate of Intelligence, researching and writing several thousand profiles and some longer papers about foreign leaders who were going to meet with US officials, diplomats and ambassadors. A briefing book is always prepared when a U.S. policymaker meets with a foreign counterpart, and those profiles are a key component of that book. "The job was like being in college but a lot more fulfilling, because you knew what you wrote could have impact on the meeting."

One of her assignments involved doing research for a U.S. ambassador and arms negotiator on his Soviet counterpart, who was gruff and unapproachable. In her research, she discovered that he had chronic ulcers and loved the Russian writer Pushkin. How exactly the U.S.

ambassador used this information was never shared with her, but she did receive a laudatory cable in response, suggesting he had made a breakthrough.

Her DI career gave Janet the tools to write clearly and to adhere to the "bottom line up front" — telling pertinent things in journalistic style with supporting evidence, weighing sources for relevance, and summarizing for an important audience. It was essential to get things right, to pay attention to detail, and to be succinct. She was able to apply those skills in subsequent positions at the Agency as a manager and senior staff officer, including one job that involved preparing the daily briefing books for the Director and Deputy Director at CIA.

Janet and Paul chose Wilmington after a nine year search for a city with a warmer climate than DC, educational opportunities like OLLI, and a youthful vibe due to the colleges in the area. They found their ideal place in Brunswick Forest. Their son lives in Miami, and their daughter in Richmond, both pursuing their careers. Janet's mother lives nearby, as does a close friend from college. Janet loves being outdoors, jogging, biking, swimming, and writing. She belongs to a creative writing group and gets inspiration from their stories. Her ambition is to write creative nonfiction starring her grandfather, who was an immigrant.

Via the Cape Fear Literacy Council, for the last three years, Janet has tutored a middle-aged woman

who is working for her GED. Over the course of almost 200 lesson plans, they have made progress, as so far she has passed her English and Social Studies exams. Janet is someone who loves to accomplish things, and her student's achievements make her joyful.

Why did she join WIN? She was researching grant possibilities for the Cape Fear River Watch and thought it would be interesting to see the grant writing process from the grantor's point of view. With that in mind, she happened to meet Kim Nelson at OLLI's Adult Scholar's Program. Kim, and subsequently Carol Kennedy (whom she then met at a fundraiser), assured Janet that she would fit right in to WIN. And Janet did indeed find her place and fit in. She joined the Small Grants Committee in 2019 and 2020, then the Arts&Culture Circle in summer 2020. There, with Virginia Holman and Lynne Herndon, she interviewed and wrote reports on 15 arts influencers for the 2021 grants cycle, using those skills she learned throughout her career. Now she is heading up the Grants Committee.

"I didn't anticipate how much I would learn about our community, its needs and offerings," she says. "And I have really enjoyed meeting my fellow WIN members, who are into so many exciting projects. They have opened many doors for me in gratifying ways."

As well as being an active WIN member and CFLC tutor, Janet is an OLLI classroom host, takes OLLI classes

("Crime in the Cape Fear" is her latest), and aims to get into the short story writing class there, too.

How does she do it all? She says it helps to have a supportive husband like Paul. But fundamentally, Janet is very organized, very skilled, and a huge asset to WIN.