

Diane Helentjaris' Ivy O'Neill Novel Wins Second Literary Award: From Indenture to Independence

Award-winning novel earns PenCraft honor as Helentjaris prepares to release the next chapter in Ivy O'Neill's story

LOS ANGELES, CA, UNITED STATES, August 10, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Diane Helentjaris' The Indenture of Ivy O'Neill](#) has won the PenCraft 2026 Summer Seasonal Competition in Historical Fiction, adding a second major literary honor to the novel following its 2024 win in the Maryland Writers' Association Novel Competition.

"I am very grateful to PenCraft for this award, and for all they do to support writers. When I learned I had won, a thrill went through me. Writing is ultimately about reaching readers, and PenCraft's recognition gives me confidence that *The Indenture of Ivy O'Neill* is doing just that. A book is also a team effort, and I am deeply grateful to AIA Publishing, now Alkira Publishing, my beta readers, my editor John DeDakis, and the Hellenic Writers' Group of Washington, DC for their support. Most of all, I hold my readers, including the many book clubs who have embraced Ivy's story, very close to my heart."

Set in the late 17th century, *The Indenture of Ivy O'Neill* follows an Irish girl whose life is upended by war and upheaval before she is taken across the Atlantic to the British Colony of Maryland. There, Ivy faces indenture, family, faith, survival, and the difficult realities of building a new life.

"At the heart of the series is a question that remains timeless: how do you build a life out of terrible circumstances? Everything that happens to Ivy in my books is happening somewhere today," Helentjaris says. "The only differences are in the specifics. Ivy experiences religious persecution, loses a sibling to war, and is kidnapped and trafficked; experiences that still occur around the world. By placing these events centuries in the past, I hope readers can recognize their shared humanity and grasp the foolishness of hate."

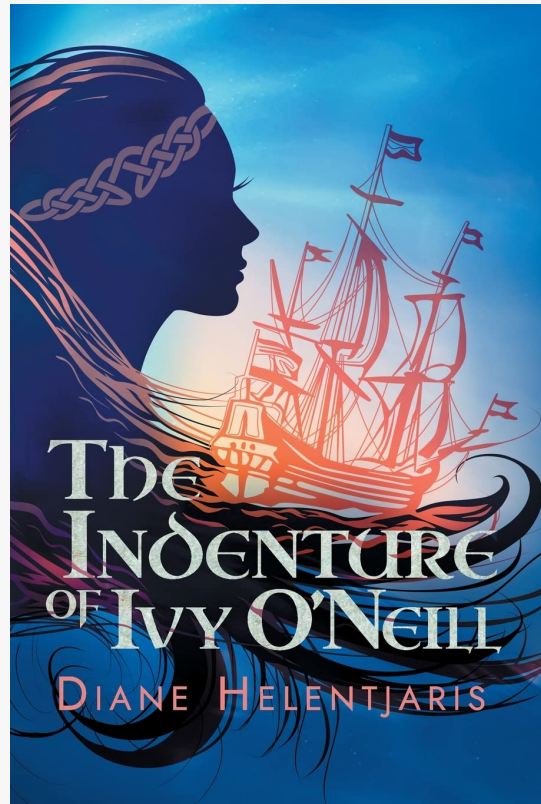


Readers responded to the novel's ability to bring history to life. One Amazon reader praised Helentjaris' research, writing, "This is a beautiful story of a young indentured girl coming to America in 1690. Not only did this book touch my heart, but I learned a great deal about how our country was built on the backs of involuntary labor. It's clear Diane Helentjaris did her research — she opened my eyes to the roots of this country and the manual labor it required of early generations just to survive. But in the end, love is the same no matter what generation you are a part of."

The story continues August 28 with the release of *Ivy in America*, the second book in The Life and Times of Ivy O'Neill series, published by Alkira Publishing. Now living in colonial Maryland, Ivy is married and raising a family when pirate raids, religious tensions, crop failures, and other hardships threaten the life she has built.

"Honora O'Flynn, the real woman who inspired this novel, had descendants who went on to live incredible lives," Helentjaris says. "Some went on to establish the Methodist Church, while others contributed to society in other meaningful ways. I wanted to share the origin story of this remarkable family. I hope Ivy's story is not only exciting, but also gives readers a glimpse into the struggles of a colonial family whose beginnings may not be what most would expect."

About Diane Helentjaris



Diane Helentjaris is an author, historian, and former physician whose writing brings overlooked people and forgotten stories to life. She is the author of *The Indenture of Ivy O'Neill, Ivy in America*, and [I Ain't Afraid – The World of Lulu Bell Parr](#), *Wild West Cowgirl*. Her work has received recognition from the Maryland Writers' Association, PenCraft, and the Thomas Balch Library. She holds a BA in Interdisciplinary Humanities and an MD from Michigan State University, as well as a Master of Public Health from the University of Michigan.

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Diane Helentjaris is available for interviews.

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