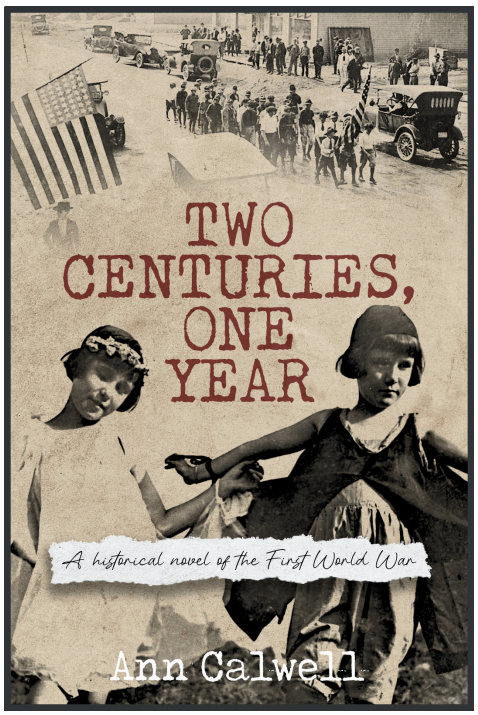
Q&A with Ann Calwell

Ann Moody Calwell's new novel, *Two Centuries, One Year: A Historical Novel of the First World War* (Hart + Harvest Press, 2025), tells the story of Nitro, West Virginia's rapid transition from farmland to industrial hub—all through the eyes of 12-year-old Ana Ariano.

Ann Calwell spent her career as a teacher of English and Spanish, in addition to working as a play therapist for the children at West Virginia University Hospital and as a coordinator for the West Virginia Department of Education's Youth and Government Seminar programs. She lives in West Virginia with her husband, Stuart Calwell, with whom she shares daughters Elisa and Emily.

What is your connection to Nitro, West Virginia?
My father, Jack C. Moody, worked as a chemical engineer at American Viscose Corporation's plant in Nitro during the town's second wave of manufacturing. So my siblings and I grew up in this town, surrounded by the marvels of modern manufacturing, much like Ana in the novel. My father also founded the Nitro World War I Memorial Museum and was named a West Virginia History Hero in 1999, passing a passion for the history of our town down to me.



What inspired you to write this novel?
I came across a 1912 letter from President Woodrow Wilson to a young girl named Mildred White, which showed a remarkable appreciation for young people. I began to imagine a different correspondence, one with an aspiring war correspondent during World War I. This launched me into extensive research through my family's collection of historical books and magazines, as well as archived documentation of the munitions plant in Nitro.

When did you begin work on this book?
I started my first draft in 2014, and had a completed draft by 2020. In late 2024, I connected with Hart + Harvest Press and began work on editing the book until we arrived at a finished novel.

What do you hope readers will take away with them after reading Two Centuries, One Year?
I wanted to capture Nitro at the turn of the century, a moment when farmers lived next to scientists and workers from all around the world formed a melting pot in a matter of mere months. With this rapid change came emerging careers for women, creating new aspirations for girls like Ana Ariano, who dreams of becoming a war correspondent. I hope readers learn something about history from reading the book, especially the engineering marvel that is my hometown. But I also hope that young women might take something more universal from the book—Ana's ambition, determination, and relentless "I can do it!" attitude.