

# *the* **Fly Strip**

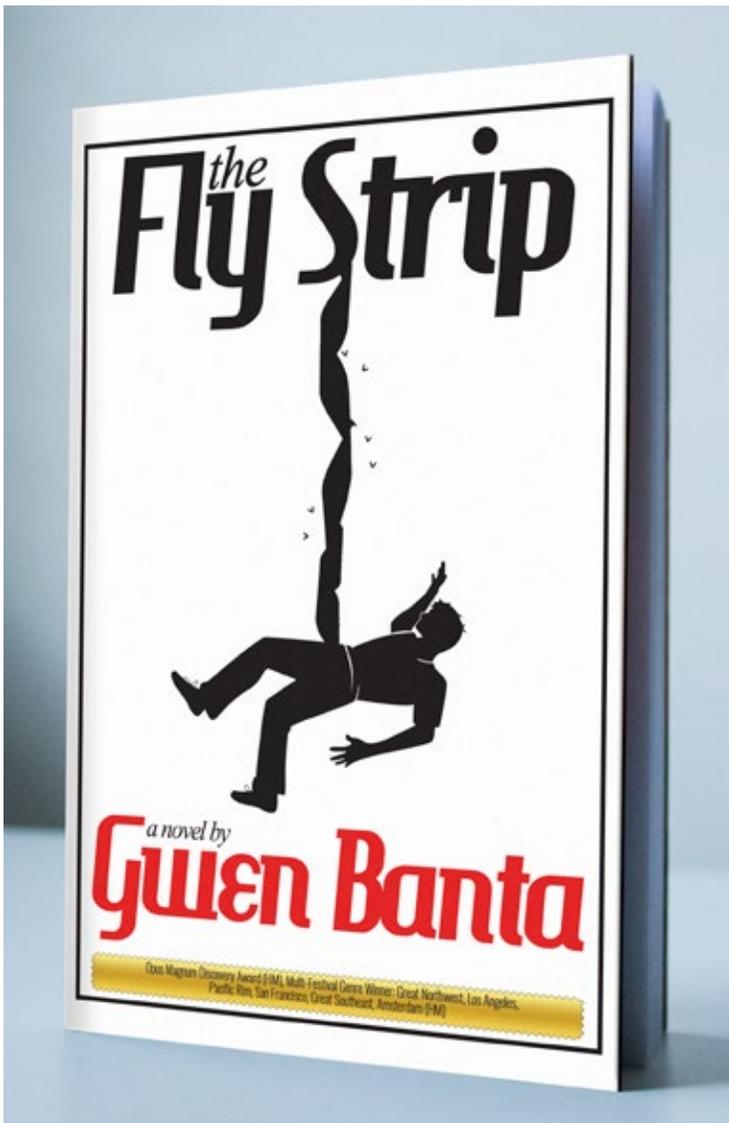
*Media Kit*



*a novel by*  
**Gwen Banta**

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## The Fly Strip

*The Fly Strip* tells the story of Weed Clapper, a witty, passionate young man from Pennsylvania who loses his family in an accident and is forced to live with his eccentric grandmother in Indiana. Even in this rural setting, he cannot escape the social unrest and sexual revolution of the 1960s. When his black friend is terrorized by racists, Weed discovers the dark past of this small country town and learns of long-hidden family secrets. Overwhelmed by his devastating loss, he turns to a beautiful young woman for support... and tumbles into a forbidden love affair. Laugh-out-loud funny, and yet achingly poignant, the story of Weed's struggle to defy convention and to defend justice will cause you to stand up and cheer for this charming, brave – and unlikely – young hero.

## Reviews

“...It’s evident that something special is being finely tuned in *The Fly Strip*. Think *Catcher in the Rye*, but with a greater focus on social events. Think *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but with the mature eye of a seventeen-year-old... As readers pursue *The Fly Strip*, one thing becomes evident: this is an extraordinary coming-of-age story.”

– D. Donovan, Senior Reviewer,  
Midwest Book Review

5 Stars! “Gwen Banta’s *The Fly Strip* is an uproariously funny historical novel that will have you in stitches...Gwen Banta is a genius. She managed to convey the seriousness of the times and at the same time managed to inject humor to bring her story to life...it is highly educational, entertaining, and emotional.”

– Kerliza Foon for Readers’ Favorite

“Gwen Banta is J.D. Salinger reincarnated. Her language is so rich, so palatable and enveloping that readers feel bathed in it and rejuvenated by it. What a read!

What a pleasure!”

– Dmitry M. Arbuck,  
Author – *Mastermind*

“Gwen Banta has a resonant voice, one that pulls you into highways and bus terminals. For anyone who ever wanted to disappear, or feels like they already have...”

– Gerard Way,  
Musician - My Chemical Romance;  
Author - *The Umbrella Academy*  
(Eisner Award Winner)

## About the Author



Gwen Banta was born in Binghamton, NY and educated in Indianapolis, Indiana, where she received B.A. and M.S. degrees from Butler University. She also received a language certification degree from The Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California.

The author has received numerous awards for her fiction, including: Opus Magnum Discovery Award For New Literature – Honorable Mention; Winner, Unpublished Fiction – Great Northwest Book Festival; Winner, Unpublished Fiction – Los Angeles Book Festival; Winner, Unpublished Stories – Pacific Rim Book Festival; Winner, Unpublished Stories – San Francisco Book Festival; Honorable Mention, Unpublished Stories – Amsterdam Book Festival; Winner, Unpublished Stories – Great Southeast Book Festival.

Gwen has also written several screenplays, including *Skies A Fallin,'* which is currently under option to an independent producer. Awards for her screenplays include: Writer's Project Semi-Finalist; Chesterfield Screenplay Competition Quarter-Finalist; Columbine International Screenwriting Competition Finalist; Ohio Film Festival Semi-Finalist; People's Pilot Semi-Finalist.

The author, a former award-winning actress of stage, screen and television, alternates her time between family, writing and a successful real estate career. She is a supporter of Global Green International and numerous other charitable organizations.

Gwen resides in LA with her dog, Buddy, who is a major fan of her books...as long as there are endless treats involved.

# Awards for *The Fly Strip*

The author has won numerous awards for this novel before it was published, including:



**Winner**, Unpublished Stories



**Winner**, Unpublished Stories



**Winner**, Unpublished Stories



**Winner**, Unpublished Stories



**Honorable Mention**, Unpublished Stories



**Winner**, Unpublished Stories



**Honorable Mention**

# Gwen Banta Q & A

**1) What is the genesis of The Fly Strip? Are the story and characters purely imagined or drawn from people and events in your life? What inspired you to write it?**

One evening I was thinking about my grandmother and some of the stories she had told me. I wanted to write another novel, and I had been praying for guidance. (I have a habit of getting in my own way, so I knew I needed a push in the right direction.) It may sound strange, but that night the general framework of the story came to me in a dream. When I awakened, I began the first chapter. As I was writing, the characters took me where they wanted and needed to go. I realize now that the book is a kind of retrospective of my life – a combination of my own experiences and those told to me by others. Thus, it is very personal. I witnessed segregation when I was growing up, and the memories of those events have stayed with me throughout my life. I had a hard time making sense of the inequities of society, and thus it was a challenge to find my place in a world I found equally magical and menacing. Eventually I realized I was Weed Clapper. And maybe on some level, each of us is.



**2) How did a successful business woman and actress come to write a novel through the voice of Weed Clapper, a funny, troubled, passionate 17-year-old young man forced to grow up with his grandmother in Indiana in the 1960s?**

I admit it is interesting even to me that I tell the story in the voice of a 17-year-old boy. (I think a good therapist could have some fun with that.) When I imagined the story, I saw a 17-year-old boy, albeit one who was much more mature due to the traumatic experiences he had undergone. I have a brother who is close to me in age and therefore was an influence. Of course we all have male-female within us, and I was a tomboy with strong male influences. I suppose it was natural and comfortable for me to speak as that character. Having lived in rural Indiana in 1960, the setting also was natural for me. Indiana is a wonderful place, but like most areas of the US in 1960, there was racial prejudice. There were many areas of the country where the racial divide was much worse of course, but it was my love for the Midwest that led me to choose that setting.



**3) You really capture not only the intelligence and good-heartedness of Weed, but also all of the confusion, eccentricities, irreverent humor, undirected energy and horniness that comes with the territory of any teenage boy. What was your process of discovery on Weed, and how did you bring his unique voice to life?**

Weed is very bright and extremely witty. He even makes me laugh! But often that humor is a defense mechanism when he is agitated, threatened or confused. I think if you really analyze it, most of Weed's turmoil is common to both sexes. I certainly experienced a lot of the confusion Weed did in areas of religion, sex, love, and morality. I

think there is a kind of universal angst in that age group. Of course with Weed, it is much more complicated because he feels abandoned in a location that is radically different from all that he has ever known. We moved a number of times when I was growing up, so I was able to identify with his fears and isolation. He, as I did, is seeking a new support system and feels completely unanchored - always ready to flee. And he comes close to making the ultimate escape...

**4) This is a story that could be set today - even, sadly, down to the racism. Why did you decide to place it in the tumultuous 1960s? How did that add to the story?**

I lived through that era, so many of those experiences were my own or those of my friends. In my lifetime it has saddened me to see how racial prejudice remains and is often just suppressed. A Trayvon Martin incident, or Ferguson, or all the other examples of racial conflict rip the scab off a wound that has never healed here in America. You will note that Weed's Jewish friend Murray has his own struggles, as do people like Ollie and Robert – those who won't give in to racial or religious hatred and therefore pay heavily for defending the rights of others. Standing up for what is right - even when it can result in loss of life - is Weed's ultimate choice to make. I didn't make the decision for him, he made his own choice. I think most writers and avid readers will understand what I mean by that.



**5) You were born in New York but attended university in Indiana. Your affection for the slower rhythms of rural life and common decency of almost all Midwesterners are evident in *The Fly Strip*. What did revisiting Indiana in this book mean to you?**

Indiana will always be in my heart. The people are wonderful there. But in some respects, the Midwest, too, was coming of age at the same time as I; and for that matter, probably all of America was. It's a long journey to equality. But every time I go back to Indiana I am reminded

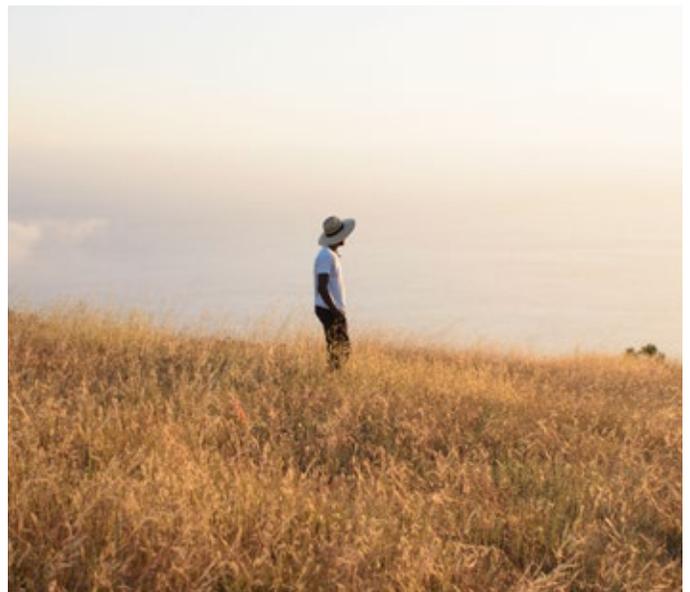
of the simple pleasures of life. When I am there, I relax. I love the covered bridges, church steeples, barbershop quartets, county fairs and small towns. I love the smell of the sweet cornfields. In Indiana, I never lose sight of who I am. And it goes without saying, there's no team in the world like the Butler Bulldogs!

**6) Weed has a rough introduction to racism in the book when his young African-American friend is targeted by the KKK. Why was it important to you to include that episode in the novel?**

That is a combination of stories - actually real life incidents - that were told to me during that period in my life, leaving indelible images in my mind. The car accident was something my high school boyfriend lived through, although the circumstances surrounding the incident were different. I witnessed blacks being mistreated, and I saw "coloreds only" drinking fountains. My grandmother, on whom the character of Ollie was based, told me stories about the KKK. To this day I am shocked when people suggest those days are over and that the KKK and other bigoted vigilante groups have disbanded. People who have been targeted by such groups know they still exist. The victims will never forget, nor should we. Equality is something we all need to fight for, and until we have achieved it, none of us is free.

**7) The most controversial - and maybe the sweetest - part of the novel is Weed's forbidden love affair with his school teacher. Even though she comforts him over the loss of his family and is sympathetic, did you feel you were running a risk of making both characters seem too careless and selfish? What was the redeeming value of this romance for Weed and the teacher?**

I knew I was running a great risk. But it's important to point out that this love affair was organic, not gratuitous. It occurs on the day Weed turns 18 and is no longer her student. She is in her early 20s, and both are lost, broken. Each has experienced almost unbearable loss. Like others in that town, they are carrying profound secrets and hiding deep wounds. Both Weed and Laura, each in his or her own way, are as disfigured as soldier Andy. Each character gives the other reason to live, so their love is the least selfish love of all the relationships in the book in my opinion. I knew there were some incidents in the



book that would be shocking and controversial, but I did not want to compromise what I felt was their truth.

**8) You were an award-winning stage, film and television actress for many years. What advantages does being an actor - and thinking and feeling like an actor - bring to being a fiction writer?**

In acting, one tries to become the character to a degree. A good actor will think of the character's backstory and even create it when necessary. It's important to know the character's motivations, to listen carefully to the actor opposite whom you are playing, and to allow your character to make discoveries – to go where that character needs to go. It involves growing, and discovering the arcs. Acting requires extensive research and tremendous discipline, as does writing. As an actor, you are a participant in the storyline, so storylines come fairly easily to me. When writing *The Fly Strip*, I could visualize it as a film, which helped me to find the arcs and to flesh out the themes. To me, it's all literature.



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**9) For the last several years running, you have been named "Top Producer" residential real estate agent in Los Angeles. That's an incredible achievement in an incredibly competitive market. How do you balance the non-stop demands of that job, and being a mother, and writing creatively? How and when do you write every week?**

Well I must point out that I am *a* top producer not *the* top producer. These are accolades awarded by different real estate entities, and they are based on a variety of things such as production, client reviews, experience, etc. Believe me, there are plenty of realtors doing better than I, but I do well thank you.

I find it amusing, however, that you asked me how I balance things. I don't know what gave you the impression that I do! I don't seem to be balancing much of anything these days. I'm on a slippery slope of insanity and exhaustion...but I'm having a helluva good time.

My real estate business has been expanding at a rapid pace, so I haven't been writing as much as I would like. I spend a lot of time writing in my head. But that's how I do it. Then when it comes time for me to put another story onto paper, hopefully it will be up there in the gray matter, ready to extract.

**10) What's next for you? What new projects are you working on?**

I'm torn between writing the sequel to *The Fly Strip*, and creating an entirely new novel. I have to get to a quiet place in my life so I can decide what my next direction is. For me, it is always the road less traveled.

