

"A poignant and gripping heart-tug of a page-turner filled with heart and hope. I couldn't put it down. Magic."

— Jennifer Niven, New York Times bestselling author of *All the Bright Places* and *Holding Up the Universe*

THE BEST WEEK THAT NEVER HAPPENED

DALLAS WOODBURN

For fans of **Everything Everything** and **The Love That Split the World** comes a **breathtaking** new **love story** about **living each day as if it were your last...**

"Dallas Woodburn weaves a bittersweet love story between star-crossed lovers—thwarted not only by distance but also by insurmountable tragedy. This captivating, poignant story is perfect for teens on the brink of discovering who they are and what really matters in the time they have left."

—Natalie Lund,

Author of **We Speak in Storms**

"This debut novel is captivating and moving. A dazzling, emotional story of love, loss, and living in the moment."

—Kirkus Reviews

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 /DallasWoodburn

"A poignant and gripping heart-tug of a page-turner."



Dear **Readers,**

I'm thrilled that you will be discussing my debut novel **The Best Week That Never Happened** with your book club. While it is hard to pinpoint exactly where ideas come from, I began writing this novel shortly after one of my best friends was killed in a car accident at the age of 26. I didn't realize it while I was writing the first draft, but looking back on the book now, it is clear that on some level I was writing—trying to write—a different ending for her than the one she was dealt.

I hope that you find this book club kit useful and that you have a great discussion. And I would love to Skype with you during your meeting—connect with me at dallaswoodburn@gmail.com and we'll get it scheduled!

With all the best wishes,

—Dallas Woodburn

About the Book

After her parents' bitter divorce, family vacations to the Big Island in Hawaii ceased. But across the miles, eighteen-year-old Tegan Rossi remains connected to local Kai Kapule, her best friend from childhood. Now, Tegan finds herself alone and confused about how she got to the Big Island. With no wallet, no cell phone, purse, or plane ticket, Tegan struggles to piece together what happened. **She must have come to surprise-visit Kai.** Right? As the teens grow even closer, Tegan pushes aside her worries and gets swept away in the vacation of her dreams. But each morning, Tegan startles awake from nightmares that become more difficult to ignore. **Something is eerily amiss.** Why is there **a strange gap** in her memory? Why can't she **reach her parents or friends** from home? And what's with **the mysterious hourglass tattoo over her heart?**

Kai promises to help Tegan figure out what is going on. But the answers they find only lead to more questions. As the week unfolds, Tegan will experience the magic of first love, the hope of second chances, and the bitter-sweet joy and grief of being human.

About the Author

Dallas Woodburn is the author of the short story collection **Woman, Running Late, in a Dress** and the novel **The Best Week That Never Happened**. A former John Steinbeck Fellow in **Creative Writing** and a current **San Francisco Writers Grotto Fellow**, her work has been honored with the **Cypress & Pine Short Fiction Award**, the international **Glass Woman Prize**, second place in the **American Fiction Prize**, and four **Pushcart Prize** nominations. She is also the host of the popular book-lovers podcast "**Overflowing Bookshelves**" and founder of the organization **Write On! Books** that empowers youth through reading and writing endeavors. Dallas lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her amazing husband and adorable daughter.



Dallas would love to Skype with your book club, school, library, or community group! She also teaches writing workshops and gives presentations. Email her at dallaswoodburn@gmail.com to learn more.

Looking for **inspiration** for what food to serve at your book club gathering?

Here are some delicious recipes that would perfectly complement the tropical setting of *The Best Week That Never Happened*.

Pineapple Salsa

By Christina Loeffler, Blogger at *Recipe & A Read*



Servings: This will make a large bowl of salsa that you can save in the fridge

Prep-Time: 15 minutes

Cook-Time: None!

Pots: None! Just a bowl

Ingredients:

- 2 cups diced tomatoes
- 2 cups diced pineapple
- 1 cup diced bell pepper
- ½ cup diced shallot
- 1 finely minced jalapeno
- (seeded and de-veined)
- Juice from 1 lime
- Salt to taste

Notes:

1. This is not a particularly spicy salsa. If you want to add spice to it **you can double the jalapeno or use a serrano** (serrano will be spicier than jalapeno).
2. Feel free to **use any tomato**, Roma is my favorite for salsa but any would work.
3. **Any color bell pepper** would work, orange would add additional color but whatever your preference or whatever you have on hand would work just as well!
4. You can **replace the shallot** with red **onion** or any onion if you prefer.

Directions:

1. **Add all ingredients** to a large **bowl**, **mix** well.
2. **Salt** to taste and serve!

Tropical Trail Mix

By Brittany Mullins, blogger at *Eating Bird Food*

Ingredients:

- 1/4 cup macadamia nuts
- 1/4 cup raw cashews
- 1/4 cup banana chips
- 1/4 cup dried pineapple
- 2 Tablespoons unsweetened coconut flakes

Directions:

Toss all ingredients together in a small **bowl** and enjoy. Store any leftovers in an **air-tight container**.



Mandarin Pie Parfaits

By Sarah Keil, blogger at *The Pajama Chef*

Servings: 8

Time: 30 minutes plus time to chill

Ingredients:

- 25 **Oreos**
- 8 ounces **cream cheese**, softened (I use Neufchâtel)
- 1 – 14 ounce can **sweetened condensed milk**
- 1/2 cup **orange juice concentrate**, thawed
- 1/2 cup **sour cream**
- 8 ounces frozen **whipped topping** (Cool Whip), thawed
- 1 – 15 ounce can **mandarin oranges**, divided **mini chocolate chips**, for garnish

Directions:

1. **Crush Oreos** in a food processor or by hand.
2. To prepare pie filling, **beat cream cheese** in a stand mixer **until fluffy**. **Add sweetened condensed milk**, orange juice, **and sour cream**. **Beat until smooth**. **Fold in whipped topping**.
3. **Assemble the parfaits:** Oreo crumbs, pie filling, mandarin oranges, chocolate chips, and repeat.
4. **Chill** in the refrigerator **until serving**. Best enjoyed the same day, especially for presentation, but leftovers are also good for ~**48 hours**.

Pulled **Pork Tacos**

By Christina Loeffler, Blogger at [Recipe & A Read](#)

Servings: 6

Prep-time: None!

Cook-time: 4-7 Hours

Pots: 1 crockpot or slow cooker



Ingredients:

- 2 pounds **pork tenderloin**
- 1 tablespoon **apple cider vinegar**
- ¼ cup **Worcestershire sauce**
- 1 teaspoon **garlic powder**
- 1 teaspoon **onion powder**
- 1 teaspoon **paprika**
- ½ teaspoon **cayenne**
- ½ teaspoon **coriander**
- ½ teaspoon **cumin**
- ½ teaspoon **pepper**
- ½ teaspoon **salt**
- Flour **tortillas**
- Optional: ½ cup **BBQ sauce**

Notes:

Most pulled pork recipes will call for pork shoulder. Feel free to use pork shoulder! I used pork tenderloin because pork shoulder tends to come in larger quantities. **If you use pork shoulder, just scale the ingredients to match the weight of the pork.**

1. These are easy ingredients to adjust for your taste – if you like a **spicier** pulled pork taco, simply add additional **cayenne**.

- Optional garnishes: **Lime, Avocado, Cilantro.**

2. I'm a firm believer that **the quality of your taco directly relates to the quality of your tortilla**. If you have access to fresh tortillas (either from a restaurant or grocery store) it will take your tacos to the next level!

Directions:

1. Place **pork** into **crockpot**.
2. In small **bowl**, combine **all dry spice** ingredients and **mix**.
3. **Pour on top of pork and rub across pork** to coat evenly.
4. Add **apple cider vinegar and Worcestershire sauce to crockpot**.
5. **Cover** crockpot, cook on **high for 4 hours** or on low for 6-7 hours.
 - a. You're cooking the pork until it's fork tender. It should fall apart effortlessly inside the crockpot.
6. **Optional: to add a little bit of moisture, you can add ½+ cups of BBQ to the shredded pork.**
 - a. Be careful not to add too much as it can overwhelm the remaining flavors.
7. **Serve with tortillas and pineapple salsa.**

Did you know...?

1. Hawaii's **Big Island** is growing by more than 42 acres each year because of the **Kilauea Volcano**. This volcano has been **erupting for around 30 years**.

2. **Mauna Loa** is one of the **biggest volcanoes** in the entire world. It is located on the **Big Island** and its lava fields were once a training site for astronauts before they went to the moon.

3. **Hawaii** is the only state that **grows coffee, vanilla beans, and cacao** commercially. Another interesting fact is that **it can take as long as five years** for just one vanilla bean to be grown completely!

4. Both the **highest and lowest** recorded **temperatures in Hawaii** have occurred on the **Big Island**. The highest recorded temperature was **100 degrees Fahrenheit** and occurred on April 27, **1931** in the town of **Pahala**. The **lowest** recorded temperature occurred on May 17, **1979** close to the **Mauna Kea's summit**, and it was recorded at **12 degrees Fahrenheit**.

5. The state of **Hawaii** has **lost more species** and **has more endangered species than any other state** in the U.S. Around **70%** of Hawaii's **native birds** are **extinct** and the rest are listed as being in danger of becoming extinct.

6. A **lei flower** is often used in **celebrations** and there are certain rules that are associated with it, starting with the fact that it is **considered rude to refuse one or remove it in front of the person** who gave it to you. A lei should not be thrown away but **returned to the land**, preferably where the flowers were first gathered.

7. The world-famous Hawaiian **macadamia nut** is not actually native to Hawaii, but was first **imported from Australia** as decorative vegetation back in the **1880s**.

8. The word '**Hawaii**' comes from the **Proto-Polynesian "hawaiki,"** which means "**Place of the Gods**" or "**Homeland**."

Group Discussion

and/or Personal Reflection Questions

1. **Reflect upon your travels to a special place.** Describe the sights, sounds, smells and tastes. What made this place so memorable?
2. Tegan feels, at times, like she doesn't quite belong at her school. Reflect on **a time when you felt like you didn't belong**, or conversely, a time when you felt truly at home with a group of people.
3. **Who was your best friend as a child?** How did you meet? What sort of activities did you like to do together? Are you still friends with this person today?
4. At the beginning of the novel, Tegan lies to Kai about her memory coming back, because she doesn't want him to worry about her. Did you think this was the right move, or should she have told him the truth from the outset? **Do you think it is ever okay to lie?**
5. One theme in the book is that fear prevents the characters from pursuing their deepest truths. Tegan confesses that she was afraid of her feelings for Kai, so she pushed them away for a long time. Kai is afraid of failing as a "little fish in a big pond," so he insists that he doesn't want to go to college. **How does fear manifest in your life?** Has fear ever stopped you from going after what you truly want? How do you move past fear?
6. **Why do you think the author begins with the story about the o'opu alama'o?** How does this relate to the novel?
7. Animals crop up throughout the book, from Kai's dog Olina, to the sea turtle Tegan and Kai follow while snorkeling, to the geckos they spot at Akaka Falls, to the manta rays. **What is the significance of animals in the novel?**
8. Tegan tries to explain Schrödinger's cat paradox to Kai, but he doesn't really understand it. Does it make sense to you? **How would you explain Schrödinger's cat paradox? How does this paradox relate to the plot of the novel?**
9. Tegan decides to drift down with the manta rays instead of saying a final goodbye to Kai. **Why do you think she chose this?** Did you agree or disagree with her decision?
10. **How might the week have been different** if Tegan were able to connect to the **Internet**, communicate with people back home, and post on social media? Have you ever taken a "digital detox" or a break from your phone? How did it change the way you experienced the world?
11. Throughout the novel, Tegan reflects on various choices she made or didn't make, and the impacts of these decisions. Two big choices were not kissing Kai in the lava tubes when they were fifteen, and deciding to board the train to Georgetown instead of visiting Kai in Hawaii like she'd promised. **Think about one or two big decisions** in your life, and imagine what might have happened if you had made a different choice. **In what ways—good and bad—might your life be different today?**
12. **Love and loss are major themes in the novel.** Have you ever fallen in love? Have you ever lost someone? How did your experiences relate to or differ from Tegan's and Kai's feelings in the novel?
13. **How** did you think **Tegan's Best Week was going to end?**
14. **Tegan wonders if she will ever get to relive this week again with Kai—if her Best Week is his Best Week, too.** If the book had ended differently, and Sunday was indeed the end of Tegan's life, what do you think would have happened to Kai? **What do you imagine Kai's Best Week would have been?**
15. **What was the Best Week of Your Life?** What made this week so extraordinary? (Check out [The Best Week Project](http://www.thebestweekproject.tumblr.com) at www.thebestweekproject.tumblr.com to submit your response and read about other people's Best Weeks!)

Interview with Dallas Woodburn

Adapted from interviews with Carand Burnet on *Fiction Writers Review* & Karen McCoy on *The Writer Librarian*.

How does writing about young adulthood shape your narratives?

Dallas Woodburn: Our teenage years are a time period filled with such uncertainty, shifts in identity, massive growth, and trying to find one's place in the world. These challenges are ripe for internal and external conflict—the lifeblood of stories! I am so interested in exploring the inner lives of my characters, and one's teen years are such a liminal time period: not a child anymore, but not quite "grown up" yet either. Or, perhaps it is in your teen years that you realize that your concept of "adulthood" is in some ways an unreachable terrain—that you will never quite feel like you are in control or know what you are doing all the time.

Memory plays an important role in your narratives—both in your short story collection, *Woman, Running Late*, in a *Dress*, and in your novel *The Best Week That Never Happened*. Could you speak about memory and how it relates to your writing?

DW: I am fascinated by the way that memory is intangible and impermanent; how different people might remember the same event in vastly different ways. Much like reading the same book during different times of life can incite fresh realizations and connections—when I read *The Great Gatsby* as a thirty-one-year-old, the experience is incredibly different from the first time I read the book as a high school sophomore—I am fascinated by the way that our memories can evolve when we look back at various times of our lives. Or, in contrast, the way our memories might remain static even as we grow and change ourselves.

I am also curious about the way memory is both connected to us yet also unreachable. We can share memories and

bring the past "back to life" again through the retelling, but we cannot return to the past, and the stories might become distorted over years of retelling. Some of my earliest "memories" are ones I'm not sure if I actually remember, or if I just imagine these memories so vividly from being told the stories again and again. I've also been thinking lately of the ways in which we are gatekeepers and preservers of memory for each other. I have so many memories of my fourteen-month-old daughter already, but she will not remember any of them—she will only know this period of her life through the stories her father and I tell her. And yet, our perspective of these memories is incomplete because we of course cannot know what she is thinking and feeling right now.

In *The Best Week That Never Happened*, Tegan and her mom have a very close relationship. Being a new mother yourself, has your perspective of parenthood changed since this book's publication?

DW: Oh yes, my perspective has shifted immensely now that I am a parent myself! Parenthood was something I observed and tried to imagine, but there was so much I simply could not understand until going through it myself. Being a mom is the most difficult and also most rewarding role I have ever experienced. I have so much respect for parents everywhere, and I feel connected in a deeper way to every parent I see on the street or read about in a book. I expected becoming a mom to change my life, and it has in the most beautifully small and also monumental ways. I stay at home with my daughter, and so I spend all my time with her; it is remarkable how I

can feel so connected to her, and also how she can seem so mysterious and unknowable at times. She grew inside me for nine months, and now she is in the world as her own distinct person. She grows and changes constantly, which both makes me proud and also breaks my heart a little.

As a fiction writer, you inhabit the lives of your characters. Your writing overflows with such a range of emotion. There are moments of tragedy, humor, happiness, longing, grief, and bravery. What inspiration do you draw from to create such multidimensional characters?

DW: Thank you! This brings me back to your question about writing characters in their teens; to me at least, that time was filled with such raw emotion. So much was new. Everything felt heightened. Every emotion was bursting with importance. So I drew upon all of the emotions I was feeling when I imagined being these characters. I think emotions are the fabric that connects us all to each other. I can feel joy and empathize with everyone who has ever felt joy. When we fall in love, the experience is singular to us and yet also universal. Writing has always been a place where I feel free to delve into a full range of emotion—an outlet for exploring anger, grief, longing. Even the happiest of people have felt these painful emotions at times. I wanted my characters to seem like authentic, full-fledged people existing in complex wholeness.

How do your fiction and narratives typically develop?

DW: I typically begin with character: getting to know a character and letting the narrative evolve by asking what my character would do in certain situations. What is my character struggling with? What does my character want to say? Sometimes, a story emerges plot-first, from something I read

in the news or something that comes to me in a dream. Occasionally, I will get a first line that pops into my head like a miraculous gift. For *The Best Week That Never Happened*, the idea sprung up in my head out of nowhere: "What if, when you died, you got to relive the Best Week of your Life?" The characters and story came quickly from there.

Could you speak about your revision process? How many rounds of edits do you typically find necessary to reach an equilibrium on the page?

DW: I love how you phrase that—an "equilibrium on the page"—because a story never fully feels "completed" to me; it always seems like I can delve back in and rewrite more and more. Eventually, you have to let go and move on to other stories, other characters, other explorations. I typically go through at least four or five revisions for my stories. This book evolved over more than three years of revising, with wonderful insights from my writing friends, literary agent, and editor, and I am proud of the way the novel grew with me as I gained confidence in my voice and grew into my own self as a writer.

In *The Best Week That Never Happened*, Tegan gets to explore what her life might have been like if she had made a different decision the summer after graduating high school. If you were given a chance to re-experience a moment from your teen years, what would it be and why?

DW: This is such an interesting question! I had a really great time in high school. One of my favorite memories was when the drama department put on a play I wrote for the spring production. While I've never really been someone who feels comfortable in the spotlight, I found "my people" among the theater kids, who really welcomed me into their fold and

became my close friends. It was a thrill to see my words brought to life onstage, and so fascinating to watch the actors and directors take my script and make it into this whole new artistic experience. I'll never forget the joy and pride I felt when the cast called me up onstage after the opening performance to take a bow with them.

Your other book, *Woman, Running Late in a Dress*, is a collection of linked short stories. How do you approach writing a short story versus writing a longer piece of work?

DW: I enjoy both forms for different reasons. I used to run track and cross-country, and perhaps that's why I think of a short story in terms of "a sprint" and a novel in terms of "a marathon." In a short story, everything is so compressed. Whether I'm reading a short story or writing one, there is a sense of urgency that builds almost immediately, because you have such a limited time to create the arc of a story and capture the lives of the characters. It often feels to me like we are just getting a glimpse into their lives. In a novel, you have more time to explore the world and get to know your characters inside and out. When I'm writing a novel, I generally have a vague sense of where the story is headed, but it might change a great deal as I go along. Writing a novel seems to me like swimming across a giant body of water—I can barely make out the shoreline on the other side. All I can do is keep swimming, keep writing, and try not to focus on how much farther I still need to go.

How has writing helped you overcome adversity in your personal life?

DW: I have heard it said many times that writers need a "thick skin" to be able to handle lots of rejection and criticism. I

think this is true and has helped me handle rejection and criticism in other areas of my life as well. There is a sense of creating something wholly for yourself and to please yourself, and then unleashing that work out into the world, and when you let it go, it becomes something separate from you. The criticism is not a reflection of you, or even a reflection on the quality of the work; it is a chance for you to hone your own voice and perspective, and to grow. I try to view all disappointments in my life as opportunities for growth. Even the really painful experiences have been meaningful because they have taught me about myself. Writing has also given me an identity as someone who perseveres against all odds. The successes are that much sweeter and are savored that much more truly when they do arrive!

What are some of your current projects?

DW: I'm currently working on the first draft of my next YA novel, which is similar to *The Best Week That Never Happened* in that it is realistic fiction with a touch of fantasy and romance. I also recently launched a podcast called *Overflowing Bookshelves* where I interview an author every week. It's been such a fun endeavor! You can listen to episodes at www.anchor.fm/dallas-woodburn or wherever you like to listen to podcasts.

Connect with the Author

Website: www.dallaswoodburnauthor.com

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Dallas would love to **Skype** with your **book club, school, library, or community group!** She also teaches **writing workshops and gives presentations.** Email her at dallaswoodburn@gmail.com to learn more.

Submit to **The Best Week Project**

At The Best Week Project, we are asking two simple questions:

What was the best week of your life?

What made that week so wonderful?

We invite you to write a few sentences or a few paragraphs describing your best week. Feel free to include a photo or illustration, too.

We would love for you to share your story with us! To submit your Best Week story, and read the stories of others, visit www.thebestweekproject.tumblr.com