



Jessamyn Hope's novel [Safekeeping](#) won the J. I. Segal Award. Her memoirs and stories — published in *Ploughshares*, *PRISM international*, *Descant*, and elsewhere — have been selected for *Best Canadian Essays*, two Pushcart Prize honorable mentions, and a Best American Notable. She grew up in Montreal and lives in New York City.

Can you tell us a bit about the process of writing "Verified Purchase"?

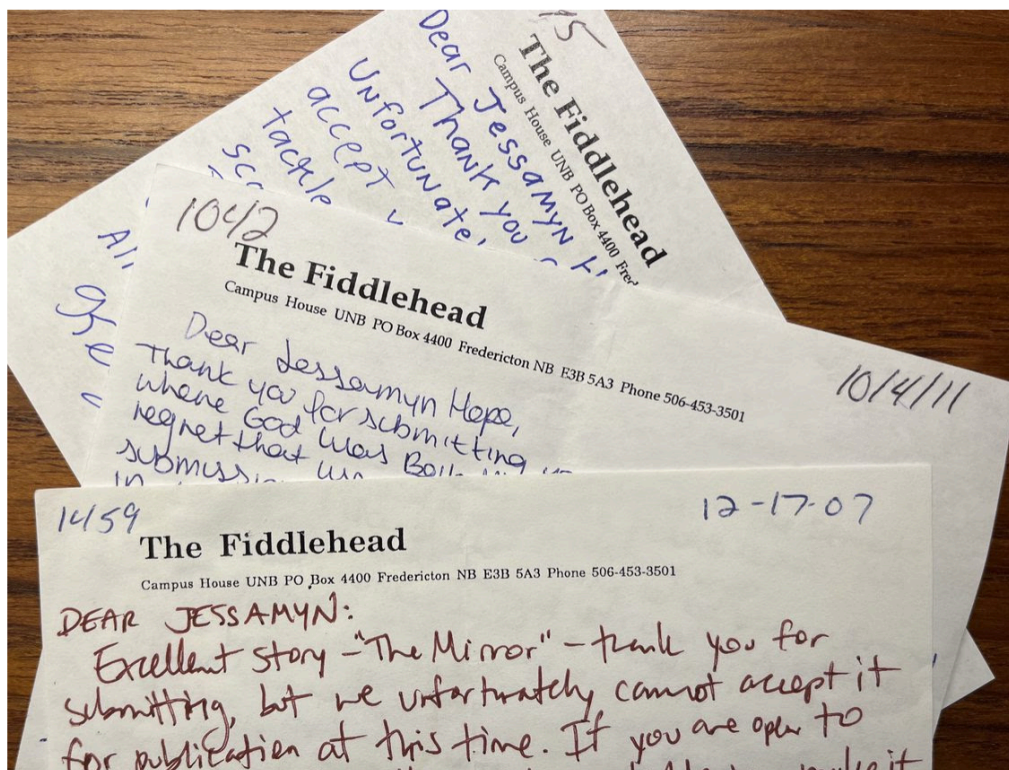
"When I started writing "Verified Purchase", all I knew was that I wanted to tell a story solely through Amazon reviews—and that it should be both funny and tragic. The idea that Amazon reviews could provide a compelling update of the epistolary form came to me while I was deep in the throes of researching doggie mouthwash. I'm incapable of buying the simplest product without a NASA-level investigation, which means I've read too many Amazon reviews. I realized these reviews naturally contained the following story elements:

Stakes. Engaging stories usually feature a time when everything went spectacularly wrong or when a character's dreams came true—same with Amazon reviews. Most are written by shoppers who are mad as hell or way happier than expected. This could be because we invest real hope into the products we buy. Like most protagonists, we too are often striving to become the person we really want to be, and many purchases are made with the hope that they will help us get closer to that happier, more organized, active, and yet serene, [fill in the blank] ideal.

Believable characters. Unlike Twitter or Facebook, we aren't curating an idealized image in our Amazon reviews. Most of us post reviews with a sense of anonymity and hence more honesty than on social media. On Instagram, a woman's hair may be blowing grey-free in the wind, but on Amazon she's praising Revlon's Root Erase. And maybe later the Squatty Potty. Occasionally a review reveals far more about the reviewer than the product, like when a poetry collection receives one angry star because it contained a swear word.

Traumedy. Life can be both hilarious and heartbreaking, and often simultaneously, which is why, even if I'm partial to sadder novels, I never fall in love with those that totally lack humour. Amazon reviews frequently epitomize this duality of the human condition. Just check out the sadder reviews for the lightsaber chopsticks.

I first submitted to *The Fiddlehead* 15 years ago, when rejections (a kind of product review) still arrived in the mailbox with handwritten notes. It's thrilling to finally have a story in the current issue."



Read an excerpt from "Verified Purchase"