Show of hands: Anybody here superstitious about the number 13? If so, you may be suffering from the dread:

triskaidekaphobia

noun: A morbid fear of the number 13 or the date Friday the 13th.
Triskaidekaphobia is from Greek treiskaideka, triskaideka, thirteen (treis, three + deka, ten) + phobos, fear.
Not to be confused with

trickiedickiephobia

noun: A morbid fear of Richard Nixon
In Christian countries the number 13 is unlucky because there were 13 persons at the Last Supper of Christ. Fridays are also unlucky, because the Crucifixion was on a Friday. Hence a Friday falling on the thirteenth day is regarded as especially unlucky.
In Japan, China, and Japan, some folks are tetraphobic, afraid of the number four, which sounds like the word for “death” in those languages.
Famous triskaidekaphobics include:
Napoleon
Herbert Hoover
Mark Twain
Richard Wagner
Franklin Roosevelt
By Madonna Dries Christensen

Americans dedicate two days a year to honoring our military forces. Veteran’s Day, originally called Armistice Day, commemorates the day an armistice was signed ending the Great War, “the war to end all wars.”

The ceremony took place at eleven a.m. on the eleventh day of the eleventh month—November 11, 1918. The anniversary remains stationary on November 11, but tributes are focused on veterans rather than the armistice itself.

Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day, dates to the Civil War, when women decorated the graves of fallen soldiers on May 30. Today’s remembrance of those who lost their lives in service to their country is held on the last Monday in May.

During my childhood in the 1940s, Decoration Day was also called Poppy Day. As the daughter of a World War I veteran, I was recruited by the VFW to sell red crepe paper poppies on the street corner on Decoration Day and Armistice Day.

By the time I did my home front duty, World War II was in full swing and my two oldest brothers were in the Navy. The names of all those from the county serving in the military were inscribed on a billboard erected in a park along the town’s main street. A special panel of the board listed those who had died. Some were sons of my parents’ friends and neighbors. The parades on those two holidays marched to the courthouse and paused at a granite memorial to World War I veterans.

My father’s name is on the marker, but he had no war stories to tell. On the day the armistice was signed, he’d been aboard a troop ship bound for overseas. It never sailed. He returned home to farm, marry, and raise a family.

Years later, I wondered about the poppies I’d peddled on the street. What was the significance of poppies? I learned that during the Great War on Europe’s Western Front, farmland had become battlefields. The soil contained thousands of dormant seeds of what was commonly called the corn poppy (papaver rhoeas), a weed that flourished in cornfields. Disturbances caused by trench digging and shells and shrapnel plowed up the seeds, where sunlight caused them to germinate and thrive in abundance. The delicate blooms lent a silent beauty to areas of destruction. Soldiers’ folklore said the vivid red flowers had been nurtured by their comrades’ blood.

An area called the Ypres salient, near Flanders, Belgium, became noted for its abundance of poppies after three horrendous battles there in 1915. The Germans had experimented with a new chlorine gas, which brought an enormous number of Allied casualties. Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, a Canadian doctor, wrote in his journal that it was impossible to get used to the suffering, the screams, and the blood. He added, “I wish I could embody on paper some of the varied sensations of those seventeen days. Seventeen days of Hades.”

A young friend of McCrae’s had been killed. After officiating at the funeral, McCrae sat in the back of an ambulance watching poppies wave in the breeze amid a makeshift cemetery near his first-aid station. To ease his sorrow, he recorded the scene in verse. Unsatisfied with the composition, he tossed it away. A fellow officer retrieved it and sent it to newspapers in England. It was published on December 8, 1915 by Punch, under the title “In Flanders Fields.”

Continued next page
In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

Three years later, McCrae was wounded and taken to a hospital on the coast of France. The story goes that on his third night there, he sat looking over the sea toward the white cliffs of Dover. He said to the doctor, “Tell them, if ye break faith with us who die we shall not sleep.” His death that night was attributed to pneumonia, not battle wounds.

Moira Michael, from Athens, Georgia, was so impressed with McCrae’s poem that she wrote a reply titled “We Shall Keep The Faith.”

Oh! You who sleep in Flanders’ fields,
Sleep sweet, to rise anew;
We caught the torch you threw;
And holding high we kept
The faith with those who died.
We cherish, too, the poppy red
That grows on fields where valour led.
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies,
But lends a lustre to the red
Of the flower that blooms above the dead
In Flanders’ fields.

And now the torch and poppy red
Wear in honour of our dead
Fear not that ye have died for naught
We’ve learned the lessons that you taught
In Flanders’ fields.

Michael, who worked for the YMCA, conceived the idea of wearing a poppy in remembrance of the war dead, and she instigated calling Memorial Day “Poppy Day.”

Three days before the armistice was signed, she hosted a meeting for wartime secretaries from other countries, at which she spoke about Doctor McCrae and his poem. When the guests gave Michael a small monetary gift for her hospitality, she declared that she would spend the money on poppies. She sold some of the flowers and gave the money to a fund aiding ex-servicemen.

French YMCA Secretary Madame Guerin adopted the idea and made artificial poppies to sell to benefit war orphans. The idea caught on elsewhere. In November 1921, the British Legion and Austrian Returned Sailor’s and Soldier’s League sold poppies for the first time. The Legion adopted the poppy as its emblem. Their annual Poppy Appeal raises funds to support ex-servicemen and their dependents by selling small paper or fabric poppies in November.

Each Remembrance Day the Legion lays a wreath on John McCrae’s grave, and British citizens wear poppies to show support to the memory of victims of all wars. Poppy Day is also held in New Zealand and Australia.

McCrae’s poem may be the most recognized prose to arise from wartime experiences. Most of us probably could not name the author if asked, but when his timeless words are read at patriotic rites around the world they never fail to stir emotions and powerful images.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow, between the crosses, row on row ...
[Previously published in Yesterday’s Magazette, Spring 2008]

Coach’s note:
Coming in December—
TOYS REMEMBERED: Men Recall Their Childhood Toys And Games, edited by Madonna Dries Christensen. (In a moment of weakness, she even included my piece on... well, never mind. Buy the book to find out.) Put this book on your holiday shopping list and then add last year’s Dolls Remembered,(which includes a piece from Mrs. Coach). “Toys” will be available in December through Amazon and other major booksellers. Royalties from both anthologies go to Down Syndrome Association of Northern Virginia. Madonna thanks you, and they thank you.
By Rex Owens
In the October issue of *Extra Innings* Randi Lynn Mrvos wrote an article titled: “To Blog or not Blog.” She described taking a class on how to create a blog and provided a brief description of her blog.

She never directly answered the fundamental question posed in the title – should we blog? I think the answer is “No.”

Blogging, it may surprise you to know, actually began in December 1997 and was known as the weblog. In 1999 weblog was shortened to ‘blog.’ So the ability to blog is thirteen years old – not a new phenomenon.

The public became aware of blogs when Dan Rather presented documents questioning President George W. Bush’s military service record, and bloggers proved that Rather had used documents that were forgeries. The incident ended Rather’s career at CBS and embarrassed the network.

Bloggers suddenly had clout.

It took until 2004 for blogging to grow in popularity, and political consultants and news services began using them to shape public opinion. Israel was the first government to set up a blog. The blog was established by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign affairs. Many governments now maintain blogs to shape public opinion.

**Individuals, communities, corporations, organizations and governments create blogs. Blog directories are common, and blogs frequently carry advertising.**

The personal blog, like the one Randi described in *Extra Innings*, is a form of a personal web page, an on-line diary with short (300 words or less) entries about anything the blog owner chooses. Blogs often contain personal information, opinions on anything under the sun, and frequently openly or discreetly promote something the blog owner wants to sell.

How one learns of the existence of a blog is frankly pure chance unless you search one of the blog directories or the blogger tells you about it. Those of us reading *Extra Innings* learned of Randi’s blog by reading her article. How many of you checked out her blog after reading the article?

Many experts advise us to have a website, a blog, and a facebook page and even to tweet. The point of all of these electronic storefronts is to create a virtual writing community and of course to sell books.

Blogging is a waste of time for two reasons. First, electronic social media effectively takes the “social” out of media. Do you really get to know anyone on social media? There’s nothing preventing me from being a Walter Mitty or creating completely false personae for the social media. Communication with another person is much more than words, static pictures or a video on a blog site. Communication is sitting across from a person, paying attention to their body language, breathing, and the tone in the words they use. The social media robs us of the “social” part of communicating.

Second, most content of a blog is reportage or opinion. What it isn’t is creative. A writers’ time should be spent writing, creating, editing, rather than sharing with the world what you write about or how many queries you sent this week or how many contests you entered. A blog is too often shameless self-promotion. Frankly, every minute spent blogging is a minute not writing. It’s your choice, to blog or to write.

How about it readers? You heard from Randi, who blogs, and Rex, who doesn’t. Anybody else want to weigh in on the issue?
Moon-A
June 12, 2009
This is easily one of the best sci-fi films that I have ever seen. Sam Rockwell delivers a tour de force performance. His intensity keeps you going through the film. I really can't give much of the plot away, but I will say that it's about Sam Bell, who works for Lunar Industries. He's on the moon, reaching the end of a three year contract. With nothing but video transmissions and a robot named GERTY (voiced by Kevin Spacey) to keep in contact with Earth, Sam is just anticipating getting home to his wife and daughter. With only two weeks to go, Sam starts to see something interesting on the base. What follows is a mind-blowing experience of a film. I can't recommend it enough. After numerous viewings, the film has gotten ever better. This is a very intelligent sci-fi film and also heartbreaking at times.

District 9-A
August 14, 2009
This is hands down the BEST sci-fi film I've ever seen. I remember when I was at the midnight screening and I was just blown away for every second of the film. Sharlto Copley does an outstanding job in his first performance. The visual effects are stunning. The story is original and fresh. It's in my top ten films of all time and I can't even count how many times I've seen it. I never get tired of it.

And one to stay away from!
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen
June 24, 2009
One of the worst films I have ever seen. This is right down there with Manos and Monster A Go Go. Michael Bay will never be able to make a decent film. I don't consider him a filmmaker. Let me point out the stupidity. The acting is some of the absolute worst I've ever seen. The robots are morons, and when they fight, it's like someone took the camera and shook it like crazy. The visual effects are poorly done. The humor is just racial and sexual. This atrocity is long, boring, idiotic, and dull. I have such pure hatred for this thing, I can't even call it a film. I don't usually hate films, but this was one of the rare movies where I walked out of the theater trying to comprehend how I managed to sit through it. This is not a film. It's just two and a half hours of loud noises and bright colors. Don't see it. Do what Roger Ebert said, "Go into the kitchen, cue up a male choir singing the music of hell, and get a kid to start banging pots and pans together. Then close your eyes and use your imagination." Read his review as well. It's one the best reviews I've ever read. [http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090623/REVIEWS/906239997]

Plus a challenge from Pat Fitzgerald
our Bob Dylan and Billy the Kid expert, now headquartered in New Mexico.
Pat recently tagged me on Facebook to write down 15 movies that I’ve never forgotten/will never forget. I was to pour out my list without hesitating or thinking about it. I was amazed to find that I easily listed 15 in, oh, about 90 seconds and could have kept going.
Anybody want to take the challenge and list your 15? We can list some of the picks in our next episode. Email your lists to mcook@dcs.wisc.edu.
Pat Reads Books, Too
Reed’s Story will keep the pages turning

By Pat Fitzgerald

Buzz Off, by Hannah Reed, A Berkley Crime book, 2010

Why read Buzz Off?
* The plot is almost too much fun to center around a double murder.
* Barely a page goes by without main character Story Fischer bumping into trouble.
* Reading about how Story untangles those troubles kept the pages turning for me well past midnight.
* Story's gutsiness is downright enjoyable. She has no problem telling off the local police chief or entering an unlocked house because she's driven to discover what lies behind the door.
* Story's relatives, friends and foes burst with personality. They're huffy, over-bearing, nosy, nasty, treacherous, even murderous, not to mention charming and sweet. Sweetness is appropriate, after all, for a mystery that centers around honey bees.
* Hannah Reed expertly captures the atmosphere of Southeastern Wisconsin.
* The honey-based recipes at the end of the book are downright delectable.

Why the bullet-point review? You’ll find out if you read Buzz Off.

ps. Deb Baker fans will adore Hannah Reed's work.

Extra Innings #13

Dedicated to writers, their enablers, turkeys, and veterans

Madison, Wisconsin, November 2010

Columnist this issue: Madonna Dries Christensen, Perry Stone
Film critic: Jacob McLaughlin
Book reviewer: Pat Fitzgerald
Feature writer: Rex Owens
Poet: John Manesis
Humor editor: Laurelynn Hardy
Minister of defense: Warren Pease
Cat humor thanks to Linda Konichek
The Masked Man: Brace Beamer
Editor-in-Coach: Marshall J. Cook
Professor Emeritus, UW-Madison Department of Continuing Studies

I publish Extra Innings monthly and distribute it free to an open-enrollment mailing list. To get yourself on the list, email the Coach at mcook@dcs.wisc.edu

Extra Innings comes to you through the good graces of the folks of the writing program at the Division of Continuing Studies, Liberal Studies and the Arts, University of Wisconsin-Madison, led by Christine DeSmet. Find out about their workshops, courses, conferences, and critiques services at:

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Extra Innings is a proud booster of

Write by the Lake
The Writers Institute
The Rhineland School of the Arts
Weekend with your Novel
and the Odyssey Project

No added sugar, honey. No carbs, no trans fats, no salt--pretty tasteless all in all.

This newsletter contains your recommended daily dose of nouns, verbs (transigent and intransigent), gourds, adjectives, adverbs and other artificial sweeteners, pronouns, antinouns, prepositions, propositions, conjunctions, contradictions, contractions, eruditions, bloviation, chiastus, charisma, metanoia, paranoia, trace metaphors and the occasional half-witticism.
Our farewell tribune to baseball for another season

“Nails”
By John Manesis
Lenny Dykstra sinks into a deep crouch, his strike zone no taller than a railroad spike--jaw set, a chaw in his cheek, blond curly hair sticking out from beneath a Phillies cap. A slider high and outside--the lefty hammers it foul, steps out of the box to curse himself, spits, whips the air with a practice cut and digs back in between the chalk lines, muscled forearms taut and eyes daring the pitcher to throw a strike. A low fast ball--a compact swing--CRACK--a liner into the right field stands. He circles the bases with choppy steps, nodding, hands fisted, chin jutting forward. A player in the other dugout mutters, “Look at that son of a bitch--I wish we had him.”

*The poet John Manesis lives in Fargo, North Dakota.*
By Perry Stone

They tip toe through the syntax of many a good story because these are such compelling ingredients when it comes to holding a reader’s interest. That could be because saint and sinner alike lives under a veil of confidences and dishonesty. As a husband, father, friend, brother and neighbor, I carry around more secrets and tell more lies than the Pentagon. If we are honest with ourselves those little white lies, if not giant whoppers, spew out of our mouths daily. Diminutive secrets are locked away in all our hearts and minds on a regular basis. So, what, if anything, is wrong with that?

Twila, my wife, will say, “Don’t tell the kids.” Or one of her friends calls and she waves her hands in signal while mouthing, “tell them I’m asleep,” or “tell them I’m gone.” (This was when we were living together.)

My Kids are forever confiding in me, the confidence always starting, “You have to promise not to tell Mom.” Emily, my sixteen year old, will hold me to keep things from Ashley, my 14 year old, who will not want me to tell Emily or Brandie, my 35-year-old. In the whole household only one member of the family doesn’t lie or tell secrets. Even Alsia, my granddaughter, has secrets. She just doesn’t tell them to anyone.

Those secrets cause the most chaos and frantic imagination. Alisa’s tidbits of secrecy, the ones I have learned about, have to do with hidden treasure -- treasures being whatever she deems worthy of hiding. They range from car keys to cookies, anything small enough to fit in a hiding place the size of a heat duct or behind the kitchen cabinets.

Thus, my eight year old granddaughter becomes an inspiration for adding secrets to my writing: The best mystery isn’t always who did it but—“What the HELL is she hiding--where?” The wonderful thing is, this maddening curiosity doesn’t have to have anything to do with the main flow of the day while it drives me crazy.

I am thankful my granddaughter hides her treasures in the house, unlike Ella, my sister, who has kept a secret buried four and a half decades in the back yard, between two big trees, at our childhood residence on Glover Street in Joplin, Missouri. She confessed this to me only a couple weeks ago. And I wished she hadn’t.

We were always close when we were kids. Yet at that time in our growing up, I had moved to the farm to help my grandparents, and to get away from my father, whose greatest pleasure was whopping on me for no reason, then whopping me harder when there was good reason. So now I feel a certain guilt that I wasn’t there for Ella; we could have talked through her decision. It might have even saved lives.

Of course there is a lot of difference between Alisa’s ecstatic pleasure in hiding her stolen spoils and what my sister wrapped in a small blanket and buried in a secret grave. For one thing, sooner or later what Alisa takes comes up missing. Someone notices that it isn’t to be found. Alisa smiles her beautiful innocent smile and enjoys the fact: she knows what no one else does. On the other hand, I got the impression Ella has felt guilty about what she did 45 years ago when she admitted that in today’s society therapists and doctors would have a field day analyzing her actions, making something out of maybe nothing. If it was nothing, why feel the need to finally talk about? Why after 45 years do I become a priest confessor; worst of all, what if the burial place is discovered? I can no longer honestly deny any knowledge of the deed.

The most important thing to remember about a secret is: if more than one person knows it, it isn’t a well kept secret. If more than two people know, it isn’t a secret at all unless they’re all dead.

Secrets and lies tip toe through all our lives. Most are of no consequence, while a few are significant and life changing. In a story they can be vital points, to hold a reader’s attention.

Continued on next page
And in a story, as well as in real life, we must decide if and when to share the secrets and confess the lies. Discretion being the better part of self-preservation, or something like that, I leave my sister’s secret untold. Believing Alisa got her innocent, if not beautiful, smile from me, I will sit back content with the knowledge only Ella, myself, Twiddle Dum and Twiddle Dee know who is laid to rest in an unmarked grave on Glover street.

Bless you and yours Coach

Paw Joe

Perry “Paw Joe” Stone’s new memoir, Doing Unto Others, is available as an ebook, and it’s yours for the asking. These stories about life for a new nurse’s aide in a nursing home are funny, poignant, and wise, with characters you’ll never forget. Perry and I would love to have you read them.

If you’d like a pdf copy of the book, just email me at mcook@dcs.wisc.edu, and I’ll fire it right on back to you.

Coach
Janice Kaat publishes first novel
and it’s a doozie. Here’s the quick version:
The death of a fiancé, overcoming multiple
injuries, fighting the pain of physical therapy,
and moving to a strange town and an old
house that needs repairs -- all strain the
emotions and fortitude of a young woman.
She hires a carpenter to rebuild her house.
Can she rebuild her life and have a second
chance at love?
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Perry Stone offers memoir
FREE to E.I. readers!
Perry “Paw Joe” Stone’s new memoir, Doing
Unto Others, is available as an ebook, and it’s
yours for the asking. These stories about life
for a new nurse’s aide in a nursing home are
funny, poignant, and wise, with characters
you’ll never forget. Perry and I would love to
have you read them.
If you’d like a pdf copy of the book, just
email me at mcook@dcs.wisc.edu, and I’ll
fire it right on back to you.
Coach

Doing Unto Others
The wisdom of the old-folks’ home

by Perry Stone
On behalf of the entire family here at the World Headquarters of *Extra Innings*, we wish you and yours a happy, healthy, safe, blessed Thanksgiving.

Kulula Airlines, South Africa, official airline of *Extra Innings*

World headquarters of *Extra Innings* (interior shot)

Ground transportation provided by Brandon Born Bus.