First Person Singular

The old man and the carburetor

By Tom Crawford

Everything starts with a memory, however distorted, of an event that goes to the heart of our formation. In my case, poetry.

He wore old blue coveralls, the kind with bright buttons and straps over the shoulders. Maybe he owned the Shell gas station, but that wasn't important to me. I loved hangin' around there as much as he would let me. The smell of gasoline, grease, the air compressor drumming in a back corner among the cobwebs and assorted parts: generators, carburetors, old gas lines, gaskets, tail pipes. Once he let me hand him some wrenches while he was on his 'creeper' under an engine.

One day when there were no cars in the garage or at the pump he came up to me holding a deflated inner tube.

"Let's patch it," he said.

First he brought the air gun to the stem valve and blew it up. It was big so it barely fit in the water tank. Together we watched for the air bubbles. There were three in all that he dried and marked with a white chalk. Then came the beautiful yellow and red patches he fished out of a cigar box, along with a sandpaper, glue and some matches.

The best part was when he lighted the smeared glue with a match...blew it out...let it cool...then applied the patch. All the time explaining to me just what he was doing.

About the time all three patches were glued on a customer pulled up to the pump. When the car pulled out he turned to me and said, "Well, young man, the patches should hold by now."

He laid the inner tube down on the cement, pressed the air gun onto the valve stem and presto, the inner tube buckled and swelled and tightened to five feet high. He slid the inner tube around to check each beautiful patch. Straightened up, his hand resting on the top of the inner tube, smiled a real big smile showing the nicotine stained teeth I'd never seen before, then rolled the inner tube to me.

"Now, it's yours and nobody else's," he said. "Now, you get outta here."

If you missed Tom's article in the last E.I. and news about his upcoming poetry collection, The Names of Birds, you can access the issue at our website: www.dcs.wisc.edu/lsa/writing/extrainnings
And watch this newsletter for information on how to order your copy.
By Madonna Dries Christensen

Years ago, I purchased a vintage book titled Album. The back cover is gone, and the front cover is loose, but the interior is perfectly aged. The cover design is gilt, the pages edged in gilt. Published by J. B. Riker, New York, such albums, with blank pages, were intended as journals or for collecting autographs from friends. In this album, the verses in ornate Victorian script are faded but legible. They’re all dated 1836., making this book now 175 years old.

Tucked within the pages is a poem, clipped from a newspaper: The Last Words Of A Dying Girl. After reading the poem and deciphering the handwritten verses, I believe this album pays tribute to a dying girl named Sarah.

One verse, on a loose scrap of paper, reads:

Farewell dear girl, the time has come,
When thee and I must part.
But distance ne’er shall break the tie,
That binds thee to my heart.

To Sarah

The other contributions reveal a death theme—with phrases such as: life is a transient season, prepare thy path to Heaven, friendship beyond the grave, point the way to Heaven, and, let hallowed friendship deign to tell, if Sarah will remember me.

Each page bears a signature and date (all March, 1836), and most have a place name: Bucks County Pennsylvania, Middleton, Cheltenham, and Upper Dublin. My research indicates that the following verse is paraphrased from a poem by Sir Thomas Moore. Perhaps Grandmother learned the poem as a schoolgirl, for I found a few of Moore’s lines used as an example of poetry rhythm in McGuffey’s Fifth Eclectic Reader.

There are hours, there are moments, which memory brings
Like blossoms of Eden, to twine 'round the heart.

And as time rushes by on the might of his wings,
They may darken awhile, but they cannot depart.
Oh! these hallowed remembrances never decay,

But they come o'er the soul with a magical thrill.
On the days that are brightest, they finally will stay.
And the heart in its last throb, will beat for them still.

Upper Dublin Anna M. Thomas
3 mo. 11th, 1836 Thy Grandmother

The final verse in the album reads:

Devote not to the world's rain show'r
Maiden, thy youthful heart,
But place thy hand in things divine;
Immortal thou art.

Then, if thy hope thy treasure be,
Beyond the changing skies,
The opening gate will seem to thee
The gate of Paradise.

And death will be the angels sent
To call thee home from banishment.

Upper Dublin, 1836 M. Garriguld

This obituary, on yellowed newsprint, was also inside the book.

Death Of Mr. Lincoln's Stepmother

On the 19th inst, Mrs. Sallie Elizabeth Lincoln, widow of the late Thomas Lincoln, and stepmother of the late President Lincoln, and by whom he was principally raised (his own mother having died while he was very young), died in Coles County at an advanced age. "Mrs. Lincoln," says the Decatur Magnet, “had for
many years resided with her grandson, John Hall, a well-to-do farmer, who lives about nine miles southeast of Charleston, Coles County, near the line between that and Cumberland, and also near the little country village of Farmington. She was much devoted to her illustrious stepson, and took as deep a pride and interest in his rise to fame and fortune as his own mother could have. It is said that she never spoke of him since his tragic death without tears, and the nation or the world had no more sincere mourner over his fall than she.”

Sarah Bush Johnston Lincoln was born December 13, 1788 and died April 12, 1869, making this scrap of paper now 142 years old.

Is there a connection between Sarah Lincoln and the Sarah of the album? Probably not; Sarah is a common name. Perhaps the album was merely a repository for the clipping; a mnemonic to aid recall on where it had been placed.

Envision a Victorian matron pausing in her parlor, pondering: Now where did I put the obituary for Sarah Lincoln? Oh, yes, it’s in Sarah’s album.

**Rodney Dangerfield still don’t get no respect**

My wife only has sex with me for a purpose. Last night she used me to time an egg.

It's tough to stay married. My wife kisses the dog on the lips, yet she won't drink from my glass!

A girl phoned me and said, 'Come on over. There's nobody home.' I went over. Nobody was home!

I went to a massage parlor. It was self-service.

If not for pickpockets, I'd have no sex life at all.

My wife is such a bad cook, if we leave dental floss in the kitchen the roaches hang themselves.

My wife is such a bad cook, in my house we pray after the meal.

My wife likes to talk on the phone during sex. She called me from Chicago last night.

*Mr. Dangerfield appears in this newsletter courtesy of Steve Born*
Payers, Preyers & Pretenders

Knock, knock, knocking on heaven’s door

By Rex A. Owens

You’ve crafted a well written, attention grabbing query letter and completed your research on agents or publishers to send that letter to. Now you need to make several decisions.

The first decision is whether to send hard copy in the mail. Mailing is a tax deductible expense if you can be classified as a writer (per the federal tax code definitions, which basically say you have to be able to prove you’re trying to make money with your writing). Personally, I chose not to send to either agents or publishers that accepted only hard copy submissions. Requiring hard copy submissions was a signal to me that they were not that interested in queries and frankly had not kept up with the times. So I sent out only e-mail queries.

When sending an e-mail query be sure you send to a personal e-mail address. Letters sent to the editor, acquisitions editor, or other vague title means an intern trying to break into the business is your first hurdle. I’ve never been sure anyone actually reads those queries. If you receive an automatic response e-mail that says: “Thanks for your interest in our firm; if we are interested we will try to respond within 12 weeks,” it may be your e-mail went into an electronic dumpster. ALWAYS embed your query letter into the body of the e-mail, as very few folks accept attachments. The only exception is if, in response to your query, an agent/publisher requests chapters or your manuscript and asks for an attachment. In my experience, the only time an agent/publisher allowed an attachment was when they requested the entire manuscript. I have embedded up to 10 chapters of a manuscript in an e-mail.

What about “multiple submissions”? Should you send a query to an agent that isn’t keen on multiple submissions? Some agents actually request that your query letter state whether or not you are making multiple queries. I think that just offers them an excuse not to read your query. If you find it morally imperative to admit you’re sending multiple query letters it’s your decision.

I would assume that ‘multiple queries' applies to full manuscripts but not to query letters. Standard practice is to "shotgun" queries to as many agents or publishers as it takes. If we send those out one at a time, we might as well use smoke signals. Better lay in a large supply of food first, too; you could starve to death while you wait for each reply.

If an agent requests an "exclusive submission" of a manuscript, I’d grant it-- but with a time limit on the exclusivity. If an agent wants to see the manuscript but doesn't specify that it be an exclusive look, I'd send it and let them know if asked that another agent or agents have the manuscript, too. (Might give them a little sense of urgency, which is not a bad thing.)

Develop a method to keep track of your submissions. I developed a data base which included: date sent, persons’ name, the firm name, the contact persons’ e-mail and then date and response if there was one. You can find free online software on AuthorsAdvance, AuthorsDen and Duotrope to track your query letter history. Keeping good records will prevent the embarrassment of querying the same agent/publisher more than once. It also provides a way to keep track of when material is requested and can trigger a follow-up on your part.

It pays to be persistent

One agent asked for my entire manuscript. I waited 12 weeks without a response, then sent a follow-up e-mail and learned that my manuscript had been “lost,” and I was asked to re-submit. Had I not sent a follow-up e-mail, I wouldn’t have gotten a second chance.

It didn’t matter that time; the agent tersely rejected my manuscript with a one liner: “I can’t make money on this”-- a stark reminder that publishing is a business.

How many query letters should you send out? How badly do you want to be published?

In my search I sent queries to over 250 agents, made personal pitches to four agents at a writer’s conference and sent over 160 letters to publishers. Proving that persistence does indeed pay, Rex’s first novel, Murphy’s Troubles, is forthcoming from Mischievous Muse Press www.worldnouveau.com
The great newspaper wars of Kankakee County

By Vic Johnson

In 1899 there were two newspapers representing different factions of Republican politics in Kankakee County — the Kankakee Daily Times and The Kankakee Daily Gazette. The Gazette was conservative; the Times was progressive.

Charles Holt and his sons, Clarence E. and Arthur B., were proprietors of the Gazette; H. J. Dunlap, editor, and C. P. Livingston, business manager, and several other stockholders owned the Times. Livingston joined the Times in 1881.

The Holts had managed the Gazette since 1869. According to the 1883 Kankakee County atlas, it was one of the best family newspapers in Northern Illinois.

It wasn’t unusual for newspaper editors to lob caustic verbal brickbats at one another. Occasionally there would be a fabricated story or news item intended to point out the gullibility and unreliability of the other newspaper’s reportage.

The folks at the Times were especially uninhibited in stating opinions about their competitors. Here are two of the shots the Times fired at another rival, the Evening Democrat:

August 30, 1893: By the way, the peculiar methods of the Democrat with reference to the free and unrestricted exercise of the editorial prerogative to criticize, find no counterpart in the ethics of modern journalism. The idea that a newspaper may attack the character of a public official and then offer as a means of redress to the individual the use of the columns to affirm or deny a specific charge is absurd. We are fearful that Thomas [Thomas B. Collins, Democrat editor] wrestled too long among the hoop-poles and developed muscle greatly to the detriment of his mental faculties.

June 13, 1894: The Democrat is metaphorically tearing its shirt and working itself into fine frenzy over the nomination of a republican ticket in this county. At its present rate of lunacy it will soon be across the river into the institution [Eastern Illinois Hospital for the Insane] it so often belabors. The signs of political lunacy are so apparent that no one is deceived.

The Times even printed a “one-act comedy” on August 21, 1894, in which the fictitious staff of the Democrat concocted a story about the Times being sued for libel. The shortcomings of the Democrat as an advertising medium are not so subtly revealed in this wickedly crafted torpedo.

The great newspaper wars of Kankakee County

The following is a sample:

Cast:
Tommy Collins, a hired man who poses as editor-in-chief.
Johnny Smith, who has the money but lacks the experience.
Mr. Whiskers, a miserable hireling.
The Infant, the little boy who carries the news to Mr. Whiskers.


Scene I — Enter Tommy in his shirt sleeves, cob pipe in mouth. He gazes into space with a stony glare and weary expression, very natural to him, then fondles a large rock that does duty as a paper weight and weapon of defense.

Whiskers is seated with his feet on his desk, his favorite attitude, thinking, thinking, thinking, a very unusual thing and very wearing. [Tommy] glances at the old man in a deprecating way, as though waiting for that oracle to speak.

Johnny Smith sits behind a glass case. Not much force, never was, but he has the “stuff.”

The Infant sits in a corner with his usual idiotic grin spread over his semi-handsome countenance. It is a consultation of War.

Tommy: “Miserable hirelings, something must be done! The Times is doing us up. In a few more weeks our 250 subscribers and our dozen advertisers will have deserted us and gone over to the enemy. We shall not be in it. We have been ‘scooped’ on everything for a week. You are becoming more and more uninteresting. The dry rot has its fangs upon you. It is no longer possible to give the paper away. We must have more sensation!” and his voice rose to an incoherent shriek. . . .

In March, 1899, antagonism between Kankakee’s “regular” Republicans and the so-called “anti” Republican faction erupted into an assault on Charles A. Livingston, a Kankakee Daily Times reporter and son of the publisher.

Arthur J. Byrns, an anti candidate for township supervisor, was angered by a series of Times editorials. One called him a member of a “ring” of antis conspiring with Democrats and not having very high political principles; another labeled him a “ticket fixer” and implied he might have left one of the anti meetings with the odor of alcohol on his breath — an implication the Times denied.

more on next page
In a story about the subsequent assault on Livingston by Byrns, the Daily Times said: The supposition is some of Mr. Byrns so-called friends who are exceedingly bitter against the paper — and possibly against the reporter — induced him to think the paragraph [suggesting overindulgence in alcohol] contained some hidden meaning.

One word brought on another until Mr. Byrns made a threat of personal violence.

No blows were struck but Livingston claimed Byrns had scratched his left cheek. The Times did not hesitate to refer to Byrns as “‘Finger Nail’ Art.”

In defense of its editorial platform the Times later told its readers:

A good newspaper is a bill of fare of mental food for as many tastes as possible, and the reader ought to know that the article which does not suit him is, perhaps, just to the taste of nearly every other reader of the paper. The man who insists on having a paper to his individual taste should buy the material and edit one for himself and ask no one to read it.

The author in his own words

Recently, as I am rapidly approaching my 82nd year, I decided to look back at my articles written for the Kankakee Sunday Journal. There are 535 of them, submitted to the Journal over 11 years. I was fortunate to be able to do this and get paid for my work. Some of the articles constituted series such as a history of the Illinois 76th Volunteer Infantry, the removal of the Potawatomi from Illinois, a history of the Kankakee River, and La Salle’s exploration of the Illinois country. Looking back I see that I sometimes overreached, was a bit pretentious, maybe, and flowery. I did make an effort to search out original records and either illuminate or dispel some tales and legends in regional folk history.

I thought that readers of Extra-Innings would find a bit of journalistic history enlightening. Of course, the original readers of those turn-of-the-century newspapers had knowledge of back stories and subtexts that we do not, but I think speculating on what that context might have been is part of the appeal these stories. Coach’s note: Keep up with Vic’s current writings at his blog: http://carzegargunii.blogspot.com/

“I made up the weird name Carze Gargunti,” he explains, “because I learned via the Internet there were many Vic Johnsons out there, some of them well known authors.”

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Steinbeck’s relative reality
By Rex Owens

I am fascinated by the theories and discoveries of modern physics unleashed by Albert Einstein almost 95 years ago. Einstein taught us that time is a fourth dimension, and that time and space are intertwined, not separate. Most important he demonstrated that time and space are flexible (relative), not fixed. Einstein painted a picture of ‘reality’ that is for the most part incomprehensible to the average person’s experience.

In a recent Science Channel program scientists demonstrated not only that an photon can be in two different times simultaneously. So what is “reality” if both time and space are in such flux?

Coach reported on Bill Steigerwald’s findings that Steinbeck’s Travels with Charley may not have been totally based on the author’s objective experience. Steigerwald sleuthed through a ton of material to determine if Steinbeck was where he said he was and did what he said he did on the journey across America. Why someone would devote time and energy to such an undertaking is not quite clear to me, but there you have it.

Let’s face it, “reality” is slippery. Maybe Steinbeck had the gift for stirring together life experiences and imagination to create a reality like the little photon in two places and two times.

Whether the Mind of Steinbeck imagined a reality in whole or part isn’t important. The observations, insights, and conclusions about Americans and the human race that Steinbeck shared are worth reading no matter how John and Charley got there.

“Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there will ever be to know and understand.”

-- Albert Einstein

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By Jonann Giles
I love to read, and when I have the time I enjoy writing, but unlike other aspiring writers I don’t feel compelled to compose the Great American Novel. Everyone who puts pen to paper wants to write one; a novel that will be discussed for generations or at least generate a comfortable income. I have heard the whispers from others; “I have an idea,” “Taking time off to write”, “Too busy right now but my idea is so brilliant when I start on it,” maybe next year…probably.” Not me, I have other aspirations.

What is so wrong with not wanting to be considered a literary genius? Am I facing my own reality and limitations, or do my interests simply lie elsewhere.

While I can stand in awe of a sunset, its magnificent reds and yellows with shafts of sunlight embracing the heavens, I don’t feel compelled to put my emotions on paper. To do so would freeze a personal and ethereal moment. Let’s say I’m more practical in my writing.

If I ever scribble on a yellow legal pad that “she went to the door,” you can bet the sentence before read “The doorbell rang.” No deep hidden meanings. I’m not trying to explain the deep conflict between right and wrong or hidden sexual desires. It’s a door that needs to opened.

My stuff is cut and dried, just the facts, ma’am. Hemingway could get away with those concise sentences because they sang with emotion. Instead of singing, I’m still wrestling with the accuracy of the facts being presented. Right after learning Roses are Red, Violets are Blue, my interest in poetry waned.

This of course is out of step with The Great American Novel and the need of English majors everywhere to wax poetic about the true nature of life. Yellow highlighters would cease to exist if dependent on marking up my soul-inspiring passages.

Speaking of yellow pads-- you can’t have an outstanding novel without a paper trail for researchers to follow: revisions found buried in a trunk by a relative years after the author’s death, a hidden document left in a library book discovered by a diligent researcher.

But word processing is where I’m at! Write a bit, delete a lot, repeat, save document and keep moving.

Stories are all around, real stories about human beings and how they struggled to survive: how cities were built, nations created, or factory workers toiled in anonymity. These are tales that need a storyteller; someone who can put words into a character’s mouth.

So why am I thinking about The Great American Novel? It’s that nagging feeling that I should be thinking about it. If everyone, even a chimp with a typewriter and a lot of time, can create a novel, why don’t I want to? Don’t I seek immortality, fame, fortune or at least a pitiful life that inspires other writers with my fortitude? Apparently I don’t. I’m perfectly happy middle class and enjoying what I do.

The Great American Novel is not on my Bucket List, but I have the satisfaction of exploring the issues that interest me; keeping my writing informative; imparting information others may enjoy, and generally staying true to my character. Literally there’s nothing wrong with me. I enjoy who I am.

Still, some mornings at 2 a.m. when all is quiet, when my eyes are staring at a ceiling black in the night and my brain starts working overtime, an idea will form, and I start whispering with the others “When I just have time, I’ll do it!”

Jonann Giles lives, writes, and occasionally has trouble sleeping in Covington, Georgia. This is her first article for Extra Innings.

The voice of wisdom
Ø You’re never too old to learn something stupid.
Ø To be sure of hitting the target, shoot first and call whatever you hit the target.
Ø Nostalgia isn’t what it used to be.
Ø Some people hear voices. Some see invisible people. Others have no imagination whatsoever.
Ø Change is inevitable, except from a vending machine.
Thanks to Wally Littman
IRIS DANCERS
_Dressed in ancient costumes_ 
_irisces dance in gardens_ 
_entertaining summer_

_willows play Irish harps_ 
_while winds sing in Gaelic_ 
_offering free passports._

_Bonny Conway_

**Haunting questions**

How important does a person have to be before they are considered assassinated instead of just murdered?

**What disease did cured ham actually have?**

If a deaf person has to go to court, is it still called a hearing?

**Why is 'bra' singular and 'panties' plural?**

If the professor on Gilligan's Island can make a radio out of a coconut, why can't he fix a stupid hole in a boat?

**Why does Goofy stand erect while Pluto remains on all fours? They're both dogs!**

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**Garden Psalm**

Zucchini, arise and stretch beyond the murky half-light of your leafy shrouds to shout out loud and show what lengths to which you'll go to grow.

Cucumbers, sprawl along the garden wall throw off the yoke of soil to toil and climb with intertwining spines among the vines.

Yellow beans, do not be held to meld to narrow norms of strings so straight and true embrace the twist, and turn to spurn such common rule.

Green peppers, lift yourselves, your shells upon your own green shoots. Let not the roots that tie you to the earth define your worth.

Lettuce, leeks, tomatoes, large and small stand tall. Let not the black spot or the brown rust strike you down.

Let all your efforts be both great and true lest ye not be set for harvest and undo all the care t'was taken with your needs and find your august gifts have gone to seed.

_Karyn J. Powers_
By Den Adler

I met Donna in March 1962 on a Badger Bus as I was heading home to Madison after a high school basketball game. I was studying to be a priest, but I don’t recall telling her that in the two hours we talked that night. I was also thinking of leaving the seminary, and I know I didn’t tell her that.

Right from the start, we saw parallels in our lives. We had the same three initials, DLA, and we both designed logos with those letters intertwined. And we loved plays on words.

I didn’t have the guts to ask her phone number, but I found her later, and we became friends. I told her, and her parents, that I was a seminarian, but I didn’t tell them I was thinking of quitting, nor that my feelings for her were interfering with a rational decision. Because of her—actually, because of how I felt about her—I decided to return to the seminary for another year, but by Christmas I knew my desire to leave wasn’t due to her.

During that year, we wrote each other letters (against the seminary rule), but the romance died soon after I joined her at the University of Wisconsin. We didn’t see each other for three years, until we met accidentally on campus two weeks before graduation. We talked for half an hour. She’d gotten married the year before; I was engaged. She’d be moving south, to New Orleans —where her husband took this picture two months later on the shore of Lake Pontchartrain—and eventually to Houston. I’d move north to the Menominee Indian Reservation and later to Janesville. Her parents, I was happy to hear, were fine. I had liked them.

After my son was born on Halloween 1967, someone told me Donna gave birth to a boy that day too, or maybe a day earlier. In 1978 I saw her dad speak at a park dedication. He told me she had three kids, one born the day before mine. In 1990 he brought film to the photo lab where I worked. His wife had died, he said. I saw him several times when he came to the lab, and sometimes he had a message: Donna says hi.

Then, in 1998, he moved to Houston to be near her.

In 2007 someone told me Donna died. I made some calls. She had died—in 2001, but no one knew why. I Googled her dad, found him still in Houston, and called to express my sympathy. She had died of heart disease, he said, after two surgeries. We developed an e-mail and phone friendship in which we talked about current events and memories.

He said he couldn’t believe the parallels in our lives. He and I shared the same birthday as well as similar health problems. Donna and I went to Catholic grade and high schools and graduated from UW-Madison on 6-6-66. I got married that year on her mother’s birthday. Donna and her husband, and I and my wife, had our first children, sons, born one day apart in 1967. She and I loved cats. And we both underwent cardiac bypass surgery—twice, but that’s where the parallels ended: I did well after my surgeries; Donna died after hers.

After her dad told me he was dying of congestive heart failure, I decided to visit him and his second wife, and we spent two days reminiscing, talking for five hours each day about religion, friendship, work, age, illness, death, marriage, and his daughter. Donna had left a note for her husband in case she didn’t make it, and in it she wrote that he’d been a great husband. On the second day, I spotted this photograph just past her dad’s head, and my eyes kept going to it as we talked. Two things stood out: The date at the bottom—July 1966, and Donna’s look of utter happiness.

“She looks like she had the world by its tail,” I said. Her dad agreed.

Donna had her Pete, and I had my Judy. We’d graduated from UW-Madison on the same day and headed out on our own with good jobs, new places to live, and families to start. We would never see each other again, but in this photo her dad and I discovered one more parallel: In July 1966, Donna and I both had the world by its tail.
Why poetry matters

By Sue Roupp

Regarding poetry: the physical short lines down a page, the end or internal rhyme, concise expressions of images and emotions give a gift to those who read it.

Poetry speaks for us the feelings we stumble to express, or even identify, on our own. How many times have you been at a funeral, a wedding or a celebration and someone groping for the right words uses either a part of a poetic passage or a whole poem to speak for them?

Around the planet we may speak different languages, but we share universal emotions-- loss, joy, grief, fear and more-- but often we just can’t get the words out. We turn to poetry to help articulate our feelings.

Since the beginning of time we mere mortals looked around us trying to put into words or images what we saw. Artists capture mountains, streams, animals, the plains, relationships and much more.

All the arts matter, because we inarticulate humans need to see, through photography, drawing, painting, sculpture, who we are, where we have been, and who we can be.

Poetry allows us to explore complex topics like Dante’s 14th century “Divine Comedy” and the journey of the soul toward God. With a touch of humor, Billy Collins takes the fear out of “Forgetfulness.”

We have always been storytellers. Through cave paintings and hieroglyphics we first boasted of our successes and lamented our failures. Sometimes the artist left an imprint of his/her hand. That hand imprint says I was here and this is what I saw.

Native American carvings tell us a story, as do 3,000 year Korean votive sculptures.

We think that Sappho (7 BCE), a woman from an aristocratic family, was the first person to write poetry using the first person and wrote in a lyric form so her work could be sung, as was the custom of the day. Fragments of her poetry have survived – some found in Egypt, some on papyrus used to wrap mummies. Listen to her voice (quoted by the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus, about 220 B.C.) “I know not what to do; my mind is divided.”

There is comfort in knowing that thousands of years ago some other human being struggled with the same day to day problems we still face.

Poetry slams make poetry alive today, along with open mics where poets read their work, and photography puts us in a scene anywhere in the world.

Poetry expresses our deepest feelings and observations, asserts that we were here and that we matter. In sharing our experiences, artists and poets remove a bit of our loneliness, replacing it with universal and historical connection.

‘Phantom’ words can mislead

Phantonyms are words that look as if they ought to mean one thing but mean something else entirely. For example,

Disinterested looks as if it ought to mean “uninterested” or “uncaring.” Nope. You could care about something passionately and remain unbiased or impartial, the actual meaning of the word.

Noisome must mean “noisy,” right? Not even close. Smelly would be a lot closer.

Enormity has to do with evil, not size-- describing something that is hugely wicked.

Enervated looks an awful lot like “energized” but actually means the opposite-- weakened.

Presently really ought to mean “right now,” but you actually have to wait for it to occur in a little while.

If Wile E. Coyote had enough money to buy all that ACME crap, why didn’t he just buy dinner?

If corn oil is made of corn, and vegetable oil is made of vegetables, what’s baby oil made of?

If electricity comes from electrons, does morality come from morons?
The plight of the GREAT! modifier

By Shannon Ross

Every day 35-70 animal species go extinct, and every month two languages do as well. But let's be honest, other than Green Peace people and stockholders in Rosetta Stone, most of us aren't moved by these disappearances. They just don't have enough of an immediate affect on our lives.

However, one extinction does or at least should: the great modifiers. Superlatives are in danger of being loved to death.

I'm not a purist; I embrace the fluidity of language and grammar. Of course I believe in having a set of basic principles lest chaos ensue, such as the use of question marks and explanation points interchangeably (Loose bear, run?) or randomly using our names as verbs ("Oh, she Paul ed you."). But beyond this people should let their linguistic Thomas Edisons roam free.

However, I cannot condone the unholy, wholly uncreative employment of those adverbs and adjectives that dutifully stand close at tongue and poised for action in the event that we need to respond to a genuinely unbelievable happening (such as when a man threw a live mouse into a bonfire in his back yard then watched helplessly as the flaming rodent shot back inside the house and set a curtain ablaze, which then spread through the rest of the structure).

Our inclination to exaggerate explains in part why the superlatives and exclamations adorning our sentences tend to look the way adult clothes look on children.

I'm sure such verbal negligence has occurred throughout history, but in the past it was limited to periods of personal social contact. Now, due to the pole vault jump in the amount of social media, we're bombarded by it.

Consequently, society is becoming the boy who cried "Oh my God!" as we pour on "incredible," "superb," and "brilliant" like our father's put pepper on their food.

Of course, one could easily dismiss all this as semantics; after all, isn't one man's "adequate" another man's "outstanding"? Technically, yes. But there has to be a limit. If someone tells me that a movie is "amazing" I should at least be able to trust that after watching it I won't wish I had just spent the last few hours watching two small puddles race to evaporate instead.

Furthermore, if the mundane qualifies as amazing, where does that leave me when I see - which I have - a snake swallow an adult alligator whole? "Super-amazing?" I'd rather go mute.

Pretty soon travel brochures will require adjustment, as “breathtaking vistas” will evoke little more than the neighborhood park. Nice? Sure, why not. Super and breathtaking? Not even close enough to ask for directions.

Ultimately, unless a "great modifier rights campaign" engulfs the nation in the near future it appears that we have no choice but to accept a life where words like "gynormous" are no longer run out of town but courted instead.

Our only hope is that the technological proliferation of you-gotta-see-it-to-believe-it entertainment will desensitize society to “incredible” and “superb.”

But another option occurs to me: we could facilitate destruction. Exaggeration got us into this mess, and maybe it can get us out - at least long enough to reacquaint our dialogue with order and reason. If the great modifiers are to die off, let's hasten the process.

I'll be happy to get the movement rolling by working “excellentasterifically stupawsome” into my next review.!

Famed newspaper editor Horace Greeley always insisted the word ‘news’ was plural.

Once he telegraphed a reporter in Denver: “Are there any news?” The reporter wired back: ‘No. Not a single new.’

Thanks to Richard Emery.
Super 8 a rare, original gem

Here's the rare summer film that has some originality to it. JJ Abrams has had a good directing career so far with Mission Impossible 3 and Star Trek, but I think this is his best work yet.

The film does have an early Spielberg feel to it, and since he is the producer, that only makes sense, but I think the film also pays homage to the old sci-fi and monster movies of the 50s.

Joe Lamb (Joel Courtney in a great debut performance), is helping his friend Charles (Riley Griffiths) make an 8mm zombie movie for a local film festival. One night they sneak out with some friends to film a scene at the train station. Alice (Elle Fanning) even 'borrows' her dad's car and drives them there.

They start filming as an oncoming train passes by. Then a pickup truck shows up, driving on the tracks head on towards the train. They crash and the kids run for their lives. The crash is the most impressive action piece I've seen in awhile.

Something escapes from one of the train's cars, and strange things start happening around town. Dogs run away, people begin to disappear, and Joe's father, the Deputy Sheriff (Kyle Chandler) begins to investigate.

That is all I can say. The less you know about the film going in, the more satisfying it is.

The kids in this are great. They remind me of the cast from The Goonies and Stand By Me. Most of them are in their first major roles, and they all do great. The one who steals almost every scene he's in is Ryan Lee, who plays Cary, a fireworks and explosives obsessed kid. I hope to see all of them in future projects.

Super 8 is the best film of the summer so far. In a summer full of sequels and superhero films, it's always great to see something original. It's a piece of movie magic, one of those films that reminds us of why we go to the movies. This is definitely the film to top this summer and maybe this year.
The Fearless Book Reviewer

The day the world exploded

By Pat Fitzgerald

Stallion Gate, by Martin Cruz Smith, Ballantine Books, 1986.

(No longer in print but available on-line.)

Staff Sergeant Joe Peña looks forward to leaving the military, buying a jazz club and returning to his life as a jazz pianist, but first he must fulfill his obligation to the Army. He also needs to raise funds to purchase a club. He’s a former boxer, and the chance to garner a chunk of money arises when he’s asked to revive his pugilistic skills for one last fight. He wins, and suddenly everything is right in his life . . . until Peña's world explodes around him. Literally.

The novel takes place during World War Two. Peña's stationed at Los Alamos, New Mexico. He’s the driver for J. Robert Oppenheimer, director of the Los Alamos project. Peña despises the job yet cannot take it lightly, since “the fate of the world will be riding in the car you'll be driving . . .”

This responsibility is heavy enough, but as a full-blooded Pueblo Indian, Peña also serves as liaison between the Army and the area's native Americans. He is forced to watch bomb-making activities destroy the old way of life around Los Alamos and Stallion Gate, where the bomb will be tested.

'They kicked off the white ranchers,' the father said. . . . 'Still horses, though. If we don't take them, they just shoot them.'

'They come over in planes and machine-gun them,' the son said. 'Sometimes they bomb them. Day and night.' ”

I decided to read this novel because I live 80 miles east of the first atom bomb explosion and thought it might be interesting to learn about the making of the bomb. But Stallion Gate often sets aside the factual tale and brings Joe Peña's story of intrigue and suspense to the forefront - not that this interfered with my fascination with Stallion Gate. Yes, it's a cliché, but I could not put this book down.

Coach’s Mail Bag

E.I. helps pull Young out of writing slump

Hi Marshall:

I really enjoyed your piece about Steinbeck--Coach's Bullpen Bloviations [last issue]. (Must confess I had to go to the dictionary to get the definition for "bloviate." It's a new word for me.) I read Travels with Charley years ago and loved it. So it was with great interest that I read your piece. I was a bit surprised to learn it wasn't factual but must say it won't change my mind about the book. I'm compelled to reread it as you did. Steinbeck was a great novelist.

Enjoyed the June issue and was pleased to read that Madonna Christensen "agreed with [my] sentiments about handwritten letters."

I have been in a terrible writing slump, as I may have mentioned to you. The truth is that receiving and reading Extra Innings every month has been motivation for me to get moving again--thus "The Touch of a Letter." [last issue] I'm beginning to work on a piece about my writing slump for possible submission to Extra Innings. Now that I've said that, I need to hit the keys on a regular basis--right??

Sharon Young

Absolutely!

Nothing could make me happier as editor-in-coach than to help a fellow writer get back to hitting those keys, Sharon!

And the rest of you—admit it, you didn't know what a "bloviation" was either, right?

Krenz endorses Taliafaro’s system of revision

Sure enjoyed my copy of EI last night while I waited at [daughter] Anna’s play practice. Was particularly tickled to learn that another writer, Janet Taliaferro, has a similar system for starting to write (or rewrite): Start by doing the laundry, making the bed, straightening the kitchen.

(Personally I substitute ‘make a snack’ for cleaning the cat box.) I feel so much less alone in my writing craziness (and I mean that in the best sense of the word) now.

Isn’t it funny how writers need so desperately to be alone, yet we feel comforted to find out we’re not alone at all? In fact I was so inspired and a little bored (remember boredom is the birthplace of creativity) that I took out pen and
paper and wrote about four pages of the next chapter in my _What I Didn’t Expect..._ tome. Whether I’ll be able to read my scrawl today to get it onto an electronic file is another question.

**Lisa Krenz**

“What I didn’t expect...” is Lisa’s work in progress on the surprises of motherhood, her “maternal musings,” she says. I’m serving as first responder for the book and loving it. Stay tuned for updates.

### Is herding chicks tougher than screenwriting?

Hey Marshall,

I just returned from winning a round of "city woman vs. baby chicks." No, it's not a video game. It's my own private comedy reality show. I'm doing barn chores for our neighbors, who are out rodeo-ing for a few days.

Feeding four horses and a pony is practically no effort at all. But I also have to corral four baby chick into their little pen for the night. Yikes! They run off in four different directions, and there's only one of me!

Three of them finally entered their pen voluntarily, probably to escape the crazy person chasing them. But one was stubborn. She ran 'round and 'round the pen. Catching up with her was impossible, and if I'd go in a different direction, so would she. Finally, one of the older chickens must've taken pity on me. She blocked the baby chick's route, making it possible for me to pick the poor scared thing up and safely deposit her in the pen. Dunno if I'm looking forward to tomorrow!

But I gladly do these chores because the neighbors generously allow me the privilege of riding two of their horses whenever I want. They actually consider this a favor, since it's necessary for them to exercise their rodeo competition horses. The two I ride are older and retired from the rodeo, and our neighbors felt guilty about the horses not getting enough exercise. I consider this a dream come true. I love riding. I have horses at my disposal whenever I want to hit the trail. Totally cool!

First, we entered loglines. The semi-finalists were chosen solely on the basis of those loglines. Next up, we will submit the first 10 pages of a script. The deadline's tomorrow. I think I'm good to go, though I'm unwilling to submit until tomorrow. How awful it would be if I turned in my work, only to realize in the middle of the night that something needs changing.

Imagine my honor and intimidation when I saw that Christine DeSmet and her writing partner were also semi-finalists!

I'm confident of one thing - I've given this my best shot. What happens next, happens.

**Oh, my qualifying logline:** _A rock drummer has a stoned blast on tour, until his ex-wife deposits their five kids backstage during a show._

The suggestion I received from the judge was to have all five kids have different moms. I loved that. Whether or not I'm passed on to the finals, I'm gonna enjoy completing the script.

If there are any late-breaking developments in "city woman vs. baby chick" I'll report them!

Best always,

**Pat Fitzgerald**

### Brief take on Steinbeck

Marsh,

I enjoyed the expose about “Travels with Charlie.” Who’da thunk it?

**Leah Carson**

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**A few more from Henny Youngman**

A wife says to her husband, “You're always pushing me around and talking behind my back.” He says, “What do you expect? You're in a wheel chair.”

Man calls 911 and says, “My wife is dead.” The operator says, “How do you know?” He says, “The sex is the same but the laundry’s building up!”

I was explaining to my wife that when you die you get reincarnated and come back as a different creature. She said she would like to come back as a cow. I said, "You're obviously not listening."

The wife has been missing a week now. Police said to prepare for the worst. So I went to the thrift shop to get all her clothes back.
Coach’s Bullpen Briefs

Mickelson sweeps Iowa awards

Sandy Mickelson, a dear friend of long duration, toils in the trenches of daily journalism, taking photos, writing and editing features, and producing a weekly column for the Fort Dodge (Iowa) Messenger. Heroes like her seldom get the praise they deserve.

At this year’s Iowa Press Women’s award ceremony, Sandy got hers!

“Sent 10, won four,” she reports.

She took an honorable mention for editing for her Lifestyle section, a third for her sports story on the ragbrai (bike race across Iowa), a second for reporting/photography for her full page on the Dayton Labor Day rodeo, and a first for feature writing, for the story of Bob Schossow, a man whose shop in nearby Pomeroy exploded, and a neighbor rolled him to safety.

“What’s that called in baseball parlance,” she asks, “around the horn?”

No, dear, it’s called hitting for the cycle (single, double, triple, and home run in the same game), and four hits in 10 at bats is batting .400. That puts you in anybody’s hall of fame.

And none of these was the best thing she wrote all year in my view. That honor goes to a feature she wrote on her “Uncle Bub,” Lawrence Mickelson, about his life in and since World War II, which first ran in the Cadott (WI) Sentinel, as good profile as I’ve ever read. You can read it by accessing our back issues at www.dcs.wisc.edu/lsa/writing/extrainnings

Congratulations, Sandy. You are truly the best.

Adler commits author’s cardinal sin

The Tuesday of WRITE BY THE LAKE week, I had lunch downtown with author/historian/train buff/E.I. “image to essay” columnist Den Adler. He had promised to bring along a copy of his new book, the first of a projected two volume history of Janesville-- but forgot it!

Rule #1: never, ever go anywhere without at least a medium-sized crate of your books in the trunk of your car. Here he had a live one, cash in hand-- and no book to sell!

There’s no excuse here. This is not Den’s first rodeo; he previously published a novel, To Become a Priest: A Love Story.

Shape up, Den. Next time you’re in town, I might not have the money for the book!

The Help lives up to the raves

Thanks to all who kept recommending The Help to me. (Recommend? More like insist I read it. This is as much a cause as a novel.) It is truly a courageous and beautiful piece of work, and I’m very glad I read it.

New travel journal to debut soon

As previously mentioned, longtime friend Janice Kaat will soon be hitting the highway, leaving Tucson, Arizona for the open roads. (Last I heard, she planned to get a puppy to accompany her.: travels with yippy?) You’ll be able to keep up with her in her new online publication, Kaat’s Cross Country Chronicle, which will appear at jankaat@kaatscrosscountrychronicle.com.

I get my best ideas from typos

“celebrate” vt: to chew someone out for getting out of line at a party.

A final visit with Henny

My neighbor knocked on my door at 2:30 a.m. Can you believe that -- 2:30 am?! Luckily for him I was still up playing my Bagpipes.

I saw a poor old lady fall over today on the ice!! At least I presume she was poor - she only had $1.20 in her purse.

My girlfriend thinks that I'm a stalker. Well, she's not exactly my girlfriend yet.

Went for my routine check up today and everything seemed to be going fine until he stuck his index finger up my ass! Do you think I should change dentists?

And now a final word

from your Coach-in-Chief...
Coach’s bullpen bloviation

Play it again, Fydor

By Marshall J. Cook

This column will appear on Suzanne Beecher’s superb online Book Club, DearReader, July 6. You can join any or all of her virtual reading groups free. Email Coach for details.

I’ve been rereading my favorite books.

This is a big change for me. Except for an unending journey through the Bible, I’ve rarely let myself revisit old friends.

After all, there are SO MANY BOOKS to read; I mustn’t “waste time” repeating, or I’ll never get them all read.

How’s that for a realistic goal: read every good book ever written before you die? When put that way, it seems kind of silly, doesn’t it?

Suppose you could read two books a week, Linda Holmes posited recently on National Public Radio. You might finish 100 books a year (allowing for one or two long ones that slow you down.) What if you’d started at the tender age of 15, kept up your reading regimen faithfully, and are still going strong at age 80? By now you would have read 6,500 books.

That’s a lot of books to be sure. But it’s a tiny fraction of the number of books published in a single year-- and while you were reading, you’d have 65 more years of new books piling up.

You can’t read all that’s out there waiting for you. You can’t even come close.

“If ‘well-read’ means ‘not missing anything,’” Holmes notes, “‘then nobody has a chance. If ‘well-read’ means ‘making a genuine effort to explore thoughtfully,’ then yes, we can all be well-read. But what we’ve seen is always going to be a very small cup dipped out of a very big ocean, and turning your back on the ocean to stare into the cup can’t change that.”

So let’s stop fretting about ALL THOSE BOOKS we’ll never have time to read, put away the scorecards, and give up a battle we can never win. Each good book waiting for you is a wonderful gift-- and you’re never going to run out of such gifts! That should be cause for celebration, not frustration.

I’m still reading lots of new stuff, too (‘new’ to me, although some of the books have been around for a long time), but I’m also spending time, guilt free, with some old, dear friends. So far, these include To Kill a Mockingbird, by Harper Lee, Horton Hatches the Egg, by Dr. Seuss, Two O’Clock Eastern Time, by John Dunning, and Sometimes a Great Notion, by Ken Kesey.

I reread The Sound and the Fury, by William Faulkner-- and got a lot more out of it this time around-- and I’m currently re-immersing myself in Fydor Dostoevsky’s masterpiece, The Brothers Karamazov. Assuming I survive that, I think I’ll revisit the two gruff old ex-Texas Rangers who illuminate Larry McMurtry’s Lonesome Dove next. Or maybe have a catch on W.P. Kinsella’s field of dreams with Shoeless Joe. Or I might enjoy the adventures of Ulysses and Homer Macauley on this earth in William Saroyan’s The Human Comedy.

God willing, I’ll have time to visit many more old friends before I die-- but I won’t be keeping count. I’m just hoping that I’ll die with a good book by my bedside, yet another dear friend who still had much joy to give and much wisdom to impart.

That’s it until next time. Be real careful if you handle fireworks on the Fourth; you need all your fingers to hit those computer keys! Let me hear from you if you get time and inclination.

Coach