Why does Stephen King keep writing novels?

No, really.

He certainly doesn’t need the money or the fame, and he has nothing left to prove to anybody. The guy can flat-out write great stories, often exploring complex and important themes, reflecting on the human condition, and touching the heart as well as pushing the terror button seemingly at will.

I thought about Mr. King (and yes, we dare to call him a fellow writer!) as I was finishing reading his newest (and surely one of his best) novel, 11/22/63, which centers on a time-traveler commissioned by a dying friend to try to stop the assassination of President John Kennedy.

But I was also thinking about myself and about some of you. (Lisa, Monette, and Tana, you’re foremost on my mind and my heart right now, and you, too, Sandy, if you decide to take the plunge again, but this will apply to many other E.I. readers, too, I think.)

Why keep writing novels, when they only seem to elicit rejections or, worse, silence? Does anybody want them?

Let’s face it: our own mamas, God bless them, never understood why we do it.

Having grappled with this question in the arena of my own skull and ministered to students and other writers tormented by the seeming futility of our craft for years, I’ve concocted many answers. But I’ve never thought about it from the point of view of someone like Mr. King, who is the very definition of having MADE IT, BIG TIME! as a novelist.

He could retire from writing, with all its attendant frustrations and enigmas, and spend full time playing in his band, The Rock Bottom Remainders, and rooting for his beloved Red Sox.

I’m guessing here, but I’m betting he writes novels because he loves to, because there’s no other way he would rather spend large hunks of time each day, because he is most fully alive and most authentically himself when he’s writing.

Maybe that’s you, too.

If so, stop fighting it, friend. It’s what you were made for. Fish gotta swim, bird gotta fly— and sing its sweet song even when there’s nobody around to hear it— and a skunk gotta lift its tail from time to time and let fly, just so the other critters will know it’s there.

Don’t waste time asking “why?” You’ll just create after-the-fact rationalizations anyway. Don’t ask ‘why?’ Fly! Swim! Stink! Write!
The meaning of “The Lone Wolf”

My parents had the print shown here prominently displayed in all the houses they lived in from the 1920s-1950s. I don’t know when or where they acquired the picture; I know its provenance only since they departed this world. My oldest brother took possession and then one of his daughters.

The original painting, “The Lone Wolf,” is by Alfred von Wierusz-Kowalski (1849-1915). Born in Poland, the artist studied in Warsaw and Dresden before entering Munich Academy of Fine Arts and settling in Munich. His work won numerous awards and was sought by private collectors as well as art dealers in Germany and the United States. In 1890, Kowalski became an honorary professor of the Munich Academy. His paintings are now found in Polish museums.

Kowalski’s body of work is impressive, stunning detailed images of European peasantry in the late 1800s. An Internet source reports that the artist’s family had once been attacked by wolves. That sounds plausible, for wolves are common in his paintings: lone wolves, wolves in packs, wolves pursuing or attacking men and horses. Many of the paintings are wintertime, with snow and ice and horse-drawn sleighs in bleak landscapes.

The Lone Wolf was one of the most popular home decorating items of the early 20th Century. The print came in different views; the wolf sometimes faced right, sometimes left. When the list it on eBay, sellers call the buildings a camp, a ranch, or a village. The least common of the prints shows mountains in the background, a lake or river, and the buildings. Some show a single building. In a discussion board on the Internet, anonymous writers discussed the meaning behind the painting.

* The austere and cold imagery is an illustration of the coldness of the world . . .
  one not connected to God or his fellowman. Subconsciously, ignorantly, or willfully we choose to live in a way that leaves us out in the cold.

* An image of the darkness of man's soul.
* Meant to portray one’s strength during solitude and change.
* He speaks to our soul and to those who do not understand that all beings, even the most savage, are entitled to acceptance, compassion, and purpose.
* The wolf may be a father, or a mother. Neither is afraid of death, for it is inevitable, but mindful and most intelligently watchful of what is and what has been already.
* A symbol of hope.
* One obvious theme is the harshness of winter and the survival drive of the wolf.
* Are the cabins symbolic of the intrusion of humans into the wolf's territory and the impending end of the wolf's rule?

One could repeatedly speculate about the artist’s intent. He obviously had a connection to wolves. For me, the scene is peaceful. It reminds me of Christmas—Silent night, all is calm, all is bright. And the picture is a link to the past—to a quiet rural life in the Midwest, where The Lone Wolf graced our parlor wall and lingers still somewhere in my family.
Extra Innings #28

In which we celebrate writers, their enablers, and those who risked it all for love

Madison, Wisconsin February, 2012

Our lineup: Madonna Dries Christensen, Rex Owens, Jacob McLaughlin, Robert Hale, Ron Hevey, and Perry Stone, with Jan Kent as the Word Whisperer,

Poetry from Betsy Lawson
Web Weaver: Celeste Anton
Fisher of the Internet: Steve Born
Editor-in-Coach: Marshall J. Cook,
Professor Emeritus, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Continuing Studies.

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

Extra Innings comes to you through the good graces of the writing program at continuing studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison, led by Christine DeSmet. Find out about workshops, courses, conferences, and critiques services at: www.dcs.wisc.edu/lsa/writing

Extra Innings is a proud booster of
Write by the Lake
The Writers Institute
The School of the Arts at Rhinelander
Weekend with your Novel
and the Odyssey Project

No added sugar, carbs, trans-fats, or taste. 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, chiasmus, charisma, metanoia, paranoia, trace metaphors and the occasional halfwitticism.

Back issues available at: www.dcs.wisc.edu/lsa/writing/extrainnings

THE WORD WHISPERER
JAN KENT

“I” and “me”: round two

Last time we pondered I and me, (The Easter bunny gave eggs to Sue and me,) and me emerged as the champ. That's because we were talking about pronouns as objects.

Make them subjects, though, and everything changes. The same rule of "take out the proper name and the and" still applies, but the results are different.

"That little rat, Arthur, and me both got detentions for fighting at school even though I was just standing there." (“Me got a detention...”?)

"You and me can do anything we put our minds to.” (“Me can do anything...”???)

Me thinks the Whisperer doth protest too much.

Lessons from little kids
1) No matter how hard you try, you can't baptize cats..
2) When your mom is mad at your dad, don't let her brush your hair.
3) If your sister hits you, don't hit her back.
   They always catch the second person.
4) Never ask your 3-year old brother to hold a tomato.
5) You can't trust dogs to watch your food.
6) Don't sneeze when someone is cutting your hair..
7) Never hold a Dust-Buster and a cat at the same time.
8) You can't hide a piece of broccoli in a glass of milk.
9) Don't wear polka-dot underwear under white shorts.
10) The best place to be when you're sad is Grandma’s lap.

![Business Hours Sign](image)
The literary world is over-flowing with “suffering” authors who have anguished, bled, screamed, slammed their heads, kicked the cat, strode the floor with purpose, strode the floor with no purpose, stared at the sun, stared at the moon, stared at the stars…

Enough! Suffer, all ready, just don’t tell me about it! Admit what’s happening – you’re just damned stuck!

Got it? You’re stuck.

Get your asterisks in gear! Start writing, all ready! Now! Just go!

I’ve been re-reading Stephen King’s, On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft, which has been on and off my shelf several dozen times since 2000. I bought it, not for additional intense writings lessons, but because King wrote about his near-death experience when struck by a car. He came this close to death! Very few parts of his body did not get smashed, broken, crushed, ripped, bloody. King was convinced he was dying. He accepted his death on the way to the hospital.

King’s memoir puts anguish, pain, and despair in proper perspective, and certainly in proper context. Writing is not that context! Pain and anguish experienced by a lot of writers, says King, is artifice. So are a lot of books on writing!

“This is a short book because most books about writing are filled with bullshit!” Any questions? “One notable exception to the bullshit rule is The Elements of Style, by William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White.”

King points to Strunk and White’s Rule 17: “Omit needless words.” Excellent starting point.

For the sake of brevity – if it isn’t all ready too late – let’s do a short tick list – just some teases to lead you to King.

*No telephone in your writing room! Yikes! Who among us has to fortitude to pull the plug?

*A thousand words a day! Can you keep the door closed for that long?

* Space: King says a writer can do it almost anywhere, but stay away from library carrels, park benches, and rented flats. “[M]ost of us do our best in a place of our own. Until you get one, you’ll find your new resolution to write a lot harder to take seriously.”

* “Read.” “If you don’t have time to read, you don’t have time (or the tools) to write.”

* All right, Stephan, what to write about?

“Work!”

People love to read about work. God knows why, but they do. If you’re a plumber who enjoys science fiction, you might well consider a novel about a plumber aboard a spaceship…

King’s last chapter is on editing, a logical placement, for sure. Once an editor called me and asked what draft I was on.

“ ‘The 21st,’” I said

“Good grief! Send it in. You have to be close after all that. The knife can be honed only so sharp.”

I sent it in. The editor made a one-word change. I’d honed it as well as I could but didn’t realize it. In sum: there is a time to “send it in.”

Working with one of his previously published pieces, King provides an excellent mini-course in really good, tight editing. King assumes some degree of professionalism on our part.

* Brevity: Consider this piece merely a “starter kit.” King, in his brevity, will overflow your bucket. Keep his counsel next to you during your next writing outing. Refer to it frequently-- coffee breaks can be productive!

* Brevity- again: I’m moving on. Much more is to be mined from King’s book. Read it a few times. Read it once just for the shear pleasure of reading King; a second time for the drama sprinkled throughout the book; a third time to learn something about the craft of writing! Even if you’re meeting the King for the 10th time, you will turn up something new and exciting.

This guy is good!
**Bullpen Blurbs**

**E.I. authors unveil new books**

*Enlarged Hearts*, by Kathie Giorgio


This follows Kathie’s acclaimed first novel, *The Home for Wayward Clocks*, which came out a year ago, both from Main Street Rag Publishing.

Kathie is the founder and director of the AllWriters’ Workplace & Workshop.

Author Kelly Cherry calls this new story collection “fascinating, funny, and deeply--I mean deeply--moving...It's impossible not to lose your own heart to one who loves so freely.”

The series of linked stories is set in a specialty boutique called Large & Luscious in Milwaukee. The women who work there, while of different ages and backgrounds and hair color and heritage, all carry the same name: The Fat Girl.

Their stories takes us through cancer and sex, motherhood and death, rejection and acceptance. There are Fat Girls at the state fair, Fat Girls in Starbucks, and Fat Girls in bars, in bed, and alone.

All readers, regardless of size and gender, can learn that there is so much more to a Fat Girl than her weight.

Copies are available from the publisher and from the usual outlets.


Link: [http://www.mainstreetrag.com/KGiorgio_2.html](http://www.mainstreetrag.com/KGiorgio_2.html)


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For more information, contact Kathie Giorgio at 262-446-0284, editor M. Scott Douglas of Main Street Rag Publishing at 704-573-2516, or publicist Liz Ridley at 414-476-9925.

*Virgin Hall*, by Janet Taliaferro

Four women meet at Southern Methodist University in their freshman year, 1951. The book follows them from that time until they meet again 30 years later.

Is the tale autobiographical? “No!” Janet says, although she does admit to having had eight (not four) bff’s on the third floor of Virginia Hall (thus the book’s title) in college, but “None of the events happened to any of them or to me.”

The novel started out as a short story, and Janet liked the characters so much that, “in a moment of weakness, I gave them their own book.”

It took forever to write, she says, but then, that’s what we were put here to do, right?

You can get a copy as an ebook or in print from the publishers, CreateSpace, or download it at the Kindle, iTunes, or Nook stores. Visit Janet’s website at [www.janetmtaliaferro.com](http://www.janetmtaliaferro.com) to learn more about her and her other books and get on her mailing list at: [http://janetmtaliaferro.com/email-signup](http://janetmtaliaferro.com/email-signup)
**Book of Laws, by John Swift**

Also just out from CreateSpace and available just about anywhere and in any format, John Swift’s new mystery, *Book of Laws*, presents us with a pastor who turns up HIV-positive, pregnant and murdered. And there are no lack of suspects-- and that’s just within her own congregation.

Sheriff Gogebic is coming up for reelection in 90 days, and his prospects are bleak if he can’t get this sucker solved. Are his problems over when three younger women step forward with clues and offers-- or are they just beginning?

I’ll bet you can guess the answer to that one, but you probably won’t be able to anticipate all the twists and turns John gives his plot.

“If you like Nelson DeMille, Michael Connelly, or John Sandford mysteries,” John notes, “you might be able to endure this one, not nearly as well written, of course, but it has its moments. I had a lot of fun writing it, and if you get half as much from its reading, we’ll both be happy.”

He promises plenty of sex and cussing, murder and mayhem, so don’t buy this one for the kids, but do buy it for yourself. Check it out at: https://www.createspace.com/3726942.

**The Way It Was: not so long ago in a country not so far away, by Hilde Wohl Adler**

Hilde wrote her marvelous memoir so that folks might know what life was like for German Jews before Hitler. It’s a loving remembrance of her parents, the undaunted father, who died shortly after the family immigrated to America, and the mother who never talked about Germany.

“I’m not a historian,” Hilde readily admits. “I’m not qualified to write about anything historical.” But she did live the life and, in writing about what she calls “unimportant, insignificant episodes, as seen through the eyes of a child. ... I was hoping these stories might shed a small ray of light on what the life was really like. And on the way it disappeared.”

She does that and more in this rich, loving book, which includes wonderful photos. It’s a family treasure and an historical document for all.

**and speaking of book authors...**

This in from our own Rex Owens, still awaiting publication of his first novel, *Murphy’s Troubles*, fro Mischievous Muse Press: The *Writer Magazine* is celebrating it’s 125th year of publication. As part of their celebration they invited readers to send in stories on how the magazine has changed their lives. In mid-December Rex submitted an article, and early in the new year he got word that it had been accepted. The piece will be published in the May edition.

“I am the living example of beginner's luck,” Rex says. I say someday Rex is going to figure out that he’s a fine writer.

**Ron Hevey** placed a story in the Writer’s Digest Genre Short Story contest, placing 20th for the second year in a row. His piece is “Reflections of an Altar Boy.”

“They got some 11,800 entries in 10 categories, so I am very pleased,” Ron notes, and well he should be! Congratulations!
My wife and I managed to continue our regular attendance at our athletic club through the holidays, a first. We didn’t do it to justify gluttonous meals or to chase after some unattainable goal like losing 75 lbs. We did it out of habit, and it makes us feel good and keeps us healthy enough to enjoy life.

Once again this January the parking lot was packed, and the workout included the quarter mile trek from the car to the front door. Inside, the various exercise machines, free weight rooms, racquetball courts, swimming pools, sauna, whirlpool and basketball courts were filled with new faces. The typical aspirant was 30–75 pounds overweight, and as they exercised, they became as flush as a ripe plum. Not a pleasant sight, but you have to give people credit for making a resolution and making positive changes in their lives.

Most years the New Year’s Fitness Resolution crowd diminishes by February and vanishes by March because their three-month trial membership expires and their resolve has gone to the resolution graveyard of New Year’s past.

This year the exodus has come much faster. By mid-January the newbies, those once resolute fitness mongers, were nowhere to be found, racquetball courts were empty, and there were at least 30 machines available. The weight room is again like an empty cave.

What happened?

Resolutions typically take the form of changing something about ourselves and the way we live. Thinking of all the folks at the athletic club who couldn’t maintain their resolution for a month, I began to suspect that something was terribly wrong. So I decided to take the writer’s approach and look at the language. I was inspired by a comment from one of my LinkedIn writer’s group members, who suggested scrapping “resolutions” and replacing them with “intentions.”

This author suggested that resolutions have a built in self-destruct mechanism with a short fuse.

So, what’s the distinction between a resolution and an intention? According to my 40 year old *Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, a true and trusted friend, a resolution means a decision, a determination, an expression of will. So I could say my resolution is to write every single day – no matter what. Ok, that’s a decision, but what’s missing? The how is missing, the plan.

By contrast, an intention has purpose, a plan, to proceed on a course. An intention includes ACTION, and a resolution doesn’t. If I say I intend to write every day, no matter what, I must have in mind a process for accomplishing my goal.

So language reveals the secret; resolutions fail because they’re only a decision and don’t include a plan on how to achieve the resolution; they lack purpose to create motivation. To live an intentional life requires self-awareness (not self-absorption) and a purpose with actions designed to fulfill the intention.

My intention to write every single day no matter what became: write before e-mail, before Facebook, and before LinkedIn writer groups. For me, it has worked. Having survived at least five false starts on my current manuscript, I’m now 40 pages into it and rolling along and have written a timeline to guide me.

I’ll never make another New Year’s Resolution, but I will live intentionally.
Barbara got Gary’s point, despite the editing

Bullpen Mail Bag

Marsh,
I have nothing but admiration for how you handled this sticky situation. (“Not everybody was happy with the last issue,” January, 2012) Mr. Dries came down awfully hard on you, and you didn't deserve it. His feelings were well communicated in his story (“Who were these guys,” December, 2011) and if you were 'editorializing' by removing those few words, it was so subtle that I didn't catch it-- not that I'm the brightest bulb on the tree. (However, my IQ does fall into the three digit range if anyone really needs to know.)

If Mr. Dries wants to wave his flag and shoot his rifle, perhaps he'd be better off doing it on his own from now on. Though he might want to be careful doing two things at once. People sometimes become distracted by all that fluttering fabric and shoot themselves in the foot that way.

Barbara Burris

Perry would rather laugh than fight
Coach,
I enjoyed it. There was no doubt I would. ... I'm not a pacifist, but I do stumble among double digit IQers and am proud to read you are one of us.<G> Mostly I love to laugh and be happy. There have been unavoidable battles, at which times winning was the best scenario.

Meandering Madonna great as always.

Loved the smile page and reminisced on the only train ride I ever took. That was to KC for my army physical. We did get hobos stopping by the farm. They walked the tracks after getting thrown off or after finishing a field job, though the real hobos found work an insult.

Perry Stone

Betsy ponders Penn State with son
Dear Coach:
Ever the baseball fan, my eight-year-old saw Extra Innings in the masthead and asked what I was reading. (“What would Coach Taylor do?” December, 2011) Sports are the joy of his life as, I imagine, they were for those little boys at Penn State. My son's interest prompted a difficult, but necessary, talk about what is and isn't appropriate behavior for coaches and other adults in positions of authority.

Thank you, Marsh, for channeling your disappointment and rage at the horror allowed to transpire at Penn State into words. Through writing, sharing, talking, and acting we can make the real world a little safer, a little kinder – just like Coach Taylor did in the fictional world of Dillon.

From the heart of Red Sox Nation,

Betsy Lawson

Larry lets loose with new year’s rant
Hey, Coach.
Just finished reading The Lacuna. Found it slow to get into but by midway through I was hooked. I've always found we need to be reminded of our failings as a way of (hopefully) not returning to them. We make enough errors without repeats.

Also saw the movie, The Help. Excellent! I highly recommend it for much the same reasons. I wish they'd do something more on the way Japanese-Americans and German-Americans were forced into concentration camps during WWII with no hint of guilt, much like the artists and wordsmiths noted in The Lacuna.

Another of my dislikes is the sanitizing of historical literature like Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer. How the hell can you rewrite history just because you don't like it? Like a couple of Iranian and Venezuelan idiots claiming the Holocaust didn't happen. Taking 'nigger' out of Twain's work is like denying the word ever existed. We probably won't agree much on some current affairs, but it's not much worth arguing over.

Now I have my first-of-the-year rant over and hope the rest of it goes well for both of us. Take care, my friend.

Larry Tobin
Obituaries of “ordinary people” paint compelling portrait of America

In preparing a special section for the New York Times Sunday Magazine on non-famous people who died during 2011, Isabel Wilkerson searched obituaries from more than 750 newspapers across America. She was struck by one phrase that kept popping up in obits of folks aged 35 to 102: “The first African-American to...”

These included:

**Walter Tharp Jr.**, the first African-American window dresser and Wolf & Desauer’s Department Store, Fort, Wayne, Indiana;

**Walter Lee**, the first African-American postal clerk in Winter Park, Florida;

**John Howard**, the first African-American salesman in Cherry Hill, New Jersey;

**Adolph Hall**, the first African-American garage-door tech in Houston;

**Bayleas Bingham**, the first African-American female school-bus driver in Newport News, Virginia;

**Leon Gates**, the first African-American agent for Heavy Construction Laborers’ Union Local 663 in Kansas City, Missouri;

**Eugene Smith**, the first African-American licensee as a plumber and master electrician in Spartanburg, South Carolina;

**Travis Lucas**, the first African-American paramedic for the Naval Station Great Lakes Fire Department, Lake County, Illinois;

**Jimmie Nolcox**, the first African-American reserve sheriff deputy hired in Gibson County, Indiana;

**Donald Dickerson**, the first African-American firefighter in Statesboro, Georgia;

**Pressie Frentress**, the first African-American mail carrier for the Grey Iron Foundry in Saginaw, Michigan;

**Majorie Grevious**, the first African-American licensed as a funeral director and embalmer in the Commonwealth of Kentucky;

**Wilbert Coleman**, the first African-American narcotics detective in Hackensack, New Jersey;

and the list goes on and on.

Ms. Wilkerson concludes: Sometime in the future, the phrase will be invoked for the biggest first of all, the first African-American elected to the Oval Office, a designation that surely the first milk-delivery man and the first postal clerk and the first business agent for Heavy Construction Laborers’ Union Local 663 in Kansas City, Missouri, had, upon consideration, more than a little something to do with.

Isabel Wilkerson is the first African-American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in journalism.
As 15 year-old Madisonians in 1956, we put out a neighborhood paper called The BADGER. It was an immediate success. How The BADGER ended still bugs me, enough so that I have put off writing its story for over a year.

We plunged ahead based on two advantages: a ‘printing press’ and an abundance of newspaper boys. My mother’s business provided the mighty Gestetner mimeograph, and three of us pedaled papers.

The BADGER’s size doubled in five months, from four to eight pages, with 10 advertisers and 146 customers. We hadn’t tested the market, but we were on the right track, we thought.

‘Newspaper’ was stretching it; newsletter, flyer or pamphlet better described The BADGER, but whatever you called it, the neighborhood enjoyed our tantalizing stories.

The incumbent alderman in our East Side neighborhood reluctantly gave us an interview. His challenger (who favored the Monona Terrace, Madison’s ongoing controversy) enthusiastically cooperated with us and won the election. Had we changed the neighborhood’s political landscape?

We had Cartoons, Lawn Care Tips, Society News, Madison History, Baby Sitter listings and East Side Business Men’s Association clips, plus ads such as the nutritional one that stressed “We Are What We Eat.” We even had an ad for a Hudson car radio.

Eight pages grew to 12 and then 16; advertisers topped out at 17 and customers at 233. For anyone familiar with the Gestetner, that’s eight stencils and three-plus reams of paper, printed, folded and stapled feeding three paper routes twice a month. Daunting. Any business with a clue would have at least raised advertising prices a buck or two. Each copy of The BADGER was still value-priced at 5 cents. Did the dinosaurs experience such a growth spurt sixty-six million years ago?

Use of the name Badger did not become an issue in 1956. East Side happenings traveled westward slowly to a UW that had not yet entered a litigious age. No, our problems were more basic, like total lack of publishing experience, business judgment, and common sense.

Work flow, paid workers (that’s right, no one got paid) and the art of kind and gentle editing - all foreign concepts. We lacked a model such as Marshall’s Extra Innings to guide us. Twice-monthly was insane; monthly or quarterly might have kept us going a while longer.

Fifteen going on sixteen year-old interests turn 180 degrees without notice. The original team of Rick, Dave and Dick became Butch, Howard, Dicky and Donnie within six months. One kid’s eleven year-old brother (name withheld) was drafted to deliver newspapers; he kept the money he collected.

We missed putting out the paper one week. The workload had become humongous, not to mention the nuns at Edgewood wanted to see some homework. During the next week or so of ‘reassessment,’ customers started calling. We came to realize our newspaper days were over. Quitting made the most sense.

It wasn’t over yet. Customers demanded their paper. Their phone calls reminded us that we had created an expectation and we had a responsibility to continue. But we could not. Mrs. Dempsey – she lived next door, so it was impossible to duck her – came to the house, demanding, “Where is my paper?” Humility was in order. We were too big not to fail.

One of the lessons we learned proved useful later in the corporate world: don’t try to grow faster than you can handle and promise only what you can make happen.
I have never paid over $10 for a book, and that was a Wisconsin Engine Service Manuel. An expensive purchase, but it saved me hundreds of dollars in mechanic bills. I researched repairs methodically for over five years. Finally, the book went with the Yazoo mower when I sold it.

Since then the county library has loaned me many books for both learning and pleasure. It has gone so far as to order several, not yet on their shelves, literary wonders upon request.

Another of my sources of affordable reading is Aunt Mary. She shops 'The Eccentric,' a local new & used store in Joplin, Missouri that deals in books, movies, CD's, baseball cards and other collectibles. Mary brings a couple sacks of books every month or two for me to read, re-sack and return. The cycle goes full when Auntie again dickers with 'The Eccentric', bartering 2 for 3 or 3 for 5. Book barter is a wonderful way to dabble in frugalization.

I can learn a lot from the latest $5.95 Ralph Compton and Dusty Richard westerns. All authors are teachers in their right, or their wrong. Style is supported, or refuted, by others’ attempts to counterfeit proven methods as well as unconventional ones.

Compton often has disappointing endings, but they’re true to life’s possibilities. The final page brings a response of "Well crap!" from me, but I enjoy the novel despite the ending. Compton's reads are honest and believable fiction that bring me back again and again. And it's a tutoring worthy of much more than five dollars and ninety-five cents, considering the lessons between the lines.

The same can be said for Dusty's westerns. Richards once advised if a protagonist rides to the top of a ridge, he better get shot at when he reaches the skyline, or his horse better step on a snake. Meaning, I believe, you have to keep the reader interested and wondering. It might seem inevitable that the more interest and wonder offered the worthier the work is for the price.

The used book stores and the aunt Mary's, who trade books at a fraction of original price, supply an economical opportunity far beyond an enjoyable read.

The obvious reason to read is for story. Good verses evil. Love conquers all. Having heart and doing right prevail in the end. Doing bad is good—when done for the right reasons. The lure of story has endless possibilities.

For me as a reading writer, the opportunity to compound the worth of any book goes far beyond story. Often times, renowned and unknown scribes alike challenge past and present teachings. $100 words popping-up become an English lesson to absorb, not a spot to skip over. Mutant words take on meaning. Whether the words come from a professional or a dilettante, within each word hides potential wealth beyond story. Take the time, follow all tangents. Don't just close the book at story's end.

The more read, the more learned.

Even Service Manuals can prove far more worthy than just a mechanic's guide. I used mine as a model to write an operation manual on the automated lathe at work. The plant superintendent liked it so well, he kept it in his office for new employees after I was fired.

Bless you and yours, coach
Paw Joe

***

lucubration

\lOO-kyoo-BRAY-shun; loo-kuh-F
noun: The act of studying by candlelight; nocturnal study; meditation. That which is composed by night; that which is produced by meditation in retirement; hence (loosely) any literary composition. Latin lucubrātiōn (stem of lūcubrātiō ) night-work.
I may have had my top ten list last month, but I didn't get to see *The Artist* until early January, and it tops everything I saw in 2011 and is now perhaps one of my top films of all time.

Silent films are still very enjoyable and impressive. I think anything I have seen of Chaplin's is better than just about everything that is released in this day and age.

**The majority of films today can't compare to the classics, but there are still a few gems that capture the magic of them.** *The Artist* is one of those gems. This film is a perfect tribute to the silent era.

The film starts in 1927. Silent film star George Valentin (played by a wonderful Jean Dujardin) is at the premiere of his latest film. Afterwards outside the theater, he's taking pictures and signing autographs, when a young woman named Peppy Miller (a fantastic Bérénice Bejo) drops her purse and is accidently pushed in front of Valentin. He laughs and gets a picture with her. She appears in the paper the next day and auditions as a dancer. Valentin spots her and is able to get her a part in the next film he's working on with Kinograph Studios.

She becomes a star as the talkie age begins. Valentin laughs at the idea of talking pictures, but he starts to realize that the silent era is coming to an end.

The entire story is excellent and the climax of the film is more exciting than anything I've seen in recent memory.

The cast is great. Everyone in the film makes us forget that it was made just last year and not during the early 1900s. The facial expressions alone say more than most words could. Dujardin and Bejo definitely deserve any nominations they get. James Cromwell plays his usual kind-hearted role as Valentin's loyal driver. John Goodman plays Al Zimmer, the boss of Kinograph Studios. It's always nice to see Goodman on the big screen.

The other two elements that really bring the film to life are the magnificent score by Ludovic Bource and the gorgeous cinematography from Guillaume Schiffman. The score really heightens the excitement and wonder of the film, and the cinematography gives it the perfect feel of a 1920s silent film.

I absolutely love *The Artist*. It's the best film of last year by a long shot, and it certainly deserves all the praise it has been getting. Director Michel Hazanavicius takes us on a magnificent journey back to the age of the silent film.

I can guarantee that this is going to be the best picture winner at the Oscars this year. Go see this film without hesitation. For an hour and a half, I didn't even notice the lack of sound, and that was just fine.

**Siri says**

**New phone app knows (almost) all**

Siri, the new “personal assistant” voice recognition technology on the iPhone 4S, is programmed to answer all sorts of questions, serious and otherwise. Because “she” has a voice that many men find sexy, many have asked: “What are you wearing?”

To which Sari replies: “Why do people keep asking me that?”

Profess your love for her, and she’ll assure you: “You are the wind beneath my wings.”

Express your love again, and she says, “I hope you don’t say that to those other mobile phones.”

To the age-old riddle, “Why did the chicken cross the road?” Siri admits her limits: “I’m not perspicacious about the peregrinations of poultry.”
Imaginary Football

The gift of new pajamas
fuzzy with feet; worn all day.
The boy plays
imaginary football
in the living room.
From the bleachers of the
couch,
mom holds the headlines,
half watching. Delighted.

The solo game continues;
he's unstoppable in joy.
Until words he doesn't
understand
take captive his attention.
What happened at Penn State?
Boys, too, were they.
What should have been safe,
stolen. Where to begin?

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