The obituary read like a mother’s worst nightmare of a son’s life—except for one salient fact: the subject of the piece was a well-known novelist and essayist. Thus the prominent obituary in the *New York Times* (March 30, 2012).

As portrayed by obit writer Margalit Fox, **Harry Crews**, who died at 76 from complications of neuropathy, was a Marine, a boxer, a bouncer, a Barker, a drunk, an all-around roustabout, a tough kid from the Okefenokee Swamps of Alma, Georgia where, he once wrote, “there wasn’t enough cash money in the county to close up a dead man’s eyes.”

“I was so humiliated by the fact that I was from the edge of the Okefenokee Swamp in the worst hookworm and rickets part of Georgia, I could not bear to think of it,” he wrote in an *Esquire* magazine essay years later.

“Nearly everybody I knew had something missing,” he wrote in his memoir: “a finger cut off, a toe split, an ear half-chewed away, an eye clouded with blindness ... And if they didn’t have something missing, they were carrying scars from barbed wire, or knives, or fishbooks.”

(Quoted in an appraisal of Crews’ life and work by *NY Times* critic Dwight Garner the day after the obituary appeared.)

His daddy was a tenant farmer who died before Harry turned two, after which his mama married his daddy’s brother, a violent alcoholic. Then life for young Harry got even worse when, at about five years old, he got real sick— it might have been polio but he was never sure. He saw lots of faith healers but no doctors. Whatever it was it left his legs paralyzed and in perpetual spasm.

The disease left him as mysteriously as it had come, but then he fell into a cauldron of scalding water that sloughed his skin off.

Joining the Marines at age 17 must have seemed like a picnic after his childhood.

He picked up several tattoos along the way, some of which he didn’t remember getting. One, prominently displayed on his right arm, depicted a skull with the words “How do you like your blue-eyed boy, Mr. Death?” a line from the e.e. cummings poem “buffalo bill’s defunct.”

**But with the help of the Corps, Harry started to turn things around. After three years in the service, he went to the U of Florida on the G.I. Bill and found something to pour his energy and his anguish into.**

As a kid, he’d escaped his miseries by leafing through the Sears Roebuck catalog— the only book in the house and possibly the county—writing stories about the perfect people pictured in its pages. In college he started writing stories again, this time with a mentor, novelist Andrew Lytle. He got his degree and followed up with a master’s in education.

He married a classmate, Sally, they divorced, got married again, had two sons, Byron and Patrick-- but continued his life of constant sorrows when Patrick drowned when he was just four years old.

starring Southern sideshow freaks, midgets, lunatics, and sociopaths-- kind of Flannery O'Connor (whom Professor Lytle had also taught) on meth.

His memoir, *A Childhood: The Biography of a Place*, published in 1978, laid out the black comedy and despair of his life, making his fiction seem almost tame.

“Everything I had written had been out of a fear and loathing for what I was and who I was. It was all out of an effort to pretend otherwise,” he wrote in that *Esquire* article.

Along the way he taught writing at the University of Florida in Gainesville and acquired a devoted following for his fiction. Other books included the novels *The Hawk is Dying*, *The Gypsy’s Curse*, *The Knockout Artist*, and *Celebration*.

He finally stopped drinking in the late 1980s.

“I had an ex-wife and I had an ex-kid and I had an ex-dog and I had an ex-house and I’m an ex-drunk,” he said in an interview in the *NY Times* in 2006. “I’ve supported whores and dopers and drunks and bartenders. Thank God I don’t do that anymore.”

About his epic drinking, he wrote:

“Alcohol whipped me. Alcohol and I had many, many marvelous times together. We laughed, we talked, we danced at the party together; then one day I woke up and the band had gone home and I was lying in the broken glass with a shirt full of puke and I said, “Hey, man, the ball game’s up.’”

Crews’ life would hardly seem to serve as a blueprint for literary success-- except maybe for the part about going to the university and studying creative writing with a master. But the fact is, lots of our best and most famous writers have similar stories to tell-- poverty, disease, and neglect in childhood, drugs and a series of mean menial jobs to support both the drugs and the writing. Some can add mental illness to the resume, others a stretch in jail. Some ran off from home early and hopped freights. Others sailed the seas trying to find themselves.

They all found their redemption in words-- reading them and writing them. For some, the Carnegie Library was their university, their syllabus whatever books they could lay their hands on.

Is the hard life a prerequisite for a writer? If you come up easy, the ‘victim’ of a happy home and devoted parents, are you doomed never to produce great art? Of course not. But the fact remains, an awful lot of writers have turned the nightmares of a cruel life into stories that will live for as long as human beings live on the earth.
In beginning this monthly column, I planned to keep it humorous, yet there’s another sort of ‘funny,’ meaning ‘odd,’ so allow me to explore a matter that both engages and enrages me. 

I’m a bookie—for literature, not horses. Twice a year my library has a massive sale which starts fairly expensively in the morning but at noon promptly reduces prices to a dollar a bag for books of every sort. This is a wonderful bargain, and so far so good.

But here’s the rub—which for me takes part of the pleasure out of acquiring new titles. The library sets its own books out for sale— but not donated books. These they brand in large black letters— "DISCARDED."

This unfortunate message seems to declare such tomes as being unworthy and worthless. The individual volume may be last year’s best-seller, a respected mystery, or a simple children’s tale, yet it is labeled as if of no value.

Sure, libraries need to recycle books. New publications come along; old titles cease to be checked out, so rotation happens. But why brand a book DISCARDED? For a minor sum office supply stores can make an ink stamp that reads “RELEASED,” which offers a positive message.

Prisoners are released, not dumped. So with a rescued bird: we encourage it to soar. In a similar manner let surplus volumes be released! Such a book needn’t be a classic or ‘important’; it simply needs to hook up with someone to love and respect it.

Releasing rather than discarding a book seems most timely when teachers and educators deplore America’s literacy level. Scholars moan that online communications ignore spelling, punctuation, and complex language. If we don’t want ignorance in charge, let’s respect all reading material, keeping books (and magazines, too) both easy to obtain and treated with courtesy. Through pleasure reading educates us!

Wanting to do my part to foster the welfare of books, I’ve written a plea, aimed at librarians and others, to respect authors and the effort they put into print. A poem offering a message or moral is called didactic. Alas, some efforts are goody-goody preachy. But a serious message can contain humor, so don’t be averse to this verse!

**PLEASE DISCARD “DISCARD”!**

“I shall be released.” —Words from a Spiritual

Don’t stamp books “Discarded,”
But declare them “Released.”

You may not need them yet they’re not yet deceased,
For a book stays alive
If one person on earth
Desires it and claims it
As still holding worth.

Please, dear librarians,
Don’t puzzle your readers:
“Discarded” means worthless yet you are our leaders,
Along with strong teachers
Plus all who love reading;
You’re meant to be role models;
Yes, up-front and leading.

By small cost of buying
One new rubber stamp
You’ll help to keep lighted Book-learning’s bright lamp.

Old books are not worthless
When new ones are printed.

Let readers embrace all,
Having choices unstinted!
We don’t throw our Seniors
Heave-ho in the bin

Of green-monster dumpsters;
Trashing books, too, a sin!

………..

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**FOR THE LOVE OF WORDS**
**ESTHER M. LEIPER-ESTABROOKS**

**A book should be released, never discarded!**
Last month I wrote about a teenager who developed an art program for school children with special needs. I’ve since spoken to a teenager who spearheaded another project close to my heart—restoring St. Anne’s Catholic Cemetery in Deerfield, Wisconsin, where some of my ancestors are buried.

St. Anne’s Church was founded in 1855 to serve Irish immigrants. The parish lasted only 20 years. The settlers had, as a group, moved to Iowa, lured by the Homestead Act’s free 160 acres of rich land. The church was razed in 1881, leaving the cemetery abandoned.

In 1995 my niece visited the forlorn cemetery and found the top half of Jane Reed O’Brien’s headstone and others arranged in a mini-Stonehenge formation. John McLaughlin’s broken headstone sat propped against a tree, surrounded by overgrown grass and wild flowers. Given that the entire place lay in shambles, with no sign of resurrection, Jean took a corner of the tombstone as a keepsake. When she moved out of the country she gave it to me. It’s in the ground along the walkway by our front door.

Although Eagle Scout Nick Collar of Deerfield’s Troop 88 has no family connection to the cemetery, he decided something should be done. He devised a plan and enlisted help from individuals, businesses, and his church. Within months, the team completed the work.

Dealing with 129 years of neglect, they cleared the wooded area that had encroached on the grounds—removed trees, limbs, and brush, sprayed weeds, and seeded the area with grass.

Nick wanted to do more—restore or replace headstones and locate where they belonged. There are some 25 to 30 graves, but with the markers broken and scattered, no one knew where they belonged. The Madison Catholic Diocese found a hand drawn map from 1970 showing where some of the sites are located. It also showed the footprints of where the church stood.

Nick sought help from civil engineer Jeff Quamme and his company, Vierbicher & Associates. They surveyed the area and covered it with ground penetrating radar. This showed the location of the graves. Nick says that while the map is not official and he can’t guarantee accuracy, when they began carefully digging in those areas they hit tombstone foundations.

After Nick pieced together broken headstones, like a giant jigsaw puzzle, Pechman Memorials in Madison assisted in repairing, refinishing, or replacing the markers. Those with names were put in place according to the map. John McLaughlin’s partially restored marker stands proudly upright again.

Eric Gestland, artist and assistant Scoutmaster, created a sign, designed by Nick. Lastly, the cemetery needed to be assigned to a church for maintenance. The Cambridge church Nick attends, St. Pius X Catholic Church, accepted responsibility.

In addition to the already mentioned individuals and businesses that donated time, services, and funds, credit goes to Deerfield Farmer’s Co-op; Deerfield Lions Club; and Unilock Corporation of Elkhorn.

Nick Collar’s thoughtfulness and diligence is a gift to the community as well as to the families whose ancestors lie beneath the Wisconsin soil that many of them tilled more than a century ago.

Nick told me, modestly, “Sometimes when I drive past, I’m kind of impressed.”

I’m highly impressed and told him so.

Madonna’s previous column about the cemetery appeared in the January 2011 issue of Extra Innings.
So you think you got a bad job review
Taken from actual Australian Federal Government employee performance evaluations
Thanks to Larry Tobin

1) "Since my last report, this employee has reached rock-bottom and has started to dig."
2) "I would not allow this employee to breed."
3) "This employee is really not so much of a has-been, but more of a definite won't be."
4) "Works well when under constant supervision and cornered like a rat in a trap."
5) "When she opens her mouth, it seems that it is only to change feet."
6) "He would be out of his depth in a parking lot puddle."
7) "This young lady has delusions of adequacy."
8) "He sets low personal standards and then consistently fails to achieve them."
9) "This employee is depriving a village somewhere of an idiot."
10) "This employee should go far, and the sooner he starts, the better."
11) "Got a full 6-pack, but lacks the plastic thingy to hold it all together."
12) "A gross ignoramus...144 times worse than an ordinary ignoramus."
13) "He doesn't have ulcers, but he's a carrier."
14) "I would like to go hunting with him sometime."
15) "He's been working with glue too much."
16) "He would argue with a signpost."
17) "He brings a lot of joy whenever he leaves the room."
18) "When his IQ reaches 50, he should sell."
19) "If you see two people talking and one looks bored, he's the other one."
20) "A photographic memory but with the lens cover glued on."
21) "A prime candidate for natural de-selection."
22) "Donated his brain to science before he was through using it."
23) "Gates are down, the lights are flashing, but the train ain't coming."
24) "He's got two brains, one is lost and the other is out looking for it."
25) "If he were any more stupid, he'd have to be watered twice a week."
26) "If you give him a penny for his thoughts, you'd get change."
27) "If you stand close enough to him, you can hear the ocean."
28) "It's hard to believe he beat out 1,000,000 other sperm."
29) "One neuron short of a synapse."
30) "Some drink from the fountain of knowledge; he only gargled."
31) "Takes him 2 hours to watch '60 minutes'."
32) "The wheel is turning, but the hamster is dead."
Payers, Preyers, & Pretenders

Rex Owens

‘We are not alone’

Urban legend has it that writers are folks that are tied to their laptops or PC’s, sweating out one sentence at a time, all alone in the world, no matter what genre we write in.

Some choose to lug their computers to the local coffee shop and expose their creativity to the world or at least to the humanity of people sitting at nearby tables slurping coffee and talking with friends-- perhaps to assure themselves that real people do have friends. Others plop themselves in the coffee shop to eavesdrop on conversations, hoping to mine some exotic quip they can use in their work.

This ‘lone ranger’ view of writers is an outdated, romantic image that some, unfortunately, stubbornly cling to. In our virtual world there is no excuse for any writer to be alone.

On line writer communities are plentiful, and more pop up every day. Let me share a few that I participate in.

Several years ago I found Authors Advance. The basic service is free, but for a small fee (about $60 a year) you can get additional services. The site includes a wealth of research resources including publishers, agents, and freelance sources. It also allows you to create a public profile and post any of your work and have a blog. It has forum groups for dialogue with other writers. My experience is that this is a good site for research, but there is very little traffic in the forum groups.

Another site, Author’s Den, allows you to have an author’s page, not unlike the Amazon author’s page, for no fee. The site is easy to use and updates to your author’s page are very simple. It’s like having a webpage without having a webpage because the author controls all the content.

LinkedIn offers a variety of on-line writer’s groups. I belong to four: Writer’s Café; Aspiring Writers; Authors, Writers & Publishers; and Books & Writers. You must be invited to join the group and can apply to join each group. Each contains a different type of author with different interests. Aspiring Authors, for example, are newbies like me who ask a number of craft and marketing questions.

My experience with these groups has varied widely. In one group one of the members asked a question about the difference between using first person and ‘close third person.’ I was surprised that someone asked such a basic question, and I wasn’t familiar with the term ‘close third person.’ (I asked Marshall if he knew the term – he didn’t, I was relieved.) I commented on the post that the person should consider some writing courses and conferences before embarking on a writing career. His response was nasty, and he ordered me to stop posting on his thread. My intent was to be helpful, but I had unintentionally offended him.

In another group writers that work for Examiner.com were posting to get members to read their articles on the Examiner website. I was opposed to these posts because the purpose was to make money for the writer, (an Examiner writer is paid by the number of hits on their articles), not to contribute to the group’s dialogue. The Examiner writer had a personal response, contacted his Examiner buddies and they flooded the site with their articles – for one day. At that point the manager of the site stepped in and sent a post out that I was correct in my description of the purpose of the Examiner writers and they were being kicked off the site. That felt good.

From the other sites I’ve gleaned tips on marketing, book signings, sites that will book reviews for free, blogs that will interview new authors when their books are launched and a variety of excellent resource information.

The newest site is the Writers, Agents & Editors Network, started by New York Literary Agent Jeff Herman. To promote the site the first subscriptions were free, and I received one. The site exists to connect the three groups and for a writer provides an inside route to agents and publishers. Activity in the chat room has been sporadic, and generally Jeff Hermann himself has to pose questions for there to be any activity. The site also offers some resources, like a Query Writing program at reduced cost.

So, there you have it. Find a group, participate, and don’t be alone. If you’re a ‘lone ranger,’ it’s because you want to be.

Final note: SPAWN has accepted a rewrite of my May E.I. column for their June issue. I’ve really learned how to recycle articles!
FATALLY FLAWED
by Craig Steele

“I can’t use your poem; it’s fatally flawed.”
I know flawed is bad, so fatally must be worse.
But what does it mean to be fatally flawed:
too crippled to serve as intended;
infected with dangerous weakness;
worm-eaten beyond hope of salvation?
If so, I’m grateful God is not an editor.

“Fatally Flawed” was previously published in WRITERS’ Journal, May/June 2011. Published here with permission of the author.

CYBERSPRING
by Bonny Conway

Spiders create websites in tomato patches
begin uploading bugs for later consumption
sun texts Red Admirals to chat about lilacs
blooms are going viral spreading fructose through yards
May is nature's Facebook booting up with tulips, dandelions, and June.
Hackers failed miserably.
Punography: all intended

Thanks to Barry Reszel and Steve Born

A man walks into a bar with a slab of asphalt under his arm and says: "A beer please, and one for the road."

A dyslexic man walked into a bra.

Two cows are standing next to each other in a field. Daisy says to Dolly, "I was artificially inseminated this morning."

"I don't believe you," says Dolly. "It's true; no bull!" exclaims Daisy.

Deja Moo: The feeling that you've heard this bull before.

I went to a seafood disco last week and pulled a mussel.

What do you call a fish with no eyes? A fsh, of course.

Two fish swim into a concrete wall. The one turns to the other and says, "Dam!"

A dwarf, who was a mystic, escaped from jail. The call went out that there was a small medium at large.

A woman has twins, and gives them up for adoption. One of them goes to a family in Egypt, and is named 'Ahmal.' The other goes to a family in Spain; they name him 'Juan.' Years later, Juan sends a picture of himself to his birth mother. Upon receiving the picture, she tells her husband that she wishes she also had a picture of Ahmal. Her husband responds, "They're twins! If you've seen Juan, you've seen Ahmal."

When chemists die, they barium.

Mahatma Gandhi walked barefoot most of the time, which produced an impressive set of calluses on his feet. He also ate very little, which made him rather frail, and with his odd diet, he suffered from bad breath. This made him (oh, man, this is so bad, it's good) ... A super-calloused fragile mystic hexed by halitosis.

I know a guy who's addicted to brake fluid. He claims he can stop any time.

I stayed up all night to see where the sun went. Then it dawned on me.

This girl said she recognized me from the vegetarian club, but I'd never met herbivore.

I'm reading a book about anti-gravity, and I just can't put it down.

What do you call a dinosaur with an extensive vocabulary? A thesaurus.

I used to be a banker, but then I lost interest.

I got a job at a bakery because I kneaded dough.

Velcro - what a rip off!

Hear about the big earthquake in Washington D.C.? It was obviously was the government's fault.
Mere mention of the word ‘tornado’ scared me from early childhood. The words hurricane, earthquake, tsunami, meteorite or even nuclear attack were not that scary; the Russians had the bomb, but I do not recall scrambling for dear life under a desk to the sound of sirens. Tornado warnings I remember.

Tornados struck nearby, but not directly on Madison, in my experience. When one hit, we went to see the damage immediately. My first, in the mid 1940s, touched down on Lake Mendota’s north shore in a grove of cabins. Afterward, my dad, mother and I jumped in our fishing boat for the trip across the lake from Spring Harbor to find a cabin turned upside-down.

My memory is as vivid and real today as it was then. Picture a small wooden building, torn from its foundation, flipped topsy turvy, and seated on one surface of its gabled roof. The upside-down cabin leaned over at about forty-five degrees. Otherwise, the building was more or less unscathed.

My next tornado was a sad day for a farm family west of Madison whose young daughter perished. We drove by the place a number of times, shaking our heads at the unexplainable tragedy. What seemed out of place was the sunny, clear calm that followed the storm, another vivid memory. How could a terrible event be followed by such beauty? Every time I see survivors on TV picking through tornado wreckage on a sunny day, I am reminded of that fine-looking, but deadly, farm on a lonesome hill west of Madison.

My first tornado, the upside-down cabin on Lake Mendota, a non-killer tornado, did not make the Wisconsin Magazine of History Archives. We must rely on oral tradition, and I guarantee it did happen. Multiple references abound about the tragic Frank Ballweg family farm tornado of July 30, 1948.

Numerous myths accompany tornado lore. One urges hiding in a culvert or seeking refuge in the southwest basement corner. Picture rain water rushing into that culvert after the tornado has passed. Picture a tornado from other than the southwest dumping house debris on you in the basement corner. Many have been saved when they took refuge in inner bathrooms. Common sense plays a role in the do’s and don’ts of tornado safety.

On 1980s/90s visits to Madison, Dad and I checked out the Barneveld tornado and another one near Lake Waubesa. Again, we viewed damage on gorgeous sunny days. Barneveld was flattened on one side of the main street; houses in neighborhoods were destroyed while adjacent houses were untouched. Even stranger was to find parts of damaged buildings strewn in farm fields miles away.

I never did see a tornado come ripping across the Madison lakes and set down where we lived. The word around town was that the lakes protected us from tornados, yet another myth.

I was bothered that my undocumented upside-down cabin incident in the mid-40s did not turn up when I searched. The incident was undoubtedly reinforced and might have been amplified by discussions I had with my dad and mother over the years. I don’t think I dreamed it, and yes, I know that dreams do become mixed with reality. I did not hear about it second hand. I stood by that upside-down cabin. It was angled to the left.
A Roman slave and a Nephilim star in these two fine YA novels

*Children of Angels*, by Kathryn Dahlstrom
WinePress Publishing
Young Jeremy Lapoint's life is in the dumps. Dad’s in prison. Mom’s overworked. He's bullied. And things don't improve when Jeremy discovers he can fly.

A guardian angel appears to inform Jeremy that he is a Nephilim - half human/half angel. A demon, visible only to him, chases Jeremy through school, and he must fly to escape. His principal thinks the flying is an attention-getting gimmick and suspends Jeremy.

He thinks his problems will end with an invitation to attend a boarding school for kids like him. But he discovers that the headmistress insists her students have reached the next level of humanity, nothing more. She does not tolerate talk of Nephilims and attempts to imprison Jeremy for speaking the truth. He uses his new powers to escape captivity and takes the lead in a search to discover why the long dormant Nephilim trait was passed to him and his classmates.

This Christian-based novel is an action-packed tale of good versus evil, where Jeremy finds strength and values he never knew he possessed, all in an effort to allow truth to prevail.

*Servant to the Wolf*, by Sue Wentz
A Quake ebook
A historical novel that takes place in ancient Rome, this is the story of a Marcus, a privileged slave who serves a wealthy master. He's arrogant and looks down on other, lowlier servants. But his status ends due to a disfiguring accident. Marcus finds himself on the auction block, where he is purchased by blacksmith Lupus.

Marcus has a hard time understanding Lupus. He acts more like a friend than a master - most of the time. When Marcus' lingering haughtiness gets the better of him, Lupus is quick to put him in his place. But after many tribulations, twists and turns, Marcus develops respect and affection for Lupus, who schools him in the blacksmith trade.

Marcus isn't the only one to learn. He's able to teach his once-enslaved master a thing or two about tolerance and understanding.

This tale may take place in 109 A.D. but Marcus faces problems familiar to any present day boy or girl. The novel is available on Nook or Kindle. I can't wait for it to come out in paperback, so I can share it with my grandkids and grandnephews!

Writing advice from C.K. Chesterton
A lot of us get discouraged looking at the mess we've made on paper. ... Just keep telling yourself: the first draft has to come before the second and the third. All good writing is rewriting. ... Don't give up. There is an embittered editor up in your brain who expects your first draft to be classic literature. Tell him to sit on it and spin. ... At 40, take a year off and work as a chanteuse in a roadhouse, leaning against the baby grand in your little black dress slit up to the thighs, a cigarette in your left hand, singing bittersweet ballads for lovelorn truckdrivers.
**The Avengers** is the film fans have been waiting for

Grade: A+

After years of waiting for the film that would bring Earth's Mightiest Heroes together, I can gladly say that the wait was well worth it. The *Avengers* is everything fans could have hoped for and more.

Joss Whedon was the perfect choice to direct this massive film, which needed someone who knows how to deal with multiple characters fairly. Whedon knows his craft well, as we have seen in projects of his such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Firefly*, and *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*. He gives his characters multiple shining moments and balances them all so well. In *The Avengers*, Whedon gives each character enough screen time and plenty to do.

The cast is perfect. **Robert Downey Jr.** is again flawless as Tony Stark/Iron Man. **Chris Evans** has gotten even better as Steve Rogers/Captain America than he was in his solo film last summer. **Chris Hemsworth** proves he's still the right choice for Thor, as is **Samuel L. Jackson** as Nick Fury. **Clark Gregg** as Agent Coulson has his best scenes yet, and **Tom Hiddleston** is still excellent as the villainous Loki.

I was surprised with **Scarlett Johansson** reprising her role as Natasha Romanoff/Black Widow. Usually I don't find her to be a very good actress, but she did really well in this film. Her scenes with **Jeremy Renner** (an awesome Clint Barton/Hawkeye) are believable and well acted.

But the cast member who left me most impressed was Kenosha native **Mark Ruffalo** as Bruce Banner/Hulk. Ruffalo is perfect for this role, a lot better than the previous two actors who played the Hulk in film. His Bruce Banner has come to accept the monster within, where the other actors portrayed him as tortured. And the Hulk himself is fantastic to watch. He steals many of the scenes he's in and, finally, he's played for laughs and it works. A big, green, angry monster is kind of hard to take seriously, and the film has no problem showing that. His sheer delight in getting to smash things during the climatic battle is a blast to watch. Also the film shows it's best to have the Hulk in small doses.

The excellent cast includes (from left): Robert Downey Jr. (Iron Man), Mark Ruffalo (the Hulk), Chris Evans (Captain America), Jerry Renner (Hawkeye), Chris Hemsworth (Thor), and Scarlett Johansson (Black Widow).

The dialogue is sharp and fast, the visual effects are amazing, and the action is fun and exciting.

The plot is pretty simple, but that's all this film needs. It knows it's not something serious like *The Dark Knight*. Loki has come to Earth and plans to unleash an army from another dimension, so he can take over the world. Nick Fury has to bring the Avengers together to stop Loki. The Avengers have conflicts with each other, but we know they'll have to overcome them and fight against Loki and his army as a team. The climatic battle is marvelous. Every Avenger gets to have many shining moments.

*The Avengers* is a thrill ride the entire way through. It's almost two and a half hours, but it flies by. It's the perfect film to start the summer movie season with, and I doubt we'll see anything as fun as this for quite some time. It gave me a feeling of childlike awe not unlike my favorite film, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

This is Marvel's best film and, having seen it three times already, I'd say it's one of my all time favorites. If you haven't seen it yet, what are you waiting for?
And they wonder why they didn’t get hired

These are taken from real resumes and cover letters and were printed in Fortune Magazine

1. I demand a salary commiserate with my extensive experience.
2. I have learnt Word Perfect 6.0 computer and spreadsheet programs.
3. Received a plague for Salesperson of the Year.
5. Wholly responsible for two (2) failed financial institutions.
6. Its best for employers that I not work with people.
7. Lets meet, so you can ooh and aah over my experience.
8. You will want me to be Head Honcho in no time.
9. Am a perfectionist and rarely if ever forget details.
10. I was working for my mom until she decided to move.
11. Failed bar exam with relatively high grades.
13. I have an excellent track record, although I am not a horse.
14. I am loyal to my employer at all costs...Please feel free to respond to my resume on my office voice mail.
15. I have become completely paranoid, trusting completely no one and absolutely nothing.
16. My goal is to be a meteorologist. But since I possess no training in meteorology, I suppose I should try stock brokerage.
17. I procrastinate, especially when the task is unpleasant.
18. As indicted, I have over five years of analyzing investments.
20. Instrumental in ruining entire operation for a Midwest chain store.
21. Note: Please don't misconstrue my 14 jobs as job-hopping. I have never quit a job.
23. Reason for leaving last job: They insisted that all employees get to work by 8:45 a.m. every morning. Could not work under those conditions.
24. The company made me a scapegoat, just like my three previous employers.
25. Finished eighth in my class of ten.
26. References: None. I've left a path of destruction behind me.
Racehorse Rapids--and a gentle friend

My friend—let’s call him Al—drove through the forest that surrounds the log home he built, then swerved off the highway onto a gravel road that curved along a tumbling stream visible through the thick growth.

“West Branch,” Al said in his clipped, northern-Wisconsin accent. I remembered. I had explored the West Branch area, though not this exact place two and a half decades before I met him. He stopped where the sound of the river made it hard to talk. It came from around a bend, roaring downhill over and around countless rocks strewn between the trees.

“Racehorse Rapids,” he said. “Pretty, ain’t it?”

The sun was almost setting when we got there, so we had very little time, but Al promised we’d come back someday in better light.

About 25 years earlier, I had met and become friends with the woman who became Al’s wife. We’ll call her Anne. My wife, Judy, had met her then, too, but we lost touch, as people do, and then one day we were nearby and Judy encouraged me to find Anne.

A man I asked told me Anne had married Al, whom I didn’t know. Al, he added, built the house that he and Anne lived in off the highway north of town. It was easy to find, and Al greeted us warmly and called Anne to the front room. She was surprised, and it was a great reunion.

Al and I became friends, and on future visits he took me on photographic journeys to secret places in the woods and along the rivers of his area. I found him gentle and compassionate, with a quiet sense of humor.

He talked of leading me on a winter expedition to a scenic falls—one of my favorite places to photograph—where we would snowshoe along the unplowed, two-mile lane from the highway to photograph the river falling onto snow- and ice-covered rocks.

But Anne surprised me one day when we were alone. “If you think you’re coming up here and getting my husband to go out taking pictures with you all the time,” she said, “you’ve got another guess coming.”

After that visit my suggestions about stopping by—even with Judy—were turned down with a “We’re really busy, Den.” And when I asked to talk to Al, he was always “at a meeting.” So I stopped calling, though I kept hoping Al might someday suggest taking more pictures of Racehorse Rapids. I really didn’t think he would, though, and he didn’t.

Last fall—more than a decade later—I was driving through the area, and I stopped to take some photos along the river. I thought of Racehorse Rapids and Al, and I wondered if he went back there sometimes, and did he think of the pretty fall afternoon when we took great pictures there together?

At an old wooden lunch counter along a lake I dropped Al’s name to a guy standing next to me, and he told me my kind, gentle friend had developed “a brain problem” in which he forgot where he was, talked “gibberish,” and “really lost it” mentally. A court had committed Al to a nursing home. I got the impression there was more to the story, but I didn’t press him.

The joy was gone, but I kept shooting the way Al had encouraged me years earlier along the river. I worked on a note to tell Anne that I know and am so very sorry, but I had written I was coming and got no reply, so I decided she probably prefers to leave things as they are. But this photograph, and others I took that day, will remind me of my friend Al and our short time shooting fall colors along Racehorse Rapids.
Memories of Ricky

The article about Nelson, Ricky Nelson's twin sons, got me to remembering Ricky. Our whole family, Mom, Dad, my two younger sisters and I watched *Ozzie and Harriet*. My sister, Becky, had a crush on Ricky. I remember my mother calling me to tell me he had died. She was crying and then so was I.

I wanted to congratulate Rex Owens for getting his novel published and then having two articles accepted by *The Writer*. I had a short piece in *Writers Digest* awhile back. They had a feature with a picture, and you had to write the first sentence of the story you would write. So I did, and they used it.

I found Madonna's article interesting and inspiring.

Have enjoyed the poetry, especially the spring one about the little girl making mud pies.

I am pleased to have this journal as an outlet for some of my writing and good reading besides.

Thank you. Take care.

Andrea Schoenthal

Another Ricky memory

Hi Marsh:

Just a quick note to say how much I enjoyed your newsletter and, especially, your piece on Ricky Nelson.

Like you, I really identified with Rick. I believe we were switched at birth. (See young photo of me-- below-- about the same age, holding my sister. Note same hair style as Ricky.)

Also, I had an older brother who was about as serious as Rick's brother David. I was about the same age as Rick and my brother the same age as David. Weird. So I watched *Ozzie and Harriet* with a passion to see what ol' "Irrepressible Ricky" would do each week.

Thanks for the memories!

Ned Burke

*Garden Party* is one of my favorite songs.

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Chris DeSmet scores three-book contract!

Chris DeSmet has earned a three-book contract from New American Library/Penguin for a mystery series set in Wisconsin’s “Door County.”

You know Chris as the director of the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s yearly Writer’s Institute, the Write by the Lake workshops, Weekend with your Novel, and many other fine programs for writers. She’s also an award-winning screenwriter and has published extensively with Hard Shell Press.

She’s the author of a new holiday story called “The Christmas Magi of Birch Bay” in the collection *Christmas Gems*, published by Whiskey Creek Press. She’s this month’s featured author at the Jewels of the Quill website, where you can read excerpts of her writing.

*E.I.* salutes this marvelous writer, teacher, and friend. She deserves every good thing that comes her way. Congratulations, Chris!

Check out her programs for writers at: [www.dcs.wisc.edu/lsa/writing](http://www.dcs.wisc.edu/lsa/writing)

Some lit mags now require cooling-off period

Craig Steele informs me that many literary magazines now require a waiting period (one year seems to be fairly standard) before an author may attempt to submit anything they’ve published to another periodical.

Legally, there's no time requirement on waiting to republish. As long as you've retained the copyright (which you automatically do unless you sign something that says otherwise), you're free and clear as soon as it's published. You just can never sell "First North American serial rights" again.

But if you agree to the magazine’s terms, then you must abide by them, which Craig has done with “Fatally Flawed” (this issue) and all the other fine poems he places in magazines with waiting periods.

Just for fun

Norma Sundberg (aka Sassy from Tallahassee) heard a man bragging about being from Alaska and wonders if he might be Nome grown-- or even Nome-groaned.
I just finished Marilyn Robinson’s new book of ten essays, *When I Was a Child I Read Books*.

First, I am very jealous of Ms. Robinson, to have put her time as a child to such good use. I lived in the middle of a dense forest as a child and cut down trees to heat the house, holding the handle of a two-man crosscut saw at age five. The saw did the work; we gave it rhythm. In my ninth summer, I began working at the sawmill.

But also at about that time, my schoolteacher, Mrs. Stowe, gave me Zane Grey’s *Sunset Pass* for Christmas, which really irritated me, inasmuch as I was hoping for a toy. When all the toys were broken, I turned to Trueman Rock, the beautiful Thiry Preston, and her evil brother, Ash, and found what I’d been missing.

I left the sawmill, never looking back, and hold that same book in my hands today, a bit weathered, as is its owner.

I’m sure Ms. Robinson cherishes those years as a child and uses them daily, teaching at the Iowa Writer’s Workshop.

When I get back to my summer home in Mercer, Wisconsin, I will probably have to park out on the road, get my chain saw from the garage, and cut my way through the winter season’s windfall blocking the path to my front door. That’s what I had to do last year and on many previous occasions.

One side benefit is that I’m cutting trees faster than they’re growing so one of these days I can put my saw on shorter hours.

One of the things in the *New York Times* review I did not care for was the observation that Robinson's essays "shed light" on her fiction. Well, certainly, one (the essays) would inform the other (fiction). That's almost a ‘duh’ comment. My point is that this book is fully capable of standing on its own.

There’s a problem with writing a book of essays that you don’t have with fiction. If fiction is decently done, the reader suspends disbelief and rides along with the story, escaping to another world, where the story tells a higher truth. If essays are well written, they’re full of childhood upbringing, selected facts, and opinions just sitting there, waiting for the reader to pick a fight. I loved *Gilead*, Ms. Robinson’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel, but her essays irritated me. But I have hope. I’m bringing them to Wisconsin; maybe in between cutting trees, the Trueman and Thiry in them will find me.

BTW, I just finished Graham Swift’s book *Wish You Were Here*. If anyone needs help with rotating Omniscient Narrators and point of view questions, Swift does a great job handling this tricky craft issue and is a master of internal monologue/dialogue and the past perfect tense.

**A Swift Look at Books**

**John Swift**

**Ms. Robinson writes of a well-spent youth**

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**Jan Kent is**

**The Word Whisperer**

**No hope for ‘hopefully’?**

Hopefully – it’s an adverb meaning filled with hope, in a hopeful manner, is it not? (“She rushed forth hopefully, thinking the knock on the door announced her true love at last.”)

Alas, it has morphed into an introductory word which describes our attitude toward the statement that follows. (“Hopefully he won’t burn down the house in the process of grilling steaks.”)

Hopefully has lots of company: sadly, frankly, fortunately, happily, honestly, seriously. While we can hope the correct use of this word might prevail, it would seem to be hopeless.