Announcing with joy the wedding of

Elizabeth Ann Klossia

and

Jacob Dean McLaughlin

Saturday, August 11, 2012

The new Mr. and Mrs. McLaughlin are shown here outside the historic Park Theatre, in Clear Lake, Iowa, moments after repeating their vows.

(That’s Jake’s sister, Shea O’Malley, just visible between them in the background.)
A defense of critics—really?

“No statue has ever been erected to a critic”
Jean Sibelius

After fellow novelist Alice Hoffman had dissed his book in the *New York Times Book Review* in 1986, Ford shot bullets through one of her novels and mailed it to her. Years later, confronting novelist Colson Whitehead, who had had the temerity to pan another of his books, Ford spat in his face.

Admit it. You know the feeling.

Critics? Who needs ‘em, right? Can’t live without ‘em and you ain’t supposed to shoot ‘em— or even spit on ‘em.

Writing in a recent edition of the *New York Times Magazine* (August 19, 2012), Dwight Garner, himself a (and there’s no polite way to say this) critic, begs to differ. We not only need them, he writes, but we need them to be much tougher.

“The sad truth about the book world is that it doesn’t need more yes-saying novelists and certainly no more yes-saying critics,” he argues. “What we need more of...are excellent and authoritative and punishing critics— perceptive enough to single out the voices that matter for legitimate praise, abusive enough to remind us that not everyone gets, or deserves, a gold star.”

Well... maybe.

Or we could probably just leave it to writers to tear each other apart. You might have read Stephen King’s recent comment that Stephanie Meyers, author of the fabulously successful Twilight series, “can’t write worth a darn. She’s not very good.”

King was pulling his punches compared to Gustave Flaubert, who called George Sand, “A great cow full of milk.” Robert Louis Stevenson compared Walt Whitman to “a large shaggy dog, just unchained scouring the beaches of the world and baying at the moon.” The great Dante Alighieri? “A hyena who wrote poetry on tombs,” according to philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who even had the audacity to write God’s obituary.

See “critics,” continued on next page
“Critics” (continued from last page)

From one great novelist to another, Vladimir Nabokov found Fyodor Dostoevsky’s “lack of taste, his monotonous dealings with persons suffering with pre-Freudian complexes, the way he has of walling in the tragic misadventures of human dignity-- all this is difficult to admire.”

Those two giants of American literature, William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway, famously mixed it up in the following exchange:

Faulkner on Hemingway: “He has never been known to use a word that might send a reader to the dictionary.”

Hemingway on Faulkner: “Poor Faulkner. Does he really think big emotions come from big words?”

Nabokov didn’t much care for Hemingway either: “I read him for the first time in the early ‘forties, something about bells, balls and bulls, and loathed it.”

More?


Truman Capote on Jack Kerouac: “That’s not writing, that’s typing.”

Virginia Woolf on James Joyce’s Ulysses: “[T]he work of a queasy undergraduate scratching his pimples.”

Mark Twain on Jane Austin: “Every time I read Pride and Prejudice, I want to dig her up and hit her over the skull with her own shin-bone.”

Just to come full circle, Faulkner said of Twain: “A hack writer who would not have been considered fourth rate in Europe, who tricked out a few of the old proven sure fire literary skeletons with sufficient local color to intrigue the superficial and the lazy.”

When Jacqueline Susann published her blockbuster, Valley of the Dolls, the critics trashed it. Gloria Steinem was perhaps the kindest, writing: “For the reader who has put away comic books but isn’t ready for editorials in The Daily News, Valley of the Dolls may bridge an awkward gap.” Truman Capote particularly despised the book and its author and said on The Tonight Show that Susann looked like "a truck driver in drag."

All of the negative publicity didn’t seem to hurt the book’s sales: 350,000 copies in hardcover and 8 million copies in paperback.

If you want to embrace a critic, you’d do a lot worse than film critic James Agee, whose posthumous novel, Death in the Family, is one of the most beautiful and moving novels I’ve ever read. No less a lover of words than poet W.H. Auden called his film columns for the Nation, “The most remarkable regular event in American journalism today.”

Good to know a writer has occasionally spoken well of another writer.

JAN KENT IS
THE WORD WHISPERER
This is not not what I mean

Consider the not. No, not the knot – square, granny, bowline or otherwise. The one that is a negative. You do not see, do not want, do not have. Not having indicates the state of being without something you may wish you had.

So how has missing something gotten teamed up with not having instead of having? Consider this sentence from the venerable Chicago Tribune. "Gibbs said the president likely misses not having a regular place of worship." I don't think so. I think what he misses is having a church in which to worship regularly. He already has the not having situation covered.

STRANGE, AMAZING, AND MAYBE EVEN TRUE FACTOIDS

Heroin is the brand name of morphine once marketed by Bayer.

Albert Einstein was offered the presidency of Israel in 1952 but declined. Astronauts can’t belch. There’s no gravity to separate liquid from gas in their stomachs. (No information on farts, but we’re still digging.)

The Mona Lisa has no eyebrows. Check it out! It was fashionable to shave them off in the Renaissance era.

Because of the speed at which the Earth moves around the Sun, no solar eclipse can last more than seven minutes, 58 seconds. (You did know the Earth orbits the Sun, right? So said a fellow named Copernicus, and nobody’s proved him wrong yet.)

Note: These ‘facts’ were not vetted at Snopes.com or anyplace else.
Lois Duncan Steinmetz made her first writing sale at age 13, to *Calling All Girls*. During high school, she wrote regularly for *Seventeen* and other magazines for teenagers. As an adult, she taught journalism at the University of New Mexico and wrote for women’s magazines and *Reader’s Digest*, using the name Lois Duncan. She’s the author of some 50 books, from picture books for children to adult novels, but she is best known for her young adult mysteries, for which she has won numerous awards.

In 1992, Duncan received the Margaret A. Edwards Award, which honors a living author for a distinguished body of literature for adolescents. Several of her novels have become movies, most famously *I Know What You Did Last Summer*. Duncan has stated her distaste that this suspense novel for young people became a horror comedy film. She and her family know there is nothing comedic about horror.

**Duncan learned the hard way that it’s simpler to solve a fictional mystery than one in real life.**

In July of 1989, in Albuquerque, the youngest of Duncan’s five children, 18-year-old Kaitlyn Arquette, was found in her car, shot twice in the head. She died a few hours later. The police ruled the death a random drive-by shooting and did no further investigating.

The Arquette family believes Kaitlyn was murdered and, in their opinion, the case remains unsolved. In search of the truth, Duncan poured her energy and grief into writing *Who Killed My Daughter?* The book speculates that Kaitlyn was killed because she was a potential whistle blower.

She had been living with her Vietnamese boyfriend, Dung Ngoc Nguyen, but on the night of the shooting she stopped by her parents’ house and said she’d broken up with him. She told them that if he called they were not reveal her whereabouts (headed for a friend’s house). Dung, reportedly a member of an Asian drug ring, had an alibi for the time of the shooting.

The Arquettes believe that Kaitlyn might have had information about crime in New Mexico and California, some involving New Mexico VIPs.

On a Web site, the Arquette family says: “We accept the fact that police can't always solve murder cases. The challenge is sometimes too much for them, and families have to live with that. What we should not have to live with, however, is a deliberate police effort to conceal or alter important evidence!

“We believe there's an official cover-up going on with our daughter's case. It's our hope that exposure on the Internet will keep information about her case from becoming buried and will give informants an easy way to contact us. ~ Don and Lois Arquette

Lois Duncan says her dream is to write a sequel to *Who Killed My Daughter?* That would mean the mystery was solved. If she were able to type *The End* on the last page of that manuscript, those two ordinary words would no doubt be the most important of her illustrious career.

To read detailed information about the case, go to [http://kaitarquette.arquettes.com](http://kaitarquette.arquettes.com)
Poetry for most of the past hundred years has been dominated by free verse that is only rarely humorous. Yet I suggest lightness can leaven the raw dough of self-exploration. Laughter—or at least wry wit—is a pleasant way to examine both self and world.

The following poem by Albert Goldbarth was first published in the *Beloit Poetry Journal*, and while not “ha-ha” funny, the touch of whimsy points out a truth: time only seems forever to the very young. This is ironic with mortality waiting ahead.

“Off in the darkness the hourses moved restlessly.”

--a typo in Clifford Simak’s *A Heritage of Stars*

We believed they were horses; and so we saddled up, and rode expectantly through the long day and into the night. Then we dismounted; and slept; and still they continued to carry us---the hours. They wouldn’t stop. They carried us clean away.

Truman Capote declared:

*A man who doesn’t dream*

*Is like a man who doesn’t sweat.*

He stores up a lot of poison.

Substitute ‘laugh’ for ‘dream.’ When Pandora opened her box, hope was at the bottom. Too bad humor wasn’t present because laughter skewers tension even as it offers ironic truth, as in David Palmer’s piece from the *Great American Poetry Anthology*:

*SO LONG*

*When his wife left him*

*it was three days before he noticed*

*so absorbed was he*

*in his study of the late Romantics*

*establishing his philosophic position*

*proving beyond any doubt*

*that the ultimate virtue*

*is love.*

Humor can be sophisticated or silly. There’s a long-standing joke about socks eaten by the dryer, but here’s a worse problem I detailed in this verse.

*ACTION UNDER THE BED*

*I know: Shoes crawl about*

*and mate with each other*

*as I sleep, clearly*

*indiscriminate;*

*never rightly matched*

*when I want to wear a pair:*

*Yet shoes appear sterile*

*unless they produce*

*bastard socks which*

*will not sort out even*

*nor which I recognize*

*as good ones newly-bought.*

*Footwear, bah! While I rest*

*boots slyly huddle*

*and cuddle together*

*shifting soundlessly;*

*humping like rabbits*

*gladly doing their thing,*

*spoiling fresh mornings*

*when even faithful slippers*

*sprawl disreputable;*

*sorry changelings*

*worn out plus overdue*

*to meet the rubbish bin!*

This fantasy addresses a real situation. In truth I suspect our cats play under the bed as Peter and I sleep, and the shoes make an intriguing obstacle course.

Humor can explore truth or fantasy, exaggerate or understate. Often it rhymes, but it doesn’t have to. Like all poetry, its scope is flexible, and each of us can bend the bar, trusting that the bar won’t break.
A Shawano (WI) High School teacher introduced me to the Wolf River Dells on the Menominee Indian Reservation in the summer of 1966, a week after I graduated from UW-Madison and got my first professional job as a social worker for Menominee County. A month later I called Judy home from Washington, D.C., where she was working, to get married. She taught school for a year before our son, Eric, was born, and a year later we left for Ann Arbor for my masters of social work from the University of Michigan.

We still felt the draw of the reservation and the Wolf River Dells, and when we returned to Wisconsin in 1970, we drove north to again explore the Dells in the center of the heavily wooded reservation, and we have done that periodically ever since.

This year we decided to attend the 34th annual Shawano Folk Music Festival on the second weekend of August. The day before, we drove onto the reservation to see the Dells again.

We don’t know anyone in Shawano anymore, but we passed the home of long-lost friends and thought about them and their four kids. We drove past Sacred Heart Church and School, where Judy taught second grade in 1966-67.

When I spotted the public library I wondered if it still had the weekly radio show on which I gave a positive review of the Rev. James Kavanaugh’s controversial book, *A Modern Priest Looks at His Outdated Church*. Weeks later I met a library staffer who told me that the station’s owner threatened the library director that if she ever allowed me to review another book, the program would be banned from the air.

Judy and I were both somewhat infamous by then. We were considered liberal Catholics, I suppose, and one day friends stopped by to inform us that a local resident had just alerted them to his suspicions that we had been sent north from Madison to make communists of the Menominee Indians.

When we went to Ann Arbor, I hoped we could return to Menominee and Shawano Counties, but the Menominees were in a drive to return to federal status as Indians (if you want another sad story of how whites defrauded tribes with whom we’d signed treaties, google Menominee Indian termination), and it wasn’t a good time to go back. They regained Indian status in the 1970s.

But Menominee County was where I began my professional career, where I hoped to do great things to help alleviate human misery. And we loved it there. So we decided to spend the day before the folk festival on the reservation.

We drove Highway 55, then the sand road through the forest to the Dells in the morning to hike and photograph in solitude the trail to the walls of the chasm. Until rafters appeared later, there were no voices to interrupt the video recordings I made of the river, its granite banks, and the trees that grow out of them.

It was like coming home, and that surprised me because I thought coming home meant someone had to be there to greet me and reminisce about old times.

This time Judy and I had each other, but no one from our past, just the memories of them and of others with whom we had shared this special place: my parents, Eric as a child (and, most recently, on his and my annual bike ride in 1996), and other friends.

This year, the Dells itself seemed to welcome us, though I knew the feeling came from what I was thinking, not from anything the Dells was doing. The photo of Judy sitting along on of the many Wolf River rapids was taken in the same spot where I photographed her in the fall of 1967 when she was pregnant with Eric.

Being able to “go home,” I decided, depends on no one else, and on nothing more than how we feel about a place.
Creating your author’s website – blood, sweat, tears – and payoff

Last of three articles on a novice’s journey to create a website.

The ipage host that I use offers several software programs to build the site. Nearly all of the writer magazines and blogs suggested using wordpress, which was available to me. However, they also offer another web builder called ’drop and drag.' As the name suggests, the site offers a series of templates.

The first decision was how many pages to have. Ipage allows you to have a blog in your webpage and, while I’m still not an avid blogger, all the marketing recommendations suggest that a blog is necessary in today’s social media world. So, one page would be the home page and a second would be the blog page. I also wanted folks to contact me through the webpage rather than through my personal gmail account or Facebook. I created a contact page and web e-mail account within my webpage.

I struggled to find a template for the homepage and changed it no fewer than four times searching for the right look. I asked my publisher’s art designer/editor to look at my site under construction and asked for ideas and suggestions. She said the site needed a “header” picture of Ireland. The publisher found a header picture for me to use and received permission to use it as long as credit was given to the photographer. Problem solved.

However, it took me a week to figure out how to take the image attached to the e-mail and insert it into my webpage. It’s there now, and it’s going to stay because it’s too much work to change again. The picture includes a nice quote about MURPHY’S TROUBLES from the publisher.

I felt like my website wasn’t complete with only a homepage, contact page and blog. After hours of researching other author sites I decided that I needed a history page.

The Provisional Irish Republican Army and their guerilla war strategy are prominent throughout the book. I decided to develop a brief chronology of the IRA’s history that covered the time period in the book, 1968-1998. I wanted to limit the chronology to one page and have highlights rather than stuffing a lot of detail into a small space. I also decided each entry needed to be limited to one line. It took me three weeks to research and craft a document that met all my requirements. The result is the second page of my website.

My website was launched in March, 2012 after four months under construction and refinement. I receive statistics monthly on the activity on my website. Through August 10 I have had 10,426 hits on my site. Now that’s a miracle.

However, I’ve learned that people visiting a site are not inclined to comment on the blog page. I’ve experimented with the blog and have recently settled on posting two blogs a month. I’ve posted 18 blogs to date and received three comments. The statistics I receive don’t tell me if people are visiting the blog, but I assume that at least half of the hits are reading the blog.

Hits range from a low of 1,996 to a high of 2,370 a month. I’m guessing that April was high because that’s when the Writer’s Institute at UW-Madison was held, and I let the world know about my site since the major theme of the conference was flagrant self-promotion.

In the future I plan to add e-commerce to my site to allow visitors to purchase my book. I will also add quotable (read favorable) book reviews to the site when I have them.

So that’s it. Frankly, I’ve learned more in my writing career than I did when I had the old 8-5 job, and it’s happening at that encore time of my life when it’s all very exciting. So, when you have a few minutes, stop by at www.rexowens.us and leave me a message or make a comment on my blog – everyone is welcome.
I planted some bird seed. A bird came up. Now I don't know what to feed it.

I had amnesia once—or twice
I went to San Francisco. I found someone's heart. Now what?

All I ask is a chance to prove that money can't make me happy
If the world were a logical place, men would ride horses sidesaddle.

What is a "free" gift? Aren't all gifts free?
And that "lifetime guarantee"? Who's life?

They told me I was gullible. I believed them.
Teach a child to be polite and courteous, and when he grows up, he'll never be able to merge his car onto the freeway.

Experience is the thing you have left when everything else is gone.
One nice thing about egotists: they don't talk about other people.

My weight is perfect for my height—which varies.
I used to be indecisive. Now I'm not so sure.

How can there be self-help "groups"?
If swimming is so good for your figure, how do you explain whales?

Show me a man with both feet firmly on the ground, and I'll show you a man who can't get his pants off.
Is it me—or do buffalo wings taste like chicken?

Why do birth announcements say 'new baby'? Do some women give birth to old babies?
You have all heard of cow manure and horse manure. We once got some mushroom manure. How do mushrooms make manure?

TODAY IS THE OLDEST YOU'VE EVER BEEN, YET THE YOUNGEST YOU'LL EVER BE, SO ENJOY THIS DAY WHILE IT LASTS.
This review is spoiler free
There are so few films that conclude a story right. The very few I can think of are The Return of the King, Toy Story 3, Back to the Future Part 3, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade and Return of the Jedi. I am very glad to add The Dark Knight Rises to the list.

I don’t list the final Harry Potter film because, after I watched both parts of the final film in a row, they feel uneven, and the second part grows weak after multiple viewings. The Dark Knight Rises is what the final Potter should have been.

In this day and age, a movie theater is mostly full of disappointment. But this was different. I am a Batman fanatic. I always loved him as a kid, and Batman Begins opened up a whole new world for me to dwell in. He is my favorite fictional hero of all time. So after four years of waiting for this, I am so happy that this truly is the ending this series deserved.

I’m not going to reveal plot details. Like most of Christopher Nolan’s films, the less you know going in the better.

Like Nolan’s other films, the cast is fantastic. Christian Bale gives his best performance of the series as Bruce Wayne and Batman. Michael Caine returns as Alfred, who will break your heart in one scene. Gary Oldman is still great as Commissioner Gordon, who has had an excellent character arc in this series.

Tom Hardy as Bane is one of the best villain performances I’ve seen in a long time. His master plan made my jaw drop. Joseph Gordon-Levitt plays John Blake, one of the few good cops left in Gotham. Marion Cotillard does well as supporting character Miranda Tate. She’s not given a lot of screen time, but she’s definitely not a throw-away character. My favorite of the newcomers is Anne Hathaway as Selina Kyle/Catwoman. She’s perfect, the best onscreen Catwoman yet.

The technical aspects of the film are flawless, like the previous two films. The cinematography is incredible. If you can, see this film in IMAX. There is about an hour of the film in the format and it looks stunning. The action is spectacular and never overdone. The visual effects are truly incredible.

I am so glad that Christopher Nolan prefers practical effects over CGI. The opening sequence is one of the most exciting stunts ever put on film, and the fact that they really did it is amazing.

Hans Zimmer’s score is beautiful and really adds that extra level of excitement to the film. Even though James Newton Howard doesn’t contribute to the score for this film, Zimmer has proven to be a really talented composer.

I think Christopher Nolan made the right choice to tell his Batman story in three parts. Looking back on the first two films after seeing this, it really is a solid beginning, middle and end. Nolan is one of the best directors today, and he has given us an ending of epic proportions. It’s the best film series since The Lord of the Rings.

The Dark Knight Rises is not just another summer movie. It is an event, and you should definitely take part in it. I doubt we will see anything this spectacular in film for a long time.

And now, for a second opinion...
Due to the graciousness of my parents’ babysitting service, my wife and I went out to dinner and a movie on a fine August weeknight. We watched the ‘final’ (meaning ‘give us two years for the release of the next reboot’) installment of the Batman franchise at the Stoughton (WI) Cinema Café, where you can stuff yourself on pizza or lasagna whilst watching costumed heroes eviscerate one another with high tech gadgets of destruction.

I am ambivalent about the film.

There is much to be liked in the film. There are numerous nods to the comic book mythology and just as many areas where it breaks from tradition. This is a radically different take on Batman/Bruce Wayne than I’ve seen before. This is a Dark Knight on the skids, physically and financially.

The Wayne Empire has crumbled from neglect. The Batman has disappeared since the death of Harvey Dent (whose death was blamed on the Bat in the last film). Bruce Wayne is a limping recluse who refuses to visit his own dinner guests at a party honoring the deceased Dent.

All this in the first 20 minutes!

There is much I could spoil for anyone even more wrapped in baby-induced lethargy than myself who hasn’t seen the film yet. I think I can safely say that it was painful for me to stay awake throughout the 2 hour and 40 minute film. This is only partially the film’s fault, as I’ve just started meds that cause drowsiness, and my daughter is still only 3 months old.

But the film does drag a bit, and I lay the blame at the feet, or rather the mouth guard, of Batman’s main nemesis in this film: Bane.

Tom Hardy is perhaps hamstrung by the loss of his face. With no expressions available to him except a hundred-yard-stare and an accent that at times stuck me as Scottish (?) Bane makes the movie more than a little dull. I think the film could have been pared down to under 2 hours if his monologues were cut, and little of the plot would have been sacrificed.

But I did say I was ambivalent, not antipathetic toward the film. There were parts of it I thought were beautiful. There are genuine surprises woven into the film with such subtlety, I missed them entirely until thinking about it after the fact.

One big one: not once in the entire film is the Selena Kyle character (played with an understated grace by Anne Hathaway) referred to as Catwoman. Go ahead, watch the film. They never once call her that.) They didn’t have to. It’s implied, and it’s a corny and unnecessary name, so director Christopher Nolan does away with the reference entirely. And I didn’t even notice until I was walking home digesting my theatrical and gustatory repasts.

I loved the ending (or one of the endings). Batman seems to truly be laid to rest once and for all, and for me it was in a satisfying fashion. I can forgive any mess that ends well. There’s a lot I could have wished for out of Bane. In the comic book rendition he’s the villain who not only bests Batman physically and shatters his spine, but breaks him mentally and spiritually as well.

**Spoiler ahead!**

Batman’s recovery takes a whole series. In the movie, Batman is broken in a single scene, and his recovery is handled pretty much in a single montage of push ups, sit ups, oh, and some guy pushing a vertebrae back in place with his fingers.

But wait, I was talking about the stuff I liked about the film. I’m getting sidetracked again. Bale is competent and did not break immersion for me, which is impressive since I was so ready to hate him this time around. Oldman is practically cuddly, but I can’t think of a film I’ve seen him in that I haven’t liked. Joseph Gordon Levitt steals the show as a rookie cop, perhaps by Nolan’s design.

It’s an ambitious film, and I don’t believe it’s successful on all counts, but I’m glad to have seen it in the theater instead of on the DVD rebound.

I’m the son of the guy who publishes this newsletter, and I support this film.
Do crazy ideas give rise to loco motives?

Humor is infectious, stretching out to and through family and friends.

A writer friend and her daughter were watching a large noisy flock of Canadian Geese flying over their house. Daughter said to mother, “They sound like your writer group.”

“Aha”, I said, “A gabble of geese.”

I’ve kept the little and quirky things my kids have said in the pages of my journals for years. My youngest daughter was two when I entered college (I was approaching 45 in years). I found her one day checking out the fossil pictures in my geology book, circling with a blue crayon fossils that matched the flagstones in our front walk.

Ella Fitzgerald accepted an award for a jazz record or album in the 1970's to a standing ovation. “Who’s Ella Fitzgerald?” Wesley asked.

“Oh Yeah! you know,” Sally told him. “She’s the one that sings and breaks glasses on the Memorex ad.”

We watched a big brass bed traveling through the air complete with people cargo on Disney’s Bedposts and Doorknobs. Rusty commented, “Now that’s what I call bedridden.”

I had been complaining about the fruit flies around the bananas on the kitchen table. Rusty explained, “You know what God says, Be multiple and fruit fly.”

Grandson Michael told his mother, who was washing his hair, “Don’t hurt my eyes, I might need them.”

I heard Mark singing the words to a song: Skip to the Moon my darling,

Another musical incident found him asking if the next song on his sister’s John Denver album was Song of Wide Open. (Close. Song of Wyoming.)

One lovely evening Janet came and sat down beside me on the porch to look at the half moon. She commented, “It’s broken, we have to fix it.”

Wesley asks, “would a roach clip be
called a pot holder?

Amy was clipping their 4-H news from the newspaper. “Hmmm,” she said, “If we were an all-dairy club, we could call us the Dairy Heirs.”

Back-words: My friend and husband were traveling down the freeway when friend saw a sign that read: “SHORTS.” It wasn't until they got beyond the sign that she realized she was reading it backwards. Beer here.

I have had lots of fodder for the foolish pile with those 10 children and two grandchildren at the time of the previous pennings. and the list of grandkids grows and overflows. I keep writing, posting in my journals those wonderful quirky words they continue to spout.

The classic finale' was when my nephew told his mother after a grueling session of nonsense, “Pun spelled backwards is NUP, and enup is enup!

Ed Pahnke

Bird’s-eye view

Birds appear to be all business: building nests, hatching young, hunting for food. Always on the lookout for birds in my environs, I frequently see a male cardinal in our yard, doing the usual bird things.

Under the linden tree in our yard, we have a three foot tall wooden windmill with rotating blades.

A couple of days ago, I looked out the kitchen window in time to see the cardinal land next to the windmill. He hopped about on the ground for a minute and then fluttered to the top of the windmill. From there he bounded onto one of the rotating blades. The blade began to rotate downward. The cardinal rode it as far as it went. Then he fluttered to the blade above and rode it down.

After that novel experience, he flew away, maybe to tell his mate about it.

I’m waiting for other birds to join in the fun.

More Strange, Amazing, and Maybe Even True Factoids

Your tongue is the only muscle in your body that is attached at only one end.

Kites were used in the American Civil War to deliver letters and newspapers.

The roar you hear when you put a seashell next to your ear is blood surging through your veins.

Nine out of every 10 living things live in the ocean.
Your chance to improve your newsletter

The following features have all appeared at least once in the previous three issues of *E.I.* (Many you’ll recognize as regulars.) Please rate those you’re familiar with on a scale of 1 (don’t read) to 5 (never miss). If you have comments about any of the features, please add them.

- Bullpen Bloviation
- Coach’s Mail Call
- Coach’s Bullpen Blurb
- Coach’s Bullpen Briefs
- Meandering with Madonna, Madonna Dries Christensen
- For the Love of Words, Esther M. Leiper-Estabrooks
- Rank and File, Robert Hale
- The Word Whisperer, Jan Kent
- The Missouri Muse, Perry ‘Paw Joe’ Stone
- Payers, Preyers & Pretenders, Rex Owens
- In the Projection Booth with Jacob McLaughlin
- The Sleep-Deprived Film Critic, Scud Farcus, Jr.
- Essays from Images, Den Adler
- Growing Up in Madison, Ron Hevey
- The Fitzgerald Book Rapport, Pat Fitzgerald
- A Swift Look at Books, John Swift
- Jan Kaat’s Writer’s Cryptograph
- Humor
- Poetry
- Your Monthly Moment with Lily

What could we do to improve the newsletter? Are there any features you’d like to see us add?

*Take your time. No word limit. We’ll still be friends after.*
David Wright, friend, philosopher, and Veranda’nanda (also writer and printer), is trying to start a real grassroots movement, and it’s got nothing to do with politics (or grass, at least so far as I know). His newest 8 1/2 x 11, two-fold newsletter is the Good Work Gazette, a lightning-quick read designed to lift your spirits, lighten your load, and encourage you to pass the good news on.

Like any good enlightener, he provides suggestions for further reading, favoring titles like Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, The Power of Story, Wherever You Go, There You Are, and Think, Flow, Happiness, and the Possibility of Everything.

Each issue includes a few pithy quotes, passed along from the Veranda’nanda (Swami of the Front Porch Swing), from Mother Teresa (“Peace begins with a smile”) to Willie Nelson (“When I started counting my blessings, my whole life turned around”).

You can also get “Good Work” cards, customized for your organization, website, blog, or whatever. The card offers a simple “THANK YOU...Keep up the GOOD WORK.” The idea is to slip a card to that waitperson who went the extra trip to the kitchen, the neighbor who cleans up after his dog, the tall fellow at the market who reaches up to snag that elusive box of All-Bran Flakes for the short lady with the cane.

Wright may spend time on the front porch, but he must have his laptop with him.

* He maintains a blog for stories from his part-time job at: shuttledave.blogspot.com,
* posts poems and observations at: zoupe.blogspot.com, and
* posts his Gazette (also available in print form) at: GoodWorkCards.wordpress.com, under the category “Gazette.”

You can get the GW Gazette and five Thank-You cards each month for a year by sending $12.95 to Dave, check payable to Small Potatoes Press, Box 210977, Milwaukee, WI 53221.

And it’s okay, David says, if you want to tell your friends about it.

That’s what I’m doing right now.

Three more authors join LFL Hall of Fame roster

Madonna Dries Christensen has earned a place in the Little Free Library of Felton Place Hall of Fame with her contribution of her wonderful anthology, Toys Remembered. I’ve read and enjoyed the pieces in this excellent collection and would highly recommend it even if she hadn’t been kind enough to include one of my scribblings.

I’ve not only read but have taught from The Wisdom of Memoir: Reading and Writing Life’s Sacred Texts, by Peter Gilmour, and highly recommend it for anyone writing their life stories. It’s now available in the LFL of Felton Place--unless somebody already grabbed it.

Also in receipt of a copy of the fifth collection of poetry from John Manesis-- In the Third Season: Selected Poems. I doubt I’ll be able to part with this one, as good poems need to be kept at hand for re-reading.

You can check out John’s poetry at http://www.jmanesispoetry and learn about his newest book.

FIRST PERSON PUBLISHED

JAN LANG

Yippee!

I’ll let Jan tell you this one herself.

Can I just say that after writing six unpublished novels for which I’ve received more rejections than I care to count, I was ecstatic when DesertBreezePublishing.com, an e-publisher of romance, said a very loud ‘YES’ to What the Heart Sees, written under the pen name Janice Zick. It can be ordered from the publisher and read on a Kindle or comparable e-reader or as a pdf copy on your computer. And at only $2.99, it’s almost as good a deal as these great issues of Extra Innings.

“Four words in, and you’re hooked!” one reviewer noted. “I smiled, chuckled and downright laughed my way through the whole book.”
Chace lands two soulful publications

Long-time reader and friend Mary Chase will have two more stories published soon. She touts her cat’s listening skills in a piece for the upcoming Chicken Soup for the Soul volume, I Can’t Believe My Cat Did That. And just to be fair, she writes of her dog’s commitment to the family’s safety in the CSS companion volume, I Can’t Believe My Dog Did That. Both books should be hitting bookstores right about now.

Sure-fire cure for boredom

Take a long walk. Really pay attention to what you see, hear, smell, and otherwise sense. Let your thoughts roam.

If you’re still bored when you get back, take another walk, in the opposite direction. Behave as before.

If you’re still bored when you get back, call the undertaker and make an appointment for a fitting.

Why so many great writers were school drop-outs

“I was good at school,” Maureen McLane writes in her new memoir, My Poets. “The very things that made me good at school-- a talent for aligning with authority, or for knowing what it wanted; a capacity for self-estranging self-discipline; an ability to use anxiety as a fuel; an over-identification with established codes-- were precisely the things that might render me not a writer, not a poet.”

ERRATA

In the August issue, I misreported the name of one of our new team members. She is Marcia Brown.

COACH’S MAIL CALL

Tobin chides Coach’s tardiness with last issue

In nearly 32 years of publishing a newspaper, WE have never missed a publication date and we do it EVERY WEEK! You obviously haven't croaked so you have no excuse!

Not only that, my Wonder Woman wife has written a column every week for over 30 years without a miss. Now that's a real record.

Larry Tobin

The publication is the Tomahawk (WI) Leader.
The Wonder Woman is Kathy Tobin. And Larry’s quite right on all counts.

Shaw appreciates enshrinement in LFLHoF

Latest issue of EI provided interesting reading. Especially enjoyed seeing my name along with my book titles. THE LITTLE FREE LIBRARY OF FELTON PLACE...wonderful idea. Will I ever know if anyone chose to read my books? That would be wonderful news. After all, what's an author without readers?

Thanks.

Elaine Shaw

I checked the library after getting Elaine’s email. At that time, one book was checked out, one was waiting to find a worthy reader.

Tracy gets an EI surprise

I am in a bit of shock. I just saw my comment and name in EI 34. I was indeed surprised to say the least !!!!

Yes, I do remember the Burma Shave ads on the highways.

I got a kick out of the GED answers; truth IS stranger than fiction !!!!

The Ringling Bros Circus piece brought back a lot of memories. Any time it came to Oshkosh, my mom and dad took us. What a fun time. Often we would go down to the area where the trains pulled in and watch them unload. Then we kids would often go and watch setting up of the tents.

and of course the ending-- with adorable Lily !!!

Mary Tracy

Great issue.
Maybe I should just run pictures of Lily?

I like it all...but I think I like the monthly moment with Lily best!
**Barry Reszel**
Just finished reading the most recent issue, and have to comment on the extremely cute little personage that Lily is becoming - too cool that you have her close at hand to enjoy (and spoil).
**Norma Sundberg**
Loved the updated photo of Lily.
**Madonna Dries Christensen**

Enjoyed it all-- especially little Liliana. We all think our grand babies are the cutest in all the world!!! YES!!!
**Diane Reinke**
Yeah, but I’m right.
“Monthly Moments with Lily” is so precious. Thank you for publishing one of my favorite writer’s newsletters.
**Randi Lynn Mrvos**

AND SO, BY POPULAR DEMAND...

YOUR MONTHLY MOMENT WITH LILY

Liliana is pensive. Gramellen is very happy.