The first weekend of April I attended the 25th Annual Writers’ Institute held at the Concourse Hotel in downtown Madison. Our esteemed Editor-In-Chief was one of the founders of the conference although he did express some chagrin at being paraded in front of the attendees to acknowledge his place in history. He seems much more concerned with his place in the present.

The conference included four keynote speakers, among them Dale Kushner speaking on Writing from the Self. Her presentation was based on the William Faulkner statement: “The writer has three sources: one is observation; one is experience, which includes reading; and the other is imagination, and the Lord knows where that comes from.”*

“Writing is what we do but we are more than that,” Ms. Kushner declared. “It is what we are.”

Her statement reverberated deep inside me. There are times when a fundamental truth strikes you right between the eyes, and her declaration did for me. When I have a book event, my wife, Lynette, always tells people I think differently than other people. She’s sure my brain is different from the average Joe. Both Lynette and Ms. Kushner have a point. Writing isn’t a job; it’s a way of life – the creative endeavor to share our creativity with the world.

All writers are ardent observers with a sponge-like ability to absorb all aspects of the world. Who among us hasn’t been caught people watching and listening in public places like coffee shops, sporting events, or the mall. I confess observing human behavior, which is special and irreplaceable. You absorb it, and then it pops out again as a part of conversation or a unique physical trait of a character.

Writers also have a talent for finding what is universal in their own and others’ experiences. We recognize that one individual’s experience becomes the experience of all of us. Art is an expression of sharing our experiences through the filter that is each individual. The form of sharing doesn’t matter. It can be performance or a visual or written manifestation.

I have a wood block sign with six inch lettering: “IMAGINE.” To date, science hasn’t been able to explain our ability to imagine, and even Einstein confessed that imagination is more critical than knowledge. Einstein’s ability to imagine and have “thought experiments” revolutionized our comprehension of the physical world.

After listening to Ms. Kushner’s keynote, I felt more comfortable in my own skin and was filled with the experience of revealing self-discovery. Writing is more than what I do; it completely defines my life experience; I am blessed.

*Coach’s note: Faulkner also said, “My own experience has been that the tools I need for my trade are paper, tobacco, food, and a little whiskey.” Worked for him, but I wouldn’t want to generalize off that statement.

More from the Writer’s Institute on page two.

Onward.
Nathan Bransford (author of the Jacob Wonderbar series for young adults and How to Write a Novel, for slightly older adults) led off the 25th Anniversary Writer’s Institute in Madison in early April with advice on “How to stay sane during the writing process”-- or at least go less crazy.

Bransford, an agent before slipping over to the other side, offered these

10 Commandments for a Happy Writer

1) Enjoy the present.
You’ve got to like being a writer, not just having written, Bransford says. Forget the “if onlies” and keep writing.

2) Maintain your integrity.
“Nobody is rooting for jerks,” Bransford warns.

3) Recognize forces outside your control.
Hard work, talent, persistence all play a part in success, but luck has a role, too. Don’t waste time on existential angst if things aren’t working out.

4) Don’t neglect friends and family.
Writing is important. The people in your life are more important.

5) Don’t quit the day job.
Everybody says it. Everybody is right. Bransford likens severing ties with a steady paycheck and health benefits to selling your house to buy a lottery ticket.

6) Keep up with publishing news.
You need to know your business, a task that Bransford calls “productive procrastination.”

7) Reach out to fellow writers.
Hey, we all need to be able to complain, but nobody wants to hear it except another writer.

8) Park your jealousy at the door.
This isn’t a competition or a zero sum game. There’s room for all of us.

9) Be thankful
for all you have. It could be a whole lot worse.

10) Take a break.
There’s no ‘writer’s block.’ It’s just that writing has become really hard, and you don’t want to do it. You’ve got a problem you haven’t yet figured out how to solve. It’s okay to take a break, take a walk, take a day off, give the subconscious a chance to chew on things some more.

But then get back to work. “Writing is the solution to every problem that ever existed,” Bransford says. “It will always get you over the hump.”

In response to questions from the over 300 participants at the weekend conference, Bransford urged us to “choose an idea that you love” and avoid the cultural fear of failure that turns each of us into our own bully.

“Don’t pack any blue,” Bransford advises, but we all have our bad days, even weeks or months, and some suffer from flat-out depression. (Hope you read Sandy Rafer’s discussion of same in this newsletter.) “I can’t write from the dark place,” Bransford admits. You just have to take care of yourself and get through it.

If all else fails, force yourself to sit and stare at the cursor until you’re ready to start writing. How long must you sit? Bransford says he’s done it on at least one occasion for over an hour.

Eventually, the words come-- and you’ve staved off insanity for another day.

Not too early to start making plans to attend next year’s Writer’s Institute in beautiful Madison, WI. Contact Laurie Scheer, WI director, at lscheer@dcs.wisc.edu to get on the mailing list for information. You can get information on all the University’s writing programs for adults at www.continuingstudies.wisc.edu/lsa/writing.
Interesting-- and maybe even true
thanks to Steve Born

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

They used kites in the American Civil War to deliver letters and newspapers.

They sing Auld Lang Syne at the stroke of midnight in almost every English-speaking country in the world to bring in the new year.

Drinking water after eating reduces the acid in your mouth by 61 percent.

They cook with peanut oil in submarines because it doesn't smoke unless it's heated above 450F.

The roar you hear when we place a seashell next to your ear is your blood surging through the veins in your ear.

Nine out of every 10 living things live in the ocean.

The banana cannot reproduce itself. It can be propagated only by the hand of man.

The University of Alaska spans four time zones.

The tooth is the only part of the human body that cannot heal itself.

In ancient Greece, tossing an apple to a girl was a traditional proposal of marriage. Catching it meant she accepted.

Warner Communications paid $28 million for the copyright to the song Happy Birthday.

A comet's tail always points away from the sun.

Caffeine increases the power of aspirin and other painkillers, which is why it is found in some medicines.

The military salute is a motion that evolved from medieval times, when knights in armor raised their visors to reveal their identity.

If you get into the bottom of a well or a tall chimney and look up, you can see stars, even in the middle of the day.
If you can understand it, it must not be great poetry, right?
By Jan Bosman

As most of you know, National Poetry Month just passed by in April. But it’s never too late to celebrate all things poetic.*

Recently a fellow writer stood up in my critique group and announced that he didn’t much like poetry, but he did like Edgar Guest’s verse. Then he read an invitation to the Super Bowl he had drafted for his invitees in Edgar Guest-style.

Edgar Guest’s stuff is poetry, and if you like it, fess up. It’s okay.

Many people, like this guy, will swear they can’t remember a single line of poetry and then, if given a chance, spout off the opening lines to The Charge of the Light Brigade or Hiawatha. They likely remember lines from rhyming poems that they were required to memorize in their youth, lines that have stuck with them like old song lyrics and pop up at the oddest times.

We remember what we remember; we like what we like. We “get” some poetry; some we don’t. UW-Madison teacher Laurel Yourke touts the poetry of Wallace Stevens. One summer at Rhinelander School of the Arts, a student in one of her classes gave her a shirt to wear that read “I Love Wallace Stevens.” For a bunch of other people in the class, Wallace Stevens’ work was as opaque as a ripe cataract.

Poet Billy Collins lives off record sales of his poetry books and enjoys standing room only at his readings. But some academics find his poetry too accessible—too easily understood, requiring, perhaps, only a couple of readings to grasp its meaning. He’s the 2001-2003 United States Poet Laureate. He wrote this poem about his experiences teaching poetry:

**Introduction to Poetry,**

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide
or press an ear against its hive.
I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,
or walk inside the poem’s room
and feel the walls for a light switch.
I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author’s name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

Coach adds: Almost to his dying day, my dad (the original Coach) could recite “The Cremation of Sam McGee” and “The Shooting of Dan McGrew,” both by the “Bard of the Yukon,” Robert Service. Great poetry? I’m sure no critic would say so. Really fun and obviously memorable stuff-- you bet! The Collins poem is one of my favorites. I use it every year when we introduce poetry to our Odyssey Project class.

* Yes, April was poetry month, and Jan very nicely submitted this piece for the April issue. I promptly lost it without ever having read it. I’m so glad she inquired as to where it missed the mark. I think it hits the bull’s eye.
Successful writers’ retreats carve an oasis amidst daily life and strife— a haven offering dips in the well of inspiration with refreshment and camaraderie. Our Rangeley working-holiday lasted a generous three days in a lake-girdled, snowy town, from Friday to Sunday.

Ideally on working vacations, writers absorb new stimuli, create fresh manuscripts, or refresh or update old ones while sharing output and accepting feedback, tips, and goals. Fresh eyes spot weak spots or problems; backbiting or negativity is a firm no-no. Participants share avenues toward success in a clubby “can-do” atmosphere, stimulating yet safe, since we understand the wisest pro was once a beginner.

For this excursion Greg L. Norris, heading the Berlin Writer’s Group, combined our members with others from the Nashua Writers’ Group. Participants—most of us had met previously—proved receptive and respecting.

A change of scene stimulates bumps of creativity, especially when old and new friends mingle with enough familiarity for comfort yet, at the same time, providing fresh outlooks.

Journal entry: I sit in an armchair with eight others surrounding, enjoying lazy snowflakes outside and warmth within. However, laziness does not rule. Coffee steams, warming my hands, while sips stimulate words—indeed, my first draft of this column. Everyone writes and silence reigns. No one asks the time or causes distraction. We’ve collectively entered a creative zone, within our private worlds, yet happy to be close to kindred souls, sharing uninterrupted time to refresh brains and kindle new concepts.

No one whines, “What shall I write about?” The spinning world and the vast universe await our literary attention so our shared goal is to be worthy. None of us are beginners, though no one (yet) has joined a best-seller list. But even as we strive, I speculate: Yes, I’m pretty good, but can I progress to get better still? With this thought in mind I jotted:

GETTING WORDS ON PAPER

Here picture windows look forth on the dark And dusk is near; soon stars will make their mark. For hours we have placed word onto word Being (like good children) seen, if rarely heard. Elsewhere, quite likely, folks are socializing; Discarding strict silence or even proselytizing. Soon suppertime approaches and we’ve brought (Along with burgeoning ideas duly sought) Food in abundance; grand eats gladly shared; Our appetites, as well as souls, now bared!

--We’ve set on paper ideas from our hearts, And will again—after taming hunger’s darts! In short, we’re bound to do what we all do: The telling of tall tales, both false and true. Yes, horror, fantasy, weird science fiction, Poetry or prose; drafts crafted without friction. Just two days hence, homeward we’ll return Thankful for this chance to share and learn; To see old friends, make new, plus to create: So this retreat proved to all of us, first-rate!

Such a poem (in any pattern, free or rhymed) is called “occasional” as it marks a specific event. There were no arguments, though many lively discussions developed as participants grouped and re-grouped, sharing the blessing of lively minds in company. On Saturday night we had a reading where everyone took turns presenting material from work in progress, so we shared where our minds took our pens.

Warmth and harmony reigned, and when we departed at noon on Sunday following a big breakfast, we possessed both precious memories and even had our group photo taken with a Rangeley Lake for backdrop.

Accomplishments? In the course of three days, I roughed out nine future E.I. columns and wrote four fresh poems—the first of which is included above, and am eager for a repeat experience just as soon as I assimilate current stimulation.

The word ‘Retreat’ seems wrong. It’s a conundrum that attending a retreat is such a fine way to advance!
NO HEROS ON BOARD

Tom Crawford

This little poem is a boat.
Keep it clean.
If you need to puke,
do it over the side.
If a bird appears
it means nothing.
That’s a movie.
We will take turns
at the oars, all of us.
Don’t complain.
A poem with blisters
is a good sign.

The Poet and the Poem

Craig W. Steele

Let your soul flow and soak the blank page;
use both the good and the fell.
Don’t hesitate to give voice to your rage;
free all your demons from hell.

Write what you mean and say what you feel;
use both your heart and your mind.
Readers decide what your poems reveal;
take joy in the treasures they find.

My parents skid in and out of my dreams.
Their shoes squeak on the oak floor
as they parry and feint around the room.
I strain from my hiding place on the stairs
to hear the words my mother sobs
as she staggers against a chair, but
the words sink into the scarf around her neck.
My father spills the letters as he spreads
his fingers to choke. I cannot spell,
I want to scream. The next day
she smiles at me tenderly and
fixes me a bowl of cream of wheat.

Sandy Rafter
On the Bravery of Two-Year-Olds
Marshall J. Cook

Rust cold dawn.
Pale sun spreads through turgid sky.
Bloodless, I move about,
clumsy and slow.
I carry you on my hip
so you can see that I fix your juice and krispies,
while you cling to sleep-warm dreams.

We ride together through shimmering curtains,
you with your stocking cap pulled low,
straw hair spilling out beneath.
I sing your songs
until you begin your wordless tunes,
moo at the cows,
remind me that kitties say “meow?”
and doggies say “buff-buff.”

You clutch at me as I lift you from the car,
needing me as no one has ever needed me,
turn to me at the door,
lip extended, eyes bulging with uncried tears,
face clouding with terrible storm.
As you begin to cry, you turn away,
tears flooding your cheeks.
Your urgent bravery leaves me
helpless with love for you.

Then I’m alone in the car.
Cows are just cows.
The radio spits adult news.
My own tears gather at such necessary anguish
as fathers parted from baby sons.
I will be brave like you,
but I will think of you, pray that you see,
with your serious, loving eyes,
how much I would rather stay with you.
If you watch *Antiques Roadshow* (you know who you are) you might have noticed that certain appraisers become almost giddy when any form of folk art appears. I enjoy its variety, too.

Folk art is generally defined as an object that reflects the values of a region and is made from natural materials found there. The person creating the object has had no formal training in fine art but is nonetheless talented and creative. Most of the work is done anonymously, and if the item lasts through the years it remains unidentified. Although it might have once been utilitarian, as time passes the artistic appeal outweighs usefulness.

Folk art dating from the Depression of the 1930s is sometimes called hobo art or tramp art. Hoboes might create some sort of whimsical object as a gift for a housewife who provided a meal or as a surprise for her children. There was a difference between hoboes and tramps. Both were wanderers, but hoboes sought work; tramps were more likely to be petty thieves.

Folk art from that era includes metal or wood toys, dolls, picture frames made of hammered tin or twigs, paintings, baskets, pottery, wood carvings, decorative trinket boxes, quilts and needlework, scrimshaw, leather goods, objects made from animal or human hair, small pieces of furniture, simple music instruments, yard ornaments, and walking sticks.

My husband’s uncle Otto lived off the land near Gayville, South Dakota, farming and trapping along the Missouri River. In the 1940s, while immobile with a broken leg, he passed the time by carving canes from diamond willow branches.

Diamond willow, a fairly soft wood, is ideal for carving but is sturdy enough for canes used for support. The red and cream colored diamond shapes are believed to be caused by a fungus that raises cankers in response to the infection. When the wood is used in a cane or other objects, the deformations add esthetic appeal. There are probably no two designs exactly alike.

Vintage folk art has monetary value today, but for most people, if a piece has been handed down in a family, the sentimental value is greater. To my knowledge, only one of Uncle Otto’s diamond willow canes survived. I’m proud to be its keeper for the moment; it hangs on my office wall where I see every day.

I’m certain my daughter will enjoy the cane when her turn comes to house it. She remembers Great-uncle Otto, so there’s an actual connection.

**Whittling or carving is not a thing of the past. My husband carves animal heads for use as walking sticks.**

We have a dog, cat, dolphin, lion, two elephants, and a long-eared rabbit, and he carved a bird on a stick for our oldest granddaughter, whose middle name is Linnet, a European bird. Her initial and honeybees decorate the stick.

Set into a display holder in our home, the sticks attract attention from adults and children. One child pulled out two and hid behind an opening in the wall and performed an animal puppet show. It was worth the price of admission.

We often take a stick on our daily walks. Mind you, not because we need aid, but because it looks classy to carry a walking stick.
From the early 1920s until 1949, when Sears, Roebuck first advertised televisions in their catalogues, radio reigned supreme as home entertainment. Stations broadcast shows for every taste. The E. C. Hooper survey of 1947 revealed that 82 of 100 Americans listened to the radio.

Listeners loyally tuned in to enjoy the 15 minute serials and 30 minute to one hour adventures of detectives, cowboys, and other champions against evil. Comedies such as Jack Benny and Fibber McGee and Molly provided laughter, while the sounds of Dinah Shore, Benny Goodman's Camel Caravan, and the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts soothed the soul. Women loved to share the life, love, and pathos of the soaps.

As a young listener, I waited excitedly on the rug before my Grandmother's large wooden console for our favorites to begin. Three organ chords, a turning doorknob, and the slowly creaking door of Inner Sanctum Mysteries made me shiver. The strange cackle and demented laugh of Raymond, the announcer, sometimes prompted my Grandmother to rise from her chair to turn off what she deemed too chilling for my ears. But, I begged- and then woke in the night with terrible nightmares.

The Shadow was another good scare. The adventures of the fighter of evil, Lamont Cranston -- he who could hide himself from the human eye and cloud men's minds -- were introduced by another cackling, creepy voice: Chilling laughter. “Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows.” More laughter. What young girl would dare disobey or do wrong with Lamont Cranston set on dispelling evil and wrong in the world? Not I.

My Mother and Grandmother loved Dr. Christian. I remember only the doctor's voice, that of Jean Hersholt, who seemed to speak so kindly to the people he tried to help. I don't remember the twisted plots of the soaps, but I do remember the two women of my family discussing the characters in Stella Dallas and Ma Perkins as though they were our relatives or next door neighbors.

I particularly liked Don McNeill's Breakfast Club, and there was a reason for that. The dentist always had the radio on as he worked on my teeth. My father's employer provided free medical and dental care, but no pain killers were used for dealing with cavities. On the Breakfast Club, Don McNeill called for a march around the breakfast table every 15 minutes, and there would be a drum roll, some hurrahs, a trumpet fanfare and music for the marchers. How I longed to be with them as the drill ground painfully into my tooth.

Gene Autry's Melody Ranch provided me the opportunity to be loyal in real life.

Every Saturday, the movie theater down the street from my parent's apartment featured a cowboy matinee. We young fans had our favorite cowboy, and there was a fierce rivalry between the fans of Gene and Roy Rogers. We never knew whose movie we'd see. if it were the wrong one, we'd really boo for a long time. Once the manager stopped the film -- a Roy Rogers -- stood on the stage in front of the screen and told us if the booing didn't stop, we'd all be sent home without a refund. I quit, but, loyal to the end, hummed "Back in the Saddle" as the Roy Rogers film resumed.

All my friends and I loved The adventures of the Lone Ranger and Tonto. My elementary school had music assemblies every Friday. The music teacher always introduced selections of classical music for us either on the piano or with vinyl records. Every assembly started with the same record. She would settle the needle, and we'd sit on the edges of our chairs eager to shout the name of the recording. She would say, "I know you recognize that song," and we'd shout in unison, "The Lone Ranger." She never tired of correcting us with the real title, "The William Tell Overture." She knew she had our attention.
My first knowledge of "scandal" occurred with *Arthur Godfrey Time* in 1953 when Godfrey brashly fired singer Julius LaRosa on the air for "losing his humility." The next day Godfrey fired his orchestra leader, Archie Bleyer. I didn't really know what the whole matter was about, but all the adults seemed to be gossiping about it with great relish. I perked up my ears.

Radio shows seeped into our lives. At recess at Lincoln Elementary School, as we bounced our rubber balls and skipped rope, we could hear from inside the building a radio broadcast of a World Series game between the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Yankees. My grandmother listened to the Texaco sponsored Metropolitan Opera when I visited her, and my Dad liked boxing from Madison Square Garden on the Gillette Cavalcade of Sports. My Mother liked to tune to music, and before I was born was very taken with a song she heard from the 1920s -- "Dardanella." It was to be my name, but thankfully, she came to her senses.

*(Next time: The Struggles of the Radio Writer)*

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**Extra Innings #55**

*Madison, Wisconsin*  May Day, 2014

This month’s All-Star Lineup:

Rex Owens, Madonna Dries Christensen, Ed Pahnke, Sandra Rafter, Ron Hevey, Esther M. Estabrooks, Jake McLaughlin, Perry Stone, and special guest star Jan Bosman, with Jan Kent as The Word Whisperer


Staff two-year-old: Liliana Lenore Cook

Staff devotee: Bonny Conway

Web Weaver: Kerrie Louis

Internetter: Steve Born

The Masked Man: Brace Beemer

Coach-in-Chief: Marshall J. Cook

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

**mcook@dcs.wisc.edu**

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**Next Deadline:**

**Friday, May 23, 2014**
Even more interesting-- and maybe true
for which we're still blaming Steve Born

When you die, hearing is the last sense to go. The first sense lost is sight.
(Maybe hearing is hanging on, hoping to hear someone say, “Look! He moved!”

In ancient times strangers shook hands to show that they were unarmed.

Strawberries are the only fruits whose seeds grow on the outside.

The moon moves about two inches away from the Earth each year.

The Earth gets 100 tons heavier every day due to falling space dust.

Due to earth's gravity it is impossible for mountains to be higher than
15,000 meters.

Mickey Mouse is known as "Topolino" in Italy.

Soldiers do not march in step when going across bridges because they
could set up a vibration which could be sufficient to knock the bridge
down.

Everything weighs one percent less at the equator.

For every extra kilogram carried on a space flight, 530 kg of excess fuel
are needed at lift-off.

The letter J does not appear anywhere on the periodic table of the elements.

I don’t know about you, but I’m pretty sad about the moon moving away. Do you suppose it’s because we
shot missiles at it?
The relatives all lived south of Madison a short piece down Highway 12/18 to Fort Atkinson, that same country road many took to Chicago and beyond in the 1950s before the interstates.

Mother, Dad, my sister and I would drive that highway, the road of Dad’s growing up farm. We made the trips in an array of 1950s Chevrolets – back then you bought one every two years – recounting dangers that lurked on every hill and curve. How could I forget that a youngster had been kidnapped and was still missing from one spot we passed? The winding road was filled with scenic red barns and sheds right up close to it. Cow barns filled with Holsteins are still there, while tobacco sheds, the ones with slats, are joining history, Wisconsin not so much into tobacco anymore. But I remember enjoyable aromas, at least those from tobacco sheds.

Highway 12/18 provided one major form of entertainment besides listening to a radio that worked especially well only on hills. For those lacking pre-1980 memories, let me provide quick background: men shaved with razor blades using shaving cream. Burma Shave was a key player.

**Burma Shave** placed their advertising messages on a series of small road signs, typically red with white lettering, each sign containing a few words, signs spaced about five seconds of driving time apart. Burma Shave hadn’t planned to, but they may have invented an early form of Twitter.

Phrases were catchy and humorous, many with helpful hints on things like safe driving, family, love, and patriotism. Beginning in 1927, Burma Shave’s first message was to use their product. **Goodbye! shaving brush**

Shave the modern way.

When the advertising program ended in 1963, 70,000 signs were left to take on the patina of a long-unpainted barn. Hunters shot away some of them. To this day few survive, most of these on the old Route 66. Thanks to burma-shave.org/jingles every one of the 600-some messages has been preserved.

Our family had been treated to one set of Burma Shave going and a different set coming home - signs lined both sides of the road. It was Ok that we had seen them all before.

You can read more about Burma Shave signs in Frank Rowsome Jr.’s book *The Verse by the Side of the Road*. 
Last month in these pages, Madonna Dries Christensen profiled two Iowa Pioneers, John F. and Lyn F. Glover. Their story is now available in book form! *The Orator And The Sage* is a biographical sketch of Osceola County Iowa pioneers John and his son Lyn. Using online Gazette newspaper archives provided by the library, Christensen traced the two men's diverse lives, adding pioneer stories, vintage photos, personal memories, and comments from residents who remember the Glover family.

Both factual and entertaining, *The Orator And The Sage* is a brief history of the early days of the county, from its founding in 1871, when Civil War veteran John Glover broke sod on the open prairie to, 1956, when Lyn Glover died.

Readers will enjoy the poetic language from those days. For instance, when a man who had imbibed too much “exhilaration juice” was hauled off to the justice of the peace, “he had to be handled in a manner more emphatic than elegant.”

Also amusing is the banter and sometimes caustic remarks between newspaper publishing rivals. There are humorous tales of court cases involving disputes over hogs and chickens and knock-down-drag-out street fights, as well as two murder trials involving both Glover men.

*The Orator And The Sage* is available in print and digital copy, only from [www.magcloud.com](http://www.magcloud.com).

**“Ourboox” coming soon!**

Longtime pal Gadi Bossin reports that he’ll soon launch a free-for-authors, free-for-readers website called **Ourboox**, where writers can post and readers can access their novels. He’ll have a lot more to say about this in the June issue, along with an excerpt from his novel, *Annie’s Prophecy*, the first novel published on the site.

**LFL UPDATE**

**The Little Free Library of Felton Place lives**

Thanks to everyone who inquired about the fate of our Little Free Library, which I’d had to close down because of book thieves who twice cleaned out the entire inventory. I’m very happy to report that the box on the stick is totally restocked and open for business, in time for spring.

**How’d you like the show, John?**

Remember the ground-breaking television series *All in the Family*, which starred Carol O’Connor as lovable (?) lunch-bucket bigot Archie Bunker? Most critics now credit producer Norman Lear with forging the way for more open portrayals of topics such as race relations on the tube. (This was also the first show to allow the sound of a flushing toilet—scandalous!)

But not all critics were enamored with the show when it first aired in the late ‘60s, as Emily Nussbaum reported in *The New Yorker* of April 7. John Leonard, one of my favorite media critics, wrote: “Why review a wretched program? Well, why vacuum the living room or fix the septic tank? Every once in a while the reviewer must assume the role of a bottle of Johnson’s No-Roach with the spray applicator: let’s clean up this culture.”

See the letters column, starting on the next page, for some spirited defenses of negative reviews like this one.

**Is there intelligence life out there?**

I’ll believe a more fully-evolved life form exists on another planet when I see an ET pick up an iPhone, instantly figure out how to access all the apps, and then throw the damn thing in the trash can. The real question is, is there intelligence life on earth?
If I accept a job as a book reviewer, I’m being paid to give an honest opinion. Whether that opinion is objective or subjective could depend on the policy of my employer or it could be my choice. Either way, avoiding negatives is a cop out. It’s like giving your students A’s on all their papers or teaching only those who could meet that standard.

When I took your classes you certainly didn’t hold back when I screwed up. But if you thought I was an idiot, you at least kept it to yourself.

As a professional reviewer, why would I not point out, for instance, if the writer didn’t properly check facts or his writing was trite or redundant? I wouldn’t need to include a rating of his intelligence.

Would I read something that received a bad review? I’m sure I have. After all, a review represents the attitude of only one person. If we were all that worried about one person’s opinion, we’d’ve never had anything published.

In any other career you’re told by someone – supervisors, peers, members of your audience - when your work is unacceptable. Sometimes that opinion is objective; sometimes it's subjective. Sometimes it's delivered gently, sometimes not. The point is, when that happens it's up to you to decide whether they're right or wrong and what, if anything, to do about it. Why should writing be any different?

With regard to the reading poll, I’m not sure those statistics are all that dire. I grew up in a home with very few books. I remember having some Little Golden Books when I was learning to read. But beyond that, I never owned more than half a dozen books total until I was married. When I asked for money to buy books at our first school book fair, it took a good bit of nagging on my part before Mother gave me money for one (small) book. I never saw my mother read anything other than a recipe book (she was a caterer) until I was 50 years old. Then she read romance novels - one or two a week.

Dad only read newspapers. When he retired he read the entire paper aloud to my mother every day. When she left the room, he just continued to read, only louder. It drove her crazy.

Somehow, my older sister learned to love reading. (And now that we’ve brought this topic up, I’m going to have to ask her how that happened.) I took my cue from her and annoyed the librarians by trying to check out psychology books from the adult section so often, they finally told me if my mother wrote them a note granting permission, they’d allow it. She did, so they did. Thank God for the public library!

Please don't print this if I sound like an idiot.

Barbara Burris

I do not now, nor have I ever, though you were an idiot, Barbara. Thanks for a wonderful letter.

I generally enjoy truthful reviews that substantiate their conclusions with quotes or explanations. I don't enjoy ad hominem attacks or unsupported mudslinging, except in the case of slurs against The New York Times or the Arizona Republic. I almost always check out the reviews of a new (for me) restaurant and give extra weight to negative reviews of fish houses but tend to overlook someone who can't stand a decent steak joint.

John Swift

Don't you think there is a difference between reviews which seem/are deliberately cruel and those which point out that which is less than stellar by accepted criteria? In other matters, I certainly don't want to eat bad food or pay money for a poor movie or substandard motel room. I want to know. I think in this age of so much writing and self-publishing, someone has to step up and say, "maybe you better think about your work, or, edit, or start over. ..."

I think not giving negative reviews is destructive. People build up false hopes and spend money and time. I think people should be encouraged all the time, but in my book, steering away from negativism isn't being honest, and I always expect and prize that quality.

Sandy Rafter

More letters on next page--
How about negative comments in book clubs?

I love Extra Innings. The article about reviewing books is very interesting. Since we have had our library book discussion for a few years, our leader can be quite accurate in predicting who will like which books. She tries to use fairly controversial books so the discussion doesn't get boring. It would be QUITE boring if we all read the selected book and all liked it. That would be a very short discussion.

The book we have for this month's group is The Husband's Secret. I'm not very far into it but I hate it already! I doubt that I will finish it before the next meeting, but even if we don't like the book, it's interesting to find out what everyone else thinks about it."

Marion Childs

Roper won’t go negative

Hi Marshall:
First, thanks again for letting me participate in your newsletter. [“The Art of Bob Dylan,” last issue] What a thrill; and to be given “special guest star” status—my goodness! I hope I don’t become a monster now when someone else refuses me my “props.” You’ve been so generous with your time and encouragement, I won’t forget it. I liked the artwork too.

Now on to Joe McGinniss—what a great rant. [“If you can’t say something nice about a book, should you just say nothing at all?” last issue.] I wasn’t familiar with him until I saw his obituary a couple of weeks ago. What a story.

I think you’re right about the “Uzi.” It’s not that negative reviews are bad exactly—reviews can be a valuable part of the sorting and fleshing-out process that makes art and its understanding stronger. Good and bad. But Uzi is different—it’s visceral. It’s that chill we all feel when we know “something else is going on here.”

No I wouldn’t write a negative review. There’s enough ugly in the world. Why throw flames at the one thing that may be propping up mankind—the Arts. If you don’t like it, don’t buy it.

Also, is it just me or does it seem peculiar how all the main players of Fatal Vision have last names that begin with “M”: Joe McGinniss, Jeffrey MacDonald (Convicted), Brian Murtagh (Prosecutor), Janet Malcolm (New Yorker), Jeffrey Masson (sued Malcolm for untruths, evidently inciting her hostility), Errol Morris (wrote “A Wilderness of Error” in support of the defense) and perhaps MacBeth for the title.

I’m not sure what it means…

Brenda Roper
Coach: Looks like a job for Mulder and Scully!

Maybe there is something to this genetics business

I note a certain resemblance between Lily and Gram Ellie, yes?? Getting cuter by the day!!

Pat Laux
Coach: Both of them!

Love receiving Extra Innings despite being stumped on every mystery photo. Compensation comes with the clearly identified pics of Lily. I find myself having dialogues with contributors about what they've submitted and about writing in general. I wonder how many others are doing the same. Why don't I write to them? Too much on my plate these days.

Gadi Bossin
Coach: Gadi promises news soon about a new free website called Ourboox. His novel, Annie’s Prophecy, is the first of what he hopes will be many novels posted. Details next month.

Sundberg understands depression

I appreciated the article about depression. Many of us have experienced a form of that malady, if only post partum. (I used to tell folks I didn’t experience it until a year after the child was born—"Didn't have time for it!") I’ve experienced it. No one understands unless they’ve been there.

Norma Sundberg

Online book club has a fan

Dear Rex,
I really loved your article about book clubs in the April Extra Innings! [Rex Owens, “For What It’s Worth”]. You really connected with the right folks to share your book and gain some really valuable feedback and a bit of critiquing.

It was in Suzanne Beecher’s on-line book-club that I connected with Marshall Cook. He’d written a guest column for her on the occasion of one of her yearly vacations. I wrote him, and he replied, sending me some of the past issues of the newsletter he’d edited while at the University. He told that he wanted to start another because he
really loved the process, the writing and the people connected.

It wasn't until I'd started writing some things for *Extra Innings* that I came across a book of his I'd bought from Writers Digest Book Club way back when! I just pulled the book (*How to Write With the Skill of a Master and the Genius of a Child*) out to reread it. Marshall's name seemed familiar! Not only that but I pulled out the *ByLine* Magazines I'd subscribed to some time ago (no longer in publication) and found the columns Marshall had written for them.

I get Suzanne Beecher's weekly non-fiction books on-line. I've won books from her drawings and have written at least one critique for one of the authors. I've had our BookMobile bring books that Suzanne has featured. It keeps us reading and searching for good stories and good books.

**Norma J. Sundberg**

*For details on Suzanne’s wonderful dearreader book clubs, email her at suzanne@dearreader.com.*

**Conway joins staff**

Dear Marshall, I truly enjoyed the last few *EI* issues. I love how little Lily got that desk. We bought one for our grandgirl (we have five grandgirls) when she was in second grade. They had to write a story on their favorite Christmas gift. I was so surprised when I read her little story telling that her favorite gift was that desk and why. I bet Lily will love hers also.

I like your poems you have been writing. Nice addition. Loved “Bobby.”

Moms Mabley used to say she was “old and UGLEEE!” Our winter was just like that! I know you had a bad winter also.

Love, your *Extra Innings* Devotee,

**Bonny Conway**

*Wow. Our first Devotee! I should put you in the masthead.*

Thanks for the kind words. Lily does enjoy her desk, but her favorite present from us so far as a toddler-sized broom-- which she rides like a horsey all over the house. I, of course, have to ride with her on my horsey broom while schorling the Bonanza theme and the William Tell Overture.

Thanks for bringing to mind the great Moms Mabley. They’ll never be another like her.

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**E.I. WANTS TO KNOW**

**E.I. readers relatively guilt free?**

Last month I asked you what book you’ve always meant to read but just haven’t gotten around to yet or what you feel ashamed/embarrassed never to have read?

Apparently, you’re been keeping up with your reading, as I only got these two responses.

The book I've been meaning to read but never have is *Madam Secretary, A Memoir* by Madeleine Albright. In 2004 in Chicago, I bought a copy and stood in a long line, waiting for the former secretary-of-state to sign it. ...

Maybe this summer I'll read the book. After ten years, it might be about time!

**Jan Bosman**

What books would I like to read? About the 15 or so on my nightstand that I haven't gotten around to yet.

By the way, how did an old geezer like you end up with the two good looking ladies shown at the end of *Extra Innings* #54?

**Larry Tobin**

*By the grace of God, friend. By the grace of God.*

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**Next month’s poser**

Who is your favorite underappreciated/overlooked author? As always, tell the Coach at mcook@dcs.wisc.edu.

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Dear Reader,

 Always remember and never forget, this newsletter has got your back!
Is chronic obesity catching?

Neighbor Tim's wife died. He stopped in to tell me and say he was going back to Arizona next week. He also explained how she had donated her body to a company called Genesis. Within hours after her death, Genesis transferred the body to a medical research facility. After they do what they do, they cremate the body, and the remains are sent to Tim.

It sounded like a good deal so I searched the net. Genesis is out of Kentucky and don't accept Missourians. Wouldn't you know, they are licensed in several states, Missouri not being one of them. Come to find out the neighbor's wife arranged it when they lived in Arizona several years ago. However I went to body snatchers and donations, via Bing search, and come up with BioGift, Lifequest and AGR (Anatomy Gifts Registry)

Naturally, being Saturday, they were all closed except for the receiving dead bodies departments. After reading some of the info on their web pages, I learned chronic obesity is one reason donations aren't accepted. The thought came to me: this may be why I have such a difficult time with the medical professionals not knowing how to apply their art to some of my conditions.

Come to find out, even though they use the bodies for medical students to practice on, as well as disease research, chronic obesity isn't a disease they want to research or to have students practice on. HIV positive cadavers is another. I can understand the reluctance when it comes to cadavers that test positive for the HIV virus, but I seriously doubt anyone has ever caught chronic obesity from someone else's body fluids, pregnant women excluded, of course.

In fairness a hernia factor may be considered when it comes to moving me from table to table. And yet wouldn't that be better to practice on a dead guy rather than trying to pick up a 450-pound patient after a failed first-time-ever table or bed transfer? This from a guy who has been dropped. :)

Two things come to mind after looking into body donations. One, it is a noble cause. And two: you learn your real worth when you can't even give body away. I've known a few old hookers with that problem but never give it much thought until yesterday. :) I'll still call Monday and check into the possibilities. Maybe they know of a science project with a fetish for old dead fat guys. :D

Plan for the day is stay dry. Lose 300 pounds as I strive for the perfect cadaver look. You have a wonderful day, my friend. Bless you and yours.

Paw Joe
My friend Carl and I are both comedy nerds. We love introducing each other to new comedians. One of my favorite forms of comedy is stand-up. It's truly an art to get up onstage in front of an audience, talk for an hour and make people laugh. Here are my five favorite stand-up comedians in the business today.

**Patton Oswalt-**
He's one of my idols, and I’ve listened to his albums countless times. I love his nerdy style of humor with tons of references to films and comic books. He has become a very good storyteller as well, as shown in his 2011 memoir, *Zombie Spaceship Wasteland*. He makes me proud to be a nerd and has helped me embrace it.

He's also a fine actor, appearing in shows such as *Justified* and *Parks and Recreation*, where he gave an eight-minute improvised filibuster on the upcoming Star Wars films.

In person, he's kind, humble and very nice to talk to.

**Which album you should start with:** His second, *Werewolves and Lollipops*, is one of the all-time greatest. Every bit is comedy gold.

**Mike Birbiglia-**
Easily the best comedic storyteller working today, Mike started off as a more traditional stand-up comedian, but with his second album, he started telling stories. He has mastered the format and has had four great specials, including his current touring show, *Thank God For Jokes*. Mike's stories of embarrassment and awkwardness make him accessible and easy to relate to.

He adapted his one man show, *Sleepwalk With Me*, into a film in 2012, and it's one of the best comedies I’ve seen in years.

I've seen Mike live twice and highly recommend seeing him in person.

**Which album you should start with:** While I think *My Girlfriend's Boyfriend* is his best work yet, listen to his one man show that preceded it, *Sleepwalk With Me*. It's where he really starts to hit his stride. Check out his book of the same title.

**Louis C.K.-**
Perhaps the most popular stand-up comedian today, his material may be a bit dark and explicit for some, but his brutal honesty is what makes him so funny. He's been compared to George Carlin, and the comparison is apt. Louis' style is his own, though. His thought process is fascinating and his material well-crafted and absolutely hysterical. His FX show, *Louie*, is great as well.

**Which album you should start with:** It's a close call between his first two albums, but I'll give *Chewed Up* the slight edge.

**Maria Bamford-**
I saw Maria live last November, and my sides were hurting by the end of her set. She has quite the talent for doing voices, and her impressions of her parents are hilarious. She also has done bits on her depression, and it's great to see a comedian examine something so personal and make it funny. See her live at any opportunity.

**Which album you should start with:** *Unwanted Thoughts Syndrome* is probably the best starting point.

**Kyle Kinane-**
I first saw Kyle open for Patton Oswalt in Madison in 2010. It's rare to see an opener as funny as the headliner, but Kyle had me laughing so hard, I was almost in tears. His style is unique and his outlook on life memorable. One of his best bits is an eight-minute story about seeing a man eating pancakes out of a bag on an airplane and wondering what the man must have thought for him to do such an odd thing.

Kyle is coming to the Comedy Club on State Street in Madison in mid May for a few nights, and I highly recommend seeing him live if you can. I'll definitely be at one of those shows.

**Which album you should start with:** Either of his two albums are great. I like *Whiskey Icarus* more, but his debut album, *Death of the Party*, is also great.
You might be from Wisconsin if...

The town you grew up in had a bar called “Ma’s Place.”

You know how to polka but never tried it sober.

The FFA was the most popular club in high school.

You know what “Knee-high by the Fourth of July” means.

You know it’s traditional for the bride and groom to go bar hopping between the ceremony and the reception.

You know that there is no “r” in Wausau.

You were delighted to get a miniature snow shovel for your 3rd birthday.

You buy Christmas presents at Fleet Farm.

You get irritated at sports announcers who pronounce it “Wes-con-sin.”

You own at least one cheesehead.

You spent more on beer than you did on food at your wedding.

You know that Kaukauna is NOT a Hawaiian Island.

You think fast food is hitting a deer at 65 mph.

You or someone you know was a “Dairy Princess” at a county fair.

You know that “combine” is a noun.

You know that pasties are not articles of clothing.

You let your older siblings talk you into putting your tongue on a steel post in the middle of winter.

Your class took a field trip to a brewery in second grade.

You checked football schedules before setting your wedding date.

You can visit Luxemburg, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Berlin, and Poland all in one afternoon.
Black and White

Guy Hopper was sheriff of the small, western town of Spring Grove. Through and through a lawman, Guy kept troublemakers at bay-- with the exception of “that man in the black hat, his ornery father” who rolled into town that early spring afternoon in his red pickup truck. The ol’ man made a point of revving his eight cylinder engine as he passed Guy’s office.

From the front window, Guy’s deputy said, “It’s Harold Hopper, your dad. That - that no-good cuss stopped across the street in front of the Emporium. Gal dang if he ain’t waving his black hat at me and pointing at the Salvation Army Box.” The deputy waved back in response. “What you think he could be up to now?”

“There’s one way to find out. I’ll just mosey over to the Emporium to find out.”

He crunched his battered felt hat on his head and walked across the street. While walking, he thought of reasons for his father’s visit – needs money to fix something, in trouble with someone, or just spoiling for a fight. He sighed.

Upon entering the Emporium with its variety of dry goods, Guy spied his father, Harold. Expert at ambling, Guy approached Harold.

“Good to see you, son. I’m here to tell you I’m turning over a new leaf for your birthday, be a better dad to you. I’m serious, son, and to show you how serious, I’m giving you a peace offering – a new white hat.” He handed the Stetson, to Guy. “You grin and wear it,” he said.

“Thanks, Dad.”

Hal smiled. They shook hands, then walked outside together and up to the Salvation Army Box. Hal whisked the black hat off his head and dumped it into the box. “And I’ll grin and share it,” he said.

After seeing his father donate his beloved black hat, Guy choked up. He wrapped his arms around his father and patted him on his back.

“Thanks, Dad, for my happiest birthday ever.”

Stepping back, Hal said, “You ain’t never been in my pickup truck, son. How about we go for a spin?”

“OK, I’ll grin and dare it,” Guy said.

Every word-lover’s home should have these

Among the books on the shelf over my computer are: The Watchamacallit; The Word Museum; Oxymoronica; Origins of the Specious; The Cynics Dictionary; and Writers Have No Age (a personal favorite).

Among the mugs hanging under a kitchen cabinet are The Shakespearean Insults Mug and The Greatest First Lines of Literature Ever Mug. This latter has 24 memorable opening lines, and the source of each is on the bottom of the mug.

This is clearly getting out of hand; nevertheless, my next acquisition will be The Snark Handbooks.

Sometimes the thoughts
in my head
get so bored
they go out for a stroll
through my mouth.
this is rarely
a good thing.
-- Scott Westerfield
Spring
Sandy Rafter

Sparrows hop forsythia stems,
spindly fingers sticking straight
to the maple where sated squirrels
play lazy running games.
Brown gray black electric cat
tries to hide in twos and threes
of leaves near the feeder
as the dove bobs at seeds.
Greening weeds spread
through my flower beds,
reminding of an aching back --
raking, pulling, picking winter's trash.
I call my neighbor boy,
always eager for some cash,
and praise the sun and allergist
who warns, "Better stay in these days."

And now, at last,
your Easter Lily...
Lily turns two

...with big boots to fill