"I am 70; 70, and would nestle in the chimney corner, and smoke my pipe, and read my book, and take my rest, wishing you well in all affection, and that when you in your turn shall arrive at pier No. 70 you may step aboard your waiting ship with a reconciled spirit, and lay your course toward the sinking sun with a contented heart."

Mark Twain

An American icon turns 70 Details and picture, p 20!

“I’ll never make the mistake of being 70 again.”
Charles Dillon “Casey” Stengel

“[A]fter turning 70, one has, after all, the pleasure of playing, as it were, with house money.”
George F. Will

“I’m only 70 when I look in the mirror. At all other times I’m about 17.”
Betty Birnstihl

“[O]n my 70th birthday, I woke with a distinct sense of difference. I’d arrived. ... Getting old is empowering.”
Liz Byrski
We strive to celebrate, describe, feel, give meaning to, and become life.

At times, we poets can be our own toughest critics (and champions).

With great frustration Kenneth Rexroth exclaimed, "I've had it with these cheap sons of bitches who claim they love poetry but never buy a book."

Other poets have acknowledged the difficulties of writing and having their efforts accepted by the general public, or, even those near and dear.

Randall Jarrell commented, "A good poet is someone who manages, in a lifetime of standing out in thunderstorms, to be struck by lightning five or six times; a dozen or two dozen times and he is great."

"Poetry is something that you do," lamented Robert Pinto. "If you say you are a singer or a musician, you would be asked to perform, but if you say you are a poet, people leave the room."

"Publishing a volume of poetry is like dropping a rose-petal down the Grand Canyon and waiting for the echo," complained Don Marquis.

Pulitzer Prize winner for poetry Charles Simic recalls visiting his elderly mother:

When my mother was very old and in a nursing home, she surprised me one day toward the end of her life by asking me if I still wrote poetry. When I blurted out that I still do, she stared at me with incomprehension. I had to repeat what I said, till she sighed and shook her head, probably thinking this son of mine has always been a little nuts. . . .

In his humorous fashion, Ogden Nash summarized the poetic world:

Poets aren't very useful
Because they aren't consumeful or very produceful.

I am used to reading or showing my poetry to others and receiving bewildered looks and comments, if not outright statements such as, "Well, I've got to run along now." I used to think it was my poetry and feel miserable, but it can't be all bad, can it?

They shoot horses, don't they?

For my own poetic sanity, I have concluded that poetry is difficult for a lot of people. It IS comforting to know that 42 states have appointed state poet laureates or state writers. Nine states even have state poems extolling the history, beauty, and thrills therein. A program sponsored by The Poetry Society of America and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, "Poetry in Motion," places poems inside buses or trains -- all chosen through open submission. The poems have appeared in 20 cities throughout the country with appreciation and enthusiasm from riders.

Still, Edgar Allen Poe's "The Raven" swoops around from school days when many are asked to recall a poem they know -- usually, the only poem they know. What is frequently heard from people who don't go near poetry is that poetry wasn't so bad in high school but is not something that they think of to read now.

Perhaps, people need to be reminded more about poetry. Think of that TV cereal commercial you hate, but you keep seeing the ads for it, and the next time you go to the store, there's the cereal in your grocery cart.

As I speed along or am stalled in traffic, or, even walking through a parking lot, I read bumper stickers; they are difficult to escape in front of us and could include poetry themes:

Have you hugged a poet lately?
Honk if you love poetry, even if you're a goose
How's my rhyming; call 1-800-duh-uhuh

Don't rhyme over spilt milk

Walt Whitman for President
I'm a poet, but I did not write "Ode to Billy Joe"

-Stickers continue, next page
Smile though your rhythm is breaking  
Save the whales and writers spouting poetry  
Don't drink and ode  
I brake for poets

On a more serious note, as I was researching this column, I came across a 2012 article in the New York Times by Eliza Griswold.

I live with the hope that more readers will turn to poetry. I joke about poetry and can laugh about bumper stickers, earnings, fame, and even my own lines. However, I was sobered when I read Griswold's story about the death risks Afghanistan women face to write poetry.

She describes a society where many women must take on a submissive role, a society where they may be beaten by males in their family or killed if it becomes known that they write poetry. Choosing subject matter is complex. A simple love poem may be viewed by males or other family members as proof of an illicit relationship.

Griswold points out that only five of one hundred women have graduated from high school; writing poetry is a form of self-education for many. Most are forced to marry husbands chosen by others by age 16. Their place in life is dictated to them and does not include writing.

A women's literary society which exists in Kabul and has the support of the university elite is an outlet for poets, but transmitting poetry from the provinces is a highly secretive and dangerous task for the women. The poets live in fear, suffer from depression, and never know when their poetry secret will be exposed.

I state that being a poet isn't easy, and that has truth to it, but some of the frustrations seem silly when compared with the fears for life of the Afghanistan poets. I am thankful I have the freedom to be any kind of writer I choose. I never considered before that being a poet could be deadly.

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Extra Innings #59

Madison, Wisconsin September, 2014

This month’s All-Star Lineup:  
Sandy Rafter, Esther M. Estabrooks,  
Bill Spevacek, Rex Owens, Den Adler,  
John Swift, and Madonna Dries Christensen,  
with special guest star Suzenne Beecher, and  
Jan Kent as The Word Whisperer  
Poetry from Bill Spevacek, Sandy Rafter,  
Norma Sundberg, John Swift, Bonnie Conway, Coach, and The Writer’s Poet,  
Craig W. Steele  
Neptis: Lily Cook  
Psalm 85: Justice and peace shall kiss  
Web Weaver: Kerrie Louis  
The Masked Man: Brace Beemer  
Stuntman: Yakima Canutt  
Coach-in-Chief: Marshall J. Cook

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

Back issues available at: www.continuingstudies.wisc.edu/writing/extra-innings

Next Deadline:  
Friday, Sept 19, 2014
A few issues back, I asked you to list books you felt guilty for never having read. Jeanne Kokler’s column in a recent Sunday Wisconsin State Journal, lamenting that she’d never been able to make it through Moby Dick, prompted me to revisit the subject.

I, too, tried to read Moby Dick. I really really tried. Just too damn much whaling. (I did love Billy Budd, though. Same ocean, much shorter.)

I bounced right off Gone With the Wind, hardly even leaving a dent, although Goddaughter Elizabeth, whom I adore and who is at least as intelligent as anybody I know, loves it so. Couldn’t make it into Anna Karenina either, although a dear friend, Bill, whose opinions I value greatly, highly recommended it.

Proust? Forgettabout it.

Many, many others, of course. “The Great Books I’ve Never Read” is a very long list indeed.

But I don’t feel guilty about it. (Well, maybe a little, for Elizabeth’s sake.) It’s probably a function of my age (advanced), but I’ll never be guilted into reading a book again. Oh, I’ll start them. But if it doesn’t connect, it goes unread into my Little Library out on the front lawn for someone else to try.

I like what I like and reject the rest, and I refuse to hang my head. I conquered Dostoevsky, all of him. Read The Sound and the Fury and most everything else that William Faulkner ever wrote-- some of it twice and even three times-- and loved it all. I’ve read, James Joyce’s Ulysses twice, Same for Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man, not because I had to but because I wanted to.

I am ashamed of, or at least disgusted by, some of the books I did read to the end, however.

Guilt got me through An American Tragedy, by Theodore Dreiser (well named!) and Of Human Bondage, by W. Somerset Maugham (I’d rather be shackled!). A college course coerced me through Mrs. Dalloway, by Virginia Woolf, against my better judgment.

A long-ago girl friend lured me through Ayn Rand’s monumental floppus, The Fountainhead. (Would that love were blind. Then I wouldn’t have been able to read that awful book!)

I read The Great Gatsby of my own volition, I admit, and think it one of the most overrated “classics” of all time.

Just to be “fair and balanced,” I didn’t much care for Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises, either. (I’ve memorized whole big chunks of The Old Man and the Sea, however.)

I’m currently reading The Closer, by Marianna Rivera, the autobiography of the greatest relief pitcher of all time and a splendid human being. I’m loving it. Do I feel guilty because it ain’t on the Great Books list? Not one bit.

Perhaps this sort of reflection on my reading likes and dislikes makes it a little easier for me to understand why, while some folks like the stuff I write and are nice enough to say so, others, well, don’t-- and usually just say nothing. Whatever rocks your cradle, beats your drum, scratches your itch, and sets your toes to tapping and your heart to singing, says I.

Garrison Keillor on turning 70

“When you pass 70, you are no longer obligated to finish what you’ve started, not a book, not a meal, not even a sentence.”
Recently, Peter and I bought a home in Gorham, New Hampshire. Mountains surround, including Mt. Moriah in front and Mt. Pine behind. The Androscoggin River, with huge, rounded rock for sitting, is in walking distance, while hiking trails beckon, plus a train track runs back of our house. Growing up by a Pennsylvania Railroad line, I love trains. But what I wrote of first (while doing yard work) was a cheeky squirrel. The following “occasional” poem is not about a famous face or event-- just capturing words of a cute critter doing what they do.

ACRO (short for acrobat)
Squirrel blending into maple;
Maple blending into squirrel.
Clearly he’s secure at home
But myself--new here-- not yet.
I’m intruding on his territory
So he’s wary of my presence.
He nibbles bark and scratches;
Flirts bush tail then stretches.
Watching, barely blinking,
All motion for a moment stilled.
But then, skilled aerialist, he
 Races across a sheer, taut line
Stretched from our home
Up to the telephone pole where,
Headless of my presence,
Having been eyeballed, I’m forgot,
So plainly his indifference states,
"Old lady, nuts to you!"

My next poem came by watching children from our door step. Twenty years back, my pair would be among them, Hannah and Tom having received all the athleticism I lacked.

DUSK ON POTTER STREET
Such scooters and skaters! This neighborhood caters
To kids who are out having fun.
They whirl and they twirl, each glad boy and girl,
Right onward till set of the sun.
Skateboards, roller blades; land level--no grades;
Yes, it’s really as safe as can be.
To and fro all go, some fast and some s-l-o-w--
While, by golly, I wish one was me!

Ideas fade, so capture prompts promptly and follow where imagination leads. I urge this to the Tuesday Night Writers who meet weekly in Gorham’s sister town, Berlin, and our group forms the most enthused, productive cadre I’ve encountered. We have a published playwright, four published novelists, poets at various ages and stages, artists and musicians, plus a shared collective “can-do” courteous attitude.

Recently Berlin’s Tea Bird Gallery held an exhibit of our work. Each member received two poster boards to design; featuring stories, photos, illustrations, poems et al., and quality proved superb. We each utilized space in our preferred and individual ways, while my husband Peter masterminded, then installed the show plus informational handouts. Being senior poet-- eldest!--I was intrigued by fellow poets’ choices, perforce brief. The first example is by Irene Gallant, a semi-finalist in a recent mystery-writing competition. Leaving off dastardly doings, she created this limerick:
Glory, glory to the writers.
We don’t give up; we are fighters.
We pen all day,
All work, no play,
As we create works that excite us,

Gregory Norris, who sells vast amounts of SF and fantasy, plus film scripts and articles, also completed his first poem:
Wondrous, watching dreams take shape
--Invisible wings and a silver cape—
For soon I learned that I could fly
And now I own the endless sky
Plus can explore all wild new worlds:
Words are my wings, my wings unfurled!

Now comes Launa Keenan, poet, artist, and musician, who brings our group chagga, a health tonic distilled from fungus grown on birches.
Thanks to her bounty, last cold season I’d no sniffles or flu. (Check the Internet for more info.) Here is her supportive lyric, and this piece, plus many others by her, she sets to music and performs.

Writing is Me, Writing is You:
It Grounds, It Nourishes
Releases and Builds.
Writing is Discovering
As its Mystery …… Fulfills……

See Bullpen Briefs, p 16, for Esther’s latest news.
A few weeks ago, Marshall and I talked about the differences between poetry that adheres to standards of meter and rhyme and the free verse styles much in vogue today. I’m an advocate of meter and rhyme. When I read the contest winners and poems published in learned journals, too often my mind drifts.

I’ve only been dabbling in poetry for several years, and only because it’s fun, so I don’t qualify as a scholar on the subject. But I have an open mind and will gladly discuss it with the freest of free versers.

Ezra Pound, one of the titans of the poetry industry (oxymoron), has been quoted saying, “Music begins to atrophy when it departs too far from the dance…Poetry begins to atrophy when it departs too far from music.”

Maya Angelou said, “Poetry is music written for the human voice.”

My dedication to meter can be traced to love of good music. Meter is too often absent or difficult to detect in free verse, more like a long operatic soliloquy in a language I don’t understand.

I love words, as all Extra Innings readers do. I like the clever use of words to make a point through rhyme, especially rhyme that the reader is not expecting. Anyone can put together lines than end in “red and “said.” I’m proud to have rhymed “…serious” with “…Wayne LaPierre is”

I draw inspiration from the works of Ogden Nash, Robert Service, Baxter Black and Calvin Trillin. One characteristic their poems have in common is that they tell a story. Service was best at that, although he had the benefit of an exciting life to draw from. Calvin Trillin, of course, dwells on politics. Baxter Black, the “cowboy poet and former large animal veterinarian,” developed his own genre, which defies emulating.

I have views of my own to express, and I do. The best of them all, Ogden Nash, could find humor in both mundane and intellectual subjects and turn them into poems—erudite, rhythmic, and with some of the cleverest and most unexpected rhymes.

Poems can be lengthy or short, as long as they get the job done. I was preparing snacks for watching a Packers game when this little brain fart escaped:

As we nuke those seeds that Orville Redenbacher developed so famously, Be thankful that every kernel in the bag doesn’t pop simultaneously.

I think Ogden Nash would have liked that. I love the freedom inherent in all poetry, from limericks to the prize winners.

Much of the modern, free verse poetry seems to dwell on personal introspection, reflections of bygone days, or the rapture of fields of spring dandelions. I’m not the introspective, nostalgic or rapturous sort. I prefer the more disciplined, musical approach of rhyme and meter. Inspiration is everywhere; my poem, “Climatology 101,” for example, was prompted by a recent e-mail from my brother. (See poem next page)

Let’s hear from Extra Innings poets and readers, whether you prefer free verse or rhyme-and-meter poetry or a hybrid. And let’s all follow Duke Ellington’s wise advice: “If it sounds good, it is good.”

How hard it is to take September straight—not as a harbinger of something harder.

From “Absolute September,”
by Mary Jo Salter
Climatology 101
Bill Spevacek

Three brothers from Madison with differing talents, Pursuing careers settled across the continent. One went East, where dew points are brutal, Another West, where A/C is crucial. The third stayed put, by circumstance chained To gorgeous summers, but winter’s worst pain, Where twelve months of living are crammed into three, And hibernation’s a dream -- “bear envy.”

Two liked to rib the bro in the middle: “The East gets no snow, at least very little.” “Another day in paradise” we heard from the West. Each proclaimed their climate the best.

One week a monsoon struck at that West, Its huge clouds of dust made a godawful mess. News anchors, giggling, intoned on the tube: “Phoenix has been smacked by a triple D haboob.”

To the East came Arthur, not the worst of its type, But CNN did its best to over-hype; Plenty of damage from water and wind, Religious whackos blamed our sins.

Back in the Midlands that brother named Bill Relaxes and awaits the forthcoming chill. “Our winters are bleak, one giant ice cube, “But at least no hurricane, monsoon or haboob.”

THE WRITER’S POET
CRAIG W. STEELE
Alphabetic Antics

We writers work with fancy words assembled out of letters that seem to lose identity when cast into a crowd.

One thing we need to keep in mind—the letters don’t agree; they are not writers’ pawns, and get quite sulky when combined.

And if we are unfeeling nerds regarding their contentment, someday they’ll rise above the lines to voice their mood aloud.

Don’t be surprised if you should find that stealthy rearrangement has turned your tasty melon slice into a lemon rind.

And when they flit like flocking birds, they’re often alchemistic: Imagine tales of legions bold where ion gels abound.

What of that sentence you designed that seemed so realistic? Your hero braving perils now has pliers on his mind.

The heroine that you’re assured has pouty ruby lips? So, what if she should slip and let a ruby lisp resound?

Please have a care; don’t be unkind and disregard their feelings, else letters will indulge themselves and leave your work maligned.
Tar
Sandy Rafter

A raptor's grill
of neckbones and knuckles
lightly seared and served
with crumbly black-eyed peas;
steam patches of ooze
and underarms of dripping men
with caution signs to steer
and hear the pepper pings
against the just washed car.
The sticky stew fills the pots,
is rolled and tamped
like scabs on injuries.
Vultures swoop and swill
wet elixir for the tires.
The driver's whiffs of smell
reek distastefully the same --
delays. A chance
to drum the mind
like fingers, impatiently,
and wonder when the maples
and the grass near the curb
disappeared. But, no arborists near,
only honking horns.

Interpretation
Norma J. Sundberg

Will someone please tell them
a poem means what it means!
Those dissectors who delve
into hidden meaning,
searching for something unsavory,
or enlightening
will find what they find,
read into it what they want or need
for their own fulfillment,
or determine the angst of the poet
or pacify the pupil.
Don’t they know that each time
they read the same poem
It can be different
because where they are,
who they’ve become,
resides in a different space,
a different time-frame?
A poem means what it means
to whoever happens to be reading it
in the NOW!

The Plight of the Princess Mary
John Swift

Pontoons tied fast to wooden docks
Forever gnawing at their knots
Trying beam reaches to snap the Spring,
Retesting every line that held, testing them all, and again,
Testing to join the woman whose name they held,
Broken loose and sailing free
From the old man who’d painted the stern but failed
To knot her that tight to the dock.
CROQUE-MONSIEUR
Bonny Conway

Insomnia can be good
noise is absent at midnight
when thoughts become magic seeds
gliding through your mind's back yard
I made a grilled French sandwich
walked outside to check the toad
under the kitchen window
he's there, quiet as a stone
he soaks in the clay saucer
drinking water through his skin
cold blood, warm blood, harmony
contrast makes us beautiful.

Plumb dumb
Marshall J. Cook

By all accounts
sheep are not the brightest of God’s creatures.
And they surely stink, second only,
I’d say, to pigs.
The little ones are awful cute, true.
On the Dingle Peninsula, they huddle
so still
you think them stones.
Oh, they’re dumb all right,
but consider this:
when the Shepherd comes to the sheepfold
at dawn to pick out his flock
from amongst all the others
and lead them out to green pastures,
he can’t tell one from another.
But at the sound of his voice,
his sheep know him and come running,
stink, bleat, and all.
The burden of knowing
is all on the sheep, see,
and about their Shepherd’s voice,
those dumb sheep are never wrong.

Mercy, Lord, not justice
Marshall J. Cook

I sinned.
You suffered.
Where’s the justice?

more of Garrison Keillor on turning 70
I found that younger people now addressed me as Sir. And when I spoke, they
got all hushed as if it were an invocation, which was gratifying. I’ve waiting a
long time to reach this level of veneration, and now that I’ve gotten here, I
might as well dispense some wisdom.”
The difference between baseball and football
George Carlin

First of all, Baseball is a 19th century pastoral game. Football is a 20th century technological struggle. Baseball is played on a diamond in the park, the Baseball Park. Football is played on a grid iron in a stadium, sometimes called Soldier Field or War Memorial Stadium.

Baseball begins in the spring, the season of new life. Football begins in the fall, when everything is dying. In Football, you wear a helmet. In Baseball, you wear a cap. Football is concerned with downs. What down is it? Baseball is concerned with ups. Who’s up? Are you up? I’m not up. He is up.

In Football, the specialist comes in to kick. In Baseball, the specialist comes in to relieve someone. In Football, you receive a penalty. In Baseball, you make an error. Whoops!

Football has hitting, clipping, spearing, blocking, piling on, late hitting, unnecessary roughness and personal fouls. Baseball has the sacrifice. Football is played in any kind of weather, rain, sleet, snow, hail, mud, can’t read the numbers on the field, can’t read the yard markers, can’t read the players numbers, the struggle will continue.

In Baseball, if it rains, we don’t come out to play. “I can’t come out to play. It’s raining out.” Baseball has a 7th inning stretch. Football has the two minute warning.

Baseball has no time limit. We don’t know when it’s gonna end. We might have extra innings. Football is rigidly timed and it will end even if we have to go to sudden death. In Baseball, during the game, in the stands there is kind of a picnic feeling. Emotions may run high or low, but there’s not that much unpleasantness. In Football, in the stands during the game you can be sure that at least 27 times you are perfectly capable of taking the life of a fellow human being, preferably a stranger.

And finally the objectives of the two games are totally different. In Football, the object is for the quarterback, otherwise known as the field general-- to be on target with his aerial assault riddling the defense by hitting his receivers with deadly accuracy in spite of the blitz even if he has to use the shotgun. With short bullet passes and long bombs, he marches his troops into enemy territory, balancing his aerial assault with a sustained ground attack, which punches holes in the forward wall of the enemies’ defensive line. In Baseball, the object is to go home, and to be safe. I hope I’ll be safe at home, safe at home!
A book fest is all about the people you meet

I participated in the 2014 Milwaukee Irish Fest and it was OK.

I was one of seven authors invited to participate in the Fest’s Literary Corner. This year the corner included two bookstores, a vendor selling coffee and hot tea, an IBAM (Irish Books Arts & Music) and, in a small corner, a desk with two bookshelves behind it for the authors. A volunteer sat with me to collect all the money or credit cards from selling books.

Irish Fest organizers made arrangements through a downtown hotel for a special rate for participants, which helped pocketbook stress. I was given a pass to drive onto the grounds and deliver my books to the Literary Corner Friday morning before noon, which saved me shipping cost. We were even given food coupons which helped because festival food is outrageously expensive for the quality and quantity purchased. Most important, the Fest provided shuttle service from the hotel to the Fest grounds at Henry Meier Park. Parking normally cost $20 per day.

I felt it was traditionally Irish to treat artists well, and my wife thought it was like being rock stars to be given transportation whenever we needed it.

Downtown Milwaukee has worked very hard to be attractive to tourism and business. It’s more than clean, it’s immaculate. I didn’t see a single piece of trash in three days. Saturday morning when we took a walk there were people power washing the sidewalks outside the Wisconsin Center. The streets were lined with raised flower beds containing an assortment of grasses, summer annuals, and even some exotic flowers.

The staff at the DoubleTree was more than friendly, they were engaging. We passed one staff member in the hall who was setting up a dining service. When I commented that it looked interesting he explained it was their “cloud” design and explained how food would be displayed in the cloud.

Irish Fest was a learning experience, not a book selling experience.

Stuffed into the corner of a tent on a +85 F degree day is not exactly a halcyon day. My first shift was at noon when the Fest opened. The Literary Corner is located at the far south end of the festival grounds, and in the first hour the crowd didn’t make it that far. I didn’t have a single person make their way to the author’s corner, although the two bookstores sharing the tent did robust business.

The Literary Corner Coordinator was generous, kind and well intentioned but had not a clue on how to sell books. I pointed out that both bookstores had long table displays where customers could browse books. The Festival staff didn’t want customers touching our books; she was afraid they would get soiled. I sat behind the desk, as instructed, for an hour. As I left, the person from IBAM suggested that at my next stint on Saturday I stand in front of the desk, and my wife suggested I hand out bookmarks.

There was supposed to be a “porch” area outside the tent for authors to talk with readers. No chairs were provided, no sign, just a table. When I asked the Literary Corner Coordinator about it she didn’t want to bother the fest staff to set up the area to accommodate authors. My author friend, David O’Donnell, in true Irish fashion, set up the porch area with his wife.

I did make great contacts, though. I met fellow author David McDonnell, who has written a wonderful book, Clan Donnell, on his family history. David and his wife Linda are spending the summer selling books and making presentations at Irish Fests across the country. I also met Cliff and Kathy Carlson from the Irish American News. They invited me to participate in the IBAM conference in Chicago on October 3-5. Cliff introduced me to Frank West, the Irish American News Book and Theater reviewer. Frank agreed to review Murphy’s Troubles for the newspaper – an incredible stroke of Irish good luck. I also learned about the irishbooksite.com, a good place for me to market my book.

-- Column continues, next page
On Saturday I followed all the suggestions I received and didn’t sit behind the desk. I passed out bookmarks and engaged customers as they strolled by. I sold four books in my hour. I also learned that one of the bookstore sponsors of The Literary Corner, The Little Read Book of Wauwatosa, was selling my book, and I autographed a book sold through the bookstore.

For what it’s worth, I learned two lessons. First, I need to always be myself when participating in author events. Sitting behind a desk is not me. I like to engage people, have conversation, and if that results in a sale, fine, if not fine – but it’s interactive. Second, all author events, regardless of the format, are about networking with people. By networking I was invited to another event, will have a book review, and learned from the experiences of another peripatetic author.

**In Memorium**

**Robin Williams**

1951-2014  
Mork  
Popeye  
T.S. Garp  
Adrian Cronauer (*Good Morning, Vietnam*)  
**John Keating** (*Dead Poets Society*)  
Henry “Parry” Sagan (*The Fisher King*)  
Peter Pan  
Genie  
Mrs. Euphegenia Doubtfire  
**Sean Maguire** (*Good Will Hunting*)  
Sy Parrish (*One Hour Photo*)  
Theodore Roosevelt (*Night at the Museum*)  
Dwight D. Eisenhower (*The Butler*)  
Dennis the Dog (*Absolutely Anything*)

**JAN KENT IS**  
**THE WORD WHISPER**

“Long story short”-- HA!

“Long story short” -- oh, right. A condensed form of “to make a long story short.” But haven't you noticed that when either of these phrases is spoken, the speaker is already well into the long story and will have missed the chance to be short? So far I've refrained from singing out “Too late, too late!”
I was majoring in social work at the University of Wisconsin in 1964—it didn’t have the “hyphen Madison” then—and had taken a job as a bellman at the Park Motor Inn—the Inn on the Park today—on the Capitol Square. They outfitted us in red blazers with the hotel-logo patch my first winter, then switched us to light-gray seersucker jackets when the weather turned warm. We were still wearing those (much more comfortable) when I left for my first job after graduation in 1966.

The photo shows me standing in my second-floor room at 208 N. Brooks Street in a three-story house that was torn down this year for a taller building. My landlady, Hazel Varker, predicted when I left that the university would raze the house within five years. Instead, it was closer to 50, and I wish she were alive to tease about her poor prediction.

I met her walking on State Street in the summer of 1963 (I had just left St. Francis Seminary and registered as a junior at UW), and she mentioned a room she wanted to register with the university’s housing bureau. I had made a deposit on a room in a dump on Murray Street behind the University Club, but I asked to see hers. It was small but clean and attractive—for $8 a week compared to the $15 I’d be paying for the dump. I lived there for three years, and Mrs. Varker never raised my rent. The dump, in the meantime, was torn down for the Elvehjem Art Museum, which today is the Chazen. Fifty years seems to bring not just one change in a place, but two or three.

Judy Hansen of Kenosha, who lived a block away in then-new Sellery Hall (where our nephew’s son will live this fall), probably took this picture. Judy and I were married in 1966. While we were dating, we went to a couple of Braves games in Milwaukee (you do remember the MILWAUKEE Braves, don’t you?) and met Frank Thomas, who had played for Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago, and Milwaukee before getting traded to the brand-new New York Mets in 1962. I liked Frank and became a Mets fan until he was traded to the Phillies, when I became a Phillies fan.

Judy ordered a Mets cap from Frank, and I recently discovered the cancelled check (remember those?) from July 1, 1964, for $2.50. It was one way to get his autograph. He apparently paid for the cap with the check, because it’s stamped “Metropolitan Baseball Club, Inc., Shea Stadium Field Income Account.”

We thought Frank didn’t like playing for the Mets because he was serious about baseball and the 1962 Mets became a joke, losing 120 of 162 games, a record that still stands and for which they were lampooned in Jimmy Breslin’s book Can’t Anybody Here Play This Game? But Thomas says on his website (www.frankthomastheoriginalone.com) and in We Played the Game: 65 Players Remember Baseball’s Greatest Era 1947-1964, edited by Danny Peary, that he loved playing in New York. They had the best fans, he said.

It probably helped that he hit 34 home runs that year, the most of any New York player, more than even Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris in 1962, the year after Maris broke Babe Ruth’s record with 61. I still sometimes wear a Mets cap, a black one with a blue bill that I bought in a store next to Grand Central Terminal in 2007.

So—this is what I remember about those times based on this photograph. But after last month’s column, I’m no longer so sure of my memories. I wrote then how the book Nothing Ever Happens to Me led me to start writing a diary because the main character started one. After writing the column I even spent $26 for a copy of the book for a keepsake. “$26 well spent,” our esteemed editor said. Not so much. There’s no mention of a diary in that book, and I am confused. I’ve held that memory for decades, so the book must figure in the story, but I have no idea how. So, instead of the memento I thought I was getting, I have a book that holds a mystery: What did it have to do—if anything—with my starting a diary?
I know I need a writing break when my mind is flooded with ideas, but when I try to finish them, halfway through they fall off a cliff and I can't get the rhythm back. The more I keep trying to finish an idea, the worse it gets.

Walking away and taking a break at that moment would be the best idea, but I was brought up with a strict work ethic: "Finish what you start." My mother was relentless.

So I toss my half-baked ideas into a file so one of these days, maybe tomorrow or next week, some of them might just turn into a finished column.

But for now, here's a list of Half-Baked Writing Ideas that are still cookin'...

1. My life repeats itself. If I was happy with the way I did it the first time, that's okay. But if I wished I would've done things differently, then I sure hope I took notes--because I tend to forget.

2. Life isn't a dress rehearsal, but I do need to rehearse for situations that show up in my life. The time to learn how to use the fire extinguisher in my kitchen isn't when the kitchen is on fire.

3. It's easy for me to recognize pain and sadness in my life, and I know how to respond. But it takes more skill and willingness to recognize joy and allow myself to feel it.

4. A Little Black Book isn't for hot dates and phone numbers any more, it's a book of logins and passwords.

5. Sharing yourself with someone is one of the greatest gifts you can give, unless you're in a crummy mood.

6. My husband knows how to scratch a cat.

7. Whenever I take more than my share, I wish I hadn't.

8. I want to be brave enough to take a bath at a friend's house and give them fair warning when I'm in the tub, I sing along with the tunes on my Nano. So get ready for a recital.

9. Just because I feel passionate about something doesn't mean that it's easy. It's not. In fact, it's usually the opposite, because I care about so much it.

10. If I knew everything going in, I'd never go in.

11. Sometimes I shouldn't be left to my own self in the morning, because I can talk myself into a bad day.

12. And finally, my grandson's horrible nightmare. His dad came running into his room. Paul was sobbing and crying, "Daddy, I had a terrible dream, 'Grandma said 'no' to me!'"

Thanks for reading with me. It's so good to read with friends.

Reprinted with author's permission from a recent edition of her daily column, which runs in the free Dear Reader Book Club.

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In Memory
Jeremiah Healy
aka Terry Devane
1948-2014
creator of
John Francis Cuddy
Malread O’Clare
Carthage, by Joyce Carol Oates

The book opens with the disappearance and, perhaps, murder of nineteen-year-old Cressida Mayfield, the so-called smart daughter of Zeno Mayfield, the former mayor and now a successful lawyer in Carthage, in northern New York. Witnesses last place her in the company of Brett Kincaid, a handsome former football hero in Carthage returned as a profoundly wounded soldier from the war in Iraq, his head and face stitched together around a titanium patch, an implanted intraocular lens replacing his left eye. Until a few days before, he was the presumed husband-to-be of the “pretty daughter,” Juliet Mayfield.

The Mother, Arlette, is the hostess for the search team looking for Cressida, or her body, unsuccessfully on both counts. Brett is found in his bloody jeep with a bad hangover and no firm memory of what might have happened Saturday night. Thus starts what seems to be a standard mystery, although it takes 400 more pages and seven years to resolve.

Joyce Carol Oates does not write anything that can be called “standard.” She is a master artist who washes her works with a shimmering veneer of classical allusion. This foundation can be ignored or investigated.

For example, this novel will appeal more to those still trying to figure out what Shakespeare’s play, Troilus and Cressida, was all about. That would include anyone who’s ever seen or read it but still worries about it. In the play, Cressida and Troilus are Trojans deeply in love until the men of Troy trade her to the Greeks for a prisoner of war. Up until then, the Trojan War seems to be a social event. Hector is welcomed on a visit to the Greek camp, introduced all around and feted. Chivalry is the order of the day. Troilus condones the trade and continues to sing Cressida’s praises until he suspects her of infidelity with Diomedes, a Greek commander, whence all praises, bets, and gloves are off, as if Troilus’s madness has infected everyone on the Plains of Troy.

Many heroes fall. Hector, the fairest of them all, is killed in an orgy bereft of chivalry when Achilles catches him without his armor, murders him, then pulls his body around the fields of Troy behind his horse. With Hector’s death, the Trojan War ends by prior agreement. Cressida, who has loved two men, winds up with neither.

A tragedy? Humans turned into beasts gone wild? A breakdown of the moral law of war, if there is any such thing? A Shakespearean conflation of dramatic objects and suspicious men? It would not be the first time.

In Oates’s flashbacks, Cressida has refused to be her sister’s maid of honor, claiming that she, Juliet, does not understand Brett, the injured soldier. Cressida does not accept criticism well, or forgive slights, however slight. Juliet is said to be serene and keeps her own counsel. When Brett lashes out at her, hitting her in the jaw and knocking her to the ground, she tells the ER she’d slipped and fallen, just clumsy.

Brett has nightmares about his time in Iraq and a young girl whose killing he may or may not have been involved in. Some of Brett’s current chums, including some he served with in Iraq, also there on that Saturday night, seem fully capable of raping and killing a young girl who stumbles into their party. Brett’s father and mother had a stormy and bitter relationship, ending when his father returned from the Gulf War and walked out on his family. There are many possible interpretations of these ambiguities.

I was going to launch into a discussion of her use of psychic distance in revealing character (how far the narrator is from the action/thing being discussed) but decided the subject lies outside my narrow range of competence and the purpose of this review.

Anyone interested in writing could profit from studying a book by Oates. If you’re writing a thesis in the fine arts, study Carthage.

I think Flannery O’Connor said that Carthage shows the brokenness of humanity and its need for redemption. While it’s hard to argue against that interpretation, the author shows what happens in Carthage from several points of view and lets you decide which way works best as a life strategy; to forgive or not forgive, to eat the rat poison of bitterness thinking that the rat is going to die, to curse God or to embrace Him.
Novelist and good buddy Clive Rosengren, a season ticket holder for the Medford (Oregon) Rogues baseball club, is looking for a pro contract after snagging a pop foul, from the first batter in the game, no less, at a recent game. “[A] pop just cleared the backstop, bounced once, and landed into [my] hands,” he reports. “On the fly. No glove. Both hands. Wahoo!”

For years Clive earned his daily bread as a character actor (Cheers, Seinfeld, Ed Wood). His first Eddie Collins mystery, Murder Unscripted: A Hollywood Mystery, has done well enough to warrant a second in the series, due out soon.

**Tina and Jan make a perfect team**

Novelist and longtime friend Janice Kaat, who wrote several writers’ cryptographs for E.I., has a new passion-- a Russian Arabian mare named Tina.

Tina is a rescue, brought to the Firefly Acres Horse Farm for abused and neglected horses, in Oneida, WI, after a fierce snowstorm hit the area. Here horses find healing, and the children, teens and adults who work with them themselves are healed and inspired.

Lisa Pelky, who along with husband Pat runs the shelter, teaches volunteers like Jan a gentle, non-aggressive form of training and then pairs each volunteer with a horse.

Jan says she and Tina hit it off from the start.

**Esther’s voice continues to resonate**

Esther M, Leiper-Estabrooks, our poetry columnist, reports that her narrative, "Space Station Over The North Atlantic," will appear in ANTHOLOGY: YEAR THREE, the third annual conference companion for Anthocon, scheduled for June 2015.

Meanwhile, playwright Jonathan Dubey’s second play, a comedy titled YARD SALE, was performed throughout August 2014 in Berlin, New Hampshire, and featured Esther’s light verse on yard sale choices and dilemmas during intermissions.

Next Month, E.I. hits 60

issues, that is, which means it will be our fifth anniversary of firing this stuff off into cyberspace and waiting for an echo. If you have anything special you’d like to say to mark the occasion, let Coach know by **Friday, September 19**, at mcook@dcswisc.edu

Ah, but **who** turned 70?

See answer, p 20.
Hi Marshall:

I’m still chuckling over your Robin Thicke piece! I, too, was a horn-tooter not long ago after I heard Robin on the Howard Stern show. I thought, Wow this guy’s impressive. And I couldn’t get over how in LOVE he and his wife were, ... (Although, of course, no one knows what really happened between them).

And then later, I caught a few minutes (precious time I’ll never get back) of his dad’s new reality TV show, where we get to watch him be bossed around by his latest young wife!

Maybe your initial assessment “a real jerk off the old block” wasn’t too far off!

I still agree Robin’s a likable person. I just think the smoke & mirrors of Hollywood are unfortunately all too real.

Brenda Roper

Hard Day’s Night yields darn good review
Tell Jacob McLaughlin I really appreciate his review [“50 years later, A Hard Day’s Night still rocks,” last issue]. I'm really PO'd that nowhere in Wisconsin did the movie appear on the big screen on this the 50th anniversary. But I did get to see the Blu-ray version and noted something in it I don't remember every seeing before. I wanted to share for him what my daughter found out - that the ton of "clean jokes" about Paul's grandfather are related to the role he played in a British TV series, where he and his son worked in a junkyard. Apparently the American version was called "Sanford and Son."

Monette Bebow-Reinhard

Rafter also draws rave
Love the article by Sandy Rafter! I'm writing a novel where I trace the change in music from the 40s to the 60s. Can you ask her this in your next newsletter:

Sandy, loved your article on 50s music! A lot of research went into that. Are you writing a book? I'm writing a novel which includes the evolution of a woman along with music from the 40s through the 60s. Have you ever run into a problem with quoting lyrics in a novel? One company wants to charge me a big fee, and another indicates that you don't have to have permission if it's just quoting a few lyrics in written form. Thanks again for writing this!

Monette

Hevey has advice for fellow columnists
Marshall,

Being an Extra Innings columnist is a privilege and, for me, a big treat. We columnists can do a better job for readers by asking ourselves if they will value what our column has to say. We can help Coach Barnabas by writing weeks ahead of the deadline and editing multiple times. We can help by remembering one page is 750 words and more words take Coach’s time to edit out or to be squeezed into another page. One more thing: we don't have to be in Extra Innings each and every month to feel like we are on the team.

Cheers,

Ron Hevey

Another thumbs down for Goldfinch
I thought this might be of interest to [book reviewer John] Swift. Today I attended a reading group at the library and one woman asked who had read The Goldfinch.

All hands went up (17 readers). How many liked it? None. That included me.

Madonna Dries Christensen

Lily the biker chick has an admirer
Cutest photo ever - little biker chick Lily.

Thank you so much for Extra Innings. My day brightens every time I open 'er up for a read.

Your pal,

Pat Fitzgerald

Misspellings should be outside an editor’s prerogative
Hi Marshall,

Going through the newsletter again and again...

Caught a couple of words with transposed letters. Should the word be (front page) “PERogative”? It is spelled “PRERogative.”

Second one was in the Rest of the Story (page 24) Spelling is correct in the main article, but spelled Lizzy "Border" in the italicized last paragraph.

Lily is indeed becoming a "little person", not a baby anymore....I'M SO GLAD you posted all three pics.

A really really good read!

Norma Sundberg
Many of you thought the cowpoke in last month’s photo contest was the great Tom Mix. Truth to tell, I picked that particular photo because I, too, thought it looked a lot like Mix. But actually, it depicts the subject of my long poem in the same issue, Yakima Canutt (whose name was and is also listed in the masthead).

Other guesses included Gene Autry, Guy Weadick, founder of the Calgary Stampede in Alberta, Canada (impressive guess, Mary!), Pharrell Williams (that was a joke, I’m pretty sure.), and Malcolm Baldridge, Jr., Secretary of Commerce under President Ronald Reagan. (!)

Our winners? Anna Lee Landen, Brenda Roper, and Pat Fitzgeerald.

However, all three admitted to cheating online, exposing a major weakness in the contest set-up.

“I first googled Tom Mix’s hat and got to a website of a hat maker company that showed all sorts of cowboy hats,” Anna Lee admitted under interrogation. “The Last Best West was the website. Scrolling waaay down I found a Yakima hat (that name sounded familiar for some reason). From there went to B-movie hats, scrolled waaay down again, and finally came to the same picture of Canutt ....Yakima Canutt, the stuntman you wrote about earlier!”

I was so impressed by Anna Lee’s sleuthing, I decided to award her a prize anyway.

“Okay, I cheated,” Pat likewise confessed, “but everyone should if for no other reason to learn about this guy. Talk about a movie career! He’s a true unsung hero of the film business. His autobiography is near the top of my reading list.

“The cheat happened by pure accident. Okay, I was trying to figure out how to cheat and attempted to copy and paste the photo, to what end I had no idea. When I clicked on it, I was automatically redirected to a Yakima Canutt site. That’s typical of everything I’ve learned about computers, all by accident.

Anyway, I can’t wait to watch Stagecoach again. My all-time favorite stunt scene is when he jumps off the horse, onto the stagecoach, gets caught under the horses, etc. Now I know who the guy is who performed the stunt!”

Pat gets a prize for her honesty and her appreciation of the great Canutt.

At that point, when I got Brenda’s correct answer (on a second guess), I decided she would get a prize, too, even though her ‘confession’ consisted of “I cheated.”

Congratulations to all three sly, conniving winners.

Anna Lee received her choice, Twin Killing: A Monona Quinn Mystery, at a Communications Program reunion lunch at the Great Dane Hilldale (Madison) on August 14. Both Brenda and Pat choose a copy of The Year of the Buffalo: a novel of love and minor league baseball soon.

For this issue, I’ll another cartoon caption contest-- this one with a writer theme-- the prize to be your choice from a long list of books-- while I ponder how to devise a “cheat-proof” photo contest. I must receive your entries via email by September 19, a Friday. As always: mcook@dcs.wisc.edu.

Still don’t know who turned 70?
Answer, p 20 !
Six months ago, while I was scouring digital files of my Iowa hometown newspapers, a bold headline streamed across the front page of a March, 1920 issue. **CARL JESS KILLS HIS FATHER**

I learned that the lawyer I was researching conducted the coroner’s inquest for this patricide. Although I had not yet completed writing my biographical sketch of John Glover, the Jess story framed a novel in my mind.

The Osceola County Sheriff’s Department’s digital files revealed that since the county’s founding in 1871, there have been only six murders. The last was in 1929, but another patricide, in 1909, also interested me. The circumstances were eerily similar to the Jess case. Both involved German farm families in which a teenaged son killed his father.

The facts boiled over into fiction and my novel, *Patricide*, which has just been published. A reviewer said that it’s: “A spare, elegantly simple exploration of father-son love and father-son hate. Equally strong passions, left unbridled, one can be harmful, the other deadly.

“Based on a real event, *Patricide* begins with a brutal homicide on the Iowa prairie in 1920. Told by several observers, the subject is handled with the respect befitting these salt of the earth people, bewildered by the horrifying act of fifteen-year-old Carl Jess.

“What drove this boy to patricide? What was his motivation? Did he believe he had something to gain, or was he deranged?

“While the community wrestles with these questions, attempting to sort fact from speculation, the men closest to the case examine their relationship with their sons. ...

“Stirring the pot is Augusta Duvall, the first female reporter for the *Des Moines Register*, who publishes a sensationalized and somewhat fictional portrayal of Carl Jess. She also stirs romantic feelings in John Glover, 50 years her senior; they become the target of gossip.

“*Patricide* will have readers contemplating their life and family relationships.

“Given circumstances similar to Carl Jess’s, who among us might commit murder?”

Author’s note: In defense of using this column for book promotion, I add that something good will follow the Jess tragedy because all royalties from *Patricide* go to The Down Syndrome Association of Northern Virginia. I thank readers for their support, and the kids thank you, too. *Patricide* will be available this month in print and e-book through www.iuniverse.com. While the book is also available through major book outlets, I encourage purchases directly from iUniverse, as their royalties are higher than reseller outlets.

Coach’s note: I’m very happy to have read a pre-publication version of Madonna’s masterful novel and contributed a blurb for the cover. Here’s my take: “When tragedy strikes, I turn to a master storyteller for comfort and illumination. Madonna is one such light-bearer. In this beautifully and compassionately told tale, unfolding from multiple perspectives-- the sheriff, the newspaper reporter, the reverend, the young killer himself-- Madonna portrays a community struggling to live with incomprehensible evil. Once you’ve read this story, it will be a light unto your feet always.”

See next page!
An American icon celebrates a birthday

Smokey the Bear turned 70 on August 9

“Smokey says-- care will prevent nine out of 10 forest fires,” he first told us in 1944.

Within three years, he had found his iconic motto: “Remember-- only YOU can prevent forest fires.” The motto was finally amended in 2001 to “only you can prevent wildfires.”

Washington D.C. radio host Jackson Weaver first gave Smokey his voice. (Spoiler alert: He is an incredible bear, but even Smokey can’t actually talk.) Today he relies on the deep, rumbling voice of actor Sam Elliott.

Hundreds of thousands of kids have become Smokey Bear Junior Forest Rangers over the decades. At least one still has the Smokey Bear action figure (boys don’t have dolls!) he had as a child. That child, grown to become a teacher, an obscure novelist, and a newsletter editor, was born just a month after Smokey and is also confronting his 70th birthday.

And now, the moment we’ve all been waiting for...
Your monthly moment with Lily

Lily creates her modern art while an ancient admirer and a teddy bear named Gutenberg look on.