Extra Innings
For writers, their enablers, and all who put cookies and milk out for Santa.
Madison, WI         #62         December, 2014

Santa says: “E.I. makes a great stocking stuffer, so stuff it!”

“In Memory

Harry M. Durning, Jr.
husband, father, Godfather, grandfather, great grandfather
friend, mentor, journalist, teacher, minister
good, kind, loving man

Harry M. Durning Jr. passed away peacefully in the early morning hours of Monday November 3rd at the age of 87. His wife Judith Anne (Hard) Durning died in November, 2000. He is survived by five children: Michael, John, Timothy, and David Durning and Leslie (Durning) Cocks, as well as 16 grandchildren and 15 great grandchildren.

Not bad for the man voted “Most Likely Bachelor” by his high school class.

Harry grew up in New York City but lived most of his adult life in Massachusetts. He graduated from Hotchkiss Academy in Lakeville, CT in 1945, went directly into the Army, and began training for the invasion of Japan.

Years later, Harry met President Harry S. Truman, the man who made the decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ending the war and rendering the invasion of Japan unnecessary. Harry shook the President’s hand and said, “Thank you for saving my life.”

After serving in postwar Europe for almost two years, Harry earned his Bachelor’s Degree in journalism at Columbia University. He later earned a Masters in public administration from Harvard University. He began his career in journalism in Kittanning, PA and worked for six years for the North Adams, MA, Transcript. He was the editorial director for WBZ-TV in Boston from 1960 to 1980, where he researched and wrote all the radio and television editorials for the station. He won an Emmy for his work.

He finished his professional career At Gordon College in Wenham, MA, where he taught journalism, political science, and English from 1987 – 1997.

In retirement he spent several years volunteering with the Clark University Upward Bound program as well as several local charities in and around Boylston, MA. He served in lay leadership positions at several churches, most notably at Saint Elizabeth’s Episcopal Church in Sudbury, MA and more recently at Church of the Nativity in Northborough, MA. He was a staunch supporter of the Salvation Army.

He was my wife Ellen’s beloved uncle and Godfather. She often said she couldn’t have had a better one. He became my friend and mentor, and I couldn’t have had a better one.

I will treasure the memory of this fine man always.

Coach
60’6” FROM HOME
MEANDERING WITH MADONNA
MADONNA DRIES CHRISTENSEN

Thanks for the Memory

— letter excerpt from David Dries,
January 2, 1966, Vietnam:
The Bob Hope Show will be telecast on 19 January. If I make it past the editors I’ll be on
national television, because I know I got filmed. I
looked right into the camera. It was a fine show.
Anita Bryant and Jack Jones and of course Bob
Hope were the most well-received. Anita is
beautiful, talented, charming, and delightful. I
love her. Jack Jones was superb. He received the
best round of applause, including Bob Hope. Bob
Hope was Bob Hope. He’s great.

Those words from my brother could have come from countless servicemen and women anywhere in the world and at any time between 1941 and 1990. Bob Hope’s first USO show for military troops was at California’s March Field in 1941. The first tour during World War II was in 1943 and continued for 35 consecutive years. The first television broadcast was in 1954. Overall, Hope hosted some 200 USO performances. His final tour was during Operation Desert Shield at Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Although Hope never served in the military, in 1991 the USO (and Congress) named him an Honorary Veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces.

The list of celebrities who joined Hope’s tours is endless, but some of those on the marquee include Joe E. Brown, Dorothy Lamour, Frances Langford, Jerry Colonna, Martha Raye, Bing Crosby, Danny Kaye, Lena Horne, Ginger Rogers, Marilyn Monroe, Raquel Welch, Ann Margaret, Johnny Unitas, Frank Gifford, Dolores Reade Hope, and Les Brown and His Band of Renown.

Hope strutted on stage swinging his trademark golf club and introduced himself as Bob (fill in the blank) Hope. He fired off a series of one-liners, each followed by a smirk as well-timed as Jack Benny’s innocent look. No show was complete without a voluptuous actress or two.

Hope’s leering, seductive purr and innuendo were not only part of the act, they were expected. There was little hue and cry about his schtick being offensive to women.

Hope was born Leslie Townes Hope near London in 1903. His family moved to Cleveland when he was four. He married Dolores Reade in 1934. Although the couple had four children (and later grandchildren), they spent many Christmases apart from them.

Known for his rapid-fire delivery, Hope was at a loss for words when, in 1998, he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II. “Seventy years of ad lib and I’m speechless,” he quipped when he found his voice.

Hope often hosted the Academy Awards but joked that at his house the show was known as Passover. He did, however, garner a couple of honorary Oscars.

His personal life was not without scandal and gossip, but I leave that for others to explore. At a celebration of his 100th birthday in May of 2003, Hope commented, “I’m so old they’ve cancelled my blood type.” He died two months later.

Thanks for The Memory, Hope’s nostalgic sign-off, was introduced in the movie The Big Broadcast of 1938, a duet with co-star Shirley Ross. The song won the Academy Award and since then might hold the record for the lyrics most adapted to parody, by Hope and others.

Today, San Diego’s waterfront is adorned with a sculpture of Hope standing at a microphone in front of a smattering of troops. It’s all part of a National Salute to Bob Hope and the Military. Over a loudspeaker, visitors hear that old familiar tune in Hope’s imitable voice, “Thanks for the memory…”

To “Old ski-nose,” I add the closing lines of that song:

Awfully glad I met you,
Cheerio and toodle-oo.
Thank you, so much.
Pondering old age...
but don’t ponder too long
thanks to Barry Bishop

Wouldn't it be great if we could put ourselves in the dryer for 10 minutes and come out wrinkle-free and three sizes smaller!

I don't trip over things; I do random gravity checks!

I don't need anger management. I need people to stop pissing me off!

Old age is coming at a really bad time!

When I was a child I thought Nap Time was a punishment; now, as a grown up, it just feels like a small vacation!

I don't have gray hair. I have "wisdom highlights." I'm just very wise.

My people skills are just fine. It's my tolerance for idiots that needs work.

If God wanted me to touch my toes, he would've put them on my knees.

I'm going to retire and live off my savings. Not sure what I'll do that second week.

I've lost my mind; I'm pretty sure my kids took it!

Even duct tape can't fix stupid ... but it can muffle the sound!

Lord, Give me patience and give it to me NOW.

Of course I talk to myself, sometimes I need expert advice.

Oops! Did I roll my eyes out loud?

At my age "Getting lucky" means walking into a room and remembering why I came in.

I finally figured it out: chocolate comes from cocoa,
which is a tree,
which makes chocolate a plant,
which means ...
chocolate is salad!
FOR THE LOVE OF WORDS
ESTHER M. LEIPER-ESTABROOKS

ESTHER’S BOX

Critic Richard Howard quotes the French poet Baudelaire, “The greatest pleasure of all pleasures is to be surprised. The only other pleasure nearly as great is to give surprise.” Baudelaire meant happy surprises, not shocking ones, and Christmas for lucky children often means the jolliest time of year. Whatever our faith, we honor giving time, and giving love to those we care about, including strangers. The magi did not know the babe Jesus personally, but the star told the three He was special, so they traveled from the far Orient to bring Him gifts.

Poet Norma W. Brooks declares:

CHRISTMAS IS FOREVER,

Not just for one day,
For loving, sharing, giving
Are not to put away
Like bells and lights and tinsel
In some box upon a shelf.
The good you do for others
Is good you do yourself!

The first Yuletide season I remember I’d just turned four, small enough to need a nap but old enough to know Christmas was near and would be exciting, although without having any specific idea why. I didn’t think about the spirit of love; it was always present at home. But the best gift received I still remember, and will forever.

Now “Esther’s Box” is over six decades old, but I saw it earlier than supposed to. While I napped Mother worked on homemade gifts. Woken that December afternoon by the eerie whistle of the “trouble train” chugging through our valley-- its presence meant a problem on the rail line-- I stumbled to the living-room, trailing my binkie.

Dusk fell past our antique windows whose panes of bubbled glass distorted snowflakes and made them magical. But I focused on Mother, kneeling on the floor with jars of paint. This was most unusual, and the paint smell mixed oddly with the Christmas tree! What was going on?

In front of her was a long wooden box, and on its hinged lid I saw she’d painted a series of small, romping girls holding hands. Each had wavy hair and wiggly pink fingers and toes. Each wore bright corduroy overalls and bright smiles—like me. At top edge and bottom ran a squiggly line in yellow for decoration. I’d never seen anything similar to this decorated box, and curiosity grabbed me while I treasured it on sight.

Plainly wishing I’d slept longer, Mom dabbed a paint smudge with a turpentine rag and said, “You’re just in time to watch me finish this gift.”

“What for?” I asked jealously. “Judy?” She was my best friend. “Peggy Ann?” --A bossy neighbor girl. “Perhaps Shane’s little sis—-or the new McGurk baby?”

“No, but someone special.” Mom smiled. I felt a stab of disappointment, for I hardly dared to think that could be me. I was told the spirit of the holiday meant gifting others.

But when Christmas arrived, there was ESTHER’S BOX with letters Mom spelled out for me, and suddenly I understood each squiggle had a sound that, when combined, had meaning.

Why didn’t I guess who the gift was for? Well, my mother did many nice things for many people, helping neighbors and heading charity drives. Too, an art school graduate, she created pen and ink pictures of historic buildings made into notecards sold to fund restoration. A storyteller, she created her own props and was a gifted mimic who presented her original tales at orphanages, schools, and fundraisers around Philadelphia.

But the gift of Esther’s Box was mine and held my treasures--brook stones, china cats, and—as a teen— assorted jewelry. Then my daughter Hannah used it till she grew up. Now Peter and I have two boy grand-kids, so I await a girl who-- no matter what her name--will receive Esther’s Box some Christmas, filled with goodies. In time she’ll learn the story behind the gift--by now antique--and will understand my mother was her ancestor!

Nothing lasts forever, but things often outlast us, and homemade gifts prove special. Model kits, puzzles, dolls and counter games are welcome, but sharing something personal is priceless. What follows will be love and confidence-- pleasure for giver and receiver.

The following poem is anonymous but charming:

-- Christmas continues on next page
CHRISTMAS IS HERE
A good time is approaching, I wish it were here!
The very best time in the whole of the year,
I’m counting the days on fingers and thumbs
The weeks that must pass ere Santa Claus comes,
Then when the first snowflakes start to drift
And wind whistles sharp and branches are brown,
I’ll not mind the cold through my fingers are numb.
For it brings close the time when Santa will come.

May you have special, merry holidays, plus Winter Solstice; and may life stay good. Special skills aren’t needed to please children—or anyone. Sharing time and your special talents always proves a wise and welcome gift.

Incidentally, ESTHER’S BOX (in a different version) won a competition sponsored by the Boston Herald newspaper and appeared along with other finalists as a Christmas Memory on December 22, 1987.

ESTHER’S NEWS:
Esther and other Berlin Writers’ Group members attended a four-day retreat in Rangeley, Maine. A future column features two “Maine-iac” Tall Tales set in verse.

JAN KENT IS
THE WORD WHISPER
Now you know what to call it
Wisdom culled from the Chicago Tribune: Turns out that little black critter with the white stripe down its back has a grammatical use. When the definition of a word is gradually changed through misuse -- think “hopefully,” “enormity,” or “bemused -- it’s called a skunked term.

Whew.

Extra Innings #62
Madison, Wisconsin December, 2014

This month’s All-Star Lineup:
Rex Owens, Madonna Dries Christensen, Sandra Rafter, Ed Pahnke, Den Alder, Esther M. Estabrooks, Ron Hevey, with special guest star Jan H. Bosnan, and Jan Kent as The Word Whisperer
Poetry from Sandy Rafter, Marshall Cook, and The Writer’s Poet, Craig W. Steele
Staff neptis: Lily Cook
Staff attorney: Justin Case
Staff tax accountant: Lew Pole
Staff counselor: Sue Nommie
Internet Gleaner: Barry Bishop
Web Weaver: Kerrie Jean-Louis Osborne
The Masked Man: Brace Beemer
Stuntman: Yakima Canutt
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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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:
Monday, Dec 22, 2014
I've never eaten chestnuts roasted on an open fire, but that doesn't stop me from singing about them, and drivers in the next lane at the red light are apt to see my lips moving as I blast forth with "Rudolph," "Jingle Bells," and "Go Tell It on the Mountain." Christmas time is always songs and memories for me, and as memories tend to be, some are sad and some happy.

In 5th grade, I was chosen to be an angel in a Christmas pageant at another church. We were responsible for getting our moms and dads to drive us there, and one day after school when we rehearsed, I had no ride and couldn't go. The next day, the director upbraided me for missing and told me I might be an angel in the play, but I was no angel. That was a sour holiday for me even though my mother told me I was her angel.

I always hated when my parents decided it was time to decorate the Christmas tree. There were the usual lights that didn't sparkle and a few ornaments that fell from our hands, but the worst part was getting the tree settled into a bucket of coal. I never knew why we didn't have a tree stand, because the arguments about whether it was straight in the bucket and when it suddenly leaned to one side and had to be repositioned and even some years tied to a doorknob with a rope that couldn't be found seemed even to a young girl to be nerve-wracking and avoidable.

The saddest Christmas was the year my Grandmother died. During most of my childhood we lived in an apartment the floor under hers, and she and I were very close. I was a few days past my thirteenth birthday and heavy into new teen sulks and self-centeredness when word came that Grandma had suffered a heart attack.

My aunt and mother went immediately to the hospital. I wasn't home. Later in the evening, they returned to see her, and I was supposed to go with them. It was so cold out, but I hadn't been to see Grandma in awhile even though I had told her I'd stop by. I thought she'd be mad, so I put up a fuss and said I'd see Grandma the next day. But I didn't. She passed away during the night.

It took me a long time to forgive myself, and, sometimes, I'm not sure I have.

I loved the trimmings of Christmas at church and in the house. My mother liked to collect different ornaments for the tree, and every year we carefully unwrapped each one and told its story -- from the plain yellow World War II bulbs to the teapots she loved. I lay on the floor looking up at the tree lights and ornaments and imagined myself as a character in those stories.

Icicles on the tree, saved year to year, were always a question mark: were they too scraggly looking and how could they be hung straighter, which my mother insisted upon. One year, the poodle solved the problem by raising a leg against the tree trunk he had so niftily edged near. No icicles that year as my mother cleaned up the results.

Our manger scene was a bit odd with white flannel for the ground and a mirror turned into a pond with little ducks floating on it and tiny scrub brush pine trees. Mary, Joseph, Baby Jesus, and the others were fashioned from plaster of paris and came from the five and dime. Over the years, their chalky bodies were covered with chips colored over with paints and markers.

Each year, my mother and aunt and I would sit at the kitchen table with cups of tea to retell their old family stories. Most of them were somber, because the two women had grown up poor without a father, who died at age 31: tales of homemade presents and cards from scraps of found materials, specially baked cakes and breakfast rolls made by my Grandma, who saved a few cents each week for the treats, the kindness of teachers who gave the young girls dolls they didn't expect and treasured, Bible reading Christmas Eve, a check received and depended upon each year from my Grandfather's brother, church Sunday morning, and singing at home the old hymns and carols.

-- Memories continue on next page
Both Grandmothers lived in town, and we visited them Christmas Eve. I always knew what presents I would receive. My one Grandmother had no car and severe arthritis, so she always called the stores and ordered from the newspaper ads. Every year I unwrapped my gift to find a frilly, lacy white blouse and a slip -- always the wrong sizes. Sometimes, I laughed at always receiving the same present and hated returning them to the store, but I loved her for giving me a gift when it was so difficult for her. My other Grandmother always gave me a book, most of which I still own. To end our evening, we all squeezed into the car to drive around to see the lights on homes and decide whether or not we liked the blinking ones.

In church, we stopped to pray before a life-size manger scene. Lining the altar rail were red and white poinsettias to be given after the service to those who were ill at home. Yet, as much as I liked the nativity scene, the colors, and the smell of pine bough wreathes throughout the church, I literally felt a swelling within from the purity of the words and carols as they enveloped me with hope and a clear mind and heart.

The one December I won't forget as I write this occurred when I was in 6th grade. Our teacher gave us an assignment to write a story. Mine wasn't about Christmas but was science-fiction. When the teacher passed back the papers several days later, she remarked that she had given her husband, an IBM engineer, one of the stories to read. He said it was the best story she'd ever given him. It was mine. I'd written a poem once in an earlier grade to give to my teacher with a glass duck full of bubble bath, but this was special praise.

My teacher did say I used commas too much and in the wrong places, but I still decided right then and there that I would become a writer. That was the best Christmas ever, and I believe I've solved the comma problem.

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**Christmas Mondegreens**

**Cracked Christmas Carols**

Chipmunks roasting on an open fire

**Deck the halls with Buddy Holly**

Police car ahead (for “Feliz Navidad”)

**While shepherds washed their socks at night** (or: **While shepherds walked their fox by night**)

Round John Virgin, margarine child

**On the first day of Christmas my tulip sent to me / a cartridge in a pantry**

We three kings of porridge and tar (or: **We free kings of Oregon are**)

God dressed ye married gentlemen, let nothing through this May

Joy to the world!
The Lord has gum.

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A Christmas mistake

by Jan H. Bosman

After Christmas in 1949, my parents, sister, and I were invited to visit a distant cousin in Sterling, Illinois. I was 10. On the trip from our small farm near Orfordville, WI, my parents emphasized that Cousin Mabel and her family were poor. We certainly were not rich, as I discovered many years later when I roomed at UW with a girl from Whitefish Bay, WI. My family’s idea of going out to dinner was to pick up a sandwich at the Cozy Corner, a ma-and-pa restaurant. Her family’s idea was a country club soiree.

But when my parents explained that our several-times-removed cousins were quite poor, they dwelled on the fact. We even took some oatmeal cookies and a frosted chocolate cake so as not to inconvenience them by our visit.

When we arrived at this under-heated upstairs apartment with bare floors and spare furnishings, I understood what my parents meant (as much as a 10-year-old could) by “poor.” The family had some challenges, but they welcomed us warmly into their very common home. The adults quickly settled into the front room for some conversation or a game of Five Hundred, while my sister and I moved with the children into an adjacent bedroom/playroom area.

The three children showed my sister and me the new record player they had gotten for Christmas as well as a couple of 45 rpm records. They could have been from The Nutcracker Suite; I don’t remember clearly, but one of the children pointed out that the new vinyl records were unbreakable. That was astounding news because the old 33 1/3rds had to be handled with care; they were made from a shellac compound and easily broken. My family had a bunch of those at home and an old record player that played “Smoke, Smoke, Smoke That Cigarette” and some other classy Spike Jones numbers.

We children listened to the records for a while, and then everyone left the room except me. Why I didn’t leave at the same time, I don’t know (maybe I had to use the chamber pot). Anyway, when my distant cousins and my sister closed the door, I stayed behind.

“Hum-m-m,” I thought. “So those new records are unbreakable.”

I picked up one of those small records and tested it by dropping it flat on the floor. It didn’t break. I picked it up again and held it, perpendicular to the hardwood floor, between two fingers. Then, I threw it as hard as I could on its edge. This time some pieces broke off from the rim of that small, new 45!

I knew I had made a horrible mistake as soon as the action was over. I suddenly realized that “unbreakable” was either a salesman’s gimmick or a relative term. Panicked, I picked up the pieces and dropped them into the bottom of a wastebasket in that bedroom, covered them with the trash already in there, and walked out of the room to join the rest of the group.

I never told anyone until now.

I’m not sad that I found out for myself, at a young age, that what people tell us is often not true. I have continued to be a questioner all my life. Yet I do feel guilty that I destroyed a very cool new gift that those kids got for Christmas in 1949. And the fact that I remember that incident —after more than 60 years—causes me to reflect on the power of guilt.
You know you’re from a small town if...

*thanks to Barry Bishop*

You can name everyone you graduated with.

**You know what 4-H, FFA, and FHA mean.**

You used to cruise Main Street after Sunday night church fellowship.

**It was cool to date somebody from the neighboring town.**

The whole school went to the same party after graduation.

**You gave directions by landmarks rather than street names. Turn by Nelson's, go 2 blocks to Anderson's, turn right and go four houses past...**

Your car stayed filthy because of the dirt roads, and you would never own a dark vehicle for this reason.

**The town next to yours was 'trashy' or 'snooty'-- but actually just like yours.**

You could find anyone you wanted at the gas station, ice cream shop, or pool hall.

**When you walked anywhere, 5 people stopped to ask if you wanted a ride.**

Your teachers called you by your older siblings' names.

**You could charge at any local store or write checks without an ID.**

There was no McDonalds, but you had the Main Street Cafe.

**The closest city was at least an hour away.**

You drove a tractor to plow/disc/etc by the time you were 10 years old.

**Everybody had a nickname.**

The guys had all been hunting with a gun since they were 7 years old.

**Eight out of 10 high school boys could tune a car's engine; four out of 10 could rebuild that engine.**

There was a huge crowd in town on Saturday night.

**Farmers could trade eggs, milk, and chickens for groceries at the local store.**
For What It’s Worth . . .
Rex Owens

YOTB

After I published *Murphy’s Troubles* in November 2013, my wife Lynette, in a fit of outrageous encouragement, declared that 2014 would be the Year of the Book (YOTB). She declared that all of our travel would be centered on the YOTB.

Local support was immediate with our local coffee shop, Beans and Cream, purchasing 30 books to sell for the holidays. I also made presentations at our library and Beans and Cream prior to the holidays. With the new year I was offered the opportunity to speak to a local book club. Club members were the first to give me readers’ perspectives and their reaction to certain characters. (I’ve learned that the female protagonist – Eileen Donohue – is universally disliked.)

I sold books at the annual Writer’s Institute in Madison. The experience offered me the opportunity to share experiences with friends and authors and was a personal triumph to sell my own book after attending the conference for 17 years.

I peddled my book to local independent bookstores to sell on consignment with mixed results. One store wanted to charge me $15 for the privilege of shelf space. I refused. A second bookstore accepted five books on consignment, and I asked to be included in author presentations. For inexplicable reasons I was given the cold shoulder. Only recently did we remedy the rift, and I’ll be presenting on St. Patrick’s Day 2015.

I was accepted to participate in the Literary Corner at the Milwaukee Irish Fest. This should have been the perfect venue to sell a lot of books, with three days of Irish heritage folks attending the event. Unfortunately, the staff person in charge didn’t have a clue how to sell books directly to readers. The silver lining was that I met Cliff and Cathy Carlson, organizers of the Chicago Irish Music and Book Festival, who invited me to attend. I also met reviewer Frank West, who writes for the *Irish American Newspaper* (IAN). His review is in the October issue of IAN.

We visited our son and family in Omaha and our son, Jeff, took us to their favorite independent bookstore, where they buy books for our granddaughter. The Omaha bookstore, Book Worm, was gracious and accepted books on consignment.

I also made a presentation at an independent bookstore in Spring Green, WI, on Mother’s Day. Bad choice for a date; families just don’t take Mom to the bookstore on Sunday afternoon’s any longer. Arcadia Books in Spring Green does carry my book on consignment.

I’ve written recently in *Extra Innings* about my experience at the Irish Book and Music Festival--extraordinary.

We also traveled to our favorite bed and breakfast in Waupaca, WI, The Crystal River Inn. The Inn carries my book on consignment. We were invited for a weekend and had a Saturday evening book reading followed by a splendid Irish meal, a bit of whiskey, and a lot of discussion with a group of 20 folks.

I have attended the Tuesday Morning Book Talk, sponsored by the UW-Madison outreach, for more than a decade. At the close of our session in the spring of 2014, our leader, Dr. Emily Auerbach, asked for suggested books for our next session. I suggested *Murphy’s Troubles*, and my friend Marshall Cook agreed to lead the discussion. In our last meeting this year our group of 30 avid readers discussed my book. It was terrifying to experience the anticipation and anxiety. It was priceless to have their feedback and reaction to my novel.

On our second trip to Omaha this year I learned that the BookWorm had moved to a new location. Our family visited the bookstore and I provided additional bookmarks to give away. My ever alert wife found *Murphy’s Troubles* displayed prominently. She suggested a picture with our granddaughter, Vivian. Who could resist? Viewing that picture completes the circle, and I had my first ephemeral glimpse of legacy. On December 7th, I’m scheduled to make another presentation at our local library - where it all began. As my Dad liked so say: What goes around comes around.

“Always trust a stranger,” counsels David’s snobbish mother when he returns from Rome. “It’s the people you know who let you down.”

Mother’s unusual advice makes me wonder what’s up. She has taken time from her “romances” to be with David Atherton, a young Catholic priest. A Scot who writes novels, she has never had much time for her disturbed son. His prominent British father, although passed on, remains embedded in their lives.

Fast forward 30 years to 2006 with Father David the new pastor in working class Dalgarnock, Scotland. He befriends rebellious teens Mark and Lisa, exposing himself to the world of drinking, drugs, sex, and downtrodden Scots, with their hatred of his British upper class, all of it topical with what has been going on between Scotland and Great Britain today. Father David’s maid, Mrs. Poole, a lovely intellectual who is dying-of-cancer and who often sets him straight, completes the main cast.

Author Andrew O’Hagan’s variety of characters interacting with the priest has me turning pages. Conversations rather than crashes, disasters, or terrorism, challenge the characters and capture and keep this reader’s attention, a good lesson on how feelings keep a story interesting. O’Hagan, who knows what he is doing, doles out only the right amount of information as the story proceeds.

When the frazzled cleric tells Mrs. Poole on a Good Friday that he could use a glass of wine, she says, “you’ve picked a fine day…there’s a dirty great sponge of vinegar being presented to the Lord’s face as we speak,” one of many times she reboots him. He rarely does what you would expect of a priest, certainly not the ones I remember from my altar boy days.

An outsider surrounded by people unlike himself, clueless Father David goes about trying to resolve a past that began during his stint at Oxford and that involved the lost love of his life. (This chapter kept me scurrying to Google for explanations.) Throughout, this priest spends more of his time talking in bars than attending to babies, parents, and the elderly - activities you’d expect these days when the priesthood is so shorthanded.

The past does jump up and grab Father David, who admits that, “I let the past catch up with me.”

Scottish author Andrew O’Hagan joined the group to watch when his 1999 novel Our Fathers was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. Be Near Me was long-listed for the same prize. He is an Editor at Large at Esquire and is currently a creative writing fellow at King’s College, London. Recently O’Hagan wrote about his experience as a ghostwriter for Julian Assange’s autobiography, published by Canongate and Knopf. What a guy he’d be to have a beer with.

“Laugh, and the world laughs with you…”
Ella Wheeler Wilcox

In Memory
Thomas Louis Magliozzi
June 28, 1937 - November 3, 2014
aka ‘Click’ (or was it ‘Clack’-- he and his brother Ray were never sure which was which) of “Click and Clack, the Tappet Brothers,” stars of NPR’s long running “Car Talk.”
THE QUOTABLE COACH

Two books were all this author needed

Edward G. Wilson, Harvard Professor emeritus and author of many books, admits to
having read only two books cover to cover during high school One was Owen Wister’s
classic western, The Virginian. (That’s where the line “Smile when you say that” comes
from.) The other was the 1942 edition of the Handbook for Boys, the official guide of the
Boy Scouts of America. He calls the latter a “classic of literature.... if literature is
understood as writing that stirs the soul and a classic as a work that contributes to the
growth of a civilization.” In fact,, he gives it credit for his secondary education.

“In its 680 pages are to be found the essentials of camping, field cooking,
swimming, lifesaving, first aid, semaphore and Morse code, and seaworthy knot-
tying; map making, agriculture, patriotic and popular campsite songs; and, not
least, elements of American history, including emphasis on the Constitution and
Bill of Rights. In the midst of all this are incomplete but serviceable field guides to
North American trees, birds, insects and mammals, and to the planets and
constellations. The book is true to the maxim ‘teach me, I forget; show me, I
remember; involve me, I understand...”

“If asked to decide who would be both successful in life and exceptionally
useful to society, the graduating senior of an elite New England prep school or an
Eagle Scout in Kansas, I’d vote for the Eagle Scout.”


She got her early education on a miniature golf course

“Being sentimental, perhaps, is expressing emotions now that you didn’t bother to
experience the first time around, when you should have taken care of it. Like doing
the laundry thirty years too late. I’m finally getting around to enjoying my
childhood. And this is why, perhaps, I am wondering if my being sentimental is
just another form of greed: I want it all back. It is us, and we are it.”

My Family and Other Hazards, June Melby, Henry Holt, 2014
“No way,” a Facebook friend commented after I posted this photo I shot from the Ober Gatlinburg Aerial Tramway in Tennessee. She wasn’t accusing me of lying; she was saying she wouldn’t go up in it.

That’s what I said when I discovered this “attraction” on the itinerary for Judy’s and my October trip with Van Galder Bus Tours to Great Smoky Mountains National Park. “No way!”

Judy wasn’t surprised. We’ve been married 48 years, and she knows I hate high places that aren’t anchored firmly to Earth. She, however, planned to ride it to the mountaintop.

I’ve often tried to figure out where my fear of heights came from. Dad was more afraid of heights than I am, and Mom kept saying “You’ll fall” whenever my sisters or I climbed anything. Some friends have suggested I have control issues. Could be.

At Gatlinburg, after a morning tour of the beautiful park, Judy took off toward the tram up the street from our hotel. I followed. I decided that if I let her go alone I’d stand around worrying about her, so I figured if I was going to worry about her it wouldn’t make much difference if I worried about both of us. So I rode along.

The 2.1-mile trip to the 2,700-foot elevation wasn’t too scary—I was stuck in the middle of the tram’s 120 passengers where I couldn’t see much, and the periodic rocking of the cabin wasn’t so noticeable, but I kept my eyes on the three cables holding us in the air. With a top speed of 23 miles per hour, our trip took 10 minutes. It felt more like 30.

Coming down from the mountain, I tried for, and got, a spot at the front window. This gave me excellent vantage point for photographs, including the one at the top of the next column, but it also put me at the outer edge of the bouncing tram after going over each tower on the way down. We were standing, and I grabbed the safety bar with my left hand while taking pictures with my right.

I thought I’d feel some relief as we approached the towers, but they only put our height in better (or perhaps I should say worse) perspective, and I felt even more afraid. I noted the plain, straight-up-and-down metal ladder at the image’s far right and couldn’t—and didn’t want to—imagine me or anyone else climbing it.

The view from the tram was spectacular, and I made a lot of photographs. There was no good view from the mountaintop, where the tram company has built an amusement park, ski area, and shops without any apparent regard to views. But at least I felt safe in the shops.

So, given the beautiful views out its windows, would I ride the tram again if I wound up back in Gatlinburg?

No way.
Where does the “heartfelt” passion we wish to infuse into our writing actually lurk? “Mind Matters” was first published, with minor alterations, in The Healing Muse: A Journal of Literary and Visual Arts, Volume 11, Number 1 (Fall 2011).

Mind Matters

We romanticize the heart: it’s warm or cold; black or gold; soft or hard; aching or cheating; whole or broken. But it’s the brain that holds, deep within its mist-gray folds, the magic of emotion: passion borne in murky caves and sparked by unseen lightning storms into our conscious mind, that lifelong confidant to whom the brain entrusts our heartfelt secrets.

And yet, who doesn’t keep some secrets even from themselves?

Recompense

Sandy Rafter

We girls in school were prim and proper, obeyed the teacher's rules, smiled sweetly with no sassing, stuck our tongues out at the boys but never pinched or hit as they were prone to do.

We practiced cursive writing and even ink stained fingers could not mar our grace.

We fled through the years. We didn't interrupt, followed regimens still raised our hands to speak.

I tried this just last week: church and clinic, home and with my friends.

I waved my arm back and forth, but no one would call on me.

I had no idea someone had amended the plan.

I deserve to know, I've always acquiesced: why is my breast to be sacrificed?
What is he to Succubus
or Succubus to him?

Marshall J. Cook

For the poet Tom Crawford

The poet Tom Crawford was waiting for me
in the bookstore,
a young Tom Crawford, younger than when I first met him,
slim, clean shaven, but already himself.
The book of short stories I had seen the day before
but had not bought
I’m not sure why
and had come back for
was not on the shelf.
Someone had moved everything.
I couldn’t be sure if it were even the same bookstore.
The poet Tom Crawford was speaking suasively of many things to me,
making no sense.
He murmured “succorous”
I’m pretty sure that’s what he said
and left me to wander the aisles, igniting conversations
with all the browsers.
I heard him tell a plump woman that he could tell
from the broach riding proudly
on her succorous, suasive bosom
that she obviously had been to Paris and other things
that made her blush and almost giggle.
I left him in the bookstore
but somehow came out a different door
onto a street I didn’t know,
full of mud and horse-drawn carriages.
I began to walk, hoping to find my way back
to whenever it was I was supposed to be,
but already knowing I wouldn’t,
the phrase “succorous suasion”
murmuring seductively in my mind
making something better than sense.
COACH’S BULLPEN BRIEFS

Sandy pulls it all together-- into a book

She’s been “writing, then ignoring” a book of her essays, fiction, poetry, and photography for a long time, she says, and now Sandy Mickelson has finished! *When We’re Not Together* is at the printers and will be ready for distribution by mid-month.

The title is a take-off on her long-time Sunday column for the Fort Dodge, Iowa *Messenger*, “When We’re Together,” since “most of what’s in the book I wouldn’t put in a column,” she notes.

You can preorder the book now, $18 plus $5 S/H (unless you live within driving distance of Fort Dodge, in which case the author promises home delivery). Email Sandy at mcsalt@frontiernet.net or call at 515-570-6123.

“It’s a fun book,” she says, “one you can pick up and enjoy when you’ve got 15 or 20 minutes to wait for something else to happen in your life. You won’t need a bookmark.”

Coach’s warning: You might not be able to put the book down after 20 minutes.

Sure sign of the coming Apocalypse

“End of Life Discussion Meeting Postponed”
From *The Scoop*, Neighborhood newsletter for Sunset Village

On Coach’s bookshelf

If you’ve ever played even one round of miniature golf-- or even if you haven’t but think you might like an excellent coming-of-age memoir about a young girl spending her summers with her family running the “Tom Thumb Mini Golf” in Northern Wisconsin-- get ahold of *My Family and Other Hazards*, by June Melby (Henry Holt, 2014).
**Caption Contest**

**Four excellent entries capture judge’s fancy**

Our cartoon featuring a bird on snow skis provided our best contest yet, with a haiku, allusions, and word play creating a four-way tie for the winning entry.

1) From **Norma Sundberg**:
```
frigid southern spring
many robins in my yard
re-thinking north?
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2) From **Larry Tobin**:
"Is that your Halloween costume, or are you not snow birding this winter?"

*Coach's note: Larry lives in Tomah, WI, where it snowed on All Hallow's Eve Eve Eve--WAY too early!*

3) **Madonna Dries Christensen**
"You want me to do what? Click them together three times and say, 'There's no place like home'?"

4) **S. Dardanelles**
"I said, 'shh, be quiet,' when sneaking up on a worm, not schuss."

I need to hear from the winners; what prize would you like?

**For next month:**
A cartoon classic, the two-guys-stranded-on-a-desert-isle meme, this one drawn by Eli Stein:

![Cartoon illustration](image)

Entries due to the Coach by December 22:
[mcook@dcs.wisc.edu](mailto:mcook@dcs.wisc.edu)

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**Hahnke Pahnke**

**Ed Pahnke**

**Auntie’s Oldies**

Heather steered the station wagon along the country road. She knew the route to her Auntie Sarah Teake’s house in the country almost blindfolded. Good thing. She saw no signs advertising Auntie’s Emporium.

Plump but petite and edging past 60, Sarah Teake sat in her store, the converted main floor of her house, surrounded by scores of “tempting” antique items, many from the home of Civil War hero Mat Tosela, who purportedly lived to be 133 years old. “Where are the customers when I have such fabulous antiques for Christmas presents?” she wondered aloud.

Somebody turned down her lane, approaching the Emporium. “It’s only Heather,” she noted.

Still mumbling, Sarah marched outside and crossed the vacant parking lot to Heather’s car, arriving just as her niece emerged from her car. She gave Heather a big hug and blurted out, “Nobody’s coming to my emporium. I put up all those signs with directions, but no customers.”

“Auntie dear,” Heather exclaimed, “get in my car and show me one of your signs.”

The two women drove to the nearest sign. “There,” Auntie Sarah said, pointing. Heather stopped, and the two women scrambled out of the car. A piece of white plywood, nailed to a wooden steak and sticking up from behind tall brown grass, offered directions to the emporium painted in black.

Heather shook her head. “We need something that will call folks’ attention to the sign,” she said. She thought about how she handled advertising for jewelry at the shop. “She snapped her fingers. “That’s it–gold! Come on, Auntie, let’s gather up your signs.”

Heather gilded the boarders of all the signs with a layer of gold paint. Then she placed them along the roads. They caught the attention of many travelers, who followed the directions to Auntie Teake’s Emporium, stocking up with antiques for the holidays.

Thinking about Heather and her gilding brainstorm later, Auntie smiled knowingly. It proved the old proverb, she realized:

_Gild a better house map and the world will beat a path to your store._

**And now, Coach’s Christmas card ...**
Lily asked her mom and dad if she could pack some books for a visit to Grandma’s. When they checked back with her, she was still packing.